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Is Silence Golden? Experiences of Silence, Stigma and Cultural Violence Among LGB People in El Paso, TX.

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IS SILENCE GOLDEN? EXPERIENCES OF SILENCE, STIGMA AND
CULTURAL VIOLENCE AMONG LGB PEOPLE IN EL PASO, TX.

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Is Silence Golden? Experiences Of Silence, Stigma And Cultural Violence Among
LGB People In El Paso, TX.

by

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THESIS

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Abstract

Stigma not only affects how one is treated within a society; it is also one of the factors influencing social identity and sexual behavior. LGB individuals, as part of a stigmatized group, form their sexual identities in a culture and society that is hostile to or ignorant of them. This project synthesizes 14 ethnographic interviews with LGB individuals in El Paso, TX. The interviews focus on the formative years of the individual's life on the U.S.-Mexico Border, namely their school years and early formation through family socialization. They also focus on LGBT individuals' perceptions of their community and the city at large in terms of violence, safety and stigma. Few studies on the U.S. Mexico border have looked at how silence, stigma and sexuality intersect and affect social identity among LGBT individuals. This exploration of sexual identity and society on the U.S.-Mexico border increases the understanding of the role of stigma and violence in the generation of social identities.

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Introduction

Stigma and violence against marginalized groups have occurred for centuries of human history, targeting victims on the basis of race, religion, disability, sex and nationality; yet recently violence on the basis of sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity has come to prominence. Often these acts take the form of violent attacks against gay and lesbian men and women. While the literature on hate crime against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people is expansive there are some aspects of violence that have remained relatively unstudied or unacknowledged. These include non-physical forms of violence such as silence, shunning, restriction of access to resources and more. The origins of and motivations for these symbolic acts of violence can be viewed through the theoretical lens of stigma, developed by Erving Goffman and others in the early part of the 20th century. LGBT people suffer intense forms of social stigma for a variety of reasons that will be further elaborated in the following paragraphs.

The Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990 requires the U.S. Attorney General to obtain and keep records of instances of hate crime based on race, religion, sexual orientation and ethnicity (Willis, 2004). According to the FBI, 18.5% of all hate crimes committed in 2009 were based on sexual orientation bias, which numbers third in motivation for hate crime, after religion and race (U.S. Department of Justice 2010). Of the 1,436 hate crimes based on sexual-orientation bias reported to the FBI, a majority were focused on anti-male homosexual bias (55.6%) while 15% were anti-female homosexual bias (U.S. Dept of Justice 2010). These numbers of course should be taken with a grain of salt since reporting depends on law-enforcement officials' willingness to report an attack as a hate crime, victims' willingness to report to police and available evidence that would classify the incident as a hate crime.

Studies on LGBT people along the US-Mexico border have mostly been limited to major metropolitan cities such as San Diego and Los Angeles; few if any have been done in the El Paso-Juárez border region. Metropolitan cities are defined by the United States Office of Management and Budget (2010) as an area that "contains a core urban area of 50,000 or more population." A micropolitan area, in contrast, is defined as an area that "contains an urban core of at least 10,000 (but less than 50,000) population. Each metro or micro area consists of one or more counties and includes the counties

containing the core urban area, as well as any adjacent counties that have a high degree of social and economic integration (as measured by commuting to work) with the urban core.” (USOMB 2010). The two cities of El Paso and Juárez are more intensely linked, geographically, economically and culturally, than most other cities upon the US-Mexico border and thereby constitute a different context for the formation of social identity.

Current literature that currently focuses on violence and discrimination against LGBT people does not use the theoretical lens of stigma in addressing the motivations and origins of violence. Furthermore much of this literature focuses on gay and bisexual men in large metropolitan cities such as San Diego-Tijuana, San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles and the experiences of LGBT people in other cities goes largely unknown. This thesis is intended to ameliorate these two gaps:

- (1) First by describing LGBT people’s experiences of and responses to stigma and its accompanying violence within the city
- (2) Secondly by describing and exploring how LGBT people interpret and define their sexuality and gender expression within El Paso.

Literature Review

Before analyzing violence against LGBT people, we must first define the term “violence.” Violence in this thesis is defined by two parameters: physical violence and cultural (non-physical) violence. Given the broad scope of violence that LGBT people can experience, both physical and cultural, this thesis will explore LGBT El Pasoans’ experiences of both types of violence and how stigma, discrimination, and intimidation affects the development of their social identity. Stigma is defined by cultural institutions and enacted by them upon the stigmatized other, so, in order to understand discrimination and violence against LGBT individuals, one must look at how stigma has been studied with regard to LGBT people

1.1 STIGMA

In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman (1963) describes stigma as an attribute which makes a person “reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (3). A stigmatized individual or social group is defined by “normals” as less than human, and an entire social identity is constructed around that person or social group in order to legitimate their and the normals’ positions in society (Goffman 1963). Goffman argues that a person’s social identity can be broken down into two parts; virtual and actual. One’s actual social identity is composed of the “category and attributes [one] could in fact be proved to possess” (Goffman 1963, 2). The virtual social identity is composed of the character and attributes that we, as a society, impose on an individual and what society demands that this person be (Goffman 1963).

Stigma arises when the social identity is made up of attributes, either actual or virtual, that society deems undesirable. A person whose stigmatizing features are more readily discerned is considered to have a “discredited” stigma (Goffman 1963). Among this type of stigma would be stigmas related to race or ethnicity; however, one’s sexuality or gender identity can also be discredited stigmas especially if they are perceived to be already apparent, for example by conforming to stereotyped imagery. If a person displays non-normative gender behavior, for example an effeminate man or a masculine woman, then it can be argued that they possess a discredited stigma, i.e. one that is readily

perceived by outer society. This can take the form of clothing, behaviors, speech, mannerisms and even something as arbitrary as a gait.

Discreditable stigmas, in contrast, are those in which a person's "differentness is not immediately apparent and is not known beforehand" (Goffman 1963, 42). Homosexuality can fall under this form of stigma, because sexual orientation is something which one can hide or choose not to disclose. Beatty and Kirby (2006) consider homosexuality an invisible stigmatized identity because it cannot be readily discerned. According to them race and gender are imputed visible stigmas based on factors outside of a person's control (Beatty & Kirby 2006). Homosexuality, however, is commonly (though erroneously) thought of as controllable and so responsibility is placed upon the gay or lesbian person for their own stigmatized behavior (Beatty & Kirby 2006). This has very real implications for LGBT people as some people view laws protecting LGBT people as giving "extra" rights and protections to a group that "chose" to be what they are.¹

Goffman (1963) also notes the utility of "passing" and identity management in coping with discreditable stigmas. The cultural construction of the "closet" is one such identity management tool that LGBT people might utilize to escape from stigma (Plummer 1975). Their homosexuality then becomes a discreditable stigma, because the individual must constantly maintain a deceptive social identity.

Aside from the distinction between discredited and discreditable stigmas, Goffman (1963) separates stigma into three major types: those based on physical deformities and conditions, those based on individual character, and finally tribal stigmas which are based on religion, kinship or nationality. Goffman (1963) places homosexuality among those stigmas which are based on individual character, meaning that people who are homosexual are perceived as having a fault in their personal character. Plummer (1975) indicates that this type of stigmatization of homosexuality tends to appear in societies influenced by a Judeo-Christian tradition. This is seen especially in the disadvantage LGBT parents face in custody battles and adoption proceedings, which seems based on fear that they will corrupt or harm the children. It is also seen in commonly-held beliefs that homosexual orientation is an immoral

¹ This of course ignores the protected position of one major "chosen" identity: that of religious affiliation. Though one can be born into and raised in a specific religious tradition, religious affiliation can and often does change. Even so religious affiliation is protected more than the condition of being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender which some might argue is a more permanent status.

behavior based on personal choice. Homosexuality, however, like race, can be seen through all three lenses of stigma.

1.1.1 Stigma and LGBT people.

Stigma and how it is experienced in the LGBT community have been examined primarily from a psychological perspective; these studies have focused on stigmas related to sex-work, and stigmas involving HIV/AIDS (Kando 1972; Mays, Cochran & Zamudio 2004; Morrison & Whitehead 2007). Mays, Cochran & Zamudio (2004) focus on how HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections fall under stigmas of physical deformity or condition and yet are still imbued with a stigma of moral character because those who suffer from them are deemed irresponsible and dangerous. Adam (2005) indicates that some HIV-positive gay men in Canada have adopted this contaminated identity stigma to the extreme of seeing HIV status as part of individual identity and responsibility. They will mark themselves openly with biohazard symbols and engage in unprotected anal sex with other HIV-positive men. Adam (2005) indicates that this can be the effect of neoliberal notions of seeing the body as one's own property and outside the control of the state. This view can emerge after intense government education and prevention programs where safe-sex education was often forceful and overwhelming, making these men feel as though their individual identity was coming under government control.

Herek and Glunt (1988) note that stigmas related to HIV/AIDS are added on to preexisting stigmas of sexuality, race and deviant behavior such as drug use. AIDS in itself can affect stigmas related to homosexuality by making a previously hidden social identity (discreditable stigma) into an openly viewable one (discredited stigma), similar to racial/ethnic stigmas based on skin color and language (Herek & Glunt, 1988). This was perhaps more true in the 80s and 90s when HIV/AIDS was still untreated or poorly treated among many gay men and the outward manifestations of the disease, such as sarcoma lesions and extreme weight loss were more readily visible. Now, however, with advanced retroviral medications, the outward signs of HIV/AIDS are more easily hidden or non-existent, and so HIV/AIDS can be seen as a discreditable stigma. As a result of male homosexuality's connection to HIV/AIDS, gay and bisexual men in particular, suffer from imposed stigmas related to both physical conditions and character. However, given the nature of HIV/AIDS infection and sexuality, both stigmas

can be mutually inclusive in the sense that being identified as gay will lead to inquisitions about one's serostatus and promiscuity or vice versa (Mays, Cochran & Zamudio 2004).

Despite the fact that HIV/AIDS is primarily an epidemic of heterosexual transmission globally, AIDS-related stigmas are placed on already stigmatized groups (such as IV drug users, Haitians and immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa) and continue to be imposed on LGBT people to this day. This was exemplified in a November 2010 opinion letter sent to the editor of the El Paso Times, which said, "Sure the gays want us to fund their insurance. Their lifestyle puts them in terrible jeopardy of AIDS." (Cunningham 2010). This reveals that such ideas persist even after nearly three decades of national/international education on HIV/AIDS transmission.

Research on stigma and sex-work has also focused on how particular occupations open one up to stigma. The gay male prostitute suffers from stigma related to a physical condition (HIV/AIDS or the threat of it), and individual character (being homosexual or engaging in homosexual acts). Cultural and religious mores against prostitution and associations of sex work with poverty and drug use also contribute to the sense of stigma (Morrison & Whitehead 2005). Morrison and Whitehead's (2005) study of Canadian gay male sex workers noted that the public perception of sex workers is tied to street prostitution and its stigmas of drug use, poverty, danger and exploitation. Other sex workers pointed to stigmatization of homosexuality and social mores about sexuality in general. For sex workers, stigmatization not only comes from outside society but from within the LGBT population as well (Morrison & Whitehead 2007). Some reported that gay men they have met view prostitution as dirty, demeaning work while at the same time celebrating certain aspects that represent liberation of sexuality (Morrison & Whitehead 2007).

Stigma has also been studied with regard to transsexuals and transgendered individuals. Kando (1972) noted that "passing" and identity regulation is the primary means by which transsexuals escape, avoid, or deal with stigma. Yet even with passing as a coping mechanism, transgendered people still experience a lower quality of life than most people including gay men, lesbians and bisexuals. Newfield, Hart, Dibble and Kohler (2006), in their survey of 376 U.S. female-to-male (FTM) transgender men, noted that FTMs experience a lower quality of life than the general U.S. population, with regard to

physical health, mental health and access to services and resources. This stems not only from a lack of health professionals qualified to treat transsexuals but also lack of information and education about transgender people in medical professional schools.

FTM transsexuals, despite being highly educated, earn less than the U.S. national average, which can affect their ability to access certain services which could help them in transitioning (Newfield et al 2006). An example is the limited access to gender reassignment surgery and hormone treatment. In many European countries these are treated as regular medical expenses; transgender individuals are “recruited into a single clinic, given state-funded predictable care, and followed over time by a consistent team of physicians and counselors” (Newfield et al 2006, 1448). The private U.S. health insurance system, however, treats these as non-essential cosmetic procedures, despite psychiatric consensus that transgender individuals suffer from gender identity disorder, for which the optimal treatment is gender reassignment surgery (Newfield et al 2006). The difficulty of receiving adequate and appropriate health care for transgender people is a manifestation of structural violence where social institutions delay or impede access to resources which would better the lives of a stigmatized, minority population.

Much of the stigma surrounding transgender people is the stigma of gender non-conformity; gay men and lesbians may also suffer from this stigma if their gendered behavior does not coincide with societal expectations (Sandfort, Melendez & Diaz 2007, Appelrouth & Edles 2008). Male-to-female (MTF) transgender women and gay males who present more feminized characteristics have been frequent targets of homophobic and heterosexist violence (D’Augelli et al. 2005). In largely patriarchal systems it comes as no surprise that biological men who adopt a female gender or act in a feminine way would be targeted for violence as a way of correcting them or forcing them to comply with gender norms. Studies on gay males and gender performance note that adult males (either gay or straight) who de-feminized (began acting more masculine) as they aged showed higher self-esteem, greater support from family and society and lower levels of mental stress than their peers who remained effeminate (Harry 1983, Sandfort, Melendez & Diaz 2007).² Effeminate Latino gay and bisexual men had

² A recent story on CNN (2011, June 7) about the suicide of Kirk Murphy casts doubt on how “peaceful” such transitions from feminine to masculine may be. Kirk Murphy reportedly went through an experimental gender education program which

experienced more frequent childhood sexual abuse, verbal and physical abuse by relatives and lovers, and generalized homophobia than gay and bisexual Latinos who identified as more masculine (Sandfort, Melendez & Diaz 2007).

Tribal stigma and LGBT people.

Tribal stigma is stigma based on membership in a socially defined group and has traditionally been applied to ethnic minorities within nation-states (Goffman 1963). Tribal stigmas have also been generalized to include non-ethnic categories such as gender, religion and class (Rush 1998, Goffman 1963). Berbrier (2002) comments that during the civil rights era, when gay activists fought to have homosexuality de-medicalized by the American Psychological Association, they adopted the notion that “gay” was a minority status within the United States and deserving of protection like ethnic, racial and religious groups. This adoption of a minority status during the 1960s to some degree achieved recognition and protection for members of those other minority groups; “the cultural opportunity structure of the late twentieth century offered normality within the context of difference”(Berbrier 2002, 572). As a result the “gay” community that came out of the civil rights era adopted a tribal mindset, whereby they identified themselves as a group akin to ethnic, racial, gender and religious minority groups. While this may have won certain protections and solidarity with a unified perception of a gay community as opposed to individuals, it also opened the gay community to tribal stigmas and stereotypes.

Tribal stigmas often arise when legal and institutional forms of discrimination are in need of rationalization. Tribal stigma against LGBT people can be found in justifications for legal practices that discriminate against LGBT people, such as laws prohibiting LGBT adults from adopting or caring for children, and “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell.” Sinclair (2009) notes that “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” has been defended with four different types of rationale: that homosexual people are mentally and physically unfit to serve in the military; that homosexual people are more prone to blackmail than heterosexual people and so cannot be trusted to safeguard national security; that heterosexuals have an inherent dislike for

encouraged his family to violently punish his non-normative gender behavior by beating him and withholding affection. This program speculated that the gender transition treatment advocated by the psychologist may have contributed to his suicide.

homosexuals and this would affect group cohesion; and, finally, that homosexual service members would violate heterosexual members' personal privacy. Three out of the four of these reasons seem based on the assumption that homosexual people share certain undesirable traits in common by virtue of them belonging to a specific group.

The idea that gay men and lesbian women suffer collectively from mental illness or do not have the physical stamina required to be soldiers are examples of tribal stigma applied to LGBT people. The perception of lesbian and gay service members as being prone to blackmail, thus constituting a danger to national security was also a rationale for targeting homosexual people during the McCarthy hearings; this can be seen as a group-based stigma that views homosexuality as not in line with standard ideas of citizenship and national identity (Sinclair 2009). And finally, the idea that gay and lesbian service members are a threat to heterosexual privacy seems based on the stereotype that gay men and lesbians cannot control their sexual desires, are prone to promiscuity and will, as a group, violate heterosexual privacy in close-quarter situations. All of these arguments have been discredited in studies on police and firefighter groups as well as other armed forces from around the world that have integrated openly LGBT people into their ranks (Sinclair 2009).

Tribal stigmas also affect the children of certain groups, who are perceived of as inheriting their parent's stigmatizing traits (Goffman 1963). Robitaille and Saint-Jacques (2009) in their study of children of LGBT-led families (either adopted or born to same-sex couples) have shown that they can suffer social stigma from being related to and raised by LGBT parents or guardians (Robitaille & Saint-Jacques 2009). These children are assumed to be gay, sexually promiscuous, emotionally confused, or academically "at-risk" relative to their peers with heterosexual parents. The LGBT parents of these children come under scrutiny as their ability to raise children and serve as proper role models is brought into question; adding to this stigma is the perception, forcefully expressed by some conservative religious groups such as Focus on the Family, presume that LGBT parents or exposure to LGBT issues will negatively affect child development (Robitaille & Saint-Jacques 2009, Cahill 2009). Cahill (2009) cites a claim by Focus on the Family that "same-sex parenting situations make it impossible for a child to live with both biological parents, thus increasing their risk of abuse." This assumption persists despite

much social science research showing no observable harmful effects to children as a result of being raised in LGBT homes from LGBT parents (Cahill 2009). Laws prohibiting LGBT people from adopting children are based on this assumption that LGBT are not fit to rear children, or that children benefit more from having opposite-sex parents.

This is particularly salient when one considers the intersection of race and sexuality; Cahill (2009) reports that laws prohibiting or restricting same-sex partner parenting disproportionately affect Latino and Black same-sex couples relative to their white counterparts.³ Black same-sex households report lower annual median incomes than both Black married heterosexual couples and White same-sex couples (Cahill 2009). Latino same-sex couples are more often raising children under 18 than White (non-Hispanic) same-sex couples, but have lower incomes and often at least one partner who is not a U.S. citizen, which can have implications for benefits and services the family might be able to receive (Cahill 2009). In addition, such families must cope with racial bias and prejudice as well as homophobia and heterosexism (Cahill 2009).

Goffman (1963) notes that a form of stigma known as “courtesy stigma” is particularly feared by “normals,” because it only requires a tangential association with the stigmatized individual or group. This was most often seen in studies of HIV/AIDS patients’ caregivers, who were often assumed to have the disease themselves (Herek & Glunt 1988). This courtesy stigma can affect how willing medical practitioners and nurses treat people with HIV/AIDS or even LGBT patients in general (Brimlow, Crook & Seaton 2003). Courtesy stigma can also be a factor in hate crimes. Van der Meer’s (2003) study of the causes and motivations of hate crime showed that perpetrators of hate crime often state that a touch or even a prolonged glance by a gay man that is not answered by a violent rebuttal threatens the object of attention with being considered gay himself (van der Meer 2003). This is also seen in Pascoe’s (2007) study of teenage males in a high school setting, where the specter of being labeled a “fag” was used as a form of social control in policing their masculinity and legitimacy as males.

³ Cahill (2009) notes that white same-sex couples, in comparison to Black and Latino same-sex couples, have more education and higher incomes (much like white heterosexual couples in relation to Black and Latino heterosexual couples) which allow them greater flexibility in terms of financial and cultural resources to cope with laws targeting same-sex families.

1.1.2 Stigma and violence.

While Goffman's (1963) work does not address *how* violence is enacted against stigmatized individuals, it does explore the reasons *why* it is. The reason that stigma as a social theory is pertinent to the analysis of violence lies in how "normal" society reacts toward stigmatized individuals and groups. According to Goffman "normals" act on the assumption that the stigmatized person is "not quite human" and "[on] this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly reduce his life chances." (1963, 5). Physical, emotional and cultural violence against dehumanized others are some of the ways in which people are affected by stigma.

These manifestations of violence take on social meanings depending on how a society views homosexuality. Homosexuality has been considered by Western society as a sin against a divine edict, an affliction or disease, a choice, a normal variant of human sexuality, a biologically determined state, or some combination thereof (Plummer 1975). Societies that tend to view homosexuality as a sin, a choice, or a medical condition have often acted violently against homosexuals, even to the point of genocide as happened in Nazi Germany (Plummer 1975) and as is happening currently in Iran and may yet occur in Uganda. In less extreme cases, physical violence or hate crime may be "normal" society's way of punishing or trying to physically stamp out the stigmatized population so that its members do not infect normal society (Irvine 2003).

1.2 VIOLENCE

In the literature on experiences of violence enacted against LGBT people, two main types of violence emerge. The first is physical and inter-personal violence (most typically defined as a hate crime); the second is symbolic violence, which tends to be impersonal in nature and is typically enacted by structures and institutions rather than by individuals. I would argue that this non-physical form of violence, enacted by individuals through institutions and culture, is the most prevalent and is manifested through the medium of stigma and silence. Below is a brief description of each type of violence and how it has been addressed in literature concerning LGBT people.

1.2 .1 Physical Violence and Hate Crime

Prior literature on LGBT experiences of violence has focused on the physical definition of violence found in hate crimes legislation. (Herek, Cogan & Gillis 2002; Leets 2002; Willis 2004, 2008; van der Meer 2003). Prior literature has focused on the legal definition of hate crimes, as “criminal acts based on the offender’s bias toward individuals, families, groups, or organizations because of their real or perceived racial, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, or disability status” (Willis 2004, 117). Of these crimes aimed at targeted individuals or groups the U.S. Department of Justice (2009) categorizes murder, forcible rape, aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation, arson and damage or vandalism of property as hate crimes.

Most articles examining hate crimes against LGBT people focus primarily on gay or bisexual males; some claim that attacks on lesbians are harder to distinguish from general forms of gender violence and so become harder to study in terms of sexual identity (van der Meer 2003). While Herek, Cogan, & Gillis (2002) do include lesbians in their study (in which they interviewed 450 lesbian, gay and bisexual adults) their findings are not specific to each category, but treat the LGB community as a whole. Other studies omit the experiences of transgendered people with regard to hate crimes, either because they are subsumed under the category of gay males or because there is no category for bias based on gender identity in the current reporting system (Hatzenbuehler, Keyes & Hasin 2009).

A methodological advantage of focusing analysis on the effects of hate crime is that hate crime is often reported and categorized in terms of its physical parameters (i.e. physical attacks or damage to a person or property), and thus can more easily be catalogued by legal authorities and identified by the victims. Homicides, bruises and graffitied walls are more easily documented, recorded, and legally prosecuted in court because they leave a readily available physical record of proof. Furthermore hate crimes are committed by specific individuals or groups of individuals. This is less true of structural and cultural violence which exist in systems and structures and are not as easily traced to the actions of specific individuals.

1.2.2 Structural and Cultural Violence

Another type of violence is structural violence; this concept was developed by Johann Galtung (1969) in order to explain how institutions and structures enact violence upon individuals and social groups. Structural violence is the physical, emotional or mental harm enacted upon a person or group of individuals, not through the volition of other individuals, but by the established conventions of institutions, structures and over-arching social systems (Galtung 1969). The theory of structural violence has usually been applied to issues within medical anthropology, global or transnational migration and studies of the effects of government action against marginalized people (Farmer 1999). There are of course cases where physical and structural violence overlap, for example U.S. anti-sodomy laws and vice operations in the 20th century, where many gay, lesbian and transgendered people were attacked, jailed or harassed physically by police. The Third Reich of Nazi Germany jailed homosexual men in concentration camps along side Jews as part of the national cleansing of “undesirables”; lesbian women were jailed separately, categorized as communists and political threats to the government. Anti-sodomy laws enforced in Iran, and contemplated in Uganda, define homosexuality a capital offense, whereby gay and lesbian people are subject to imprisonment and execution. These are clear examples of the overlap between structural and physical violence.

Structural violence also applies to how institutions deny or limit access to services, resources or political redress, thereby reducing the health and well-being of a marginalized group. For example, laws prohibiting gay marriage are not only social laws “preserving” morality, they also limit who has access to employer-based healthcare programs, mortgage and various tax benefits, and hospital visitation rights and next of kin policies. Structural violence is also seen in the silence around LGBT historical figures and sexual diversity around the world. For example, students learn about the military feats of Alexander the Great, but they do not learn of his deep affection, partnership and love for his male lover Hephaestion. Students learn about the American Revolution but few hear about the contributions of Baron von Stuben, a Prussian captain, who was brought in by Benjamin Franklin to train the fledgling Continental army (Sinclair 2009). Even fewer learn that he was accused of homosexual behavior in Prussia prior to coming to the aid of the Continental army or that he’s training techniques were used by

the U.S. Military until the War of 1812 (Sinclair 2009). Students do not learn about the contributions of Harvey Milk, Bayard Rustin and other LGBT people to the civil rights movement or the contributions of Lynn Conway and Alan Turing to the development of the modern computer. Such silence is evidence of the structural violence that permeates institutions of learning in Western society.⁴

Galtung (1990) expanded this definition of structural violence under the umbrella term “cultural violence” , understood as “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (291). Cultural violence provides the symbolic legitimization for structural violence and stigma. While the concept of cultural violence is useful in understanding the origins of stigma, it is not the purview of this thesis to explore stigma’s origin. It is helpful though to acknowledge the cultural origins of stigma so as to not treat experiences of stigmatization as natural.

It is important to note here that many scholars who study hate crimes and their effects omit non-criminal hate incidents where no physical assault occurs (Willis 2004). These hate incidents consist of name-calling, verbal harassment, teasing, bullying and other forms of intimidation. Leets (2002) studies these incidents in the context of how Jews and homosexual people experience hate speech when provided with examples or when recalling memories. Leets (2002) found that “the consequences of hate speech might be similar in form (but sometimes not in intensity) to the effects experienced by recipients of other kinds of traumatic experiences” (354).

Another form of cultural violence has been referred to as “indirect anti-gay harassment.” Burn, Kaldec and Rexer (2005), in their study of lesbian, gay and bisexual reactions to subtle heterosexism, found that LGB people were offended by indirect anti-gay statements in hypothetical situations. They defined anti-gay harassment as using the epithet “fag” to denote a non-athletic male or using the term “gay” to denote something as stupid or worthy of ridicule. Use of such epithets led many of their respondents to judge the hypothetical speaker as homophobic (Burn, Kadlec & Rexer 2005). These types

⁴ California recently has attempted to meliorate this discrepancy with its assembly requiring California schools to include the contributions of LGBT people to national and state history. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/14/california-gay-history-law-jerry-brown_n_898745.html>

of hate incidents occur most commonly in schools, workplaces and public streets, and are harder to study than physical assaults or vandalism; thus the methodological focus on past experiences recalled from memory or hypothetical situations. (Burn, Kaldec & Rexer 2005; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz 2009; Leets 2002 and Morrison & L'Heureux 2001).

Cultural violence and LGBT people.

Much of the literature aimed at analyzing cultural violence against LGBT people focuses on bullying and harassment of LGBT youth in school settings and its lack of redress by the schools themselves (Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz 2009; Morrison & L'Heureux 2001). School bullying against LGBT youth can have consequences when coupled with lack of resources or institutional will to protect LGBT students. Morrison and L'Heureux (2001) noted that school bullying has led many LGBT youth to commit suicide particularly if they possess the following risk factors in any combination:

1. Acknowledged their sexual orientation at an early age
2. Have suffered from sexual abuse and/or familial abuse
3. Do not disclose their sexual orientation to anyone
4. Present themselves in a gender non-conforming way
5. Report high levels of mental/emotional conflict with regard to their sexual orientation.⁵

They also comment that, “A ubiquitous tolerance of homophobic and heterosexist attitudes in teachers, peers, religious leaders, and family members may increase suicide risk for GLBQ youth.” (Morrison and L'Heureux 2001, 43).

Kosciw, Greytak and Diaz (2009) found that LGBT students in rural areas and less culturally diverse schools were more likely to experience victimization in the form of bullying and homophobic remarks. Urban schools can still be dangerous for LGBT youth, but tend to be more diverse and can offer a greater variety of niches for LGBT students to belong (Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz 2009). One of the potential reasons why rural areas are more affected by LGBT victimization is that urban schools are

⁵ Reluctance of school officials to acknowledge LGBT students' concerns adds to this problem; news reports abound of LGBT students who turned to school administrators, teachers or counselors only to be rebuffed or told they should expect harassment if they “choose” to be a target in this way. The recent highly publicized suicides of several LGBT youth have brought this phenomenon to light and school districts are now scrambling to address this issue, yet public concern continues to be centered on bullying as a student phenomenon rather than a structural one.

more likely to have the funding and political support for diversity training of teachers and staff, or to have resources available for LGBT students (Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz 2009). While on average urban schools are better equipped or under more pressure to deal with LGBT bullying, poverty is associated with high levels of LGBT bullying in both urban and rural areas. Lack of such services or resources can “negatively impact LGBT youth’s access to education [and is] linked to increased absenteeism, increased discipline problems and lower levels of school engagement and academic achievement,” which can constitute a form of institutional and cultural violence (Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz 2009, 976).

The suicides of Tyler Clementi, Asher Brown, Seth Walsh and others at the end of 2010 thrust bullying of LGBT youth into the spotlight. While bullying of LGBT youth is by no means a new phenomenon, this is the first time the news media have reported on it to this extent, and the plight of LGBT youth has become a political issue in debates about education. The popular “It Gets Better Project” was started by columnist Dan Savage, who became frustrated by the reports of the suicides of several gay and lesbian teens in late 2010. He wanted to talk to LGBT youth on a personal level about being gay, transgender or bisexual. The internet project has spawned over 10,000 videos of LGBT adults speaking about their childhoods and telling LGBT youth that the bullying and harassment they have felt is temporary and that their life will get better after high school. Pixar, Google, the Chicago Cubs, Lady Gaga and other celebrities, companies, and elected officials have also added their support, creating an unprecedented cultural shift toward public acceptance of LGBT youth. The popularity of films such as *Milk*, about the life of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in the U.S., and TV shows such as “Will & Grace,” “Glee” and “Modern Family” that prominently feature gay characters and LGBT issues, also seem to indicate a greater acceptance of LGBT youth and adults as positive characters. All this has happened within the past few years and indicates a real cultural shift in the United States which is potentially significant in understanding stigma and cultural violence.

Other scholars have looked at how larger national debates pin LGBT youth in the middle between adult LGBT rights groups and fundamentalist Christian/ conservative groups, who both interpret children and safety in different ways (Ryan & Rivers 2003, Wardeski 2005). Conservative religious groups interpret youth as vulnerable to the advances of LGBT adults and so wish to keep

“confused” youths from talking to or being influenced by LGBT adults (Ryan & Rivers 2003). Limiting mention of LGBT history, cultural issues or even sexual education is thus a central goal, so as to prevent youth from “becoming gay” themselves, or getting the idea that homosexuality is normal or acceptable. This was most poignantly evidenced by the recent vote in Tennessee to prohibit students and teachers from using any language that expresses or talks about homosexuality. In contrast, LGBT rights groups such as the Trevor Project, GLSEN and the It Gets Better Project view LGBT youth as threatened by bullying, harassment and suicide and so their efforts are geared toward fostering acceptance of sexual diversity in schools and encouraging curriculum that includes LGBT history and issues. This places LGBT youth in the middle of fierce debate and can have the effect of removing their agency and voice from discussions about their lives and education (Ryan & Rivers 2003).

Government and public policies have also affected LGBT youth both positively and negatively. The landmark Supreme Court case of *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003 declared anti-sodomy laws unconstitutional on the basis that they impinged upon the rights of privacy of citizens. The case served to “decriminalize sexual conduct between individuals of the same sex” and lifted “a major legal stigma associated with being homosexual.” (Wardeski 2005, 1365). Gay and lesbian adults no longer had the presumption of criminal guilt based on their sexual orientation. The majority opinion, written by Justice Anthony Kennedy states,

When homosexual conduct is made criminal by the law of the State, that declaration in and of itself is an invitation to subject homosexual persons to discrimination both in the public and in the private spheres. The central holding of *Bowers* has been brought in question by this case, and it should be addressed. Its continuance as precedent demeans the lives of homosexual persons (*Lawrence v. Texas* 2003).

One year after *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Kansas Supreme Court cited it as precedent in the *State of Kansas v. Limon* decision which ruled that its “Romeo and Juliet” law was unconstitutional because it violated the Equal Protection clause of the U.S. Constitution. The “Romeo and Juliet” law lessened a statutory rape sentence if both partners were teenagers who gave consent and were less than 4 years apart, over the age of 14, but only if they were of the opposite sex. Matthew R. Limon however was exempt from this protection because he had engaged in “sodomy” with another male teenager who was only 3 years younger than him. *State v. Limon* decided that Kansas’s “Romeo and Juliet” law had to

apply to same-sex behaviors as well as opposite sex behaviors (Grossman 2010). This ruling inspired other states to lower age of consent laws, which were higher for same-sex activity, to the age of consent for heterosexual sex.

Ryan and Rivers (2003) point to government policies in Australia and the U.K. that have had some success at bringing the struggles faced by LGBT youth to the forefront. The Department for Education and Employment in the United Kingdom revised their anti-bullying guidelines for public schools to include a section specifically focused on preventing bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and sexuality. These policies target not only students but teachers as well, and are communicated to them during their in-service training (Ryan & Rivers 2003). The state-by-state education system of the United States, however, allows for greater leeway in terms of how sexuality and sexual orientation are treated, especially with regards to how bullying is acknowledged, tolerated, encouraged or reprimanded (Ryan & Rivers 2003).

Most legal studies of LGBT adults have looked at encounters with legal systems in the context of hate crimes and anti-homosexual policies that can affect families, individuals and whole communities (Field 2007, Embrick, Walther & Wickens 2007, Hatzenbuehler, Keyes & Hasin 2009). Field (2007) stated that even if a nation-state has implemented legislation that places harsher penalties on the perpetrators of hate crimes, LGBT people remain vulnerable if they lack resources or trust in police agencies to help them. Without this trust, LGBT people cannot develop “substantive citizenship” that would allow them to enjoy the same rights and protections that non-stigmatized groups have. Field (2007) states that:

Substantive citizenship is limited to certain segments of the population. Thus although LGBT people live within territory covered by Canadian [or another nation-state’s] citizenship and most have formal-legal citizenship, they generally were excluded, until very recently, from important benefits and rights of citizenship including the right to equality before the law, equal access to justice, health and welfare (251).

By denying LGBT and other marginalized people equal access to justice, legal systems prevent them from achieving full citizenship within their respective nation-states. For example, a great deal of time and energy in the gay rights movement is spent arguing for marriage equality. While some have

argued that civil unions would be a better compromise, civil unions only grant a fraction of the rights and privileges that legal marriage gives. According to the United States Government Accountability Office (2004), there are 1,138 statutory provisions in which marital status can confer benefits, rights and privileges. Civil unions rather are based on a state-by-state basis and the federal government does not recognize them as equal to marriage.

Among those 1,138 rights are: the ability to sponsor immigrant spouses for citizenship; access to employment assistance and aid programs for spouses of military personnel; access to social security benefits upon the death or disability of a spouse; family visitation rights in hospitals; custodial rights to property and the right to own property in common; domestic violence protection orders; and spousal privilege in court cases. Denial of full marriage rights to same-sex couples creates a status for gay and lesbian people as second-class citizens who pay taxes but cannot fully benefit from their citizenship.⁶ This discrepancy is changing with the repeal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell law, the decision of the current Obama administration to not defend the Defense of Marriage Act in the Supreme Court, and the inclusion of transgender rights in the current manifestation of the Employment Non-discrimination Act; LGBT citizens are clearly getting closer and closer to full equality with their heterosexual peers in the federal domain. More headway is being made with regard to individual states, as states themselves move to legalizing same-sex marriage or including LGBT protections in non-discrimination statutes.

Institutional violence against LGBT people is also enacted in the workplace. In a study of 900 LGBT individuals in Australia, Irwin (2002) found that 59% of LGBT people experienced some form of workplace discrimination, homophobic behavior or harassment and that 97% of these respondents reported that it was habitual and chronic. Teachers, educators and academics were the second most likely group in this study (after clerical workers) to experience workplace discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This data was made available via a large national study into workplace discrimination that included sexual orientation and gender identity; such a study has not been

⁶ For transgender individuals the situation is even more complicated; witness the recent court case in Texas where the court found that Nikki Araguz, the wife of a firefighter killed in the line of duty, could not access her husband's benefits upon his death because she had been born a man. Currently transsexual people are allowed to file for certain documents under their assumed sex and are legally recognized as their assumed sex in all things *but* marriage, creating a marginal status for transgender people. (Christian, 2011)

performed in the United States to this scale. Australia provides an interesting look into how homosexuality and gender identity are treated in the workplace of a nation that is culturally similar to the U.S.

The educators in this study were subjected to homophobic jokes, verbal and physical harassment, destruction of property and threats (Irwin 2002). They also experienced prejudicial treatment that included: “being overlooked for promotion, not being offered the same opportunities as heterosexual staff and the sabotaging of work” (Irwin 2002, 68). Several of the teachers they spoke of incidents where fellow teachers made homophobic jokes within earshot or “outed” them without their consent. The most frequent prejudicial treatment the teachers, educators and academics received were the undermining of their work and unrealistic demands by superiors and colleagues. Several, especially those who worked in private religious schools, feared coming out or seeking recourse for discrimination because they feared they would be labeled as pedophiles or would lose their job. LGBT teachers must deal with the stigma that they are predatory towards children or are seeking to “recruit” them into being LGBT themselves. In Australia however, LGBT people are protected nationally from workplace discrimination and have legal recourse to combat it, should they feel the need to, a luxury LGBT workers in the United States do not have at the federal level.

Embrick, Walther and Wickens (2007) interviewed workers and managers at a large baked goods distribution facility in the Midwest United States and noted evidence of deeply ingrained homophobia in the beliefs of many of the workers and outright discrimination by managers and hiring personnel. While workers reported disgust but not outright discrimination, hiring managers were found to limit access to employment based on applicants’ perceived sexual orientation. They did this by asking personal questions during interviews, encouraging employees to ask personal questions or using the probation period between training and hiring to exercise the right to fire those suspected of being gay or lesbian (Embrick, Walther & Wickens 2007). Because the truck drivers, hiring personnel and workers at the

facility prized masculinity they viewed homosexual people as not being masculine enough to perform the work or that one's homosexuality was incompatible with working at the facility.⁷

For LGBT workers in the United States there are few avenues by which they can battle workplace discrimination. The Employment Nondiscrimination Act, which includes sexual orientation and gender identity as well as race, gender, religion and disability, has languished in Congress since 1994, awaiting approval. However LGBT workers can attempt to sue on the basis of gender-role discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Berkley & Waitt 2006). Title VII prevents employers from discriminating against an employee or prospective employee based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. It does not explicitly include sexual orientation; however in *Phillips v. Martin Marietta Corp.* the Supreme Court found that the Equal Protection Clause also protected against what is called "sex-plus" discrimination. Sex-plus discrimination means that one's sex "plus" another neutral category tied to gender behaviors such as wife, mother, father etc. can constitute a protected class if discrimination is based on gender-role expectations. In *Phillips v. Marietta*, Phillips was a female employee who was fired because her employer felt that her position as a mother of school age children would diminish her ability to work. The Supreme Court found that Phillips was not discriminated against because she was a woman but because she was a mother and her employer incorrectly assumed the gender roles tied to this position meant that she could not perform her duties. Berkley and Waitt (2006) argue that this protection expands to include LGBT workers, especially if they behave in gender non-conforming ways and their behavior does not impede their ability to do their job.

Cultural violence and stigma.

Cultural violence can be enacted through the process of dehumanization, which Goffman (1963) attributes to the imputation of the stigma. Because stigmatized individuals are seen as less than human, their rights, civil liberties and health are often deemed of little importance or not worth considering in the actions of legal, health, and educational institutions. Humphreys (1975) notes in his infamous study

⁷ No other workplace prizes masculinity and officially targets LGBT people for discrimination more than the U.S. Military with its expressed policy of Don't Ask Don't Tell and the discharging of LGBT service men and women. This will be elaborated on later in the literature review as it is a clear example of stigma and LGBT people.

of “tearoom trade” (sexual encounters between men in public bathrooms) that the stigma of being homosexual drove gay men into hidden or clandestine sexual encounters where they were subject to police raids, increased risk of disease and possible acts of violence. This type of cultural violence can be attributed to stigma affecting how and where LGBT individuals can live and express their identity. A recent Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2011) report noted that stigma, victimization and discrimination can lead LGBT youth to risk behaviors such as drug use, unsafe sex practices, suicidal behaviors and exposure to physical violence. D’Emilio (1983) notes that the gay ghettos in large urban centers primarily developed so that the nascent gay community could find a place where they might escape stigma; the anonymity and bureaucracy of large urban centers allowed gay and lesbian people to find employment, acceptance and relationships that were otherwise impossible in rural areas where one’s sexuality would be harder to hide.

1.3 SILENCE

Silence is another important aspect of cultural violence and societal reactions to stigmatized individuals. Latino cultures tend to use silence as a way of marking difference or stigma, as is described in literature about and by LGBT Latino authors (Islas 1991; Leyva 1997). Hidalgo and Hidalgo-Christensen (1977) linked this concept of silence to sexuality in their study of Puerto Rican lesbians, where their respondents believed a silent tolerance existed with regard to their sexuality. Their families knew about their sexuality but treated it as an “unspoken truth” (Hidalgo & Hidalgo –Christensen 1977). Silence also manifests in institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism; for example, school curricula that teach sex education but leave out the experiences of LGBT people or the contributions that they have made to human history (Pascoe 2007, Wickens & Sandlin 2010). In this manner silence can also be seen as a manifestation of cultural violence because it makes it seem as though LGBT people do not exist or have nothing of value to offer society.

This thesis looks particularly at silence as it pertains to LGBT people because it seems to be a common thread in many LGBT narratives both generally and on the U.S.-Mexico Border. Leyva (1997) notes that “silence has been an enigma, a survival strategy, a wall which confines us, the space that protects us.” (429). Silence, as it is used in this thesis, is different from the “closet” concept in the sense

that one's sexuality or gender identity are known publically and may even be tolerated, but are not acknowledged or seen as socially acceptable. The "closet," on the other hand is a method of coping with stigma by compartmentalizing or concealing one's sexual behavior and identity from society (Plummer 1975).

Silence can be seen as both a consequence of stigma and a way to cope with it; silence allows one to remain connected to one's culture and family while not actively disregarding or hiding one's sexuality. Leyva (1997) recounts the story of a Latina lesbian, Alicia, who left her family because she was afraid of hurting her mother after she "came out." When Alicia's mother became very ill, she asked her daughter to come back saying, "*Tu eres mi sangre, seas buena o seas mala, yo te quiero*" [You are my blood, whether you are good or bad, I love you] (Leyva 1997, 431). In this way silence becomes a way for Latino families to respect one another despite disagreement with the way another lives their life (Leyva 1997). Nonetheless, in some contexts outward appearance may contradict the verbal silence; in Leyva's article, Alicia is presented as "stone-butched" meaning she adopted masculine clothing and appearance, which leads Leyva to ask, "What does silence mean when your looks say everything?" (432).

The effects of silence can be especially negative when it is imposed by institutions.. Social institutions such as formal education lend credibility to heterosexism and homophobia when they treat the issue with silence. Wickens and Sandlin (2010) studied how LGBT people and issues were treated in a teacher's college at a conservative university in the southwestern United States. They noted many outward expressions of homophobia in the institution, such as a group of faculty protesting the inclusion of homosexuality in a school-wide non-discrimination policy. The faculty defended their position by citing a state anti-sodomy law, research associating homosexuality with unhealthy lifestyles and Biblical scriptures (Wickens & Sandlin 2010). Students displayed discomfort when issues of homosexuality were brought up and even argued in class that they should be able to discuss homosexuality and heterophobia in contrast to homophobia and heterosexism (Wickens & Sandlin 2010).⁸

⁸ This is similar in many ways to the phenomenon of reverse racism in which discussions of race quickly turn to how white people are victims of racism as well.

Silence in conjunction with heterosexism and institutionalized homophobia can lead to a host of negative effects among LGBT youth, such as stress, depression, suicide, high-risk sexual behaviors, eating disorders, school problems, substance abuse, running away and prostitution (Burn, Kaldec & Rexer 2005). Silence can also lead to isolation, lack of access to resources and an inability to cope with the stress of stigma, especially sexual stigma that is tied intimately with HIV/AIDS stigma (Enriquez et al. 2010).

1.3.1 “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”: Institutionalized silence.

In no other institution has silence of LGBT people been more policed or institutionalized than in the U.S. Military. The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy was an actual legal policy in which silence about one’s homosexuality was enforced; it was developed in 1993 by the Clinton administration as a compromise between those who argued that gay men and lesbian women had a right to serve in the military and those who said homosexuality was incompatible with military service (Sinclair 2009). Prior to this gay men and lesbians were prohibited from serving in the armed forces; if they were found out to be homosexual during the early 1900s they were imprisoned on felony charges, in later decades they were deemed psychologically unfit for military service and were dismissed (Sinclair 2009). This policy was often ignored during times that the military needed soldiers or during the draft years in which case homosexuality was overlooked or tolerated (Sinclair 2009). However, this policy changed at the end of the military conflict; expulsions and punishments for homosexual behavior were reestablished, as happened after World War II and the Vietnam War (Sinclair 2009).

The implementation of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” actually created a catch-22 situation for gay and lesbian personnel; they were allowed to identify as gay or lesbian but were not allowed to reveal their identity to their fellow soldiers or confidants like counselors or chaplains (Trivette 2010). This, according to Trivette (2010), created a “camaraderie paradox” in which having to hide their sexual orientation from fellow soldiers actually served to create a “disruption of that very cohesion and camaraderie” that the policy was supposed to maintain (Trivette 2010, 220). Such silence is detrimental not only to group cohesion within the military but also placed gay and lesbian service members in stressful situations where their livelihood was under constant threat.

Trivette (2010) also claims however that DADT created a queer space within the military where informal/ clandestine networks among gay and lesbian personnel helped to foster gay identity within safer social spaces while still maintaining silence. Conversely under the aegis of Don't Ask Don't Tell, silence between service members about sexual orientation can be seen as a sign of respect. Trivette (2010) recounts from one of his participants that "the only privacy you get in the military is the privacy that is afforded to you by other service members, and that's basically a form of respect" (217). Much like Leyva's (1997) observed silence with Latina lesbians in the context of family, silence can be a sign of respect within institutions such as the military where homosexuality and gay and lesbian identity are highly stigmatized or prohibited.

Understanding silence in the military is particularly useful and important to the analysis of El Paso's LGBT community because of the existence of a major military base within the confines of El Paso city limits (Fort Bliss) and the close proximity of two other military installations (White Sands Missile Range, Holloman Air Force Base). The existence of military bases and personnel has been connected to the formation of gay communities in many cities within the U.S. and abroad throughout the nation's history (Sinclair 2009, D'Emilio 1983). As a result of El Paso's close relationship with these military installations much of the population of El Paso is former or current military, which can definitely impact the LGBT community.

1.4 EL PASO-JUÁREZ REGION

Literature on silence and stigma as it pertains to the El Paso-Juárez region is rare and mostly available through other non-academic sources such as magazines and fiction. In an article found in the *Minero Magazine*, Santana-Melgoza (2006) interviewed several University of Texas El Paso (UTEP) students about their experiences of being gay on the border. One student indicated that her family was very accepting of her sexuality, despite the fact that she "never formally came out to her family" (Santana-Melgoza 2006, 5). Many students quoted in the article cited traditional Mexican culture as having a high degree of respect, reflected in not "inquiring about the already understood relationship" (Santana-Melgoza 2006, 5). This is tempered also by interpretations of the city as unsafe whereby gay

individuals are cautious of their surroundings and “don’t always feel comfortable in all public areas” (Santana-Melgoza 2006, 6).

Nonetheless, silence in this context can prevent institutions from recognizing the needs of LGBT populations, particularly LGBT youth and can prevent the reporting of physical attacks upon LGBT people. Silence can also prevent the formation of a cohesive LGBT leadership or community in line with what has been seen in other cities in Texas like Austin and San Antonio. This has shown signs of changing in El Paso with the formation of the Queer Student Alliance and the Delta Lambda Phi Fraternity at UTEP and the existence of several LGBT oriented groups and institutions within the city like Rio Grande Adelante, the M-Factor and the Metropolitan Community Church.

In searching for sources that dealt specifically with LGBT people and stigma I found it necessary to delve into fiction and literature as source material. The semi-autobiographical novels of Arturo Islas and John Rechy introduced to the intersections of homosexuality and the Latino culture that exists along the U.S.-Mexico border, primarily centered in the El Paso, TX region. These narratives, taken from the authors’ life experiences, paint the border in very different ways with regard to sexuality. Throughout both authors’ interpretation of sexuality in El Paso the themes of silence and clandestine meetings are constant, attributed to social disapproval of non-standard sexualities. In Islas’ (1991) *The Rain God*, two ostensibly homosexual characters are presented, Miguel Chico and his Uncle Felix; although they do not adopt a gay identity, their homosexuality is hinted at through indirect references to their not-quite normal sexuality (Padilla 2009, 20). Miguel Chico is constantly asked why he has never been married and mumbles something about an operation. Felix, who remains married to a woman throughout, dies at the hands of a homophobic soldier in the Smeltertown area of El Paso of the 1950’s (Islas 1991).

Rechy (1977) presents a different view of homosexuality in El Paso; through his autobiographical novel, *The Sexual Outlaw*, Rechy presents a gay culture that surrounds the bar scene and his past as a hustler. Rechy was writing about El Paso and Los Angeles during the 1970s, after the Stonewall riots captured the imagination of the United States and the gay and lesbian rights movement began to become more integrated into the larger civil rights discourse of the time.

Much has changed in the United States and Mexico with regard to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people and the El Paso of the 1950s and 1970s no longer exists. El Paso has often been seen as very similar to other border cities such as Los Angeles, San Diego and Tijuana, but no current studies exist looking into how stigma and sexuality intersect in the El Paso region. Prior literature on the U.S.-Mexico border and sexuality primarily examines the occurrence of HIV/AIDS in Latino men who have sex with men (MSM) (Carrillo 2004). The term MSM is telling here because it not only refers to gay and bisexual identified men but also straight or heterosexual identified men who have habitual sex with other men. The term gained prominence in HIV/AIDS research especially in sex research among Latino and African-American males. Sexual migration, the movement of people across borders because of sexuality, is an important aspect in the study of transnational sexuality studies, has often been framed in terms of its implications for sexual health, primarily HIV/AIDS transmission, care and treatment and access to resources (Carrillo 2004, Deiss et al. 2008, Zuniga et al. 2007). This literature focuses more on high risk behaviors such as injection drug use concerning MSM in particular (Deiss et al 2008, Ramos et al. 2009).

International travel is daily reality on the US-Mexico border and for MSM living on the border, travel to Mexico for pleasure and business becomes commonplace (Truong et al 2008, Zuniga et al 2007). Furthermore border cities such as Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana are situated along drug trafficking routes and make for prime locations for a high number of injection drugs users on both sides of the border (Deiss et al 2008). Because injection drug use is rather common in MSM communities, it can become another avenue for HIV transmission, whether through the sharing of needles or impaired judgment with regards to high risk sexual activity (Deiss et al 2008, Gorman et al 1997). Another facet of the dynamic between drugs, HIV and the border involves access to healthcare. Zuniga and others (2007) bring up the issue of trans-border migration and how HIV positive MSM can utilize the healthcare systems of both the US and Mexico in dealing with their HIV status. However recent restrictions on the border have lessened this effect for immigrant HIV-positive persons (both with documents and those without), since increased border security has created a barrier to healthcare and access to cheaper healthcare and antiretroviral drugs available in Mexico (Zuniga et al 2007).

These previous studies also are centered in locales where the interconnections between Mexico and the U.S. are different than the dynamic found in El Paso. Vila (2003) notes that the U.S.-Mexico border is not one homogenous area but rather can be divided into four distinct areas: Tijuana-San Diego-Los Angeles, Sonora-Arizona border, El Paso- Juárez and the Lower Rio Grande Valley- Tamaulipas border, each with its own unique set of “border cultures.” So while some of the sites of these studies do have a large population of LGBT people of Latino descent, they are demographically and culturally different from the El Paso-Juárez border region.

Baumle (2010) notes that a surprising number of same-sex partner households exist along the U.S.- Mexico border; Census data show that the metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) with unexpectedly high concentrations of same-sex unmarried partners exist along the Lower Rio Grande Valley, in small cities like McAllen, Laredo and Brownsville. Some problems exist in the term “unmarried partner,” especially when the U.S.-Mexico border is taken into context where extended families and some language barriers can exist (Baumle 2010). Baumle noted that on the Spanish long form the term “roommate” was translated as *compañero(a) de casa*, whereas the term “unmarried partner” was translated as *compañero(a) no casado(a)*. Baumle (2010) noted that while the common usage of the term *compañero(a)* could be confusing and lead to mislabeling of a household, same-sex unmarried partner households also tended to be more highly educated, spoke fluent English in addition to Spanish (decreasing the probability of language errors on the survey responses), and had smaller households (decreasing error tied to extended family members living in household), and census areas that requested Spanish forms had fluent Spanish translators available to answer questions (Baumle 2010). Even so the use of the term unmarried partner and its Spanish equivalents could be confusing and result in error in reporting.

What is interesting to note is that while El Paso is not among those MSAs with higher concentrations of same-sex unmarried partner households, Las Cruces, New Mexico is. Regardless, the Census 2000 data show that in El Paso county, 1047 households registered as same-sex households, accounting for roughly 15% of unmarried partner households and .5% of total households in El Paso (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Some of these may indeed be caused by reporting error or confusion about

the term “unmarried partner.” Furthermore, the Census only gathers this data in terms of same-sex partner households, it does not capture single gay and lesbian people, nor does it include LGBT young people who might be partnered but still live at home, or bisexuals engaged in a relationship with an opposite sex partner.

Queer communities in major metropolitan areas differ from El Paso in terms of socio-economic status, social and political integration and make-up. El Paso’s LGBT community is majority Latino and many of the residents here were born and raised within the city, with strong familial as well as social ties to the wider community. Whereas, in cities like San Diego-Tijuana, most LGBT residents come from other parts of the U.S. and Mexico, indicating distancing themselves from family ties as a reason for relocating (Carrillo 2004). Carrillo (2004) focuses on Latino gay and bisexual men in San Diego and Tijuana who cross an international border to actively participate in a “gay” lifestyle away from pressures and stigmas from family and work. Such a phenomenon would not be alien in the El Paso-Juárez area, however the difference in proximity between San Diego-Tijuana and between El Paso-Juárez present different opportunities for interpreting “gay spaces.” This can greatly affect identity formation and social understandings of diverse sexual and gender identities.

Studies on LGBT populations on the U.S.-Mexico border are far and few in between; this thesis will seek to expand that literature and perhaps add to it another dimension. Callaway (2005) describes some research into homosexual encounters in El Paso, specifically how family and religion impact how men who have sex with men find one another and create spaces for same-sex intimacy. Such spaces are tempered by social obligations to engage in publicly masculine behaviors such as marrying women and producing children. This can be seen as evidence of cultural violence whereby expectations of religion, family and culture prevent men from fully expressing aspects of their sexuality or integrating them into their public identity. However, Callaway (2005) does not focus on self-identified gay males, but rather on men who have sex with men, but still identify as heterosexual in public (MSM). This division between gay-identified males and MSM is common in research that looks into Latino homosexual identities, primarily dealing with Latino males (Baumle 2009, Philen 2006).

Prior literature on Latino notions of sexual identity have presented an *activo/pasivo* notion of Latino male sexual identity tied to masculinity and sexual position. This research states that traditional Latino populations tolerate habitual homosexual behavior as long as one still adopts a heterosexual identity and maintains an otherwise “straight” public life, complete with wife and children (Jeffries 2008, Callaway 2005). Masculinity, therefore, is mostly tied to a sexual role; the insertive partner in anal sex (i.e. top, *activo*) is perceived of as masculine and straight, while the receptive partner (*pasivo* or bottom) becomes imbued with a more feminine and undesirable identity and thereby is considered “gay” (Jeffries 2008). In contrast, U.S. ideas of gay male identity tend to revolve around the object choice, meaning that “MSMs, regardless of sexual role, are equally considered homosexual and potentially stigmatized as such” (Philen 2006, 33).

Philen (2006) confronts this common dichotomy in the literature of equating Latino sexual identity with sexual position, and U.S. sexual identity with sexual object choice. His study of El Paso’s gay bars and cruising sites reveals that, in this border region, social space and the behaviors that take place in them (bars or cruising sites) have more influence on how people in them define their sexual identity. He found that in El Paso’s gay bars, Latino gay men developed a sexual-object based identity, more similar to “U.S.” ideas, in other words being “gay” meant a man was attracted to other men, regardless of sexual position. In cruising sites, both Latino and Anglo men opted more for sexual position-based identity closer to perceived “Latin American” perceptions of sexuality, where “tops” were masculine and “bottoms” were feminine or “gay” (Philen 2006). This suggests that in border contexts the distinction between Latino and Anglo sexual identities is much more complex than previously thought. Philen (2006) however presumes two identities at work here, the U.S. (Anglo) and the Latino. In El Paso and other border cities with large native-born Latino populations, a third identity can exist, in El Paso’s case the Mexican-American identity, which exists between the Mexican (immigrant) identity and the Anglo identity, not including other non-Anglo, non-Mexican identities that have existed in El Paso for a long time as well. (Vila 2003).

El Paso differs from other medium-large urban centers in the sense that it is a border community. El Paso is located directly on the U.S. - Mexico border and shares a close and complex cultural, political

and economic relationship with Ciudad Juárez in Mexico. The two cities form a unique location for the formation of identity, since people on both sides of the border share familial, cultural and economic ties that span two countries. El Paso is also unique in that it is a minority-majority city. This means that people of Mexican origin compose the majority of the population, as opposed to other cities, where Latinos may be a large part of the population but are still outnumbered by Euro-American and/or African American populations. For example Census 2010 data show that in El Paso County, Hispanic people accounted for 79% of the population, whereas in San Diego they account for only 32 % of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Though no studies on stigma in El Paso exist there are indications that stigma and cultural violence play a role in the lives of LGBT people in the region. Letters published in the opinion page of the El Paso Times show the intensely debated position of LGBT people in El Paso. Several equate gay and lesbian relationships with sin and immorality, particularly in a Catholic/Christian frame of reference. Letters by Fr. Michael Rodríguez and articles about Pastor Tom Brown, two local clergy that have expressed anti-gay rhetoric, reveal a religiously based stigma applied to lesbians and gay men. At the same time, however, a few letters express support for LGB people, primarily from family members. On August 19, 2010 Bishop Armando Ochoa's letter, printed in the Opinion page, exhorted El Paso's Catholic community to treat gays and lesbians with respect and dignity (Ochoa 2010). Such complexity in the public's reaction to LGBT issues give an initial look of how sexual identity is formed in this city.

Methodology

2.1 LOCATION OF THE STUDY

This study took place primarily in the city of El Paso; no interviews were planned in Ciudad Juárez, although some life history interviews were done with former residents of Juárez or included experiences within Juárez. Interviews were done at places the participants choose, e.g. their private residence or my office on the UTEP campus. This flexibility in interview location was intended to make the interview process as comfortable as possible for the participant. Because of the nature of the study and its focus, interviews were done in private in closed rooms so as to minimize distractions and optimize recording conditions.

2.1.1 Setting: History and Present

El Paso, TX lies exactly on the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexico border within eyesight of Ciudad Juárez, in the Mexican State of Chihuahua. Politically, El Paso is generally a Democrat-controlled city surrounded by more conservative, Republican districts; that said El Paso is generally progressive when it comes to some social issues such as immigration reform, welfare programs and education, while staunchly conservative when it comes to others (abortion, birth control, LGBT rights etc.) El Paso and the region surrounding it have had a long, storied history with LGBT culture. During Porfirio Diaz's presidency in Mexico and after Mexico's revolutionary war in the early 1900s, several bathhouses gyms, school dormitories, military garrisons and other public spaces on both sides of the border were used by homosexuals to meet other men for sex or companionship (Macias-Gonzalez, 2001). In El Paso during this same time, Mayor Tom Lea Sr. implemented anti-immigration policies that barred several different classes of Mexican immigrants including those who suffered from mental disabilities, of which homosexuals were a part (Romo 2003).

While the common perception would be that religious institutions would be categorically anti-gay, El Paso does have several gay-affirming or gay-allied churches within city limits. The first Metropolitan Community Church was founded in 1968 as a Protestant Christian denomination devoted to ministering to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals and currently has thousands of

churches established in cities and towns across the United States and the world (mcccchurch.org, 2010). MCC El Paso was established in 1980 and became affiliated with the Universal Fellowship of MCC churches in 1982 (mccelpaso.com, 2011). While the MCC El Paso congregation is specifically focused on serving LGBT individuals other “gay-friendly” churches do exist in El Paso. The United Church of Christ is a liberal reformed Christian denomination that was formed in 1957 and the El Paso congregation called the Desert View United Church of Christ, located on the east side of El Paso, affirmed a commitment to accepting people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in December of 2008, though presumably they were considered “gay-friendly” much earlier than this (desertviewuuc.com, 2011). The United Church of Christ also indicates a Spanish speaking congregation in El Paso on their website called El Paso Iglesia la Trinidad Congregational UCC in Central El Paso (ucc.org, 2011).

The Unitarian Universalist community of El Paso, which is located in Northeast El Paso has recently in the “welcoming congregation” program provided by the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. This indicates that the congregation has received training and education about LGBT people and moves to welcome them (uua.org, 2011). Furthermore, some Catholic churches in El Paso have been rumored to be welcoming to LGBT people; the church in which I personally was raised, San Antonio De Padua Catholic Church, was particularly welcoming to LGBT people and allowed them to serve in different ministerial positions. Other Catholic churches that have been rumored through personal contacts as being gay friendly are St. Francis Cabrini in west El Paso and St. Pius X in central El Paso, which supposedly hosts Luminarias meetings. Luminarias was a local group of gay and lesbian Catholics who gathered to discuss their faith. In sum, the position of gay-friendly churches in El Paso is rather diverse and perhaps there are many more, this is only a brief synopsis of different gay-friendly congregations that have made themselves known publically as gay-friendly or gay-affirming.

One of the first gay bars that opened in the city in the 1970s was called The Old Plantation, which is still in existence as The New Old Plantation (OP). The city currently boasts seven other gay bars in two distinct areas of the city center; the South Ochoa St. district contains The New OP; The San Antonio Mining Company (The Mining) and The Whatever Lounge (The Whatever). Between the Old

Plantation and the Mining stands the Metropolitan Community Church of El Paso (the MCC), currently in an old railroad station that was converted in the 1970s.

The other “gay district” of El Paso lies between the streets of Franklin and Missouri where they intersect Stanton St. This has been referred to as “Pride Square” or “Pride L” as the gay bars in this location are centered around one city block off of Stanton Street. “Pride Square” contains: The Briar Patch (The Briar), which has been in existence since the 1980s; Chiquita’s; The Lips Lounge, the only lesbian-centric bar; The Tool Box and 8 1/2. The newest bar, Club Alive, is located roughly two city blocks from “Pride Square.” Much of gay public life centers around these distinct areas; attempts have been made to open “gay bars” outside of this area and closer to the “Eastside” of El Paso, but these have either closed or have changed into “straight bars.” There have been two attempts to establish a LGBT community center; one was located at the current location of the MCC and stood for roughly two years in the early 2000s. The second was begun in 2007 and was located between Pride Square and the South Ochoa district; it lasted for several months before closing due to financial difficulties. Each center aimed to provide young LGBT people with a place to congregate as well as a common center for LGBT people to socialize outside the bars.

In terms of LGBT organizations, El Paso is showing signs of development and much progress has been made over the last few years. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) began a chapter in El Paso in the mid 1990s, founded by Gery and Loraine Amudson. HIV education programs, inspired by the need for safe sex education during the 1980s HIV epidemic, developed in the city of El Paso in various incarnations. In the 1980s, the Gay Men’s Resource served as a source of sex education geared at gay and bisexual men; this was followed by Planned Parenthood’s Desert Rainbow Center, which ran three groups through the center aimed at serving LGBT people. EP Outings was a social group aimed at forming places for socialization outside bars for gay and bisexual men; Manhunter was a HIV education program funded by the CDC; and the Young People’s Project, which was funded by the Border AIDS Partnership and attempted to begin a gay youth group that also included HIV education. When Planned Parenthood Centers of El Paso closed, the programs closed with them; however the program that funded EP Outings, through the Texas Department of Health and Human Services, was

revived in 2010 and is now currently operating under the name MFactor through the County Health Services Office. MFactor currently provides HIV testing every first Friday of the month at the local gay bars and other areas around the city; it schedules social activities around El Paso and holds sex education and discussion groups every month aimed at gay and bisexual Latino men between the ages of 18 and 35.

El Paso Sun City Pride was established in 2007 as a group that would, organize an annual pride parade and festival in El Paso. They currently hold several fundraising events throughout the year that culminate in a three day festival, as well as various other events in the during Gay Pride Month in June. Prior to the forming of this group, parades were sporadically put on by various organizations and two street festivals took place in the same month, one organized by the South Ochoa bars and the other organized by the “Pride Square” bars.

Rio Grande Adelante began in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a social organization catering to lesbians, gay men and transgender people in the El Paso, Las Cruces NM and Northern Chihuahua, Mexico region. After several years in relative obscurity it restarted in 2008, offering social events, political committees and activities that range from developing and fundraising for a Stonewall Gala recognizing contributions to El Paso’s LGBT community and the Matthew Shepard Scholarship, offered to LGBT students and allies. They have also partnered with Gay, Lesbian and Straight Educators Network to form Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) in area high schools.

Currently several local high schools, Hanks High School, Del Valle High School and Chapin High School, have GSA’s operating; however, several other local high school students and teachers have started GSA’s in their schools only to see them abandoned one year later due to pressure from school officials, other students or the mobility of student leadership. I remember when I attended Bel Air High School in the lower valley of El Paso, a couple of students attempted twice to begin a GSA but pressure from administration frustrated these attempts so that the students gave up. That said a state-wide network has formed that is attempting to connect the GSA’s throughout the state of Texas, that the aforementioned high schools have survived the past few years is a testament to the greater support they have begun to receive.

The University of Texas at El Paso recently started their own LGBT student's organization in 2007 which was named LGBTQ at UTEP but later was renamed Queer Students Association. The QSA operates under the purview of the Rainbow Miner Initiative whose goal is to make UTEP a more gay-friendly space and educating students, faculty and staff about LGBT issues and lives through the Speak OUT program and other activities. The QSA provides several LGBT students with a space to belong and also holds political events such as the Day of Silence protest and others.

Other student organizations such as the Women's Studies group and the Feminist-Majority Leadership Association (FMLA) have also begun advocating for LGBT voices to be heard at the University level and have organized LGBT film festivals on campus and around El Paso. El Paso Community College also started their own gay and straight student organization. UTEP is also the second university in Texas to have a Delta Lambda Phi Fraternity for gay, bisexual and progressive male students started by students in 2006 and recently became a chapter under the national fraternal organization in 2010. The Delta Lambda Phi fraternity at UTEP has recently become a well known fraternal organization, earning several awards in the UTEP Greek System.

The recent surge of LGBT organizations in El Paso is part of a much larger growth in visibility, voice, and advocacy around LGBT issues. On June 29, 2009, five gay men were kicked out of a popular restaurant named Chico's Tacos by security guards, because two of the gay men were kissing. Reportedly the guards used anti-gay slurs and when police arrived one officer cited an anti-sodomy law in Texas, saying that two men kissing was an illegal act, despite the fact that anti-sodomy laws in Texas were struck down as unconstitutional in 2003, with *Lawrence v. Texas*. This incident ignited weeks of debate and protest as police diversity training was brought into question as well as the position of LGBT people in El Paso. The Chico's Tacos incident sparked months of debate which some reporters have linked to the city council's decision to extend health care benefits to same-sex partners of city employees.

In June 2010, El Paso's city council voted 7-to-1 to extend health insurance benefits to unmarried domestic partners of city employees (same-sex and opposite-sex). The issue was hotly debated in city council meetings and a petition was circulated by Reverend Tom Brown, pastor at Word

of Life Church in West El Paso and founder of the political group El Pasoans for Jesus. The petition was placed on the November 2010 ballot and stated, “The City of El Paso endorses traditional family values by making health benefits available only to city employees and their legal spouse and dependent children.” (Wilson, 2010). The measure passed 52% to 48% but has remained an increasingly debated issue as the measure was ambiguously worded and presumably excluded not only unmarried domestic partners but also retirees, elected officials and others who are not city employees.

Several retiree and political organizations filed suit under the equal protections clause yet this was struck down by a state judge as the statute as worded did not violate any constitutional rights to equal protection. The city council afterwards voted 5-to-4 to reinstate all benefits removed by the ordinance, igniting an effort from Pastor Brown and others to recall the Mayor and three members of the city council. Another petition has been circulating to collect signatures to implement a non-discrimination clause in the City Charter that includes sexual orientation and gender identity, in addition to race, gender, class and other statuses. As of this writing the issue remains debated in newspaper editorials, city council meetings and will likely not be resolved when this paper goes to press.

Furthermore on May 7th, 2011 a 22 year old man by the name of Lionel Martinez was beaten severely by five individuals as he was waiting for his sister to pick him up across the street from the OP nightclub. His sister, friends and others have labeled the attack a hate crime because the perpetrators called him gay slurs and seemed to have targeted him because he was standing outside a gay bar at night. El Paso Police have dismissed labeling it a hate crime and rather consider it a gang-related incident, which sparked protests outside the City Courthouse and discussions about the nature of hate crimes held by Rio Grande Adelante. The FBI is currently investigating if the attackers violated Martinez’s civil rights. The incident has had a profound effect on the LGBT community of El Paso. It is this environment that this study began and through this context that the interview data must be interpreted as the participants were no doubt affected by these local and national events.

2.2 DATA COLLECTION

The primary data collection method was ethnographic life history interviews, which focused on participant’s lived experiences. This was particularly useful with regard to understanding cultural

violence and stigma, which often are not consciously understood by their victims. I gathered a total of 14 interviews over a three month period; the shortest interview was roughly 30 minutes long and the longest was about 1 hour and 45 minutes. The interviews focused primarily on the participant's family history, religious upbringing, and schooling as these intersect with their sexuality or gender identity. I considered these three components the major formative cultural institutions where social identities are developed and where a great deal of stigma can be experienced and concentrated.

2.3 PARTICIPANTS

Of the 14 interviewees 9 are male and 5 are female. A majority (8) are Hispanic/Latino with most identifying as being of Mexican descent, though one is part Puerto Rican and part Mexican-American. Other racial or ethnic identities were White/Anglo (2), mixed race (two White/Hispanic and one White/Korean). There was only one participant who identified as Black, yet his maternal grandparents were in a mixed race marriage (Black and Mexican-American) and he was raised in their home.

Though an attempt was made to recruit transgender individuals for this thesis, few if any came forward and when I attempted to contact those that I did know the interviews fell through and could not be completed by the time the data had to be collected and analyzed. The absences of transgender individuals could have resulted from a number of different reasons; the organizations that I recruited from may not appeal to transgender individuals as some largely target gay and bisexual men (MFactor) and others (Rio Grande Adelante), advertised my recruitment for a short amount of time. I did not use the internet nor target transgender specific websites or organizations in El Paso.

Furthermore though I have been involved in the LGBT community of El Paso to varying degrees, my involvement with transgender issues has been minimal at best. It is very likely that I was relatively unknown to transgender people in El Paso and so they became wary of talking with me. Tensions do indeed exist between gay men and transgender individuals with the latter often being called derogatory terms such as "tranny" by gay men, or being assumed to be prostitutes. It is very likely that my identity as a gay man made several potential respondents hesitant to contact me, more so than if I were transgender or known in the community. Because of their absence I will now refer to any

conclusions or interpretations as applying to only lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people in El Paso. While some of the experiences and manifestations of stigma and silence could apply to them it would be over generalizing without adequate data to support it. Inclusion of transgender individuals in later studies will be among my top priorities since I actively want to include them in my analysis of LGBT issues.

The interviewees included 8 gay men, 4 lesbian women, and 2 bisexuals (one male and one female) ranging from 18 to 64 years old. The only age limit I imposed was the minimum age of 18 in order to comply with Institutional Review Board recommendations and avoid potentially lengthy and complicated procedures were I to interview minors. A majority of the participants (8) were young adults between the ages of 20 and 30, most of whom were attending the University of Texas El Paso (as was the youngest). The older participants were mostly in their 50s. No participants were between the ages of 30 and 45, so this generation is not represented in the qualitative data, this generation came of age during the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which would most likely have influenced their sexual identities. However, given that several lived through these decades, we can glimpse something of the attitude of El Paso during these years as well. I intended to have the sample reflect the diversity of the LGBT community. In terms of participant recruitment race and gender played minimal roles in that participants were not chosen or refused based on these criteria.

I recruited participants using a snowball method and contacts that I had with several different community organizations such as Rio Grande Adelante, M-Factor, UTEP's Queer Student Alliance and personal friends and colleagues. Confidentiality is of great importance in research that involves human subjects discussing sensitive or personal topics, and I made every effort to ensure that my participants and their narratives were and will be kept confidential. Transcripts of interviews that were modified to exchange the participant's name with a pseudonym and were kept on a password protected USB, that is stored in a private and secure location. Voice recordings of the interviews are being kept on another password protected for future research USB and possible inclusion in class or conference presentations. Consent forms and any information linking interview data to the actual names of the participants will be

kept in a locked file cabinet and stored separately from the password protected USB that contained the audio files and transcriptions. Below is a chart providing details of the participants:

Table 2.1 (Participants and demographic information)

Name*	Age	Sex	Identity	Ethnicity/Race⁹	Years lived in El Paso
Ophelia	18	F	Lesbian	White/ Hispanic	Born in EPT, Lived whole life
Bryan	23	M	Gay	Anglo – White	Born in EPT, lived whole life.
Zephora	24	F	Lesbian	Puerto Rican- Mexican- American	Born in EPT, lived whole life
Quentin	24	M	Gay	Black	Born in EPT; Lived in EPT 23 years
Paola	25	F	Bisexual	Hispanic	Born in El Paso
Donna	26	F	Lesbian	White/ Korean	Moved to EPT at age 14 (1999)
Nathaniel	27	M	Gay	Hispanic	Born in EPT; Lived whole life
Eric	27	M	Gay	Mexican American	Born and Raised in EPT
Rudy	29	M	Gay	Mexican	Born in EPT, moved from CJ 6 months ago
Stanley	47	M	Bisexual	White/ Hispanic	Lived in EPT almost 40+ years
Gabriel	51	M	Gay	Mexican- American	Born in EPT, raised in CJ until age 16. In and out of EPT until 1999
Norma	54	F	Lesbian	Mexican- American	Born in CJ; Moved to EPT at age 24 (1961)
Larry	55	M	Gay	White/Bahamian	Moved to El Paso in 1995
Oliver	64	M	Gay	Anglo- White	Moved to EPT in Dec. 1984
EPT = El Paso, Texas; CJ= Ciudad Juárez; * all names are pseudonyms					

⁹ Participants were not asked specific questions regarding how they identified in terms of race or ethnicity, these categories developed as participants self-identified or revealed their background in the process of the life history interview.

2.4 ANALYSIS

The interview protocol (see appendix) had three main sections: demographics, life history (centering on family, school and religion), and interpretations of the city. The interview protocol was used as a guide to ensure that most if not all of the questions were asked; however interviews were informal and questions were often answered out of sequence. Seven interviews took place on campus at my office in Old Main; the door was locked and a sign was posted outside requesting privacy. Four interviews were conducted at participants' homes but each was done in one-on-one situations; Gabriel and his housemate, Rudy, conducted their interviews in their living room one after the other. Two interviews (Zephora and Donna) took place at their places of work when no clients or co-workers were present; Stanley was the only interviewee who requested his interview be done in his car.

With regard to the Lionel Martinez beating, which took place in the middle of the interview phase of the thesis, 10 interview sessions (both Gabriel's interviews counted as individual interview sessions) took place before Lionel Martinez was beaten outside the OP on May 7th, 2011. Six interview sessions (one of Zephora's 2 interview sessions) took place after Lionel Martinez was beaten. It was difficult to contact and schedule follow up interviews with all of the participants and where comments are made about safety and physical violence I have attempted to put a footnote stating when the interview took place and in what context.

Each interview began with a broad invitation for the participants to first describe their life in El Paso as LGBT people. The interviews then became more detailed about their life history experiences. In terms of family history the questions ranged from describing the family one was raised with and then moving on to how the family reacted when the individual revealed their sexuality, or conversely, if they have not revealed it, what factors are operative in keeping it a secret. In terms of religion, questions ranged from basic knowledge of what religion(s) the participant was raised in to experiences of religious teachings, authorities and fellow worshippers around issues of sexuality. School was treated in much the same way, allowing the participant to freely narrate their own life history surrounding their formative years in the education system. Instances of bullying, friendship, peer pressure and interactions with teachers were most important here, but not curriculum or official school messages about sexuality.

The interview questions also explored the participants' experiences with the city of El Paso, especially regarding feelings of safety and spaces where expressing one's sexuality and gender identity is either condoned or sanctioned. Questions were couched in terms of how safe or accepted one felt being an LGBT person in El Paso and how one might deal with instances and places where one does not feel safe or accepted. This focus on the city allowed participants to expand their impressions and perhaps point out structural or cultural places where violence and stigma are enacted. Only two participants were able to give second interviews, Zephora and Gabriel; for Zephora the second interview took place a couple of weeks after the initial one and focused on the second half of her life history and Gabriel's second interview served to clarify a story he had told during his first interview.

Each interview was initially coded for four different phenomena:

1. Experiences of stigma or silence
2. Interpretations of El Paso and experiences being LGB in the El Paso-Juárez region
3. Instances of violence (both cultural and physical) in El Paso, and
4. Perceptions of space and safety.

These four categories developed as I heard each interview multiple times and began to make notes and observations about them. Each category developed as answers to my research questions; I posted the four different categories on a wall and went through paper versions of the transcribed or outlined interview, color-coding quotes, stories or observations that pertained to either one. Then I cut sections of the interview out and taped them under their respective heading. As this was done the instances began to coalesce into central themes or shared traits which facilitated the formation of subcategories. One methodological advantage in allowing categories to emerge this way is that one hears the interviews without forming preconceived categories and attempt to fill them, in essence allowing observations to form organically as the interviews dictate. Experiences of stigma were broken down into four subcategories: stereotypes and stigma; experiences of stigma; and stigma management and coping strategies. Silence was categorized as: general silence in El Paso; silence and the workplace; silence and family; negative or harmful silence; silence as a positive; and finally resistance to silence. Interpretations of El Paso and participant's experiences developed into these subcategories: experiences of Juárez;

connections between Juárez and El Paso; El Paso's atmosphere for LGBT people; El Paso's LGBT community; and finally impressions and comparisons to places LGB people have traveled to or lived in.

Instances of violence were categorized as physical violence; cultural violence; and the overlap of physical and cultural violence. Instances of cultural violence seemed rather broad to make into one subcategory so it was further subdivided into: general or city-wide cultural violence; cultural violence and family; cultural violence and religion; cultural violence and schools. Because the family, school and religion were the main cultural institutions that I wanted to look at they became subcategories of cultural violence. While I did not purposefully ask questions concerning participants' workplaces several volunteered this information and so I felt it necessary to include instances of cultural violence and the workplace as well. This sub category of cultural violence also included not only instances of cultural violence but instances when people were spared the effects of cultural violence or were accepted by the individuals and institutions. Perceptions of space and safety were divided into perceptions of unsafe spaces and safe spaces. What will follow this is a look at interesting phenomena that came up during the interviews and may be avenues for future study.

2.5 CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE

Given that studies of LGBT people on the U.S.-Mexico border are few and far between, this thesis will contribute to a greater understanding of sexuality and social stigma in the border region. Prior literature has mostly looked at LGBT populations in large metropolitan cities; this study will contribute a different perspective, one born of the experiences of LGBT people in another, less studied area of the U.S. This study also provides a more nuanced look at LGBT communities of color, and will add their perspectives and experiences to the wider literature. Understanding experiences of violence, especially non-physical, cultural violence against minority populations, allows for a greater understanding of the formation of a minority identity.

Acts of violence and feelings of stigmatization have powerful psychological effects upon minority individuals; social marginalization by both structural and cultural institutions (like the family and the church) negatively affects identity development and may lower one's quality of life in other ways. Conversely, feelings of acceptance and support can result in positive outcomes for stigmatized

individuals, which can help them better cope with stigma. This study aims to look not only at the negative experiences of LGBT El Pasoans, but also those which resulted in greater support, resilience or acceptance and how they are shaped by the uniqueness of the El Paso-Juárez region.

2.6 LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study primarily derive from its limited scope; while family, religion and schooling are important cultural institutions, they are by no means exhaustive. Other institutions such as the legal system, workplace, and political and civic institutions are of great importance as well. Furthermore, the analysis is not generalizable to LGBT people in the nation or the world, nor should it be. This thesis is primarily exploratory and limited to understanding the kinds of violence LGBT people have experienced in El Paso, TX; future studies may examine whether the findings apply to all LGBT people in El Paso and/or to Ciudad Juárez, even to other transnational border contexts.

Language represents another limitation; my grasp of Spanish is elementary, not adequate to the task of conducting research. Interviews were done in English with bilingual or English monolingual participants. Understanding the experiences of Spanish monolingual LGBTs in Juárez and El Paso may become an avenue for future research.

2.7 POSITIONALITY

My position in the community is also something to note in terms of methodology. Limon (1991) notes that to be a native ethnographer is to put aside any pretensions of objectivity and understand one's own culture through one's own eyes. Jacobs-Huey (2002) notes that the reflexive nature of native anthropology and insider ethnography conspires to decolonize "Western anthropology through reflexive modes of representation and critique" (792). To be a native and an anthropologist means having to negotiate different positions within the field, not only as "insider" and "outsider" but also through gender, class, ethnicity/race, sexuality, education, and of course language (Jacobs-Huey 2002). Native ethnography is replete with contradictions; for example while one may be part of a social group, one's position as a researcher and academic makes the researcher somewhat marginal to their "native" scene

(Limon 1991). It is necessary therefore for native anthropologists to deconstruct their own identities as researchers even or especially when studying their own cultural communities (Jacobs-Huey 2002).

Part of the conflict of any ethnographer is to deal with certain realities that can play into stereotypes of people without reifying said stereotypes (Limon 1991). For example a gay male researcher hears from his participants that some were molested as a child; the native anthropologist must find a way to give truth to those experiences without playing into the stereotype that all gay people were molested. If one's gay participants are upper-middle class, white and have professional degrees, the researcher must incorporate this information without playing into the stereotype of gay people in the U.S. and negating the experiences of gay people of color, or those who are working class.

The native ethnographer must reconcile his or her own account with those that have come before, written by outsiders, without falling completely in line with them and continuing a discourse of colonialism and paternalism (Limon 1991). Furthermore native anthropologists should engage in critical reflexivity so as to "resist charges of having played the 'native card' via a noncritical privileging of one's insider status" (Jacobs-Huey 2002, 799). It is important then that I speak about my own position as a researcher and a gay man who studies other gay people.

My own identity as a gay Latino male inevitably shapes the lens through which I view the issues and experiences participants related to me. This inevitably influences what I make note of and deem important and will most likely have an effect during analysis and synthesis. My position as a person within the community gives me a great deal of leverage and understanding of cultural cues, mores and understandings, allowing me to better interpret the findings to a wider audience. That said, as a gay male researcher studying other LGBT people it becomes a challenge to not privilege gay and bisexual male accounts over those of lesbians and bisexual women, as has been done in the past. For this reason I have attempted to gain as diverse a sample as possible from the LGBT community of El Paso. Being Latino also helps to communicate with other Latino gay people and to understand the influence of Mexican-American culture on gay and lesbian people; yet I also need to understand the experience of non-Latino gay and lesbian people in a mostly Mexican-American city.

Given that stigma and the cultural violence it inspires is prevalent in all societies, I have no doubt that LGB people in the El Paso region have experienced violence and stigma based on their sexuality. I personally have had one experience of such violence; in September 2010 my boyfriend and I were the victims of a physical assault as we were leaving a local gay bar in El Paso. I personally do not know if this was indeed a hate crime, yet given the circumstances and context it definitely felt like one. Having been raised in El Paso I also have experienced timidity and caution about revealing my orientation, for fear of shaming my family. Such fear seems to be common when I talk to others within the community and may lead to silence as a reaction or coping mechanism with regard to stigma.

These personal experiences may create bias in my study, however Rosaldo (1993) points out that objectivity and its institutional authority no longer hold a monopoly on analytical truth. He notes that “[t]he ethnographer as a positioned subject...occupies a position or structural location and observes with a particular angle of vision.” (Rosaldo 1993, 19). The ethnographer and the subject are both positioned beings with different viewpoints, experiences and backgrounds that contribute to differing levels of illumination and blindness (Rosaldo 1993). Though I am gay myself and can provide an inside view into some aspects of the gay community I may miss something a heterosexual person would notice. Furthermore my participants might point something out that I, as a university trained social scientist, would miss or overanalyze. Neither viewpoint is more or less valid but different positions create different realities and different lenses of analysis.

Description and Findings

3.1 EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA.

When analyzing stigma I read the interviews looking for references to stigma around lesbian, gay and bisexual people, such as derisive stereotypes, beliefs that homosexuality was wrong or sinful, and other's assumptions about participants based on their outward appearance, their actual sexuality or even just the knowledge of their belonging to a specific group. A majority of participants had experienced such stigmatizing beliefs in their lives, though on a whole they believed El Paso to be a generally welcoming environment. I also discovered that, among the participants, several coping strategies were used, and resilience to stigma was present in nearly all participants' life histories.

3.1.1 Homosexuality as inappropriate for family and children.

Among those stigmas that were most frequently mentioned among the participants was the idea that homosexuality or identifying as LGB was inappropriate when it came to family and children. Goffman (1963) himself noted that homosexual people suffer from this stigma when he says, "Further, while one parent in a family may share a dark secret about, and with, the other, the children of the house may be considered not only unsafe receptacles for the information but also of such tender nature as to be seriously damaged by the knowledge." (53).

No participants said that being LGBT automatically prevented one from having a family, but many expressed that outwardly expressing their sexuality, either through small acts of affection (such as holding hands or kissing) or merely identifying themselves as gay, would be looked down upon by society in general. Gabriel, a 50 year old gay man who had been married to a woman prior to coming out, noted that when he was growing up he wanted a family but thought it was an impossibility, because he was sexually attracted to men. Prior to the age of 16 he lived in Juárez in his mother's home, which he defines as a commune of sorts, where many of the house's residents were gay male prostitutes who would get beaten up and were drug addicts and/or alcoholics. This colored his idea of what a gay man was, and he feared becoming one.

At the age of 16 he was taken in by his aunt, who lived in the United States, which was the first time he had ever realized “what a family was.” She was a devout Catholic woman with several children and they would all sit down at dinner together and go to church. He then says, “It was around this time that I had also begun to realize and reject the idea of being gay, because I had found out what a family was like...” At the age of 16 he began to explore his own sexuality and would sometimes find himself getting into cars with older men, who would drive him to a secluded spot and have sex with him.

I don’t know that it was prostitution, I knew that I wanted to do it. Sometimes they gave me money, sometimes they didn’t but, uh maybe mmm I would say 3 to 4 times, if memory serves me right. But again I hated it, I hated it – I hated the way I felt afterwards. I hated the guilt, I hated everything and I wanted a family.

Gabriel later married a woman and had three children before he came out in the late 1990s, which culminated in his divorce.

I married a girl that I had met at Job Corps and we had three children and every time I would say “This is it, I’m not going to do this, no more gay stuff” but every time I failed. Then I felt even worse, even worse than when I was younger, because now I have a family, the guilt was incredible. She also happened to be very Catholic and she also made us go to church every Sunday. So I was getting it from the church I was getting it from everywhere and it was just really, really it was tough and I think the toughest part of it was that we really did have a beautiful family. We really did have that marriage that everybody talks about, but I had my little secret and it was just so hard to deal with. When I finally, finally decided that I couldn’t deal with it anymore was [pause] I think I had been dealing with almost nightly prayers and almost nightly cryings[sic], asking God to change me, asking God to tell me why I was this way and all this and that. And I was 38 years old at the time and, and the questions were getting worse and worse...

Gabriel’s wife eventually found a revealing chat log on his computer and asked him to go to counseling. Through counseling he came to the realization that he couldn’t continue with his life the way it was. He and his wife got divorced and he began seeing a man he had met at the Briar Patch, a local gay bar.

Such stories seem to indicate that being gay and having a family are mutually exclusive, or at least were for gay men in the 70s. Despite this stigma, Gabriel went on to raise his three children after his divorce and no longer holds the belief that being gay is antithetical to raising a family. This sentiment was also expressed by Stanley, a 47 year old bisexual man, who is currently hiding his sexual

identity from his wife. He has met other gay men around his age who themselves married women because they felt that was the proper avenue through which to have children and a family life. Stanley himself is reluctant to share his sexuality with his wife and his children, because he fears it would break up his marriage.

No my wife doesn't know, I don't think she would [accept it], because she also came from a strict Catholic family, and though she doesn't judge people for being homosexual she doesn't believe that it's right... Later on in life we would watch "Brothers and Sisters" and we would see two guys kissing she would make her remark, so I was like, "Never mind, she wouldn't understand."

Aside from the idea of LGB identity incompatible with the goal of forming a family, there seemed to be the implication that LGB people themselves ought not to be around children, or that openly expressing one's sexual identity was somehow improper around children or families. Gabriel recounts that in his time as an HIV prevention program coordinator he worked with a "very homophobic" man who ran a program on health education for teenage fathers. Gabriel recalls that this man would always say he wanted to protect his young fathers from the gays, and would prevent them from talking to the gay men that frequented the center. Such behavior seems to assume that gay men are predatory especially when young people are concerned.

Oliver is a 64 year old gay man who is a high school teacher in the Lower Valley. When I asked him if he was "out" at work he said, "Because I'm a teacher, it's not something I would feel to be appropriate to show at school." He may have feared that by coming out to his students or co-workers, some would assume he was a sexual predator or trying to "recruit" kids into being gay themselves.

Donna, a 26 year old Korean-American lesbian and business owner, seemed to share this sentiment:

EG: Are there places in El Paso that you think gay people in general should not be open, like holding hands or kissing in public, or where it would be unwise to be like that?

Donna: I think that, like you know if you're at a daycare or if you're like at a church or something where there's gonna be like little kids or maybe like older people, you wouldn't wanna - like I wouldn't advise doing it, because you know people are gonna think that it's disrespectful ...because of their traditional views and the innocence of the little kids and all that ... It wouldn't be wise to you know like hold your partner's hand or give them a kiss, because they're - kids are blunt, you know. They'd be like all, "Ewww you just kissed a girl!" Like I just think that areas like that you know, schools, maybe in

the Wal-mart, I don't know, like places where there's gonna be little kids, older women or men, older people...¹⁰So pretty much everywhere [laughs] if you think about it. I'm just joking, but yeah not in front of certain people I would say. You can do it pretty much anywhere you damn well please but like I wouldn't do it in front of kids or old people things like that.

She implied that this was a way of respecting the viewpoints or beliefs of others; what struck me most was the idea that the innocence of the children would be somehow marred by seeing same-sex couples. Donna came from a military family and had worked at the Base PX when she was in high school as a civilian employee. When I asked her what being LGBT on Fort Bliss was like, she noted that Fort Bliss had become a more "family environment" and she thought that base officials would fine non-military same-sex couples for holding hands while on base. Whether or not this is truly the case it was interesting that she presumed that holding hands was a finable offense.

The idea that homosexuality was not appropriate to an environment where children or families were present came up in many interviews. Ophelia, the youngest participant by far and a lesbian who came out in 7th grade, recounted that less than a year ago, two girls were caught kissing at Loretto, her alma mater, and a parent reported them. Parents pressured the school to expel the girls, however, the president of the school¹¹ refused, since it took place after school hours. This unexpected support was also remarked on when Paola, a bisexual woman who had been in a relationship with a woman for 4 and a half years, told me that she and her girlfriend would often have slumber parties with her girlfriend's nieces and her cousin's children, indicating that some of their family members did not view their home as a dangerous or predatory environment.

3.1.2 Stereotypes about homosexual people.

Much of stigma is manifested through assumptions about traits that all members of a stigmatized community supposedly share. Sometimes these assumptions appear benign yet they can be linked to potentially harmful ideologies and beliefs about stigmatized individuals. Eric, a 27 year old gay male

¹⁰ Ellipses in quotations indicate an elision of sentences or parts of quotations. Speakers' pauses are indicated by [pause].

¹¹ Ophelia told me that the President of the School as a position different from that of a principle; she was in charge of the school and seemed to have final say in whether people were allowed to do things. It is also interesting to note that the President of Loretto, "Sister Buffy" was also a Sister of Loretto and perhaps the only nun on staff other than a few who taught elementary school.

college student, noted that one thing that he gets a lot of is that heterosexual people who find out that he is gay automatically assume that he will like their gay friends. This is evident in the following quote,

EG: Are there any incidents that you can remember where you felt stigmatized?...For being gay here in El Paso?

Eric: It's so funny because with hetero friends, yeah I think there is, there's a couple actually, of people that are heterosexual, it's always like, "Oh I know somebody that's gay for you" and it's like, well, the fact that he's gay doesn't necessarily mean that there's any type of chemistry. I always think that that's a funny one. It's just like with any - even outside of El Paso, there's an overwhelming sense that "Oh you're gay you must be great at decorating," or "Oh you're gay you must be a great," you know, "great with your home and gardening," "You must be very clean, and you must be"- I mean there's all these stigmas: that we're very promiscuous, that we're AIDS carriers, that it seems like all these - there's so many negative stereotypes as to the homosexual male, but yet you know everybody has - everybody knows somebody that is gay that I'm sure could break the stigma, but, I think the media, people, popular belief always confine us to being hairdressers, being flamboyant, being just, you know, that kind of person.

Gabriel also expressed a similar frustration;

EG: What do you think is important for other people to know given your experience being a gay man living here?

Gabriel: Well [pause] I think that, and I'm trying to use the right words because there's so many of them, when you meet a straight person you judge them by their value as a person and you never question what their sexuality is. When they meet a gay person they get so hung up on that gay thing that sometimes I think they do not process the whole person. Being gay is just one part of who you are, you know you're also a son, a father, a brother, you could be an artist, you could be a writer, you could be a doctor, you could be something else and they just kind of get - they hear the word gay and they just sort of like judge you; it's like their mind goes immediately to the bedroom, and when I meet a straight person my mind does not go immediately to the bedroom and, and I think that's one thing I wish that I could change. If they got to know me and then found out that I was gay, I think it would be a lot easier than for them to meet me as a gay man and then try to get to know me, because I think that - When they hear the word "gay" all the barriers go up, all the fears come up, all the precon- all the misconceptions and preconceived notions come up so I wish there was a way we could get beyond that. How? I don't know."

Nathaniel, a 27 year old gay man, who is a rather well known drag queen in El Paso's gay community, expressed similar frustration with his experience of how heterosexual women often approach him and want him to be their friend because they "want the gay man to make them over." He seems to blame popular make-over shows on television for propagating this belief that gay men have an

innate fashion sense that can benefit straight women, similar to Eric's example of stereotypes around gardening and cleanliness. Such stigmas could be positive and benign, in that gay men are seen as more knowledgeable than their heterosexual peers in domains that make them desirable friends and members of society. Yet it is also similar to the "benign" stereotype that all Jewish people are bookish or all black people are good at sports. Such a stereotype assumes a natural connection to Western European femininity for gay men and can be confining for those gay men who do not express interest in fashion or femininity. At worst, such stereotypes cast gay men as the accessories or personal assistants to heterosexual women, rather than friends on an equal par with heterosexual friends.

3.1.3 Stigma of femininity in gay men or masculinity in lesbian women.

Many respondents noted that they have been stigmatized for behaving or appearing in a gender non-conforming way, rather than for their sexuality per se. Quentin, a 24 year-old black gay man, said that when he was in school he used to love to make people laugh in class and once during second grade he was mimicking a comedian's performance of acting effeminate to elicit laughs from his audience. When he did this the students laughed and called him gay because he was acting like a girl; this made him so uncomfortable that he stopped immediately. In connection with this he feared he had a "girly" voice and so was often afraid to speak in class.

Eric noted that though he never acted effeminate in school he was picked on because he didn't know how to play sports, nor did he like to roughhouse with the other boys. He was targeted for teasing because he wanted to stay clean and enjoyed more intellectual and artistic things, which among his classmates were considered "not-boy" things. Gabriel and Oliver both indicated that the main reason they have never been targets of hate crime or physical assault was because they are not "obvious" or "flamboyant," a coded reference to the fact that they do not act like effeminate men.

Femininity in gay men seems to be stigmatized by the LGBT community as well; Nathaniel recalled that when gay men in whom he is romantically interested find out he dresses as a woman, they will normally stop talking with him. He recalled his first time dressing in drag,

For Halloween that year I wanted to dress up and I had my best friend at work do my make-up, and I went out and it was a very positive response from everyone that was

there, and I thought “Oh you know I guess the people like it I should keep on doing it.” And I would only do it on holidays like I did it for Mardi Gras, the next Halloween, that kind of stuff and after a couple of years, I started doing it for EP Outings, for fundraisers and stuff. And I realized even if I only did it maybe what three times a year, people remembered it and they labeled me as a cross-dresser and it was a big turnoff for gay men. So I told myself, “Well screw this if they’re gonna remember three times a year I’m gonna do it whenever I want.”

Nathaniel noted that other potential romantic partners fetishize his drag persona and become disinterested when he is dressed as a man.

Stanley said that when he and his son, who doesn’t know about his sexuality, joke around, they pretend to be effeminate gay men. Stanley is definitely masculine and often finds male sexual partners through an online wrestling database- while appealing for some gay men it is not especially welcoming for more effeminate men (gay or straight).

Lesbian and bisexual participants also experienced stigma around the stereotypes that all lesbians acted masculine. Paola noted that at a birthday dinner for her girlfriend’s male cousin a person asked her how she knew the birthday boy and she said she was dating his cousin. They responded by asking, “Which one is he?”; she pointed at her girlfriend and they all gave her a surprised look, remarking that she couldn’t be a lesbian because she looked like a girl. Several of the respondents (Zephora, Paola, Donna, Norma) noted that they often get stared at because they or their partners present as butch or “dykey-looking” and this gaze is often felt as hostile or discomforting, I shall expand on this point below.

3.1.4 Bisexual Stigma.

Despite the fact that I only interviewed two bisexuals I found their experiences instructive. “Biphobia” is often spoken of when bisexuals are marginalized by either the heterosexual or gay communities. A stigma of bisexuality exists, especially in stereotypes or ideas that bisexuals are all promiscuous, cannot decide on a “real” sexuality, or are not willing to admit to being gay. Paola iterated that when she has come out as bisexual some people have been dismissive of her identity, which leads her to simply identify as lesbian when she is around her partner:

EG: What is the attitude toward bisexuality that you get here in El Paso either from outside or from within the LGBT community?

Paola: [pause] I would feel that like, I feel that bisexuality is kind of like [pause] ‘Choose’, people are like, “Well you either like one or you like the other, let’s not be greedy here and like both,” you know and I think I’ve gotten that quite a bit. And it wasn’t until recently that I actually came to terms that I was bisexual, and I thought for many years that I was just lesbian... I think that it’s something that I almost have to keep hidden, because I don’t want to tell my girlfriend I’m a bisexual because I don’t want her to feel, and I know it sounds stupid, but I don’t want her to feel like threatened by males, you know, so I think that being a bisexual at least like for me I feel like I have to keep it hidden more than actually being a lesbian.

She doesn’t want to come out to her girlfriend because she is afraid she will feel threatened by men, indicating a stigma that bisexuals cannot be monogamous and always want attention from both sexes. This also reveals how stigma leads to silence even between intimate partners.

Stanley, though he is not out to his family, does interact with members of the gay community online. He says that men often tell him he is living a lie and that his bisexuality is an excuse, not an actual sexuality. Despite the fact that he is having covert sexual affairs, such an assumption negates his very real relationship with his wife, which he says is also fulfilling. In addition to this he doesn’t feel accepted in either the gay or straight community because both seem to think that bisexuals are too “chicken-shit to claim what [they] really are.” This pressure has led him to feelings of guilt and conflicts with his own sexuality, exacerbated by the fact that he has no real community to turn to other than the few understanding friends he has online. Stanley also felt that his bisexuality and the fact that he is married attract gay men to him, in essence turning his bisexuality into a fetish.

All of the above examples illustrate assumptions or stereotypes about LGB people that participants have heard or noted from others and seem to have internalized during their socialization into adulthood. It is also important to note participants’ own personally held beliefs about LGBT people, because they hint at the social and cultural nature of stigma, which can be internalized and projected onto other LGBT individuals. What follows is a recounting of individual experiences of manifested stigma, mostly through derogatory name-calling, tacit approval of heterosexist/ homophobic language, or pressure and discomfort at recognizing that one is part of a stigmatized population.

3.1.5 Manifestations of Stigma.

Many participants’ experiences with stigma were instances of verbal insults, jokes or the use of words to demean LGB people. Some considered these insults or derogatory words to be normal

instances, especially in school settings. Eric, Bryan, Nathaniel and Rudy recounted that they or others were called “fag” repeatedly while they were in school. Rudy, who went to school in Juárez noted that his friends used the word *marimacho* in reference to a girl in their class, and also *joto* and *maricón* when speaking about a boy who attended school with them. Donna recalled that though her high school was generally an inviting place for LGBT people to come out while she attended, she did hear one boy in the hallway comment, “That’s a waste of a piece of ass” when he saw two girls holding hands, indicating not only a stigma of lesbianism but also sexist ideas that women are solely sexual objects for men.

Outside of school settings participants also had insults lobbed at them in public; Gabriel and Norma noted that it is common for men to drive through the “gay area” of town and shout derogatory words as they drive past. Zephora recalled the following incident when she and her fiancée were walking down Mesa St. to the Tool Box, a local gay bar:

This was just like few months ago Teresa and I, my fiancée and I, are walking down Mesa to go to the Tool Box... I’m in, I think a tie and some jeans and she’s you know in heels and, you know, I hear this car roll up to the stop light, you know, blaring ranchero music and I’m like “Uh oh.” And I’m thinking this one’s gonna whistle at Teresa, she’s in heels, you know, and she looks hot. And no, you know they [drive] by and he says, “*Pinche manflora!*”¹² and I’m just like “Wow!” I’ve never, it was more like you know I wanted to say something back but I’m like “Zephora, be smart we’re a little too far from the gay area for it to be safe, so don’t say anything, you know, your fiancée’s gonna get pissed” [chuckles]...

In terms of other slurs and insults, Bryan has been called “fag” on the street repeatedly and Quentin noted that his grandmother often used the word fag in everyday conversation to refer to gay men who behaved effeminately.

The use of slurs is not the only form of verbal violence against LGB residents of El Paso, sometimes tacit approval of other’s words can also constitute an insult. Bryan recounted that a friend of his who is involved in UTEP’s Queer Student Alliance participated in a Day of Silence protest by creating a shirt that said, “God Hates Fags” on the front and “But He Loves Me” on the back, apparently

¹² The use of the term *pinche manflora*, was admittedly new to me, since I had only heard a few slurs in Spanish, especially those concerning homosexuality. *Manflora* apparently is a play on the English word “man” and the Spanish word for “flower” (*flor*); usually used in reference to homosexual men as *manflor* (meaning “fairy” or effeminate gay man), but the feminine equivalent *manflora* has also been used in reference to masculine lesbians and is equivalent to “dyke.” (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=manflora>).

calling attention to the suggestion that God loves everyone *except* “fags.” Bryan recalls that, while some were insulted by the shirt, his friend also received high fives from a group of students who had only read the front. Zephora, who is a member of the activist gay community, said that she had never heard insults or anti-gay statements until the debate surrounding the same-sex partner benefits, when opponents would speak at the microphone during city council meetings.

Quentin also recalled a very powerful instance when he and a small group of his friends were eating at a Taco Cabana in El Paso:

I’ve had several marked experiences where like one time I was at Taco Cabana with some friends and we were literally being verbally gay bashed, period, and it was this guy was, you know it was this group of people actually, and this guy was just hating on us, and hating on us, and we did nothing but sit there and eat and it was mostly because- I don’t know how he could tell we were gay- It was actually because I had a friend his name is Omar- he’s really tall, skinny, light-skinned Black guy and he’s really effeminate and uh so you could probably tell you know. Sometimes he crosses his legs or wears pink shorts or shit like that - and so, I think just from that, just from appearances he started like saying things like, you know mocking us, mocking Omar’s voice because it’s high-pitched. The rest of us were trying to be quiet so we didn’t get made fun of but as soon as the “f-word” was thrown around, as soon as this guy said, “Faggots don’t fight,” we all were like “What!?” We were stunned that in El Paso in January of 2010 somebody would say that and it just escalated it got so much worse you know, um so I don’t know if he was trying to instigate some type of violence, which was at that point that I had to tell my friend, “Hey calm down, like there’s four of us there’s twelve of them, let’s not worry.” And we left and it was so humiliating and terrible and all we did was we were eating at Taco Cabana, like we didn’t do anything and that same friend, my friend Omar, had that type of experience again at Taco Cabana and he was with a bigger group of gay people, so it happened again, but it was a smaller person it was like a heterosexual male and he was just giving them trouble.

What was surprising to me was that neither management, staff, nor other patrons interceded to stop this behavior. Here it is interesting that the group felt powerless to address the taunting man because he was with twelve people, whereas they were only four, and that they believed the situation would quickly devolve into violence, which they did not want to happen.

3.1.6 Stigma tied to appearance

Several participants said that they had often felt stigmatized or had the perception that people knew they were gay because of outward appearance. Oliver, though he considers himself “not so

obvious,” did recall a time in the 1980s when a cross-dressing student attended the high school where he taught. The student quickly became a subject of gossip among the teachers, students and even custodians. Then rumors and jokes began to circulate among students that he was dating another male student at the school and eventually both dropped out. While we can’t be sure of the actual reasons why the students dropped out it is telling is that Oliver felt that both students left because of the name-calling and gossip.

Bryan admitted that he appeared obviously gay to others and noted, “People can tell I’m gay just from the first 10 seconds of speaking with me.” Zephora often referred to her masculine appearance as indicating to people that she was a lesbian, noting that if she were to dress more feminine, she and her fiancée would probably not get as many stares. She also recounted that once at job interview, the male employer admitted that her more masculine appearance threatened him:

When I was 18 I got out of high school, I got my own job and I started buying my own clothes so I immediately went to the men’s section. And uh I think my appearance to some employers who are men was threatening because I appeared as masculine and, um, you know I guess I don’t know if I talk that way, if my mannerisms are masculine also, but I think I, I felt tension from, from employers who were very *macho* you know, and I remember one, one man even admitting it to me. He like said, “I’m sorry I’ve been this way to you, but I’ve never met anyone like you and it’s a little bit threatening.” And you know for him to admit that was amazing...

Nathaniel commented that he feels stares from people or a feeling of tension even when he is not dressed in drag. He claimed that people can often tell when someone is gay because

Even though we dress as men, we dress differently than normal people... because you know they [his friends while they were walking around downtown Ruidoso] weren’t wearing anything particularly flamboyant, but it was in good taste, you know like a nice t-shirt, with nice jeans that are a little distressed, with nice shoes you know and of course we present ourselves well, and everywhere we went people just stared at us like, “Look at all those gays!” [pause] It was something else.

Ophelia, the 18 year old lesbian, recalled that at a school sanctioned junior retreat she and her classmates were listening to an outside group that was running the retreat. One of the outside presenters began reading passages from the bible denouncing homosexuality, in an effort to teach the girls that it was wrong. Ophelia and her friends walked out of the talk and several teachers apologized on behalf of

the school afterward, including the teacher who recommended the retreat group. Such acceptance was intriguing given that Loretto is a school run by the Catholic Church and by the Sisters of Loretto, yet given my own experience with nuns in El Paso it is not too surprising that there is this level of acceptance within the Catholic Diocese of El Paso¹³.

Paola, who also attended Loretto academy several years before Ophelia, did not have such positive memories. She was the first girl to bring a same-sex partner to their senior prom, and though she received special permission from the president, she says “all hell broke loose” when she and her girlfriend danced the last dance of the night together. The next year, girls were forbidden from wearing pants to the prom. Paola also experienced some pressure from the teachers and counselors as well; counselors would call her into the office and try to tell her she wasn’t really bisexual (indicating a certain level of biphobia in an environment that was otherwise welcoming to lesbianism among its student body).

Gabriel, in his final years in the army, after his divorce, recalled that his ex-wife would often go into his office and call him names in front of his sub-ordinates. Since his divorce was during the time of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, such open revelation of his sexuality could have gotten him thrown out of the military. Furthermore his subordinates began “throwing the gay thing in [his] face,” leading him to retire from the military “before it got worse” and because he no longer want to work in an environment that was “hostile to the gays.”

3.1.7 Stigma from within the LGBT community.

While many participants recounted that they felt stigmatized from outside the LGBT community, a few noted that they felt pressure and/or discrimination from within the community as well. These instances involved the intersections of race and gender and point to the prevalence of stigma and cultural violence even within stigmatized communities themselves. As a researcher, stigma coming from within the LGBT community is a difficult thing to relate because my natural inclination as a member of that community is to show only the positive, to show one’s community as admirable and cohesive. Zephora

¹³ One does wonder if such experiences are similar for students who attend Cathedral High School (an all-boys Catholic school in Central El Paso) or if expectations and policing of masculinity are more heavily enforced.

recounted feeling stigmatized for being a lesbian when she worked in a gay club that was frequented mostly by gay men.

When I first started working, I worked at a gay bar for almost five years, I started when I was 20 and I stopped just last year and I [worked] behind the bar and when I started there were these two macho straight guys that always worked and all the gay men loved them; they were really buff, they were good looking you know. One day someone called and said, “Hey, can you cover my shift?” So there I was, the “dyke” behind the bar and this macho straight dude. And I hear behind the- this guy, this gay man tell this straight guy, our bartender, “What the hell’s that fucking dyke doing behind the bar?” and I turned to him and looked at him and I’m like, “Really? You’re gay too and your calling me a fucking dyke?!” And so, you know, I didn’t say that to him but I said, I looked at him and said, “I’m fucking working that’s what I’m doing.” You know and it kind of just, it took me back, but then I thought, “You know, there’s been some tensions, from the times, between gays and lesbians, gay men and lesbians,” but you know it doesn’t give him an excuse.

She also noted that the straight male bartenders were often treated much better by gay male patrons than she was, and received better tips whereas she was often tipped nothing. Another instance she recalled was when a younger customer said to his friend, “Ugh, it smells like fish...” upon seeing her behind the bar. Such stigmatizing behavior suggest the presence of sexism in the LGBT community where men, specifically straight men, are more respected by gay men than lesbians, especially “butch” lesbians.

Quentin has felt some hostility from within the LGBT community based on his appearance and race. One of the few respondents to talk about the internet and the LGBT community, he noted that when he turns down advances from men that he meets online they will sometimes call him the “N-word.” The relative anonymity of the internet often allows for more overt forms of racism to emerge, as opposed to in clubs and bars, where interactions are face-to-face.

Nathaniel, though he does not identify as transgender himself, has also felt some stigma related to transgender people and to drag. He remarked that when he is dressed in drag he often feels like more of an object rather than an individual, something akin to a doll. He is reluctant to date anyone who makes advances toward him when he is in his drag persona, because of past experiences with partners who expect him to be in drag at all times to maintain their interest. The opposite has also happened when Nathaniel was interested men who, upon hearing he dresses up in drag, would stop talking to him. He

attributes this to the stigma of drag in Hispanic communities, observing that drag is treated differently in other cities he has visited. When he has done drag in other cities he noted that people have not called him “tranny” or “hooker” and that gay men outside of El Paso are more willing to date a drag queen.

Issues of race and gender have affected the LGBT community since before the beginning of the modern LGBT rights movement. Gabriel also noted that transsexuals and lesbians are often marginalized in LGBT rights movements, though they were central to the Stonewall riots that jump-started the movement in the 1970s. Sexism is rampant among gay men; I have heard several gay men poke fun at butch lesbians because they want to “look like men.” That said, though the above participants have felt these pressures from within the community, they also felt that the LGBT community in El Paso is more accepting than the straight community. Quentin himself has heard from other black gay men that they feel more accepted in the gay community than in the black community which they viewed as more homophobic. Zephora also has felt more acceptance from the LGBT community especially in terms of employment where gay supervisors or employers have been accepting of her masculine appearance.

3.1.8 Straight Gaze.

Several participants noted that one prevalent manifestation of stigma on the U.S.–Mexico border is stares from heterosexual people; often these stares feel hostile, intrusive, or unwelcoming. These instances of staring I have termed “straight gaze,” because it mostly manifests in public and communicates that non-heterosexual people are unwelcome in presumably “heterosexual” spaces. The first to mention this hostile gaze was Zephora who, because of her more masculine appearance (wearing button-down shirts, slacks and short hair) often feels that people look her up and down. She links this type of gaze to the Hispanic culture, having had similar experiences when she visited Puerto Rico at the age of 19. This was when she began wearing men’s clothes and she described it as the most uncomfortable she had ever felt in her life. Zephora now actively tries to ignore the stares in deference to her fiancée who presents as feminine and does not notice it.

Paola, who is in a similar relationship, says it is hard being with her girlfriend because which is more “dykey-looking” and they get stares or double-takes. She does not view these stares as hostile, but

rather as the product of ignorance because people have not been exposed to homosexuality so they don't know how to treat it. She contrasts this to the feeling she got in Los Angeles in the conspicuously gay neighborhood of West Hollywood, where she didn't feel the stares. Donna felt this way as well, though she, like Paola, presents as more feminine and feels it is little actions such as holding hands and hugs that elicit the uncomfortable stares.

Eric noted that once he came out in high school he often got stared at and viewed these stares as hostile. He recounts, "The football jocks would look at you like you have leprosy, look at you with disgust." When I asked Nathaniel if he had any conflict stemming from his sexuality in El Paso he noted that there were always those "funny looks," and describes it as though he is "under the microscope."

3.1.9 Passing and Stigma Management.

LGBT people develop different ways of coping with the effects of stigma and with incidents involving stigma. Several participants used humor and laughter when they talked about moments when they were made fun of. Bryan, who used humor the most, recounted a moment when he was called a "fag" on the street.

I get like weird like comments from people just within earshot that I can hear, and then I get a lot of weird glances, and then I've gotten called a fag a few times in El Paso. And, I mean, in some ways I feel like I know I shouldn't say this- but like I almost feel like well I'm kinda asking for it with the way I dress. Like, my hair was dyed pink earlier this year and I have a convertible and I was driving around with the top down. And I was next to a school bus of like high school kids and a few kids like had the window down next to me, and they were like "Faggot!" and I was like, "Oh my god [laughter] I just got called a faggot!" Because it's just so, sometimes it's just so shocking. Um but I mean those kids really called it, a guy with pink hair and a convertible. Like, "Nice job calling that one, you have a good gaydar..."

He also said he has a sense of humor about his bad experiences, especially when he was called names in high school. Nathaniel similarly used humor to talk about his more physical brushes with stigma and violence. In middle school he was accosted by two other boys who pressed his face into their crotches. He then recalled, laughing, that the principal made them call their parents to tell them what they had done. The use of humor, it seems, is a way in which LGBT people can deal with insults and distance themselves from feelings of marginalization.

Norma and Gabriel both credited their age with regard to feeling like they didn't have to hide their sexuality anymore. Also the act of coming out seems to have some coping effect on stigma as many participants (Zephora, Quentin, Nathaniel, Bryan and Eric) noted feeling much more accepted and experiencing less teasing after they came out to their peers. Prior to coming out, Zephora found herself retreating to her bedroom and avoiding her parents, which made issues, worse but upon coming out she found her parents, family, and church to be supportive in ways she never thought possible. For several participants like Quentin, Zephora and Bryan, coming out in school helped resulting in more respect and less teasing from their classmates where several classmates got respect for coming out and teasing lessened. However, coming out was not always a successful means of coping with stigma; Paola and Donna both had rather negative experiences and stigma increased for them when they came out, particularly from family. Donna, upon coming out, had an immediate negative reaction with her parents as they took away her car, which she needed to go to school and work, impeding her studies. They also refused to attend her graduation and stopped talking to her for a few years, something that still seems to hurt her when she mentioned it to me.

Quentin and Nathaniel both responded to stigma in another way, concentrating more of their daily activities in known "gay-friendly" spaces. Quentin said he prefers gay environments over straight ones and feels comfortable in academia because of a more collegial and accepting environment for LGBT people in the university. Nathaniel noted that all of his social contacts outside family and work are themselves gay and he doesn't go to straight bars unless he is dragged there. Furthermore, Nathaniel will not dress in drag unless he is in a majority-gay setting. He was involved, between 2007 and 2008, in EP Outings, a HIV prevention and community building program, which recruited gay and bisexual men and provided an alternative to socializing in the gay bars. He would only dress in drag at EP Outings events, and said he felt more comfortable because there were 30 or more other gay men in these places. Use of gay spaces to carve out "stigma-free areas" in one's life is a common way to cope with and manage stigma, but may not be available to LGBT people living in rural or conservative areas.

Stanley was the only participant who refrained from involvement in the LGBT community. Because he is married and his bisexuality is discreet his participation in the gay community is only

through online websites where he looks for “no strings attached” sexual partners. Stanley escapes stigma by passing; his being married to a woman, presents a masculine demeanor and engages in highly masculine activities such as weight lifting and wrestling. However, this passing strategy was not foolproof; he did meet a couple with whom he eventually engaged in threesomes, after the wife noticed that he found her husband attractive. He said he was taken aback by it because he tries hard to not show any attraction to males; nonetheless the woman evidently read some signals that Stanley had not been aware he was sending.

3.2 EXPERIENCES OF SILENCE.

Silence seems to permeate the experience of LGBT people in El Paso; some participants regarded it as a natural phenomenon in Mexican culture, used to “keep the peace,” whereas others spoke of it in ways that hinted at its negative effects. Silence appeared to be most prevalent within family life in El Paso, especially where other gay family members were concerned. Four participants did not find out about LGBT relatives until after coming out, or when they were already adults. Yet silence about sexuality in familial contexts was also experienced by several non-Mexican participants.

3.2.1 Silence in Public Space.

Several participants hinted that silence around one’s sexuality is prevalent not only in the sphere of family life but also in other social relationships in the general El Paso – Juárez region. Donna, whose mother is Korean and father is Anglo, noticed a similarity in how her own and her girlfriend’s mother treated their daughters’ homosexuality. Her girlfriend’s mother (who is Mexican) and her own mother speak very little about their daughters’ sexuality or their relationship, choosing to refer to them in conversation as “friends” rather than “girlfriends.” Quentin noted that silence is almost a norm of the culture, that it can be seen as a stereotype of gay Latino men, where, “Mijo has their roommate that they’ve had for years but it’s swept under the rug.” He further notes that

[Silence] just makes life run smoother, because a lot of the times you might be asking somebody to challenge their views and they’re too old for it, they don’t want to, they really just don’t want to. And so it’s like, “Let’s just keep it peaceful and not talk about it,” which of course I don’t think is necessarily the right thing but I think that what I think

it might not be right for everybody. And so from my own experiences, it's part of the package. Sometimes I feel like my life would be better if I got to talk to my family about certain things, but I also know that I'm not gonna push it, you know or, I will – I've learned that I need to sometimes just accept that things are gonna be. So they might know and we'll never talk about it or they might in particular allow my brother and his wife to stay at my parents house in the same room but I know that's not gonna happen with me. ... Or even more so that I wouldn't even want to attempt that, because I don't want to get into the argument.

Here Quentin hints that silence is an inevitability in El Paso and that it is a way to avoid conflict about sexuality.

Zephora expressed a similar notion, saying she originally thought that El Paso was a very “hush - hush culture” when it came to homosexuality, but she also mentioned that El Paso has one of the oldest gay bars in Texas (the Old Plantation) and that others are always surprised to learn of the deep roots of the gay bar culture in El Paso's history, given the prevalence of machismo and Catholicism. Silence again is defined as a tacit approval or tolerance of homosexuality that remains hidden, out of the way or not referred to. So, while El Paso has one of the oldest gay bars in Texas, it remained somewhat hidden until fairly recently when the New Old Plantation began drawing not only gay customers but heterosexual ones as well. Bryan, expressed a similar notion that one's sexuality should not come up unless “the situation calls for it.”

According to Rudy, silence is even more central to gay life in Juárez. Gay people in Juárez do not hold hands on the street and Rudy observed no overt displays of same-sex affection when he was growing up. While he did say that Juárez was accepting of gay and lesbian people, in terms of personal interactions, the fact that he could recall no overt displays of affection is significant. Eric seemed to view this silence as a gay male phenomenon; his perception was that a lot of gay men in El Paso and Juárez keep their sexuality on the “down-low.”¹⁴ He describes this silence as “overwhelming” and as something that can be felt.

I think one of the things that I touched on earlier is that a lot of men here, even though they have that inclination, they still keep it on the DL. So I think that stands out the most, it's very overwhelming. I certainly think you feel it, I mean there's all these like, it's a Hispanic culture, so it's still, regardless of how tolerant it is, it's not like something you

¹⁴ “Down low” is a term used to refer to men who engage in clandestine same-sex behavior but might not adopt or openly reveal a “gay” or even “bisexual” identity.

certainly wanna go bragging about. For a lot of different people, it still kept on a very low basis because they don't care to have anybody know.

Eric also viewed this overwhelming sense of silence as potentially keeping people from reaching their true potential.

3.2.2 Silence in the workplace

While I asked no questions asked about participant's experience of stigma at their workplaces several of them volunteered interesting tidbits in reference to feeling accepted as gay or lesbian in their place of employment. Others felt it necessary to keep silent about their sexuality at work. Oliver, as stated before, preferred not to reveal his own sexuality at the school where he works and indicated that other teachers do not either. He also said that the students probably know which of their teachers are gay, but say nothing to their faces, in essence creating a wall of silence between teachers and students. Teachers' reluctance to share their sexual identity with students may also prevent LGBT students from finding role models or mentors to whom they can turn in school environments.

As a gay-business owner who prides herself on catering to the LGBT community, Donna nonetheless keeps silent about her sexuality with several clients whom she perceives to be rather conservative. She is reluctant to publicize that her salon is a gay-owned and operated business because she is fearful of losing her clients' friendship and business:

You know it's really tricky because my clientele is, is mixed with a whole bunch of different people: from young to oldest, to black to white to Asian to Mexican, to gay to straight. Like teachers, freakin', I don't want to say strippers, you know like I've had some Go-Go dancers, you know it's very, I have a diverse clientele and some of them don't know that I'm gay and some of them know that I'm gay. So the ones that don't know that I'm gay it's because I perceive them as more being conservative, they're more reserved into like their religion, things like that so I don't want to pose that uncomfort [sic] feeling. Not that I think that they'll ever feel uncomfortable with me, because like I've already established a good rapport with my clients that I don't think that my sexual orientation should matter or should, um affect like the way that I work. Not that it does but some people are stupid, they are like "Oh she's this or that," it doesn't affect how I do hair or whatever or how I work... I have those clients that I don't really, I don't tell them anything because you know, not that it should matter I just don't like, one, I don't wanna lose their business or their friendship, you know like, that we've established for years so. But as far as, no, it gives me a little bit more freedom to have my own business to be the way that I am, to act the way that I wanna act, in a good way, but it's, it's been good.

Here Donna is clearly torn between creating a safe space for gay people (including herself) to be themselves as well as satisfying her more conservative clientele. Some people that I have spoken with have often wondered why there are no “gay businesses” in El Paso, other than the gay bars; the existence of more conservative clients may be why some gay-owned businesses do not advertise themselves as “gay businesses.”

Gabriel and Eric, the only two participants who had worked in the military, noted that silence was crucial to maintaining their jobs and developing good working relationships with those at work. “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” has institutionalized a culture of silence around homosexuality within the armed forces. Gabriel, who joined the army in the 1970s, and Eric, who joined the Navy in the early 2000s, both related similar feelings about whether or not their fellow soldiers or higher-ups knew they were gay. Gabriel believed that his fellow soldiers probably knew he was gay while they were stationed in Germany, because they would see him come back to base drunk but they wouldn’t see him at the bars they went to. Eric believed his comrades knew he was gay because of his constant refusal to go with them to “titty bars,” and the fact that when he did go he was not as excited to be there as they were. While these instances took place outside of El Paso, the large military presence in the city and the high geographic mobility of service members suggest that the experience is probably similar for gay military personnel stationed at Fort Bliss.

3.2.3 Silence and family.

There were several instances where silence came up in regard to how participants relate to their families and how they deal with sexuality. This silence most often took place after the individuals came out (or were forced out) of the closet. Silence ironically manifested itself in family gossip where a person’s sexuality became the “open secret” in which everyone knew they were gay but nothing expressly was said. Finally silence was also expressed in knowledge about other family members who were LGBT, in which the participants, when they were growing up, were not informed of their family members’ sexual orientation.

Sometimes silence did not surround homosexuality per se but rather sexuality in general. Eric, Rudy, Oliver, and Stanley all noted that sex was not a general topic of discussion in their families; much

less homosexuality. Rudy and Oliver observed that when their families tried to explain issues of homosexuality it was done through innuendo or euphemism. For example, the first time Rudy had ever heard about “anything gay” was when his parents were talking about a pair of women that lived in their neighborhood. The neighbors referred to them as “aunt and niece,” but his parents seemed to indicate that they were a couple rather than a pair of relatives who lived together. Oliver, who grew up in rural Kentucky, also said his parents used innuendo, saying, “Oh he just prefers the company of his mother,” in reference to a young man in their town who never married.

Coming out

Once the participants had come out to their families as gay or lesbian, there were different instances and levels of silence that followed. Quentin, for example came out via e-mail and he knows that the entire family knows he is gay;

Issues of my sexuality have been coming up and with my, my adoptive brother it's far more difficult. He's older comes from different generation, I think identifies more black than he does um, uh, Hispanic even though he's half-and-half and has far more issues with it. In terms of like he doesn't want it around his kids; that's the only thing, so he doesn't want his younger sib- like his young children seeing it. But he'll say he's not homophobic and stuff like that you know that's how it's been dealt with so far. My grandpa doesn't want it in his house and definitely doesn't want to talk about it. We've challenged him on the notions sometimes and I know that he feels the challenge, like it's harder to deny it being that he's a black man who is in an interracial marriage, who's, you know, faced a lot of discrimination in his life, so when me and my adoptive brother, who had an issue with it have challenged my grandfather on it, like um he definitely recognizes the challenge and will usually take the subject off [the table].

Participants' fathers were perhaps the most silent when it came to their sexuality. Ophelia, Norma, Donna, Paola and Nathaniel all spoke of instances where their fathers, upon their coming out, would distance themselves or refuse to talk about their child's homosexuality. Ophelia felt this silence was not particularly harmful, indicating that her father usually refuses to talk about things he either doesn't understand or doesn't know how to talk about. Norma and Paola's fathers were more negative in their silence; Norma said she is not allowed to talk about anything “gay” in front of her father as he becomes agitated and sometimes violent, especially when drunk. Paola's father will sometimes ask about her life as a bisexual, but when she asks if he really wants to know he'll wave it off; she also

indicated that when he drank, he often became violent, coming near to beating her while she still lived at home, which lead her to move out in her teens.

Nathaniel's father asked him outright if he was gay; interestingly whereas Norma and Paola's fathers were working class Mexican men, Nathaniel's was college educated. His reaction to his son being not only gay but also a drag queen has been silence, which Nathaniel is fine with, as he feels uncomfortable talking to either parents about his life. Eric's mother also asked him if he was gay, after hearing people call her son a "faggot" when he was in high school. When he said he was she did not look at him for a week, and then told him she did not want to hear about him holding hands or doing anything else in public such as kissing.

For some participants their homosexuality was something they felt their family realized even before they came out. Bryan said coming out to his family wasn't really necessary because he felt as though his parents always knew: "I was an effeminate little boy who liked to watch the Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour and wanted to twirl a baton...Your parents start to suspect things." Though his parents were relatively tolerant of their son's more effeminate traits he says he couldn't really talk to his parents about his feelings or being picked on in school. He referred to them as an "uptight, white family" that treated each other in a "business casual" manner. Rudy, who grew up in Juárez, also said his family probably knew he was different from an early age; for that reason he doesn't feel the need to tell them nor to mislead them into thinking he is straight.

Silence and family gossip.

Despite the influence of parental silence around sexuality, participants also noted that it was through family gossip that other members of the family were made aware of their sexuality. Eric noted that a week after he told his mother he was gay, his aunt visited him and after a few minutes of uncomfortable silence told him he was okay and that there was nothing wrong with him. He also said that news of a gay son "spreads faster than wildfire" among family members, most notably in his case the aunts. Nathaniel spoke of the same phenomenon; soon after coming out he realized that everyone in his family knew he was gay without his having told them. Zephora recounted that her parents told the rest of the family about her sexuality, in part to warn them about her masculine appearance prior to her

brother's wedding. Gabriel was the only person for whom this family gossip had malicious intent; after divorcing his wife and coming out as gay, his wife went to the rest of his family and began telling them he was gay, in an effort to "stir up trouble."

Silence and relationships.

Because romantic relationships are often a physical manifestation and "proof" of a child's sexuality, I asked the participants how their families treat their significant others, and their other gay friends. Some participants' families referred to their same-sex partners as "friends," studiously avoiding the distinction made between platonic and romantic relationships. Rudy, Ophelia, Paola and Donna have recounted that when they brought their respective partners home, their families referred to and treated them like any other friend. For Rudy and Ophelia this was not seen as a slight but as a way to be gracious. In contrast, Paola and Donna saw it as an active denial of the true nature of their relationship, which for them seemed to devalue its significance; for example Paola said that her father will not recognize her relationship with her girlfriend despite having been together for 4 ½ years. Donna's mother refers to Donna's girlfriend as her "friend," and when Donna corrects her she says, "fine girlfriend, boyfriend, whatever..." Donna's Korean mother has told her on several occasions that there are no gay people in Korea, which Donna finds hard to believe. Evidently silence is not merely a "Mexican" tradition.

Other participants' families treated partners as something "more than a friend" or referred to them using euphemisms. Bryan said that he has brought boyfriends home to meet his parents and though they don't discuss their relationship his parents treat them in a friendly manner that Bryan describes as "socially graceful." Quentin, who was raised by his grandparents, said that he finds it comfortable to talk to his biological mom about his relationships but cannot do so with his adoptive parents (i.e. his grandparents). Zephora is an interesting case because she is the only participant who is engaged to her same-sex partner. Zephora says that her mother has slowly adapted to having a lesbian daughter; last year during her brother's wedding she asked her mom how she would refer to "Teresa," her fiancée. Her mother replied that she would refer to her simply as "Teresa" or "Zephora's Teresa," which would be in some ways more significant than "friend."

Over time Zephora says her mother has become more comfortable with using the term girlfriend and “fiancée;”¹⁵ also as their marriage date approaches her mother’s terminology has changed from calling it a “commitment ceremony,” to “marriage,” to “wedding.” Either families or their gay children could use euphemisms to recognize the gay child’s relationship. My own mother once asked how I would like her to refer to my boyfriend of two years to her relatives; when I told her I don’t know, she used a similar tactic as Zephora’s mom, referring to him by name rather than with any specific title. When I began using the word “boyfriend” rather than “friend” at family events, she followed suit. Therefore the use of euphemisms such as “roommate,” “friend,” etc. can constitute silence, but it can also be a way for families to gradually become comfortable revealing something intimate, especially when acceptance of homosexuality is not guaranteed even in family settings.

Other LGBT family members.

For some participants who had other LGBT family members, silence played an interesting part in family dynamics. In my own extended family LGBT family members were never talked about in terms of their sexuality or same-sex desire; I grew up with two second cousins – one was gay the other lesbian/bisexual – and I did not find out about them until after I came out, when my mother told me. Furthermore, I did not realize that one of my *tíos* (my grandfather’s brother) was gay and that the man he lived with was his partner. I had assumed that they lived together because they were brothers, when in fact they were a couple who had been living together for over 40 years, with tacit approval/recognition of the family.

Similar revelations were also recounted by the participants; Ophelia for example had no idea that one of her mother’s sisters was a lesbian as well until after she came out. Eric also noted that once he came out he learned of other gay family members, such as a cousin who died of HIV/AIDS complications in the 1980s when he was a child and several more whom he describes as closeted. Rudy also was not told of his gay uncle until he saw him in a gay club in Juárez; this uncle married a woman for a few years, divorced and currently lives with a man that the family refers to as his roommate or his

¹⁵ Though gay marriage is forbidden in the Texas State Constitution, Zephora describes her upcoming wedding as an informal “commitment ceremony” where she and her fiancée will exchange vows and rings.

“friend.” Bryan was the only person who knew about his gay uncle before he came out; in Bryan’s case, he was able to turn to his gay uncle for advice and to ask him what it was like growing up gay in El Paso in the 1960s and 1970s.

I mean he was kind of coming of age in the 60s and 70s so I mean it sounds like he had a much more interesting experience. Like he remembers like the first gay bar opening in El Paso and he remembers going to I don’t even know if it was the OP or the new O- I don’t even know, but like the one that existed in the 70s, he remembers going there and uh, I think he moved around. He went to like Florida for a while then I don’t remember, but he lived in a bunch of cool cities, and so I thought that that was so, you know, glamorous and exciting. But um like it’s probably pretty difficult to grown up gay in the 60s and 70s in a border town so um, you know he told me some stories about like that our, my grandfather, his father kinda had problems with it, but that my grandmother was pretty accepting because she sounded like a fag hag¹⁶...It was really, really interesting to hear him talk.

Bryan’s uncle served as a role model to him, yet his case is unique in that he knew of his uncle’s gay identity before he realized he himself was gay. In this manner, out LGBT family members can serve as role models for young LGBT people and provide mentorship whereas LGBT young people with closeted or no other LGBT family would have to find such guidance elsewhere.

Other participants had LGBT family members who were not “out” yet; Quentin spoke often of a cousin with whom he grew up and who appears Mexican rather than Black but who is not willing to reveal his sexuality to his family. Paola also had a cousin who identified as bisexual but is not out yet. In some cases having LGBT friendly family members also helped to deal with the stresses of coming out. This was most seen in Paola who, upon leaving her house after revealing her bisexuality, went to live with her cousin who had several gay friends. This was the same for Quentin; one female cousin was incredibly supportive of him when he came out, and chastised him for not coming out sooner. Quentin also serves as a confidante for his male cousin who refuses to come out. Eric found support among his aunts and some of his cousins, perhaps because of their previous experience with the cousin who had died of AIDS complications. Ophelia’s parents were accepting of her coming out at the age of 14 perhaps because her mother’s sister was also a lesbian. Bryan’s parents may also have been more

¹⁶ “Fag-hag” is generally a term used for straight women who have many gay male friends.

accepting of his non-normative gender behavior and his future homosexuality since they already knew about his uncle, who was also gay.

3.2.4 Consequences of Silence

For some of the participants, silence had a more negative connotation, causing harm rather than good; sometimes silence constituted tacit approval of bullying, discrimination or even violence. Others saw silence as preventing LGBT people from being able to find community or guidance even in their own families. Nathaniel, Quentin, Bryan and Zephora had all observed bullying in school environments, which often occurred in front of teachers and yet was rarely punished. Nathaniel said that if bullying did take place it had to be done right in front of teachers to warrant being reported:

EG: How would teachers react when people would call the other guys names, or they would call you names, stuff like that?

Nathaniel: If it was in a public area like a hallway, they kind of ignore it, unless it was directly in front of them or explicit. In the classrooms people didn't do it that much because they probably know they would get in trouble for it. Um [pause] they would just say, you know, "You shouldn't- don't be calling him that," and if it was really explicit, they would go down to the office about it.

Silence also had a negative effect on the participants because it prevented them from forming bonds with other LGBT people or forming a gay-friendly community. Eric felt this when he was in the Navy; a friend of his dropped hints over several months but was so circumspect about his sexuality that he was unable to make Eric understand that they were both gay. This silence, imposed by "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," has in many ways prevented LGBT service personnel from finding one another and forming communities or friendships that their heterosexual counterparts do without a second thought. Donna also recounted that although her high school was a place where some people felt free to come out, one of her good friends would not admit she was a lesbian. Nor did Donna feel free to share this information with her. She summed it up by saying, "We both had a wall up to each other... We hung out with all the gay people and didn't come out to each other!" Silence also prevented Paola from forming friendships in the year and a half she spent attending university in Las Cruces. Though she had joined a sorority, she felt

that she had to keep her bisexuality secret because several girls had commented that they would not let another girl into the sorority because she was gay.

Conversely, silence can also create a space of protection and safety from stigma, and even acceptance. Sometimes silence is a way to survive; Paola spoke of wanting to be more public about her bisexuality and to be involved in the local LGBT community, yet because of her girlfriend's mother they have kept silent. Her girlfriend's mother is currently an elected official and keeping their sexuality silent creates protection for the mother in that their relationship might cost her votes during election times. Quentin felt that for some there is a lot of agency in silence:

I think that there's a lot of agency in silence... I think that, for a lot of gay men who are living on the El Paso-Juárez border it's a different culture. It's just certain things are more acceptable than others, or whatever it be. Or sometimes we just decide life is easier if we don't touch something, if we don't like try always to push something to change and so I think that there's agency in the decision to have silence. Whether that's good or bad, is another topic.

In this view gay men (and lesbians) are more able to live their life without hurting their families or causing strife with those around them who might not be as accepting. One cannot discount that the decision to have silence surround one's sexuality is born of a political choice. Gabriel was perhaps the most eloquent as to the utility of silence on the U.S. – Mexico Border:

El Paso has been very, if not welcoming, they just don't bother you and you do find a lot of good people that are very supportive as well... The gays in Juárez that I've met are just as free to express themselves as the ones here, they're just as open, the difference that I've noticed is that a lot more of them over there are not open to their family, to their immediate family. It's as though everybody in the family knows they just don't say it and over here is almost part of our journey. It's almost part of our duty to at some point come out to the family. It's almost a mandate that at some point you have to come out to your family and say this is who I am and you have the fight, you have the tears, you have all that and hopefully if you have a good family you have the acceptance. I think for those that I have met in Juárez - by their actions or inactions like not getting married, not having kids, their families know they just - It's sort of like a respect kind of thing. "I don't want to embarrass my parents," "I don't want to put them through this" - that kind of thing and the parents, "I'm not gonna ask," you know that type of thing.

This quote is particularly revealing in that it shows two choices at work in the decision to engage in silence; one that prioritizes familial harmony over individual identity, and the other that prioritizes individual identity over this family harmony.

Mexican-American culture in El Paso emphasizes the ideology that family unity and harmony should be maintained, even at the expense of individual identity. The family unit is venerated in Mexican culture; it is the source of life and honor and provides individuals with belonging and resources to deal with hardships that come in life. This is especially true in rural settings where the family was a central source of identity, resources, aid and affection. Should one be cut off from the family one loses part of his/her identity. Furthermore, in the absence of wealth or prestige, the family is another source of capital that one can utilize. Should a gay person come out to an otherwise conservative/anti-gay family member, shunning is not an automatic response. Silence allows those family members to co-exist, with the gay family member still being considered part of the family but his/her sexuality remains an open secret. Silence, as Gabriel says, becomes a way of respecting the family unit and taking care not to offend one's family, nor to completely separate oneself from it.

Conversely, Euro-American culture in El Paso tends to value individual identity and feels that it should be preserved over family unity. Individuality and individual rights are venerated in U.S. thought perhaps as much as family is venerated in Mexican-American thought. Related to the ideology of meritocracy, popular belief holds that one's family ties are secondary and people rise and fall based on their own attributes and efforts. Within this framework, taking up a gay identity means being "out" in all aspects of one's life including to one's family, because to do otherwise is seen as being untrue to oneself. As Gabriel notes coming out is almost part of a "journey" or "duty"; it is indeed enshrined in coming out models advocated by psychologists as an important stage in the development of a gay identity¹⁷. To be "truly" gay one must "come out" to one's family and have that struggle with them, perhaps even to the point of accepting tension, conflict or separation from family as a necessary consequence of adopting a gay identity. This idea is particularly true in more urban environments, where the family is not as important a source of safety, identity or resources as it would be in rural communities. Family rather is more based on affective kin ties more so than economic ones so should

¹⁷ The Cass Identity Model, developed by psychologist Vivienne Cass in 1979, has been used and advocated by psychologists. The model lists coming out as an integral step in developing a full, well-adjusted homosexual identity (Cass 1979). One main critique of this model is that the model suggests that anyone who abandons the model or fails to go through each of the six stages, of which "coming out" is one, would not be able to be considered as a well adjusted homosexual. (Kauffman & Johnson 2004).

one have an alternative emotionally supportive “family of choice” the “family of birth” becomes secondary or not as important.

It is not this researcher’s place to say which is more beneficial or which is healthier; because both result in the family “knowing” about a child’s homosexuality, it differs from the repression of the closet paradigm, where one’s sexuality is hidden at all costs. Those who choose to keep silent might manage to maintain familial bonds that can be beneficial in other arenas of life. However, they might also “suffer in silence” if that family is so staunchly opposed to their child’s homosexuality that the gay person is unfairly treated in relation to their heterosexual kin or at worst ignored and invalidated.

Those who choose not to exist in silence run the very real risk of losing familial ties; in some cases this might be preferable if the relationship is particularly toxic or if they have an alternative “family of choice,” composed of other LGBT people and allies. If, as Gabriel says, “you have a good family, you have the acceptance,” then more open communication of one’s sexuality can lead to greater understanding and support, and a strengthening of ties between family members, as was the case for Zephora. Yet for those without such recourse, loss of the family can increase one’s exposure to stigma, depression or feelings of alienation.

3.2.5 Breaking Silence.

Some participants escaped stigma and the pressure that silence brings by not being silent. While Gabriel’s ex-wife used her knowledge of his homosexuality initially as a weapon against him, attempting to alienate him from his own family, coming out allowed him to defuse this threat. It also allowed him to become closer to his mother and to integrate her more closely into his life. He noted that when he began dating men she would often spend time drinking coffee with his partners and attend his parties along with his gay friends. Quentin felt that, after accepting his “gay” identity and coming out to his friends and finally, school became easier to deal with. He spoke of a friend of his “Angel,” who had come out in their senior year of high school and got more respect for coming out, though he was still bullied and teased. Bryan felt similarly that the teasing and bullying diminished once he came out in high school, saying, “It helped not having to pretend you’re straight...” Yet Bryan sometimes had no control over how his sexuality was talked about or revealed. He reported an incident in middle school

when a teacher was talking about gay people in the Boy Scouts as part of a current events discussion; during this discussion the teacher pointed to Bryan and said “Well, Bryan is that way and he’s not going to do anything bad.”

In these instances one’s homosexuality is not something which the gay person has control over but is something teachers and authority figures have the privilege to discuss. For Bryan this was a moment of humiliation because he was “outed” to his fellow students, many of whom teased and bullied him and did not really need further confirmation of his homosexuality, particularly from an (albeit well-meaning) authority figure. In school settings teachers condone or repress students’ behaviors, thereby socializing them into adopting “proper” or acceptable social behaviors and condemning “undesirable” ones. So what does it mean that the teacher felt as though she had the right to talk about Bryan’s “apparent” homosexuality? Was this teacher attempting to use Bryan to illustrate the point that not all gay people are pedophiles and that they should be allowed to participate in the Boy Scouts? However noble her intentions may have been they reveal a power dynamic in school settings whereby teachers’ actions (e.g. “outing” Bryan) or inactions (failure to punish anti-gay harassment) contribute to students’ socialization. Having a teacher “out” a student can carry the message that heterosexuals have the right or privilege to reveal another’s sexuality regardless of the consequences or desires of that person.

3.3 EL PASO – JUÁREZ AND LGB PEOPLE

The second research question I sought to answer was: what were people’s impressions, experiences and interpretations of being LGB on the U.S. Mexico Border, specifically the El Paso Juárez Border region? Participants detailed their impressions of the city and the region from their own experiences as gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals and from what they had witnessed and seen. Some who had traveled to other cities also noted similarities and differences in the treatment of LGBT people in El Paso and elsewhere. Finally I also asked about participants’ impressions of the LGBT community in El Paso/Juárez.

3.3.1 Juárez.

Three of the participants grew up in Mexico. Norma, who spent 24 years in Ciudad Juárez, described the atmosphere for LGBT people in the 1970s as nice and very welcoming. Even though she presented as masculine with short hair and masculine clothes she recounted that people would often say hello to her on the street and that it was filled with very friendly people. Rudy, who had lived in Juárez most recently of all the participants, viewed Juárez as a much more accepting place because of the variety of people that live in and visit the city, citing Ciudad Juárez as being composed of people from different parts of Mexico, from El Paso, Germany, Spain and France as well. This sentiment was repeated by Gabriel who attributed Juárez's openness to the loss of its former small-town mentality now that it is one of the largest cities in Mexico.

Several participants, though they had not grown up in Juárez did experience the gay bar scene in Juárez and had different perceptions of it. Oliver who used to visit with a boyfriend of his in Juárez recalled an instance when a man asked if he could dance with Oliver's *esposa* (wife); the assumption being that because he was white his boyfriend must be the receptive person and therefore the wife, according to Oliver's own interpretation.

Visiting Juárez's gay bars seemed to be a rite of passage for several of the younger participants. Quentin, Nathaniel and Zephora reported that they frequented the gay bars in Juárez upon hearing about them from friends. Both Nathaniel and Quentin were surprised at the close proximity of prostitution near the Juárez gay bars, which are located near the Mariscal Red Light district in Ciudad Juárez. This cross border exposure led several participants to propose that there are two distinct gay communities, though movement between the two is also a constant.

When comparing the two local LGBT communities participants seemed to view the El Paso bar and club scene as more anonymous, whereas the Juárez bars were more inviting or friendly. Rudy, who grew up in Juárez, said,

In Juárez, when you go to a club people is like more um, is putting more attention to you and what are you doing and who you are and everything that you're doing. Here in El Paso it's like you go to, to a club and you are on your own, you're doing your thing and nobody cares about it.

Gabriel summed up the differences in this way:

As far as the ones on this side, the one thing that I wish was different, is that we have enough people who don't like us already [short pause] for us to break up into little cliques [short pause] you know, that young ones, the old ones, the ones with the labels, the one without the labels, the ones with the money, the ones without money. I just wish there was more cohesive, that we don't see each other as competition or, or "I don't hang out with him because" – It's almost high schoolish, you know in the little cliquish type way.

Yet overall movement between Juárez and El Paso remained a constant theme; for those raised in the U.S., Juárez was a place they went to with their friends and was for some their first exposure to an openly gay atmosphere.

However, for Rudy, Norma and Gabriel, who were raised in Juárez, El Paso was the place of initial exposure to a gay community. Rudy and Norma named the Old Plantation as the first gay club they visited and Gabriel named the Mining which he snuck into with a fake id. It is tempting to think of these experiences in gay border communities as providing a safe space for otherwise closeted gay youth to experience and experiment with their sexuality away from family and home. However, among the participants this was not always the case; for some, their initial exposure to gay life took place upon entering university. Others, who grew up in El Paso, had visited the OP long before venturing to Juárez. What appears to be present are two gay communities that LGBT people migrate between for different experiences not with the aim of hiding one's sexuality from family. A better understanding of this complex relationship is beyond the scope of this project.

3.3.2 El Paso.

A majority of participants had grown up in El Paso, and all lived within its city limits at the time of this study. When asked about their impressions of the city and its treatment of LGBT people, most characterized El Paso as existing somewhere between welcoming and hostile. This ambiguous position reflects both the sense of tolerance the city provides and recent feelings that the city is no longer safe as was once thought, due to recent events such as the beating of Lionel Martinez outside the OP in May and the rescinding of health benefits for same-sex partners of city employees. Furthermore, it seemed

that national news of a spate of suicides of young LGBT people and the increasingly confrontational debate around gay marriage in the United States has also affected how safe El Paso is perceived to be.

Quentin noted that he doesn't know anymore if El Paso's atmosphere for LGBT people is that positive; he used to think the city was tolerant but now he is not sure. He brought up the city health benefits issue, mentioning that he thought the people would have stood up to maintain the benefits and yet he was not entirely shocked when the benefits were rescinded. Eric thought El Paso was okay until the Martinez beating, which he contrasted with the commonly held view that El Paso was a quiet peaceful community and its often touted stature as the second safest city of its size in the U.S. Bryan stated:

I would say it's tolerant but not really accepting, and I don't I mean, I don't want to get off on a tangent, but I don't love El Paso that much as an environment. Like I've always felt really out of place here and I think being gay has a lot to do with that, but I've always just felt really out of place here in El Paso. I'm graduating in May and I turning 24 in October and my goal is to move before I turn 24 [laughs] because I have been trying to get out of El Paso my entire life...I just think that, El Paso has a really, it has a unique culture in the sense that there's a lot of like Hispanic culture here and there's a lot of like Texas culture and neither one of those are things that like I identify with that much ... I've always just felt out of place as far as the culture because the culture is very like traditional, and I would say conservative and pretty Roman Catholic and I've just never felt like particularly at home here.

Bryan felt as though El Paso had no other culture to offer him other than the gay culture, which he has described as "dismal."

Others had a more ambivalent interpretation of El Paso. Among Ophelia's friends, individual families have been hostile to their son or daughter being gay, but she knew of no overt incidents of discrimination; thus she views the city as a whole as tolerant. Nathaniel said he has had wonderful experiences of acceptance, for example when trying on women's shoes at the mall, attended by salespeople who were kind to him; at the same time he says that people will "look at you funny" and El Paso is not a place one can be openly flamboyant. Donna shared this view when she referred to the city as more "close-minded than others but not as bad as it seems." She mentioned,

You have to take what comes back, have to be ready for it, such as stares and being called names. You can still be yourself but take into consideration other people's emotions and actions.

Such a statement implies a belief that negative reactions are the consequences of bringing out into the open what others would prefer to keep silent. Given the influence of silence on several of the participants, one wonders if breaking silence, such as openly supporting same-sex partners of city employees, is what is being negatively targeted. Paola attributed the negative attitude as being tied to an overwhelming ethic of machismo in El Paso; at the same time she said it is not as bad as other places in Texas. Oliver said public reaction to the employee benefits issue is evidence of a negative atmosphere, but also noted the number of LGBT-friendly progressives on the city council as evidence of El Paso's more tolerant or accepting atmosphere.

Other participants had a much more positive outlook on the city of El Paso. Norma felt that the atmosphere is getting better because of changes in the larger discourse about sexuality. She pointed to the greater visibility of LGBT characters and themes in major television shows and movies such as *Black Swan*, TV shows like "Queer as Folk," "The L-Word," "Glee" etc., as evidence that the country is becoming more and more comfortable with non-heterosexual identities.

EG: Have you seen a change between El Paso from when you were growing up to now? How has it changed?

Norma: You know probably because it's been changed everywhere. Now you see homosexual or homosexuality on TV. Right? Before you didn't, now you see it and it's almost in every single program or in every single high school. It's like, it's not because they're gay, it's like something new for the kids. Like my co-workers told me before, "My kids they go out with girls and boys," not because I think they're gay, it's because [pause] it's like *la nueva moda*. It's in.

Norma here implies that same-sex dating among her co-workers' children has become a trend or fashionable, perhaps indicating a new cultural shift where the stigma of homosexuality has been lessened. Nathaniel himself thought things were changing, as he has heard from younger LGBT people that they used to dress in drag in high school and were actually supported, and described their high school dating scene as a "free for all." At the same time stigma against LGBT people can still remain if the young people who participate in "trendy" gay relationships are seen as engaging in something taboo or risqué.

Nathaniel, Norma and others also noted the increasing visibility of LGBT people and couples in public. Some attribute this to an increasing presence of gay characters and issues in mainstream media (e.g. television). Nathaniel recalled seeing a transgender couple holding hands at Bassett Center Mall and Norma was surprised when she saw a pair of lesbians kissing in a Subway restaurant. A progressive city council and a more visible LGBT community have been seen as signs that the position of LGBT people in El Paso is changing, especially in the rise of a more LGBT-friendly youth generation. However, popular acceptance does not necessarily lead to structural and institutional equality, especially in light of the same-sex partner health insurance debates.

Gabriel felt that El Paso has always been accepting and that the negative atmosphere comes from only a few.

One word that I always use to describe this town is a word that I that I took, that I misappropriated from a good friend of mine who moved here from Chicago. And she said this city is gracious. They may not agree with you but they are not going to scream at your face, they are not going to do anything to make you feel uncomfortable, they kind of let you be.

Gabriel told a story that was revealing in this regard; he said that he was contacted by the gay cable channel LOGO for a special on “being gay on the border,” with the presumption that gay people in El Paso were repressed and would venture across the border into Mexico to be themselves, and vice-versa. What they found instead were several stories of people who did not feel repressed and who were comfortable being themselves on either side of the border, leading LOGO to change the name of their segment to the Gay Oasis on the Border¹⁸.

Zephora pointed to the LGBT community’s long history in El Paso as evidence of its accepting or tolerant atmosphere. She noted that people are always surprised to see how large the LGBT community is, and that it has been starting to gain more visibility as more LGBT-oriented organizations are starting to come out. It should be noted, however, that 9 of the 14 interviews took place prior to the Martinez beating; those that took place afterward all mentioned it. In general the participants find El

¹⁸ While attempts have been made to locate the video segment, LOGO’s website does not have any archived footage that pertains to El Paso-Juarez. This could be because the footage is older than the website archives, or perhaps they have not released the segment.

Paso to be mostly tolerant, yet they have pointed out various instances in which more negative attitudes and intolerance have made themselves known.

El Paso's LGBT community.

Aside from participants' views and interpretations of El Paso's attitude toward LGBT people, I also asked participants for their views of the LGBT community itself. Most expressed the idea that the LGBT community in El Paso is somewhat nascent or barely getting its feet wet, despite its long history in El Paso. Noticeably this came from those involved in activist circles: Zephora, Quentin, Paola, Gabriel and Oliver. Others observed that there exists not one cohesive LGBT community but several (admittedly with considerable overlap): the activist gay community (centered on UTEP and EPCC), the gay bar community, and finally the gay online community.¹⁹

Those who have experienced the academic/activist community at UTEP consider it a welcoming and accepting environment, where they easily make friends and can relate to one another. No surprise that these comments came from the younger participants, who were students. Quentin as a gay, black student proved to be an interesting commentator on this gay community. He says he loves the academic/activist community he has met on campus especially because it feeds his intellectual curiosities, and he has felt a great deal of support from faculty and students in his department. He also points to his fellow members of the gay and bisexual men's fraternity on campus, Delta Lambda Phi, as a setting where he can relate to other gay men as he never has before. Bryan shared this sentiment in the sense that he relates easily to the activist-centered community on campus.

Ophelia, who is only 18, as of yet had only limited exposure to this community, but characterizes it as positive. Paola has also had exposure to the activist community but viewed it as somewhat leaderless and unorganized; a few years ago, after Proposition 8 was passed in California a few people decided to march in protest, as did activists in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York City among other places. She mentioned that when she arrived at the meeting place the marchers had no idea where

¹⁹ There exist other sections of the gay community; for instance PFLAG, Rio Grande Adelante and other activist organizations operating outside of UTEP, but since many of the participants were college students, this study reflects the perspective of the activist community on campus. Furthermore the LGBT community in El Paso includes Fort Bliss, LGBT educators and academics high school GSAs and others.

to go or even to whom to make the appeal; the march took place late at night in the relatively empty streets of downtown El Paso. She also pointed to the protests surrounding the “Chico’s Tacos incident”; she mentioned a “kiss-in” that was held, which she viewed as an improper way to address the issue at hand.

The second LGBT community mentioned was that centered on the nine gay bars in the city. Zephora seemed to perceive the gay bar culture as the first and oldest part of the LGBT community, since much of the community had formed around them and much of gay life still seems to center around them. Bryan had the perception that, outside of the university, the only other place gay people would meet others is at the gay bar; this led him to comment that the “gay community is kind of dismal, there’s not a lot of gay activities.”²⁰ Bryan and Nathaniel noted that the gay community of the bars appears to be more isolating than in Ciudad Juárez, in the sense that if one goes to the bars alone you will most likely leave alone. Gabriel also commented that the gay community of El Paso is more cliquish in contrast to other cities. As stated before, Nathaniel and Zephora have noted some discrimination or stigma from within the gay community, more noticeably at the bars.

As for the online gay community only two participants (Quentin and Stanley) spoke of their encounters there. As stated before, Stanley has encountered some biphobia from gay men who tell him he is “living a lie,” while others seem attracted to him mainly because of his marital status. Yet he is also more able to engage in his bisexual identity online, finding a welcoming, “discreet” space where he can look for men, far from the eyes of his wife and others who do not know he is bisexual. Quentin has also had a mixed relationship with the online gay community, noting that while he can find gay men to talk with, some have called him “the N-word” when he turns down their advances:

There’s times where I’ll have situations with other gay men and the N-word gets dropped, and just because we have a disagreement or something or someone doesn’t like me, and that’s happened so often that it’s colored my perspective on the gay community of El Paso, because it’s so odd, it’s so odd to deal with that, to deal with racism in a community that you think should be really accepting...

²⁰ This statement is not entirely true; Rio Grande Adelante, MFactor, and other groups regularly hold social events outside of gay bars such as book clubs and volleyball games. What is perhaps prescient here is that visibility of these aspects of the community is limited to members or those who already know about them.

Quentin does realize that he has put himself into situations where more overt racism is visible, such as online where the internet provides people with a certain level of anonymity. However he has heard more positive views of El Paso from other gay black men:

My experiences in El Paso have been different from other black men that I talk to who love El Paso, and it actually makes sense, because El Paso is a mixing pot of different things. As a matter of fact someone had told me that they loved El Paso because they felt the gay community of El Paso was more accepting than the homophobia of the black community that they were from, which I found so fascinating, so interesting. In some ways it makes me think of my brother, like the homophobia from my family in certain ways compared to what I feel with my friends and my “other” family. So If I could tell somebody of my experiences I would say that they’re very similar to others, where you’re still dealing with issues of race and racism, and class and classism and all that just like other areas but I do think [pause] that the gay community of El Paso is probably a little more accepting than areas where there’s more of a balance? I can say. Or where there’s larger populations of blacks and whites, there’s probably more clashes there than there is here, and somehow I think the Mexican culture of El Paso is far more accepting of things than some other areas...

Quentin’s statement reveals how overlapping identities create unique situations for the expression and reception of stigma, especially in El Paso where the Hispanic population is the majority.

El Paso’s gay life.

As stated before, the gay community of El Paso has often centered on the gay bars. Oliver, who used to visit El Paso from Albuquerque, would frequent many of the gay bars and can still remember several of them by name. The one he most often referred to was the Diamond Lil, which he identified as being tied to the hustler scene (male prostitution).

Visiting The Old Plantation, both its original and new incarnation,²¹ has served as a rite of passage for several LGBT people as they began coming out. Rudy stated it was the first gay bar he ever visited, as did Norma who described it as “the first time [she] realized [she] wasn’t the only gay person in the world.” Norma also said she “grew up being a lesbian in the OP,” noting that she as well as many others would go every Wednesday through Sunday. Zephora also mentioned going to the OP and marveling at the sheer number of gay people there and no longer feeling isolated as she had felt in high

²¹ The Old Plantation was located in a small building on Ochoa St. across from the current site of the MCC; in the 1990s the Old Plantation moved across the street to a larger warehouse like building and was renamed the The New Old Plantation.

school. Nathaniel's first experience there was particularly enlightening. He snuck out of his house one night when he was 17 years old, in an attempt to find the OP. The only information he knew about the gay community was that he and his friends had passed by the Briar Patch when they were walking downtown and he knew that was a gay bar. So that night he went to the Briar Patch and then followed some patrons to the OP, where he met two men who became his mentors of sorts, walking around downtown El Paso with him, telling him about their life. Below, he describes the first time he entered the OP:

We walked back to the OP and [my new friend] paid off the security guard somehow to believe that horrible fake id. And I went in there and sat around watching other men dance together and it was wonderful [long pause] it was wonderful. And I went and I asked a guy that I thought was really cute if he wanted to dance. I must have looked like I was 12 years old but, he went and asked, he had a boyfriend and he went and asked his boyfriend if he could dance with me. And we danced a couple of songs and I remember it was, it was, it was electrical to me, I hadn't felt anything that strong before in my life. I actually got an erection while I was dancing with him [pause] And I [long pause] after that it all it made sense that I never felt that way about anyone else...It was a, well, a further confirmation that I was where I was supposed to be.

Nathaniel's story was very moving in that he found himself welcomed because of the creation of "gay space," away from the physical, moral and tribal stigmas of the dominant society. In this way gay bars served as loci of community formation and are of deep cultural significance. Gabriel, who grew up under the impression that all gay men acted feminine and wore makeup, first visited the Mining Company (another gay bar) when he was 16,

I used to sneak in to the Mining Company when I was 16 and I think it was the first time when I walked in there that I saw that the majority of the men looked like men, they may not have acted very masculine but I saw that they looked like men, and I met a couple of them who were quite passable as you know masculine men type thing... That was the first time that I saw that and that's when I kind of started to lean more towards, more accepting of the gay thing.

Through the gay bar aspect of the LGBT community Gabriel was able to find a different, less stereotypical image of a gay man, which later helped him to adopt his gay identity. The stereotypes that develop from stigma can serve to alienate members of the stigmatized group, especially if they do not follow or connect to that stereotype. Stigmatized individuals such as LGBT people do not have the

benefit of growing up in communities where the majority of people or even their family members are like them as do African-Americans, many of whom grow up in communities that are made up primarily of other African-American people. Goffman (1963) notes the importance of intimates or communities in helping one to manage or escape stigma, “Interestingly enough, those who share a particular stigma can often rely upon mutual aid in passing, again illustrating that those who can be most threatening [because of their shared knowledge of the stigma] are often those who can render most assistance.” (97). However, communities not only help stigmatized individuals to pass but provide their members with belonging and validation that they lack in “normal” society, as is evident from Nathaniel and Gabriel’s comments about their first visits to gay bars in El Paso.

Other participants were involved in different aspects of the gay community; Oliver and Gabriel were both heavily involved in the HIV/AIDS education and prevention programs that specifically targeted gay and bisexual men. During the 1980s when Oliver first moved to El Paso, he belonged to several gay men’s organizations that served to educate men about safe sex, such as the Gay Resource Organization, the Southwest Aids Council and EP Outings. The impact of HIV/AIDS and the development of programs to address it are an integral part of LGBT history in El Paso as elsewhere in the U.S. Larry, a 55 year old man who emigrated here from the Bahamas, was part of the International AIDS Empowerment Council during the 1990s. He spoke of how he and his partner would visit an AIDS hospice in Juárez and talk with men who could not access HIV/AIDS medications as people could in the United States. He spoke in heart-warming detail of how his partner would speak with sick retired drag queens who would reminisce happily about the gay life in Juárez:

Well, when Tom was alive, we were in a group called International AIDS Empowerment. It was run by Skip Rosenthal. We were involved, in that when that started back in 95, 96, and there was a sub group in that called La Casita. There was a group of us that used to go to a [sic] AIDS hospice in Juárez, we would go on the weekends... We would go to La Casita, you know. It was terrible; the guys there, that was their last stage, they were gonna die, you would go one week and the next week, say there were four people there, the next week there were two people who had passed away. Oh it was [sigh] I mean, and I don’t mean - to see people suffer like that it’s just, ugh... I mean we’re here and they’re there, and there’s so much help you know, there’s so much help here and they knew, the guys knew, they knew they were dying, they knew, they waited too long, they knew they were going to die, but they wanted to die with dignity... It was I mean, I’ve never seen something like that. I’ve seen bad things in life, but that it [pause] Let’s say they are 500

feet away from us [across the border] – Why – Most of the guys, you know their families have forsaken them, and you know there was a few guys who were drag queens and they knew us pretty well. They would talk about in their hey-day, and how much fun it was and stuff like that, and you would go, because it was in the summer months, and they would be, they would be covered in blankets, because they were freezing. Some couldn't get out of bed.

Larry spoke of how traumatic the AIDS epidemic was in Juárez at the time and yet also underscores the stark differences in how sexual minorities have access to healthcare in border contexts. In this way it became clear to me that both Juárez and El Paso's gay communities are linked and in many ways the violence in recent years that has swept over Ciudad Juárez has severed that link. Gabriel himself noted that it was a tragedy that movement between the two spaces has been largely brought to a halt.²²

Eric mentioned an aspect of El Paso's gay community that was not mentioned by any of the other participants: the issue of prostitution and the influence of the adult video stores. He mentioned that his first foray into the gay community was at the age of 17 when an older friend of his, who was 23, took him to the adult theaters and he heard men having sex in the bushes. He also took him to a secluded bar where prostitutes, usually transgender (male to female) women, were picked up by customers and engaged in other illicit activities. He said this was his first view of the gay community and he interpreted it as a negative side, a side that is hidden and separate from the regular gay bar scene, but still referenced online through social networking sites and personal ads.

3.3.3 Comparisons to other Locations

Most participants, when asked to describe El Paso's LGBT community or its atmosphere toward LGBT people, compared it to other locales, either stating how much more accepting El Paso is or how much more it needs to progress. One location that was relatively close yet was markedly different was the city of Las Cruces. Nathaniel, Paola and Quentin had different viewpoints of Las Cruces as compared to El Paso. For Nathaniel and Paola it was a strange and unwelcoming environment. Quentin on the other hand mentioned that he went to a gay pride event in Las Cruces and was amazed at the

²² Campbell (2009) details the history and development of Juarez into the "drug war zone" that has stalled tourism in the city and caused nightclub owners and business people to move to the U.S. Yet everyday necessary traffic still continues to flow between the cities despite the large number of killings that have occurred since 2008, when the cartels began fighting amongst one another for control of the Juarez-El Paso border drug trade.

family-oriented atmosphere of it. He remarked that Las Cruces has more social and political organizations for LGBT people than El Paso, which he sees as more of a party/drinking atmosphere.

Some participants also mentioned other major metropolitan areas known for their large and vibrant gay communities. Several had visited West Hollywood in Los Angeles and marveled at the size and the visibility of the gay community there. Quentin, Paola and Norma all spoke of how much freer they felt to be gay in these spaces. Paola in particular spoke of how she felt comfortable holding her girlfriend's hand and how she didn't feel people watching her; she also mentioned seeing older gay people with families, a sight she had not previously seen in El Paso.

Zephora recalled living in New York City for a month and a half with her fiancée; she spoke of how they would walk around Manhattan without getting "second looks," especially around Christopher Street and the Stonewall Inn. Though it was a predominantly gay male neighborhood she felt it was "really cool seeing that many gay people holding hands and being open about it." However she contrasted this with Brooklyn, where they were living, and where she did not feel comfortable holding hands with her fiancée; she attributed this discomfort to being both a woman and an identifiable lesbian. Her fiancée would get cat calls on the street and they noticed that if they were walking off the subway after 9 or 10 at night other women would congregate around them and walk in a large group – so it is possible that her discomfort was not only fear of gay-bashing but also of possible physical attack because they were women. So even in large metropolitan areas there are spaces that can be considered unsafe for LGBT people and this can overlap with safety issues for women and other minorities. When Zephora was in Dallas she also noted overlapping stigmas of race and sexuality; she and her friend, a gay black man, felt unfriendly stares and glances when they were in downtown Dallas, leading her friend to remark, "I don't think it's just because we're colored."

Nathaniel had an interesting assessment of other places he has visited, especially as a person who presents in a dually gendered way, blending feminine and masculine even when not in drag. He has stated that while in Ruidoso²³ he felt very uncomfortable even dressed as a man, because he felt that the straight people could tell he and his friends were gay. On the other hand, when he visited Austin and

²³ Ruidoso, NM is a nearby tourist community located 160 miles from El Paso and Las Cruces and is a frequent vacation destination for people in El Paso during the summer and winter months.

Phoenix he felt much more welcome. He said that the attitude toward drag in some of the larger cities is much more inviting than in El Paso, where he feels stigma toward drag is much more prevalent, due to the Hispanic influence on the city.

Norma is an avid traveler who has visited gay communities in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Toronto, and Mexico (Puerto Vallarta and Mexico City). She summed up her impressions of these places in relation to El Paso thusly:

Here it is like a little farm, like a little pueblito, little town; then you go to another place like L.A., West Hollywood, Long Beach, San Francisco, Las Vegas, San Diego, Canada. They're like ten years ahead of us... That's the difference, but it goes with the population. Like it's more people, they're bigger cities, obviously they're gonna grow up before us. Here, it's very small, we live in this very small town.

Although El Paso is often considered a “small town” it is not; the city boasts a population of over 500,000 just within the city limits. Others have noted that El Paso, despite being a medium-large city, has a “small town feel” in the sense that it still is very provincial. Romo (2005) in his book detailing El Paso history during Mexico’s revolution in the early 1900s, reveals an El Paso that is constantly shifting from cosmopolitan hub to heavily defended border to rural backwater, and that has been ignored and isolated from the rest of Texas and the United States. This idea that El Paso is not as “developed” or as mature as other larger cities was also experienced by other participants. Quentin described the local gay community as “having always been there but barely picking up its feet.” El Paso’s isolation from the major sites of gay community formation, such as San Francisco, New York etc. is possibly the reason why El Paso’s LGBT community seems to be barely catching up with the rest of the U.S. gay rights movement.

In contrast, Rudy saw Mexico City and other large cities as being more prone to violence against gays, whereas he has never heard of anything like that happening in El Paso or Juárez. He viewed El Paso as a small city where such things don’t happen, or at least are unheard of. Rudy was interviewed several weeks before Lionel Martinez was beaten outside the OP; in 2010, Borunda (2010) revealed FBI records states that El Paso had only three hate crimes for that year, two of which were directed at gay people. There are several reasons why this might be; for example one flaw of Hate Crime reporting is that law enforcement might be reluctant to pursue or investigate accounts of hate crime, or to even

categorize some physical attacks as hate crime. Another reason could be reluctance of victims of homophobic beatings to report instances to police and officials for fear of being ignored or retaliated against. Another possibility lies in El Paso being non-violent in terms of physical attacks, but cultural and social intimidation could still exist; it is to the issue of violence that we now turn.

3.4 VIOLENCE

The third research question surrounded the issue of violence and safety as it pertains to LGBT people in the El Paso region. I refrained from asking if the participants themselves were ever victims of hate crimes, for two reasons: first, I did not wish to make the research all about hate crimes or physical attacks and feared that asking would skew the entire interview in that direction, perhaps obscuring experiences of more subtle violence such as cultural violence and stigma. Secondly, asking questions about hate crimes potentially could make the participant “shut down” if they felt it was too personal a question or, if they have never been a victim, feel as though they have nothing to contribute. Instead, I asked if they ever felt physically in danger in El Paso and if they ever had any conflicts because of their sexuality. I felt this was a more open line of questioning that could include both physical and non-physical violence. That said, a few participants did relate stories of physical violence directed at themselves or other LGBT people.

3.4.1 Physical violence.

Gabriel, Oliver and Norma, who were interviewed before the Martinez beating, all recounted stories of physical violence, yet also made it clear that such instances happened long ago, during the 1980s. When asked if he ever felt physically in danger, Gabriel said, “No [pause] no [pause] but I also think it has a lot to do with the fact that I don’t dress feminine,” implying that feminine-acting men and transgendered women are more likely to be targets of physical assault. Gabriel recounted how, as he was growing up in Juárez, the gay male prostitutes that lived in his home would often be made fun of as they walked down the street and were frequently beaten up. This lead him to believe all gay men had to suffer this kind of abuse. Oliver spoke of police beatings that used to take place around the vicinity of the gay bars in El Paso when he would visit from time to time, as well as murders of transgender and transvestite

individuals by men in El Paso. He implied that such a murder took place recently in Sunland Park, NM, yet the only recent murder of a transgender person found in *El Paso Times* archives was the murder of Arlene Diaz, who was shot in the back Justen Grant Hall and left in an Sunland Park arroyo in Spring 2002. Hall was convicted of Arlene's murder but no news indicated it was definitively labeled a hate crime; he lost his last appeal against the death penalty in 2007 for another murder he committed while out on bond for Diaz's murder (Fonce-Olivas 2005, Gracyzk 2007)

Norma also spoke of a serial killer who killed gay men during the 1970s or 80s. She said he killed three or four before the police found him and arrested him. An *El Paso Times* article from February 3, 1980 spoke of how the killings of Bill Morris and Arnulfo Santiago Rodriguez caused fear within the gay community and several gay bars were emptied (Ruiz & Marston, 1980). Ruiz and Marston (1980) also reported that gay men in El Paso were reluctant to trust the police or reveal their identity to reporters, indicating that being openly gay was still difficult in this time period. Norma and Gabriel also recounted that it was somewhat common in the 70s and 80s for gang members to drive past the Old Plantation and throw bottles at them while calling them "*jotos*" and "*pinches manfloras*."

In terms of first-hand personal accounts of physical violence only a few participants recalled experiencing anything; Paola noted that when she first came out as a bisexual at the age of 16 her father would often attempt to beat her when he was drunk. Her mother intervened so she never was actually beaten, but she recalls that as the worst treatment she ever received. Nathaniel also experienced a physical altercation in middle school, where he was often called fat and ugly and a "fag" by other students there. One day, he was retrieving items from his locker (on the bottom row), when two boys came up to him, grabbed him by the head and pushed his face into their groins. He did not recall how it got reported to the principle but he does remember the boys were forced to call their parents and tell them what they had done.

As I stated in the methodology section my boyfriend and I were also attacked as we left the Briar Patch one night in September of 2010. The sole attacker did not call us "faggots" or any other term other than "pussies." Interestingly my boyfriend, who received two quick punches before I intervened, does not see it as a hate crime, though I do. His judgment is based on the fact that the man did not call us gay

slurs nor did he make any verbal reference to our sexuality. However, we were walking, hand-in-hand away from a well-known gay area. I tell this not only to add my own account to experiences of anti-LGBT violence but also to underscore the complexity of defining such incidents as hate crimes.

Other participants noted instances when potential physical violence was threatened or where physical and cultural violence overlapped. Zephora recalled a time during the 2008-2009 school year when she was asked by students at Hanks High School to help them form a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at their school. At the time, she was heavily involved in the UTEP Queer Students' Alliance (QSA), and so agreed to help. As they went through the process to become a recognized student club she says the president and vice-president, who were a lesbian couple, were shoved in the hallway and several banners and signs were torn down. Furthermore, an anonymous hate letter, with implied threats of violence was sent to the faculty sponsor. When Zephora met with the principal to address the matter he said "it could be anything" but said he would contact the police about the letter since it was an issue of terrorizing a faculty member, though she doubts he did.

The potential for violence increases during altercations where alcohol is involved. Quentin noted that he is reluctant to go to straight bars because he fears being the unwitting victim of a beating:

[In] Pride Square you can definitely be yourself and things like that, but I think that's about it... Dangerous would be at the bars, the heterosexual bars, anytime heterosexuals are- Well people are consuming alcohol, I think that increases the danger, so when you're at bars and stuff like that yeah it's definitely not safe.

While talking about the beating of Lionel Martinez, Donna noted that she became fearful that more gay people will be victimized just because of "being in the wrong place and the wrong time." Donna also referenced Pastor Tom Brown, whose position as a clergyman can serve to legitimate physical attacks on LGBT people, as a potent symbol of such attitudes. Such incidents show how interwoven physical and cultural violence are, as it is cultural violence that lends support and approval to physical violence. As is evident from the reluctance of the Hanks' principal to investigate a threat of violence, or Quentin's incident at the Taco Cabana, cultural violence legitimates physical violence and allows heterosexual people to threaten violence with impunity.

3.4.2 Cultural violence.

Understanding cultural violence is crucial to understanding how LGBT people feel safe (or not) in their own society. Cultural violence can manifest itself in majority attitudes about sexual minorities, or in the way minority populations view themselves. When analyzing instances of cultural violence I was initially taken aback by the broad scope of instances that I thought revealed cultural violence. Because cultural violence can be defined so broadly I chose focus on instances when the participants felt their sexual identity somehow made them lessened in their own or other's eyes, a view that can be clearly linked to the stigma and inferiority with which Western European cultures have viewed LGBT people and issues. The three main cultural institutions that I examined concerning cultural violence were the family, religion and school, yet several participants spoke of the world of work as being also filled with ideologies and practices that can be considered cultural violence. The following sections examine each of the domains in turn.

Cultural violence and the family.

The lesbians whom I interviewed recounted more instances of being negatively impacted by cultural ideologies about family. Norma, Donna, Paola and Zephora all felt negative repercussions from their families as a result of cultural ideologies about what a family entails and the role of children, specifically daughters. Donna recalled that from an early age she felt family pressure to find a man to marry and she says that her mother often told her that "a woman's place is to take care of her husband." As a result, when she came out, she says her parents could not understand what it meant for her to be a lesbian; she says they are still learning to deal with the fact that she is with a woman. The same can be said for Paola who describes her coming out (as bisexual) as "crushing their long dreams of life" for her. Ophelia's father thought she was "going through a phase" or that someone made her this way, but has since come to terms with her lesbianism.

Zephora recalls that her mother looked at her with disgust when she learned Zephora was a lesbian and for a long time after would make sarcastic remarks about her masculine appearance or her being with a woman. Nathaniel's father had a similar reaction to his son's growing masculinity. Nathaniel noted that there was always music and dancing in his house and as a young boy he would

often dance with his father. The young Nathaniel always liked to dress up as a princess wearing a large t-shirt tied around the waist like a dress and walk on tip toes; in his mind his father was the man so he had to be the girl. One day his father caught him painting his nails with a marker and asked what he was doing; he replied, “I’m turning into a girl so I can dance with you.” His father then “spanked the shit” out of him and he never again dressed up as a girl until he was in his senior year of high school. Suppression of a child’s gender expression, whether through physical or verbal means is another way in which family can enact cultural violence upon LGBT people. This particular incident also reveals how cultural violence and physical violence interact and can overlap especially when physical violence is enacted by authority figures such as parents, police or teachers.

However, participants indicated that some family members were supportive of their coming out. Gabriel, Eric, Bryan and Ophelia all had parents who supported them after they came out, to varying degrees. Paola recalled that when her mother found out Paola was a bisexual woman, she became worried for her daughter’s safety, fearing that she would be the target of hate crimes. Zephora also notes how supportive and accepting her family has become in the time since she came out and how surprised she was when her paternal grandmother, who lives in Puerto Rico, told Zephora’s father that “she’s still [his] daughter and nothing else.” Such instances of family acceptance further complicate the issue of cultural violence, in that it is not a constant in the lives of LGBT people; rather, cultural ideologies exist that allow for eventual acceptance of LGBT people into their families, even if family members disapprove of their homosexuality. It should also be noted that all of the participants still maintain contact with their families to varying degrees, affirming that they love their families and that their families love them.

Cultural violence and religion.

The influence of cultural violence through religion was pervasive. Several participants said that religion has played a negative role in their life or was somewhat antithetical to their gay identity. Some expressed the idea that religion just never “stuck” with them. Bryan and Oliver both recalled that the religions they were raised with, Methodist and Baptist respectively, didn’t have much of an impact on them. Bryan said he never really enjoyed going to church and couldn’t bring himself to believe in it; he

stopped attending at the age of 16 or 17, around the same time he came out as gay. Oliver provided the most colorful metaphor, describing his Baptist heritage as an “injection that didn’t take,” equating it with an ineffective antibiotic.

Other participants described more complex relationships with religion. Quentin began going to church with his neighbors when he was in the 6th grade; his own family had no particularly strong church traditions. He began bringing his family with him when he entered high school. The church they initially went to was a Black church on Fort Bliss, which he describes as negative toward LGBT people. He recalls:

Ok church experience was very [pause] That was my black life, like we went to a predominantly black church, it was on base and I went without my dad for a long time and I went with our family doctor and eventually I started going with my dad and so the experience was very, very negative LGBT wise. Very, very negative about you know people who might be transgendered. Like, “God made you male or female and you shouldn’t want to change that,” and the preacher was very confused by people wanting to do that, and you know at least once a month you’re going to hear the preacher say you know, “Being gay, you know basically it’s not in God’s design, “you can call it whatever you want”, is what he would say and “according to God it’s sinful blah, blah, blah” and, God, it was so suffocating sometimes, like I was the one going to this church before my family supporting it.

Upon coming out at the age of 22, Quentin began attending the Metropolitan Community Church, a LGBT-affirming church. Nowadays he describes himself as at a “crux in his life” and is “not sold on the fact so much.” He says his previous religious journey felt like he was trying to prove one can be religious and gay at the same time. He says that once he felt he proved this to himself “it fell off [him] like dead skin.” Quentin’s view that church was suffocating for him was shared by other participants as well.

Gabriel was raised in a very religious environment. He describes Juárez as a place where everyone was Catholic; even the prostitutes that lived in his house would go to mass on Sundays and pray every day. At age 16 he left his mother’s house and began living with his aunt in El Paso, who also maintained a strict Catholic household. He described his wife as a strict Catholic woman as well. From here he says he was surrounded by the idea that being gay was wrong and felt a great deal of guilt for his attraction to men. This resulted in nightly prayers asking God to tell him why he was this way, or to

change him. Now he describes himself as no longer religious and considers religion in general as “very intolerant.” He has become less tolerant of religions that do not see him as a complete person, but sees his situation as bittersweet:

It plays no role anymore, and it’s sad because I do miss that faith, I miss believing in something, I miss having someone to raise your voice to and all that, you know. I still do it but it feels very hollow, it feels very empty...and it saddens me, I would like to believe in something.

Gabriel mourns the loss of his religion but attributes it to the intolerance he sees as pervading Christianity and most organized religions. It is telling that he still yearns to still believe in something; given how central a role religion and Catholicism in specific play in El Paso and Hispanic culture. To be “pushed” out of one’s familial religion is cultural violence in that it excludes LGBT people from the cultural institution of religion which validates individuals and provides them with some legitimacy in the community. This my account for the “hollow” feeling Gabriel describes.

Zephora, like Quentin, was religiously proactive when growing up, telling her parents to put her in confirmation classes and eventually becoming more active in the church itself. Oddly enough it was through her church community and the people she met there that she was able to come to terms with her own sexuality, and her coming out was facilitated by a speech she delivered at a confirmation retreat. However she has, over the last 6 years, become distant from her faith, which she attributes to moving away from her neighborhood church community to live in a different part of town. She also says she doesn’t need a faith anymore and has been discouraged by national debates where churches spread hate against LGBT people.

For several participants Pastor Tom Brown was a potent symbol of negative religious views of LGBT people and issues. Ophelia, Zephora, Gabriel, Eric and Donna all linked him to their feelings that religions are intolerant of homosexuality and their decisions to distance themselves from the faith in which they were raised. Zephora points to Tom Brown and his followers as having had a great influence in her fear to go back to her Catholic church, because she is afraid they would not accept her now that she engaged to a woman and presents as more masculine than she did when she was originally attending that congregation. She provides an interesting case of how institutional and individual behavior are in a complex relationship and not separate from one another. While her individual church community

accepted her as a lesbian, the attitude of the larger institution of the Catholic Church toward LGBT rights and identity has deeply affected her own faith. It also illuminates how one polarizing figure (Tom Brown) can become a symbol of oppressive cultural violence. Although cultural violence is expressed through institutions, such as religion, it is often enacted through the actions and behaviors of individuals. Tom Brown, as the representative for an anti-gay branch of Christianity in El Paso, has become a symbol of the religious cultural violence that participants have felt.²⁴

Paola, who was raised in a Catholic environment, attended classes in parochial schools since the age of 4. She says she still believes in God but has had to separate herself from the actual teachings of Catholicism:

Every now and then it still bothers me; I went to my brother's wedding and there they are and like, "Oh you know God created man for a woman" and this-and-that and they're talking and it still bothers me you know and I think I've had to separate myself from the actual like teachings of Catholicism and just kind of like, know- ... I believe in God but I always have to tell myself like, "God doesn't care if I'm, you know, a lesbian or bisexual," like he wouldn't care so I think I've kind of had to like tweak the teachings of Catholicism so that they can fit my own standards."

This separation from the teachings of Catholicism and "tweaking" of religious beliefs was shared among different participants, most notably Stanley and Norma, who still identify as Catholic, but believe differently than others in some aspects of their religion. It may also be a way for LGBT people to remain in their religion of upbringing without completely abandoning it, in essence creating something similar to the silence they might have with their family.

Eric, who was raised in a large family that was both Jehovah's Witness and Catholic, describes his religious upbringing as secluded; he says that his family wouldn't talk about anything other than what the Bible said, "black and white, never gray." He says that the role of religion in his life today is almost non-existent because he felt burdened with it and often in conflict. One of the primary reasons why he views Western religions with resentment is that some people "blindly believe and leave no room

²⁴ In some ways this might be detrimental in as much as by viewing one individual as the symbol for religious bigotry, larger discussions of heterosexism in religious teachings are ignored. It is similar to how larger discussions of race often center on individual racists rather than how culture itself is mired in racist ideologies that influence all its members at the unconscious level.

for anything else.” He has found some comfort in Eastern religions such as Zen Buddhism, which he sees as more accepting than Western religions. He also mentioned the irony that while heterosexuals are allowed to celebrate their sexuality and body as recreational as well as reproductive in the confines of Christian marriage, homosexuals are forbidden from doing the same thing.

One person for whom cultural violence and religion played an important role was Stanley, who hovered somewhere between shame, guilt and acceptance with regard to his bisexuality. I noted that whenever Stanley spoke to me concerning his homosexual encounters, he seemed to imply that his sexual desire for men came from his own weakness. For example he said that during his second sexual encounter with a man he “fell into his advances” because he was emotionally weak at the time (due to the death of his father) and the man “said all the right things.” He also spoke of other times when he felt a build-up of pressure and then succumbed to men’s advances or to his own “uncontrollable” sexuality. The cultural violence here is that he views his bisexuality and homosexual desires as innate and irresistible, and yet so deviant that they sometimes fill him with grief or guilt when they are over. This guilt also seems to stem from being raised in a strict Catholic household, where sexuality in general was seen as a bad thing. He recalled a time when he was three and he touched himself between his legs. He told his mother that it tickled and she admonished him, telling him he would go to hell if he did it again.

Cultural violence and schools.

Several participants viewed school environments as filled with cultural violence, noting that teasing and bullying of LGBT people at their school, was fairly common. Zephora and Quentin were the only two to admit that they themselves took part in some bullying as a way to avoid becoming targets themselves. Rudy and others said that LGBT issues were never really talked about in classes and that only bullying that was overtly physical (such as Nathaniel’s face-in-crotch incident) was reported or reprimanded. Rudy, who attended school in Juárez, noted, “I think I was lucky that I wasn’t bullied, but I think a lot of people, a lot of people, get abused in high school and I think that’s a pretty negative side of this.” The view that bullying of LGBT students was common in school settings existed in most of the interviews and indicates the interconnections between cultural and physical violence. As stated before, cultural violence validates or legitimizes physical or structural violence against a people; school bullying

that goes unpunished or unaddressed sends a clear cultural message that the bullying is at least tacitly approved of by administration or teachers.

Nathaniel recalled two other gay boys at his high school who also got picked on and routinely teased because they were on the dance team at Socorro, the Missionettes. While Nathaniel tried to hide by adopting a more mainstream dress style to blend in with the other students, he was still called names in the hallways; one of the other gay boys escaped some of the ridicule because he was friends with popular girls and was bigger and more masculine-looking. Ophelia was the only participant who did not recall ever being bullied in high school; she thinks they didn't bother her because she had been open about being a lesbian. She has heard that some girls were taken into the counselor's office and asked if they were gay but nothing beyond that, which coincides with Paola's account as well (both Paola and Ophelia went to Loretto at different time periods). It is interesting that Loretto's President, who is a nun, allowed two same-sex couples to attend prom, indicating a much more accepting atmosphere, at this specific school, whereas others had been met with violence or hostility.

Cultural violence and work.

While several participants offered information about their work life none recalled feeling personally discriminated against at work, at least not for their sexuality. Eric, who worked in the Navy until recently found some support from his supervisor who disciplined a young man for making a lewd comment about a female sailor who had shaved her head and behaved in a masculine manner. The supervisor said, "These people are like your brothers and you never know when they're gonna save your life. Your life may very well depend on them."²⁵

Gabriel, who worked in an HIV prevention program, was surrounded by other gay men and worked with a program that specifically targeted them, so he never felt the need to hide his sexuality since it was integral to his job. Bryan said that he felt comfortable in his two jobs (as a retail worker and at a speech and physical therapy center) where he often engaged in "office girl-talk" with the

²⁵ With the recent repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, this supervisor's attitude could serve as a model for training heterosexual service members to serve alongside and accept openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people into the armed forces. Rather than asking these young men and women to accept another's homosexuality or transgender identity, which they might be vehemently opposed to on several grounds, the military can teach them instead to first accept them as fellow soldiers in whose hands they will put their lives.

receptionists or others co-workers. At his retail job in the mall he noted that there were several gay people working there already and his supervisor was gay, so he felt comfortable being himself there as well. Others have found life-long employment in very welcoming environments; for example Norma has worked as a lab technician for the same company for 21 years and several of her co-workers and management are gay themselves. This raises the question, are queer or queer-friendly workplaces so because they actively make the environment queer-friendly, or because a large number of employees and management are queer themselves?

Zephora shed some light on this question when discussing the different places she has worked: at the Student Development Center at UTEP which also is home to the Rainbow Miner Initiative, as a bartender at a gay bar and later at a restaurant owned by a gay man. She says this employment history makes her resume “very queer” and has also allowed her to dress in whatever masculine clothes she wishes without fear of discipline. At the same time she is hesitant to enter the “general” work environment because she fears her appearance will influence or intimidate employers who are not exposed to LGBT aesthetics on a regular basis. This fear was made more manifest when she spoke with a friend of hers several years before Zephora began adopting a more “butch” appearance. Her friend, who presented as very “butch,” told her, “You can get a job anywhere, you have long hair, and you still dress feminine, but me, looking like this...I’m in the back of the house, I’m a cook, I’m a dishwasher.”

Non-conforming gender appearance becomes a cultural and institutional problem when appearance is central to one’s job. Strict adherence to gender norms in the workplace (for example enforcing that women wear “feminine” clothes to work) can limit employment opportunities for those who transgress gender norms by means of their clothing or behavior. Nathaniel has felt somewhat comfortable working at the front desk of a hotel, but he knows he cannot go dressed as a woman because he is dealing with customers, who might not approve of him dressing up in drag. This indicates that non-normative gender presentation might not be accepted in workplaces and by employers, especially those in customer service fields, with the exception of recognized queer spaces (such as a gay bar), gay friendly (such as “progressive” coffee-houses) or gay-owned businesses, for example Donnas’ hair salon which she owns with her partner.

Cultural violence outside of institutions.

In some of the interviews, participants pointed to structural or cultural forces that prevent LGBT people from living full lives within the El Paso-Juárez region. Others noted a shift in the time that they have lived here, toward a more accepting environment for LGBT people in the borderland. Eric suggested that the lack of a more vibrant or visible gay community might be keeping talented young gay people from staying in El Paso, where they would be able to help the local gay community. While he himself could not pinpoint the cause, he linked it to economic issues and the general perception of El Paso's gay community as "lame" or "non-existent." Such a view of LGBT brain-drain seems entirely plausible; many young gay people express the desire to leave El Paso to live in more gay-friendly cities like San Antonio, Austin or New York. Bryan expressed this desire himself; he wanted to move to a more liberal "hippy" city where he could be himself and feel welcomed and where there was "more going on." The existence of a well-established but "silent" gay community seems to foster this perception that there is no identifiable gay community in El Paso outside of the bars and UTEP.

The issue of city climate for LGBT people had come up prior to the same-sex partner benefits debate in 2010. In 2001, El Paso was courting GAP, Inc. when the company was looking to move some of their offices from San Francisco. The then director of the city's Economic Development Department, Roberto Franco felt it was because the committee that interviewed with GAP officials did not adequately answer "quality of life" questions for gay and lesbian employees (Crowder, April 16, 2001). GAP later released a statement saying that the decision to move to Albuquerque instead was not based on questions about the city's attitude toward gay and lesbian people. However, some gay people that I have spoken with in El Paso have pointed to this instance as evidence of how conservative attitudes toward sexual orientations that pervade El Paso, have prevented the city's economic progress. Urban studies theorist, Richard Florida (2002) has observed that cities which foster a vibrant "creative class" tend to achieve greater economic success. Florida (2002) also writes that because gays have traditionally been members of this creative class leading him to theorize that protecting gay people from stigma and discrimination helps a city to grow its creative class.

Others have felt tensions from within the gay community itself; as mentioned before, stigma against lesbians, transgender people and bisexuals could also be forms of cultural violence caused by patriarchy and heterosexism that permeate even the LGBT community. Zephora's encounters as a lesbian bartender reveal that lesbians in the gay community are sometimes targets of ridicule. Gabriel has also noted that people often make fun of lesbians for being too masculine or for not acting like women. Disregard of lesbians has very real consequences for health as well. According to Zephora, currently in El Paso there exist no health initiatives targeting lesbian and bisexual women. Any health initiatives targeting the gay community always deal with HIV/AIDS prevention among gay and bisexual men. This is true of the MFactor program which is funded by a grant through the Texas Department of Health and Human Services; the grant does not allow the program to provide sexual health education for lesbian and bisexual women. This is no doubt due to the tendency to view public health initiatives for the gay community through the lens of HIV/AIDS, a remnant of stigma that reduces LGBT people to gay and bisexual men and the threat HIV/AIDS poses to them, ignoring that lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender people also can lack adequate sex education and health services as well.

Yet HIV/AIDS is not the only health concern for the LGBT community; Zephora noted that several of her friends are often misinformed about the need to receive gynecological exams or breast exams because visiting a gynecologist is perceived as something women do if they are having sex with men. This puts them at greater risk for cancer as well as other sexually transmitted infections that can often be asymptomatic. The neglect of lesbian and bisexual women as well as transgender individuals in discussions and funding of public health initiatives seems influenced not only by heterosexism (which views LGBT people only through the lens of sex and risky sexual behaviors) but also sexism (which prioritizes male experiences and issues over female ones).

Cultural violence still appears in the lives of LGBT people in El Paso, mostly through the cultural institutions of family, religion, school and work. These institutions can enact violence upon LGBT people in various ways, from preventing them from fully accepting a LGBT identity to pushing them away from social institutions that might bring deeper meaning and a sense of community to their lives.

3.5 SPACE AND SAFETY

The final section of these findings is concerned with perceptions of space and safety, i.e. areas of El Paso that LGBT people consider safe and accepting or unsafe and intolerant. I found this interesting because it details how LGBT people navigate and understand different spaces in the city; while participants viewed El Paso as somewhat tolerant, they saw some places as more tolerant than others. The danger of physical violence was interpreted as being greater for lesbians and flamboyant or feminine acting men, presumably because more masculine gay men can “pass” in such environments. Others noted that safe/unsafe space isn’t fixed on one neighborhood or area of town but can move around depending on social context.

3.5.1 Unsafe Space.

Parts of El Paso that were collectively seen as unsafe for LGBT people were generally lower-income and more “family-oriented” or traditional areas of town. Several pointed to the Lower Valley, Northeast, and Far West as being less welcoming because they are seen as more rural, traditional and with greater potential for violence. Specifically, Segundo Barrio and the Dyer St. area were singled out as places where participants avoided being more “visibly gay” or where gay people could not hold hands or display affection. These areas were interpreted as having a greater influence of machismo as well as the presence of gangs, which increased the potential for violence. Dyer Street’s proximity to Fort Bliss may also affect the participant’s perceptions of that area of town as unsafe. Bryan said that Segundo Barrio was particularly dangerous to him; “If something’s gonna happen it’s gonna happen there.” Bryan’s interview took place prior to the Lionel Martinez beating by a gang that police allege are located in Segundo Barrio.

While Segundo Barrio was perceived as a more dangerous zone for LGBT people, it is also intimately linked with parts of the LGBT community. The New Old Plantation and San Antonio Mining Company are located on the border of Segundo Barrio and Downtown. Eric said that he knows several transgender people who live in Segundo Barrio, sharing apartments and living in common because they can understand one another’s plight. Yet he says they are objects of gossip in the neighborhood.

Most areas that are considered to be unsafe for LGBT people (the Lower Valley, Segundo Barrio, Socorro, and parts of Horizon) are mostly south of Interstate 10. Eric attributed this to poorer neighborhoods being located south of the interstate and closer to Mexico. Here, he says, residents are “less affluent, less cultured, less knowledgeable. It’s a different mindset – still kind of elderly, machista society, people tend to be more unaccepting [sic].” This suggests that perceptions of these spaces as violent are also tied to perceptions of class, race, nationality and age. Such perceptions are no doubt fueled by accounts of actual beatings taking place in such areas, such as the Lionel Martinez beating, but are also part of a larger dialogue of class and race inequalities that view poor neighborhoods of color as “dangerous” or “troubled” while more affluent neighborhoods with presumably white residents are viewed as safer or more “family-friendly.”

Gabriel perceived the Lower Valley as potentially problematic because,

A lot of them [the residents] are first time immigrants and they still have the old Mexican traditions, they might not be quite as welcoming...You go where the gang members are more concentrated, like the Northeast or the Lower Valley...In those places you have to be a little bit more careful.

Zephora also said that she perceived the Eastside and Lower Valley as unwelcoming because they are more conservative and have larger church communities. She said, “I think of the Lower Valley as places where grandmas live, you know...at Christmastime you know those areas are packed because everyone is visiting their grandmas.” She says she has often gotten stared at in that part of town, which makes her feel uncomfortable.

Nathaniel also felt that the area around Socorro was more traditional and elderly, and said he feels uncomfortable when he visits his family there. Several participants assumed that older residents would have less favorable views of LGBT people or be more socially conservative. This contrasts with accounts that participants’ own grandparents have been more accepting than their parents (Zephora, Paola).

The Northeast and specifically Dyer Street are also perceived as dangerous spaces because gang activity is concentrated around that area of town. Norma noted that she will not hold her girlfriend’s hand in areas where “homies” are concentrated, such as Dyer St: “Because [pause]I think it’s a lot of

homies, black people. It's not that I'm against black people I have good friends that they're black. They have this [pause] they're *machistas*, like Mexicans." Dyer St. therefore becomes a dangerous place not only because of the existence of gangs but also of *machismo* that is evident, according to Norma, in both Mexican and Black communities. These statements also reveal a deep-seated racial dynamic that casts communities of color, Mexican and Black, as particularly dangerous to LGBT people. This has hampered efforts at political cooperation between minority communities within the United States and has created some divisions white LGBTs and those of color.

For some it was less a question of specific areas of town than of straight space in general as "unsafe" and gay space as "safe." Donna has said that she doesn't feel comfortable holding her girlfriend's hand unless she is inside the gay bars or during Gay Pride, two settings where gay space is the rule rather than the exception. For Quentin, Norma, and Nathaniel straight spaces are sites of potential violence, especially if alcohol is involved. Nathaniel has noted that he doesn't go to straight bars because he doesn't want "some meathead to start shit." The last time he recalls walking into a straight bar was when he decided to go to the 3 Legged Monkey because his car was getting fixed. He recalls that it "felt like walking into a beehive, everyone stares at you like you aren't welcome." He also recalled that two lesbians came and sat next to him and began talking to him, presumably as way of creating safety in numbers, gay space in a predominately straight one. Gabriel also said that gay men who are more notably effeminate stand a greater risk of being attacked or insulted in public spaces. In response to a question about what might cause someone to be targeted he stated, "Outward expression, the way you dress, the way you speak and all that. I think you have to be a lot more, more careful around those places [dangerous spaces for LGBT people]."

3.5.2 Safe Space.

While some areas of town were perceived as unsafe, most participants spoke of one particular area of town as safe and welcoming for LGBT people. For Gabriel, Norma, Bryan, Zephora, Paola, Quentin and Ophelia, UTEP and the area surrounding it were considered accepting of LGBT people in general and safe for LGBT couples to hold hands, show affection and otherwise openly display their identity. Sometimes this was the only place they felt comfortable doing so; Paola refrains from holding

her girlfriend's hand in public but feels comfortable doing so within UTEP. The bars and surrounding area near the University were also considered particularly safe for LGBT people. For some this area was safe because it was perceived as more highly educated. Eric and Larry noted that the areas around UTEP, such as Kern Place, Manhattan Heights and Sunset Heights were all filled with degreed professionals and were also places where many "out" LGBT people lived. For Norma the presence of degreed professionals was also important in defining gay- safe space in El Paso. She mentions that she has no problem going to the Dome Bar, located inside the Camino Real Hotel in Downtown El Paso. She says,

Nobody's going to tell me nothing. Probably it's not about if they accept you or not, supposedly people who have money to pay for the Dome, they're lawyers, doctors, people. You're not going to those places to make a scene.

It seems that these places are more accepting, not just because of their wealthier, highly-educated residents but also because of upper-middle class cultural standards around "making a scene," regardless of how one might feel privately.

Ophelia also spoke of the University as a safe space, but also included malls and movie theatres as safe because of the number of people who are there. Quentin and Bryan shared this perception though they still believed that people would stare and might say something if they saw two gay people holding hands. Therefore the safety found in crowds seems mostly to be safety from physical harm. Nathaniel went so far as to say that everything west of Zaragoza street till the Westside was safe, excluding the "suburbs" such as Horizon, the Northeast or Far West El Paso, as well as spaces south of the freeway.

For others, downtown El Paso, specifically the area surrounding the gay bars off of Stanton St. and Ochoa St., also constituted "safe space." These spaces are safe by virtue of their being "gay-spaces" as opposed to "straight-spaces." Donna spoke of how even when straight people pass by the "gay areas of town" they already know it's a gay space and have more respect for outward expressions of LGBT identity in these areas, thus creating something of a "gay ghetto" where homosexuality and transgenderism is the norm. Nathaniel found safety in the gay areas because of the sheer number of people like him, in contrast to settings in which "You're the only [gay person] in the room, no matter where you are and usually you are the only one, you have to be more conscious of where you are." This

level of isolation and discomfort in public space reveals the effects of cultural violence, in that public space is viewed as “straight” space and gay people can feel alone and disconnected in it.

The importance of other gay people to create “gay space” came to the fore in several interviews; Nathaniel noted that until he participated in EP Outings/M-Factor, he would not go out in public (such as to Music Under the Stars) while dressed in drag. He enjoyed participating in the group because there were 30 or so other men like him in one place, which lessened the danger and isolation, and perhaps lessened the effect of stares upon him. Zephora and Quentin said there is a safe zone around the gay bars, but that it is small and immediately outside it one is more vulnerable to harassment, physical assault and name-calling.

Regardless of this, people say they feel safe downtown; Gabriel and Norma have said that they have had no problems while shopping downtown. A male friend and I also went high heel shopping downtown for an event we had at Planned Parenthood; at first we were hesitant to ask the sales ladies for help finding larger shoes but once we did the ladies were eager to help and very friendly, even going so far as to suggest styles. This blending of safe and unsafe space is not uncommon for the participants; though Quentin stated that he felt safe on campus he did remember that he and his fraternity brothers received cat calls from “athletes” when they held a Greek Week activity.

Some older participants thought the presence of younger people contributed to safe space. Norma, Gabriel and Oliver felt that younger people seem to be more accepting of LGBT people or have no problem with them expressing themselves. According to Donna, Nathaniel and Ophelia it has become “normal” and even trendy for youth to adopt a gay or transgender identity or style. Major clothing suppliers that cater to younger demographics show increasing willingness to appear gay friendly either by selling rainbow belts and gay-themed shirts as Hot Topic does, or selling gay pride paraphernalia in the weeks leading up to June (Pride Month) as GAP has done. This idea that being around younger people or that having large groups of gay people around regardless of locale make one safer highlights how mobile and ephemeral safe space can be. Unsafe space was defined as mostly solid and definable, consisting of places of stark class differences, poverty, social conservatism, traditional religiosity and non-white and immigrant populations. Safe space was mostly mobile and decentralized, defined by the

presence of wealth, education, and social expectations of refined behavior, but also youth, other gay people or places with a gay aesthetic.

Conclusion

This thesis began as an attempt to understand the life histories of LGBT people in El Paso and to what extent silence and stigma play a part in them. It also was an exploration of space and how LGB people use, interpret and understand the urban space around them as either safe or unsafe.

4.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Those participants who have lived here longest (Oliver, Stanley, Gabriel, Norma and Larry) have seen El Paso change from a fairly hostile environment to one that is mostly accepting or even welcoming. Perhaps they have learned to ignore the stares the younger participants described, or perhaps they never really received them because they were more “normal” in terms of gender appearance. This could be because in earlier decades visually identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual was frowned upon, save for the most marginal of the gay community, such as butch lesbians and flamboyant gay men, some of whom dressed in drag. For the older participants silence was not as pervasive or important, save for Stanley, for whom it was vital in maintaining his “straight” identity. Other participants’ families knew they were gay and had accepted them to varying degrees; for Gabriel and Norma, who were raised in this area, it is interesting to note how central family is to their life and how silence serves to facilitate acceptance from family.

For the younger participants who have lived here all their lives (Quentin, Nathaniel, Zephora, Ophelia, Paola, Bryan, Rudy and Eric) El Paso is a complex city filled with tolerance and intolerance, acceptance and violence and hostile stares. The stares could be a result of higher sensitivity to stigma among younger people (as opposed to older ones who may have become desensitized to it over time) or a reaction to a more visually obvious gay identity frequently adopted by younger LGBT people. The threat of violence has driven some of the participants to take refuge in mostly gay spaces. Some attributed this ambivalent position of LGBT people in society to national debates about same-sex marriage and the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, where acceptance seems both on the horizon and at the edge of a knife. For others, Tom Brown and the recent debates about health care benefits for same-

sex partners, as well as beatings outside the OP, have left them feeling worried that El Paso is not as safe or tolerant as they may have once thought.

All participants reported experiencing stigma in some form, from families who deem their homosexuality as improper or inappropriate around children (Quentin, Nathaniel), to an unwillingness to reveal one's sexuality in the workplace (Oliver, Donna). For others stigma was felt in early childhood, when gender nonconformity was the cause of jokes and teasing. Bisexual stigma was keenly felt by both bisexual participants and raises questions about the experiences of other bisexuals in El Paso. The most common manifestations of stigma are the derogatory words and statements thrown from cars, or tacit compliance with homophobic behavior such as bullying or calling of names in public settings.

A few participants (Zephora, Paola, Stanley and Quentin) felt stigma from within the LGBT pertaining to sex, gender and race. Zephora pointed to the marginalized and often ridiculed place of lesbians (particularly masculine appearing lesbians) within the gay community, especially in the gay bar subculture. Quentin noted racial stigma within the online gay community, where relative anonymity can foster more explicit manifestations of racism. And Paola and Stanley noted feelings of bisexual stigma where they were assumed to be promiscuous or incapable of having monogamous relationships or treated as though their orientation did not exist.

In no place did stigma seem more manifest than in the phenomenon of the "straight gaze" whereby participants recalled feeling others' eyes upon them keeping their behavior in check, keeping them from fully enjoying the company of their loved ones. Such straight gaze is alienating and according to Nathaniel had the potential to make LGBT people feel as though they were "the only one in the room." Straight gaze is seen as normal and routine but also uncomfortable and sometimes hostile in places considered unsafe, where the potential for violence is heightened and some arbitrary stimulus such as alcohol or the touch of a hand might set people off.

Participants also had a variety of ways of coping with stigma. The most common was the use of humor, sarcasm and irony to recall harrowing events or to shrug off the pressure of the straight gaze. For others passing was central to avoiding stigma, from Stanley encouraging discreetness in his same-sex encounters to Nathaniel dressing more like a man during work.

Silence is a complex social phenomenon; it can both ameliorate and complicate social relationships lived in the context of stigma. For some, silence was a way to be gay and still maintain a healthy relationship with one's family; this silence manifested as not talking to parents or grandparents about their sexuality but still having them know who and what they are. For others it meant referring to their significant others as their "friend" and having parents treat them as such rather than as their children's romantic/sexual partners. For some it also meant separating family life from "gay life," where family became part of the "straight world." Sometimes this silence was oppressive and harmful, for example hiding same-sex encounters from wives as Gabriel and Stanley have done, or refusing to acknowledge a daughter's long term relationship as was the case for Paola. And for some, silence impeded knowledge of other gay family members at least prior to one's own coming out. Silence also was complicit in the tacit approval around school bullying of LGBT people.

At the same time, silence served as a means of protection, agency and a way to keep peace in an otherwise hostile world. Quentin summed up the reasons for silence well when he said, "Life is easier if you don't push"; perhaps it is not a full life, but it is an easier one. Given the global spread of a particular, upper-middle class Euro-American gay identity, which prizes individuality and authenticity over collective "harmony", one wonders what might happen in societies where silence has traditionally served to maintain a space for non-heterosexual people within their society. It seems likely that such a change would lead to conflict as it has in El Paso, a city with a long history of silent LGBT acceptance and tolerance, as is evidenced by the history of gay spaces in the El Paso/Juárez region. Silence permeates El Paso's culture when it comes to LGBT issues, yet more and more, "being gay" also means "being out." Still even for many participants who are "out" to their families, silence still exists in some form or another.

Finally with regard to violence and space, the general consensus was that El Paso was once thought of as a safe space for LGBT people and perhaps will be once again, when memory of the Lionel Martinez beating begins to fade. At the same time, the perceptions of certain spaces as unsafe, dangerous and intolerant as opposed to spaces that are safe, accepting and tolerant seem to reflect larger social divisions of race, class and gender. This is not surprising in that perceptions of safety and danger

are intimately tied to deep-rooted phenomena such as racism, sexism and classism as well as heterosexism. Areas of town thought to be unsafe were often poor, working-class neighborhoods of color (e.g. Segundo Barrio and Dyer St.) whereas safe spaces tended to be mostly white, affluent and highly educated (e.g. Kern Place, UTEP area, Sunset Heights). Yet safe space was also seen as mobile and ever changing based on context and demographics; younger people were considered more accepting and tolerant of LGBT people in both public and private spaces. Gay space was defined not only as the streets around notable gay bars but also where other gay or gay friendly people congregated, such as at Gay Pride, EP Outings/M-Factor events, the El Paso Symphony etc. Issues of safety and space are informed not only by cultural phenomena such as racism but also by individual actions and social contexts. Yet it should be noted that safe spaces always existed with a thin membrane of protection; to cross this membrane is to walk into a space where violence and intolerance were potentially present.

4.2 SIGNIFICANCE

This project is significant in that it addresses the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people; the participants were diverse in terms of sexual identity as well as age and race. It also included the stories of people who grew up in Juárez, illuminating the differences between the so-called “sister cities.” This study also spoke of the life histories of LGBT people of color, specifically Mexican-American LGBT people, for whom silence, sexuality and “being out” play a different role. The significance of this project also resides in its location; prior studies of LGBT people on the U.S.-Mexico border have mostly focused on one specific zone (the San Diego-Tijuana border region). This study begins to fill a gap in the literature of LGBT border identities by focusing on the El Paso- Juárez border region which is unique in terms of culture, economics and space.

This study also used the social theory of stigma to indicate how cultural violence is experienced by LGBT people in El Paso. Analyzing non-physical violence through the lens of stigma helps to illuminate a possible origin for cultural, institutional and structural violence as well as provide a grounding for understanding silence as it is used with regard to minority populations.

4.3 LIMITATIONS

That said, this study does have some limitations; most notable is that of language. All interviews were conducted in English with English monolingual or bilingual participants; the experiences of Spanish monolingual LGBT people merit further study. Their experiences would add a greater understanding of how language plays an important role in being LGBT in locations where two languages are in constant movement across borders and contexts.

Furthermore, the study focused mostly on college educated participants and their understanding of what it means to be LGBT. Working class or non-college educated LGBT narratives are also needed to understand more fully the role of sexuality in their lives as it pertains to class. College life, specifically at an LGBT-friendly campus as UTEP, allows people to find community and to feel accepted. But what of those who have never attended college? Those who live in the Segundo Barrio or the Northeast have surely had different experiences being gay and perhaps silence and stigma are different for them as well.

Another major limitation is the broad scope of this thesis, which naively, I thought would give a plethora of information that was easily analyzable. By focusing on stigma, silence, cultural/physical violence and space and safety, I missed the opportunity to delve into greater detail and analyze the effect of silence or stigma on LGBT people. A much more narrow focus on one phenomenon would have given me more detailed data and allowed me to analyze more deeply its relation to social context. Furthermore, secondary and third interviews could have elicited more information and greater understanding of LGBT people's lives on the U.S.-Mexico border.

4.4 AVENUES FOR FURTHER STUDY

These limitations suggest several avenues for further study. The need for study of working class LGBTs and Spanish monolinguals is of course evident, but also the experiences of other LGBT people of color in El Paso. The experiences of Black, Asian, Middle Eastern, mixed race and Native American LGBT people in El Paso should be included to see how their gay identity develops in a city that is majority Hispanic as opposed to more ethnically mixed or majority-white cities. Not all people of color experience race the same way and racial dynamics between minority ethnic and racial groups are

different in context and action. The experiences of lesbian and bisexual women could also be expanded as there were only 5 in a total sample of 14; such a study would further illuminate how El Paso is experienced and perceived by gay and bisexual men and women. Finally the absence of transgender individuals from this study is a gaping limitation that should be addressed by future research; given the hints that the participants felt it would be harder to be transgender in El Paso, one wonders what transgender people's experience of safety, silence, stigma and violence would be and if it is vastly different from the others.

El Paso still serves as a unique locale for the study of sexuality and sexual identity. Perceived as more politically progressive than the "rest of Texas" it is seen as a mostly Democratic city in a staunchly Republican state. It contains a minority-majority population and is intensely bilingual. Though several members, if not a majority of the LGBT community were born and raised within the city and still maintain close familial ties, it is also a city of strangers who have migrated from other parts of the U.S, most notably in the expansion of Fort Bliss.

The findings themselves pointed to future studies as the participants brought up several interesting facets to being gay on the U.S. – Mexico border. Zephora for example spoke of the health concerns of lesbian and bisexual women in terms of breast examinations, gynecological exams and sexual education. Zephora, a 24 year old lesbian who studies gender and lesbianism remarked that she knows several lesbian women who assume they didn't have to go to a gynecologist because they didn't have sex that resulted in reproduction or because they were uncomfortable with the idea of a male gynecologist touching them "down there." Furthermore she noted that some lesbians who present masculine or "butch" and are borderline transgender have expressed to her that they are uncomfortable with the idea of recognizing they have breasts or a vagina, thereby limiting their breast examinations. A study on the influence of sexuality and health seeking behaviors among lesbian women would be necessary, especially in an area where silence of one's sexuality could lead lesbian and bisexual women to refrain from seeking help.

This also indicates an issue with regard to sexism and heterosexism within public health initiatives in the United States; most public health funding is aimed at addressing HIV/AIDS in gay and

bisexual men. This is sexist in the sense that it presumes lesbian and bisexual women do not need adequate sexual education because they are low risk for HIV/AIDS, but negates the fact that lesbians and bisexual women can also be at risk for syphilis, gonorrhea, Chlamydia and a host of other sexually transmitted infections. Heterosexism is also present in that if public funds are aimed at addressing the concerns of the LGBT community they are in the context of HIV/AIDS education/prevention rather than overall health or well-being, maintaining the stigmatizing connection between LGBT people and risky sex.

While insults and derogatory words are common manifestations of stigma, further study can look into how they might be used and interpreted in El Paso, which is divided between English and Spanish. In bilingual contexts, how LGBT people interpret and understand these words could have an effect as to how safe they perceive El Paso to be. For example, the use of words such as *joto*, *maricon*, and *manflora*, could mean something different than if a person was to hear “fag,” “queer” or “dyke.” Use of these words could also differ in terms of space, class, age and context. This would be particularly prescient in school environments, many of which are struggling with the new implementation of GSAs or more open and expressive LGBT students.

Finally, the findings also suggested the importance of gay space as opposed to straight spaces; however several participants hinted at more mobile “gay” spaces such as that created by the presence of large numbers of gay people or in gay-friendly events such as the symphony. El Paso, unlike larger more metropolitan cities does not have an identifiable gay neighborhood which blends commercial, residential and cultural gay space as for example the Castro or Boystown. This creates a unique blend of identifiable gay spaces, such as Pride Square, and Sunset Heights, as well as “gay- converted spaces” such as when a city street is cornered off for gay pride. Furthermore, several straight bars in El Paso and Las Cruces have attempted to instigate “gay nights” where they presumably try to attract gay clientele and provide “gay space” in regular “straight space.” Future research could look into if these spaces are indeed “gay” or still are influenced by stigma in some shape or form.

This thesis’s intent was to explore the life histories of LGB people in El Paso and find what might be unique about them, with regard to stigma, silence and violence. In this initial exploration I feel

that I have somewhat succeeded; the experiences of stigma reveal how stigma is both imposed on LGBT people from outside and enforced from within when LGBT people internalize the stigmas about themselves. In a border context, such as El Paso, the interplay between Mexican and Euro-American ideologies of gay identity becomes complex, most notably through the social phenomenon of silence, which seems to be prized among Mexican/Latino communities as a way to deal with homosexuality within the family. El Paso, as an understudied area with regard to sexuality, provides a new and interesting frontier for analyzing how gay identity is formed, enacted and interpreted in increasingly global contexts. In future studies I hope to expand on this research here and explore how El Paso and other transnational border contexts affect LGBT people and their sexual identity formation.

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Appendix

A-1 Interview Protocol

Demographics

- When and where were you born?
- How long have you lived in El Paso or on the U.S./ Mexico border?
- Where else have you lived and when did you decide to move back? What reasons led you to make El Paso your current home?
- How do you identify yourself in the LGBTQ community?
 - o How long have you identified as this?
 - o What led you to identifying yourself as this?
 - o Have you “come out”? To what degree are you “out”?
 - Family?
 - Friends?
 - Strangers?

Life History Interview questions

- Could you describe your early childhood where you grew up?

Family

- What was your family life like?
- Describe the relationship between you and your family.
- Does your family know about your sexual orientation/ gender expression? [silence, cultural violence]
 - o How long have they known?
 - o Is your relationship the same or different since they found out about your sexuality/gender expression? In what ways?
- How does your family deal with issues surrounding your sexual orientation/ gender identity?
- How have your romantic relationships been treated in your family?

Religion

- In what religion were you raised?
- How would you describe your religious involvement growing up?
- In what manner does religion play a part of your life?
- How does your religion (either past or present) view different sexual orientation/ gender expression?

School

- Where did you attend school (elementary, junior and high school, college)
- What was the atmosphere at your schools like with regard to LGBT people?
- Were you “out” in school? How did this affect your experience of school?

Cultural Violence and Stigma

- Were there any conflicts in your life growing up with regards to your sexual orientation/ gender identity? Describe what they were like and how they were resolved, if at all? [stigma, cultural violence, physical violence]
- Describe points and places in your life when you did not feel welcome or felt discriminated against. [Stigma]
- Do you believe this was due to your sexual orientation/gender identity? Why/why not? Describe points and places in your life where you did feel welcome. [Stigma]
- How has your sexual orientation/gender identity been treated in these places?
- Have there been points in your life where you have felt physically in danger because of your sexual orientation/gender identity? [violence] Describe these events*
- Have you or someone you know ever been the victim of a “hate crime”? [violence]*
 - o What were the circumstances that led to it?
 - o How did you know it was a hate crime?
 - o In what ways did you/or the friend cope with it?

Safe Space/ Unsafe Space

- How safe is El Paso for LGBT people? Is the city welcoming to you as a gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender person and in what ways? [Stigma, cultural violence]

- Describe specific places/areas of town that you consider safer than others for LGBT people. [violence, stigma]
- Describe specific places/areas of town that you consider more unsafe/dangerous than others for LGBT people. [stigma, cultural violence] What makes these spaces safe/unsafe for you?
- Are there places in El Paso LGBT people cannot/should not openly express their sexual identity/gender expression? If so, where would these be and why do you think they are this way? [stigma, cultural violence]
- As a whole how would you interpret the city's atmosphere in its treatment and acceptance of LGBT people? Is it mostly positive or mostly negative, explain?
- How is El Paso different compared to other places you may have lived/visited?

Vita

Elias Gonzalez was born in El Paso, TX in 1986 and graduated from Bel Air High School in 2004. He began attendance at UTEP the Fall of 2004 as a linguistics major; in 2006 he added a second major, anthropology, and subsequently graduated with a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Anthropology and Linguistics at the end of Fall 2008. Mr. Gonzalez worked as a writing tutor and later as a HIV prevention program coordinator with Planned Parenthood Centers of El Paso's Desert Rainbow Center. In Fall 2009 he began his studies in pursuit of a Master's Degree in Sociology, focusing on sexuality and health; he has attended the National Sexuality Resource Center's summer institute held in San Francisco, CA. He has also presented his preliminary research at the 2011 Southwest Social Science Association, in Las Vegas, NV. He is currently enrolled as a PhD candidate in Anthropology at the University of Iowa and a recipient of the Dean's Graduate Fellowship.

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