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# Identity Navigation Strategies of Queer Latinx Religious/Spiritual Individuals

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# “There is no right way to be”: Identity Navigation of Latinx LGBTQ Religious Young Adults

Viena Murillo '21 – (Sponsor: Professor Esteban V. Cardemil)



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## Introduction

- **Identity** → subjective concept of oneself as a person (Vignoles, Gollidge, Realia, Manzi, & Scabini, 2006).
- **Identity navigation**, defined as identity continuously in interaction and under construction (Bamberg, 2011), **is complexified by the queer theory framework.**
- **Queer theory** critically analyzes social construction of identity through (Abes & Kasch, 2007):

- Heteronormativity
- Performativity
- Liminality

Identity navigation of **ethnicity, sexual orientation and religiosity** (Cerezo, Cummings, Holmes & Williams, 2019; Noyola, Cardemil & Sanchez, 2020; Tuthill, 2016; Garcia, Gray-Stanley & Ramirez-Valles, 2008):

- Integrated spaces
- Resistance
- Compartmentalization
- Self-authorship

There is a lack of emphasis on social circles' impact on identity navigation that will be tackled in this specific qualitative study.

## Methods

Using semi-structured qualitative interviews, a sample of **12 Latinx individuals** were interviewed, **between the ages of 18-30, who identify within the LGBTQ community and as religious .**

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and subsequently coded and analyzed using queer theory (Grzanka, 2019) and phenomenological analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018), as both provide flexibility in exploring and understanding identity and how it interacts with the social environment around the individual.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Information of Participants (n = 12)

Demographic Information	N
<b>Ethnicity/National Origin</b>	
Latino/a/x	12
Hispanic	2
Mixed	2
Mexican	1
Brazilian	1
Salvadorian	1
Cuban	
<b>Gender Identity</b>	
Cis gender	9
Male	3
Female	6
<b>Non-binary spectrum</b>	
Non-binary	1
Gender non-conforming	1
Gender fluid	1
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	
Queer	1
Gay	1
Lesbian	1
Bisexual	6
Pansexual	2
Unlabeled	1

“Okay, there's a whole can of worms but in the whole queer community like you have people with kind of different opinions in terms of what it means to be queer. So like, I think of, how I think of like my own sexual orientation and sexual orientation in general, I don't think of it as like, I think of it the same, very similar way I think of the rest of my identity and that is it's not one thing or the other. I think a lot of people think it's either you're gay or straight, or you're bisexual, and you have to fit in one of those boxes. Now I don't think of it as like boxes as much as it's like a spectrum. I got nothing to prove, you know? I, it's not my job to like prove to you, like (laughs) I don't know, I don't have to fit in the box of your understanding, you know like, ugh.”

Rigidity versus Flexibility

“There is no right way, what is Latino and what is not Latino, what is Guatemalan and what is not Guatemalan, what is Mexican and what is not Mexican. Like there is no one right way to identify what that is. Even with religion, Catholicism and Christianity, there are different communities within them.”

Claiming Identity

## Findings

When navigating their identity, participant ranged from:

1. **Claiming Identity** → formulating their own understanding of their identity regardless of rejection
2. **Proving Identity** → finding ways to appear and be perceived in their identity to the people around them
3. **Identity Awareness** → keeping track of their behavior and words in spaces in which their identity may be rejected
4. **Rigidity versus Flexibility** → making a distinction between the rigid identity narratives that surrounded them and their flexible understanding of their identity
5. **Making sense of religiosity:**
  1. **No Shame, No Guilt** → finding religion that did not endorse shame and guilt mongering
  2. **Societal versus Spiritual** → distinguishing between God and the church
  3. **Decolonizing Religion** → deconstructing the colonial background in Catholic church
  4. **Theological reframing** → reframing religious beliefs in a way that would make sense for them

## Discussion & Future Directions

- Social circles impacted by heteronormativity move participants to perform their identities in ways that they deem most beneficial for them.
- Most shared a space of liminality between sexual orientation and religiosity (Abes & Kasch, 2007)
- Participants found the essentialized nature of identity invalidating to their experiences, as they experienced a more fluid identity navigation in par with queer's theory understanding of performativity (Abes & Kasch, 2007).
- **“Queer authorship”** → individual changes the heterosexist society and thus their identity.
- **Future research should explore further how gender identity impacts this process in trans and non-binary Latinx individuals.**
- **Additionally, a deeper look into non-western religiosity may bring different results.**