

Queer Valley: Stories of Culture and Resistance along the Lower Rio Grande Valley

by

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When I initially enrolled into graduate school, I knew that I wanted to study Latino histories because the history of my people was never emphasized while I was in public school, despite the fact that I lived in a region of Texas where a majority of the population was Latino as was the faculty. I planned on studying the Civil Rights Movement, but through the perspective of Latinos like the Chicano Movement and the Young Lords as I spent most of my time as an undergrad at the University of Texas – Pan American engaged in political activism for women’s rights, immigration reform, healthcare reform, and LGBT equality. However, after being introduced to the historiography of Queer History, I shifted my thesis to highlight the history of queer Latinos, a history that is often neglected outside of activist circles.

I would like to thank everyone who had a part in helping me complete this thesis, while managing the stress of graduate school. My family, friends, and professors played a crucial role in helping me to maintain my motivation to see this through even when I felt that I did not belong in an environment surrounded by such talented and intelligent scholars. I am also grateful to my fellow graduate students at Texas Tech University who constantly reminded me that I belonged here and that my research truly mattered. Thank you all for your support.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

Queer histories suffer from many problem like sources, theoretical approach, and the balance of genders so not to diminish the role of queer women in these histories.

However, I decided to focus on one problem in particular that came as both a personal and academic conclusion as a queer man. The greatest shortcoming with queer history is the lack of histories focused around queer people of color or at the very least histories of POCs that are balanced equally with those of Anglo queers.¹ The stories of queer POCs are often ignored in favor of the queer, white story or fetishized into brief blurbs in the history of queer-friendly metropolises. This thesis then highlights the history of queer Latinos and an area of the country that much of the historiography has ignored.

Aside from so many personal observations, this thesis came about after reading Queer writer James Villanueva's essay, "Dancing with White Boys." This essay is the best embodiment of the experiences and treatment of queer Latinos by the LGBT community. He recounts his experience in a West Texas gay bar during the 1990s and the ways in which his Latino identity is exploited as both a sexual fetish and conquest for white, gay men.² His essay includes a powerful memory of his compromised self and a reminder of how easily the stories of queer Latinos are ignored:

¹ This is a similar problem addressed in Martin F. Manalansan, Chantal Nadaeu, Richard T. Rodriguez, and Siobhan B. Somerville, "Queering the Middle: Race, Region, and a Queer Midwest," *GLA: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2014, Volume 20, 6-7.

² James Villanueva currently works as a Managing Editor for *The Slatonite Newspaper* in Slaton, Texas. He's written two books, *Remember Slaton, Texas: Centennial Stories 1911-2011* and *The Sweet Taste of Bread*. Academically, he studied Sociology at Eastern New Mexico University.

A boy with blue eyes stares. I smoke my cigarette because this is what has happened before. Another white boy just trying to get his Latino fix—I stare back because, well, because that’s just what we do. No words are needed; I want to tell him that I’m a teacher, I want to talk to him about my short stories, but he just bats his eyes and takes me away because tonight he’s ready for something spicy, something exotic—he gets what he wants because he is a white boy and around here they get their way.³

As Villanueva submits himself and his identity to satisfy the needs of a white man’s sexual desires, he mentions his own shame and guilt for surrendering his body to someone else’s desires. Scholar Michael Hames-Garcia experienced something similar at a gay bar where he was labeled a hustler/thief because of his ethnicity: “Somehow, at this moment and in this context, my ethnicity and this white man’s assumptions about its significance outweighed all other aspects of my identity.”⁴ He also pointed to the other stereotypical conclusions that mark Latino sexuality as something “exotic, dangerous, and risky.”⁵

With the eroticization of the Latino body, queer persons and scholars often forget they are people too with their own unique stories to tell. This thesis joins other academic studies and social works that dismantle the obsession with the sexualization of the Latino body and privilege instead queer narratives. My emphasis is on Latino queer histories in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, not only because it is understudied, but also because it is my home. I decided to focus on one problem in particular that came as both

³ Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, ed., *Why Are Faggots So Afraid of Faggots? Flaming Challenges to Masculinity, Objectification, and the Desire to Conform*, (AK Press: New York, 2012), Kindle Edition, Location 3475

⁴ Michael Hames-Garcia, *Identity Complex: Making the Case for Multiplicity*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 9.

⁵ *Ibid.* This association with Latino sexuality as something exotic, dangerous, and risky is not limited to Latino men as these are tropes shared with Latina women.

a personal and academic conclusion as a queer man. The greatest shortcoming with queer history is the lack of histories focused around queer people of color or at the very least histories of POCs that are balanced equally with those of Anglo queers. The stories of queer POCs are often ignored in favor of the queer, white story or brief fetishized blurbs in the history of queer-friendly metropolises.⁶ Margot Canady's *The Straight State* touches on this problem. Within the first half of twentieth-century America, homosexuality was thought of as a problem that came from the Mediterranean and Asia or in highly populated areas.⁷ She describes the conflict with heteronormative, Anglo culture versus foreign and queer bodies as being deviants that are disruptive to traditional, American values during this period. We can then see a reflection of Canady's observation in Latino communities with their relationship to queer persons. For Latinos, queer behaviors are viewed as an Anglo problem with queer Latinos being the result of Latinos becoming too American.⁸

Such histories on queer people suffer from many problems, the most obvious being the difficulty of finding sources; especially queer histories that center the Valley. However, this thesis features a wide array of sources. While I use newspapers from *The Monitor* in McAllen and *Progress Times* in Mission from 1970s-1990s, websites from various organization such as Valley AIDS Council, and yearbooks from local (junior) high schools, it is above all else the oral histories that allowed me to privilege the

⁶ Examples include George Chauncey's *Gay New York*, John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, Josh Sides' *Erotic City*, Colin Johnson's *Just Queer Folks*, Nadine Hubbs' *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*, and Brock Thompson's *The Un-Natural State*.

⁷ Margot Canady, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), Kindle Edition, 35 and 41.

⁸ This concept is alluded to in works like Lionel Cantu Jr.'s *The Sexuality of Migration*, Susana Pena's *Oye Loca*, and Chris Girman's *Mucho Macho*.

experiences of queer men and women whose stories have previously gone untold. Indeed, this thesis turns heavily on the use of oral histories from a collection of sixteen interviews I conducted within the past year from Valley residents; most of which are men but four are women. These residents are predominantly Latino (Mexican-American) who are residents of the U.S. and a majority define themselves as somewhere are somewhere along the LGBT+ spectrum. More than half of them are over forty, but a majority come from working-class families and have largely middle-class lives and aspirations. I use their voices to chronicle the Valley's history during the 1970s and 1980s, looking specifically at youth culture and the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In so doing, I primarily demonstrate that the Valley's queer narratives reinforce, complicate, and challenge popular assumptions about the queer experience, ranging from school and leisure to sex education and the AIDS epidemic. Linking the Valley's queer narratives to the greater queer experience helps to demonstrate the ways that the Valley is at times unique, while also showing universal ties.

Forging Inclusive Queer Theories

This thesis is built on the scholarship of anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, communication scholars, but also the work of historians who have transformed queer studies.⁹ This thesis seeks to complicate Metronormativity and its successor, Queer Anti-Urbanism in Queer Studies.¹⁰ Metronormativity bases itself on the

⁹ Works that include but not limited to Eithne Luibheid, Lionel Cantu, Collin Johnson, John Howard, and Alice Echols.

¹⁰ The term Metronormativity originates from J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: NYU Press, 2005).

inseparable nature of urban spaces in weaving queer identities. It sought to critique the problem of the narrative surrounding queerness only being visible in urban spaces as Jack Halberstam introduces this approach in his analysis of transgender lives and their media representations.¹¹ Scott Herring then introduced Queer Anti-Urbanism and offers a method for studying rural places and their connections to forging queer identities that differ from what develops in urban spaces as he examines rural spaces across the country.¹² Thus for example, scholars such as Josh Sides have often argued that cities were a destination for gay liberation, but I find instead stories of migration from queer men and women who left home primarily in the name of economic opportunities. While these theories both highlight the problems of understanding queer spaces as being exclusively urban, they also fail to adequately incorporate race, which the interviews here address because these individual stories come primarily from queer Latino/as.¹³

The goal of this discussion on the Valley as a rural space is to follow the academic trend of talking about rural, queer spaces. Even though works such as John Howard and Nadine Hubbs focus primarily on queer Anglos in rural spaces, these works offer a significant foundation that make this project possible. Like John Howard's *Men Like That* with its analysis of queer men in rural Mississippi, I attempt to use the Valley as an example of how queer people's sexuality was both ignored and regulated in this

Meanwhile Queer Anti-Urbanism was developed in Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*, (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

¹¹ Halberstam, 4-7.

¹² Herring, 4-5 and 12.

¹³ The interviews feature in this thesis reinforce and complicate part of these theories as the Valley shows its queer residents leaving for economic opportunities, not sexual exploration, which follows some of the assumptions seen in Herring's *Another Country* and Brock Thompson's *The Un-Natural State*. And this problem continues to be addressed in Manalansan, 1 and 4. Also in E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 11.

region of the country along with other social mores such as race and tradition that acted as welcome and unwelcome distractions. The men in Mississippi who did not fit normative manners and mannerisms were generally ignored because of a full-fledged fight to retain white supremacy.¹⁴ In the Valley, the Cult of Virginity sometimes masked queer interactions in much the same way. When examining the Valley as a rural space, I find that queer visibility in itself was reasonably tolerated even though extreme gay bashings and homicide were also prevalent.¹⁵

Similarly, Brock Thompson's *The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South* follows the example of *Men Like That* and moves this study of Mississippi to Arkansas, chronicling much of the twentieth century. Thompson's study of a queer presence reveals a peaceful coexistence in rural Arkansas until the end of WWII, which saw a rise in religious, conservative fervor that forced Arkansas' queer communities to retreat into the closet.¹⁶ Like Howard, Thompson's work is particularly vital, in that he focuses less on legislative processes and legal histories and employs oral histories to study this history of community formation.¹⁷ The later half of *The Un-Natural State* is filled with stories of queer communities forming in pockets of rural Arkansas where queer people built queer utopias, while the rest of the state did everything it could to hide their existence.¹⁸

¹⁴ From John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), xvi and 234.

¹⁵ From Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez's *Erotic Journeys*.

¹⁶ Brock Thompson, *The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South*, (Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, 2010), Kindle Edition, Location 185 and 234

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Location 250 and 291.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Following the examples of these other rural Queer histories, Colin R. Johnson's *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* looks at the role of sex education and how this ushered in a homophobia but also a new discourse during the first half of the 20th century. More specifically, he argues that the emerging discourses on gender roles led to a cultural transformation in American rural communities that were similar yet different to what I found in the Valley through his analysis on mannish women and male cross dressing.¹⁹ Johnson finds that sex education ushered in rural homophobia and the broader policing of all sexualities, including heterosexual sexual contact, public nudity, and bestiality.²⁰ In the 1980s, sex education in the Valley turned so much on the fears of heterosexual relations, that queer youth were somewhat marginalized yet found a measure of autonomy.

Queer (Latino) Borderland Scholarship:

As much as this research is a study of queer histories, it is necessary to remember that the culture of the Valley centers Latino history and the Borderlands. The majority of the Valley's population is Latino, mostly Mexican-American, but Anglos have held much of the political and economic power. Young people coming of age in their families were negotiating their sexuality as well as what it meant to be American and follow certain family traditions. Scholars such as Chad Richardson, Michael Hames-Garcia, Ana

¹⁹ Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender Sexuality in Rural America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 2, 133, and 166.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

Elizabeth Rosas and especially Susana Pena and Lionel Cantu have helped define the parameters of the thesis.²¹

Susana Pena's *Oye Loca: From the Mariel Boatlift to Gay Cuban Miami* is a history of the Cuban, gay scene in Miami from the 1980s through the 2000s. The focus of *Oye Loca* is on queer first and second generation Cubans. Her argument focuses on the visibility of gay Cubans, emphasizing how flamboyant Cubans assisted in shifting the ethnic and sexual landscape of Miami through their resistance to the American, cultural norms that sought to silence their voices.²² And like the stories of the queer people in the Valley, *Oye Loca*'s queer men needed to craft their own spaces and organize their resistance against the cultural norms of their communities, both the American and Cuban.²³

One work that stood out from the others was Lionel Cantu's *The Sexuality of Migration* as he constructs his narrative around queer, Latino men who immigrated into the U.S. His interviews with these men are placed on the backdrop of gender roles and machismo culture amongst Latinos that often restricted the ways in which queer Latinos could embrace their sexuality, forming the methodological basis for this thesis, especially as he includes an analysis on activist and out-reach organizations dedicated to queer

²¹ Chad Richardson and Rosalva Resendiz, *On the Edge of the Law: Culture, Labor, and Deviance on the South Texas Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); Chad Richardson, *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture on the South Texas Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); Ana Elizabeth Rosas, *Abrazando El Espiritu: Bracero Families Confront the U.S.-Mexico Border*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014); Michael Hames-Garcia and Erneso Javier Martinez, eds, *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Hames-Garcia, *Identity Complex*.

²² Susana Pena, *Oye Loca: From the Mariel Boatlift to Gay Cuban Miami* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), xii-xiii.

²³ *Ibid.*

Latinos.²⁴ For these men, their resistance comes not just from their sexuality, which defies appropriate masculine norms, but also from their development of extended, familiar circles.²⁵

Instead of finding nice neat narratives of queer liberation or stories that paint familial or rural spaces as oppressive, this thesis argues that stories about liberation are mixed with histories of defeat and sorrow. The Valley, like the family, the gay bar, and any political organization has been oppressive and nurturing. The queer borderlands of Valley do not reveal simple conclusions that end in victory or defeat. For example, families were sources of abuse but also comfort. Thus, I argue that the Valley is not just a borderland in the sense that identities are in constant flux, but that queer narratives are also in constant negotiation. The Valley was where queer people found refuge and suffering as the politics of identity were reshaped throughout these decades.

Chapter Summaries

Each chapter seeks to display how this borderland region's queer stories reinforce, challenge, and complicate existing scholarship. The first two chapters are geared towards discussing a foundational understanding of the physical Valley and its various, cultural roots with regards to race, class, and gender. In Chapter 2, I introduce the Valley of the 1970s and 1980s geographically before describing how the intermingling of American and Mexican youth culture and leisure affected the formation of Mexican-American identities. It bred a conflict that complicated the identity process because becoming more

²⁴ Lionel Cantu, Jr., *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men*. (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 77.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

American could be cast as progress yet also associated with immoral identities.

Meanwhile, Chapter 3 looks closely at the institutionalized tropes of the Valley—The Cult of Virginity and machismo. Here I demonstrate how these institutions forged a heteronormative culture that closely regulated sexuality, but during the 1980s the Valley began to adopt new norms once the teen pregnancy and STD rates grew, ultimately affecting the treatment of queer youths that were both positive and negative.

The remaining three chapters focus on telling the stories of queer communities and spaces that challenged the traditional heritage of the Valley. Chapter 4 discusses the origins and roles that local bar, Duffy's Tavern, had in the formation of Valley residents' queer identities. Duffy's Tavern was the sole place where gay men could congregate for a significant part of the 1970s until more gay bars began to pop up, but Duffy's continued to hold a steady clientele because of the issue of proximity and transportation that continues to affect movement in the region. Chapter 5 documents the history of AIDS in the Valley and Texas, and how the problem surrounding the treatment of AIDS in the Valley reflected the disease's connotation with being an urban problem. While the severity of the disease would encourage Valley institutions and residents to rally to combat AIDS. Like the rest of the country, once it was perceived as contained, then the Valley attempted to return to a tradition of silence on the subject of sexuality. Finally, in Chapter 6, I close by discussing how the events of the 1970s and 1980s nurtured a culture of activism that exploded after the AIDS Epidemic that continues to this day, especially with the strides that the Valley's queer community made in increasing their visibility as an effort to dismantle heteronormativity that permeated throughout the Valley, some of which are beginning to collapse in recent years. The oral histories in this chapter, more so

than previous chapters, are heavily privileged because of the ways that they document this history of activism and community formation that bridges discussions of family and faith with discussions of physical and sexual abuse. Then, I conclude with the stories of the modern Valley and the development of new groups dedicated to assisting queer youth, while educating the community on queer issues as they build upon the foundations of their predecessors and reconstruct the Valley so that it can become more inclusive of queer persons.

Chapter 2:

Coming of Age in the Valley in 1970s and 80s

The Rio Grande Valley is more than a place that I call home; it is also a land where culture and politics collide from the intermingling of two worlds. For many Valley residents, they are left alone to piece together how to be an American on their own terms, while preserving their Mexican heritage. This struggle commonly plays itself out in preparing traditional Mexican meals that their grandparents or parents would often cook, or preserving their Spanish tongue to communicate with their family on both sides of the border. But this is also a struggle in which gender, labor and race complicate understandings of what it means to come of age in the Valley. This chapter looks at everything from music and movies to hairstyles, and argues that Valley youth were not just negotiating Mexican-American identities but also adopting practices of a questionable American youth culture that shaped the 1970s and 1980s.

Young Valley residents coming into adulthood perhaps best epitomize this struggle to maintain balances between the two worlds. On one hand, they have sought to be true to themselves and carve out their own identity against the backdrop of American mainstream cultural trends that has created often more alternative styles of dress and social activities. Sociologist Chad Richardson's *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados* and his follow-up work *On the Edge of the Law* are part of the Borderlife Research Project Collection at the University of Texas – Pan-American that features a collection of interviews that document the lives and culture of Valley residents. Although a sociological project, Richardson's research affirms how histories of borderlands and

sexuality are an invaluable field in reconstructing this region's history.²⁶ Both books embody how the stories of these locals maintained this balancing act in the Valley and how these transnational customs were in constant struggle. The interviews of Valley residents and the documents on Valley culture beautifully describe what it was like growing up in the Valley between the 1950s-1980s with the ever present challenge between preserving Mexican culture yet appearing as respectable Americans.

The balancing act in the Valley represents a conflict in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality as well as constant fluctuation between American and Mexican cultures that has made it difficult to understand which culture young people are adopting and/or rejecting. At the same time, much of secondary literature has focused on conflict and ignores this topic altogether. Rather than looking at border violence and issues of immigration that dominates so much of the historiography, this thesis focuses on the realm of pleasure.²⁷ By transitioning to the lived experiences of the Valley's residents coming of age and privileging the constructions of race and class, we see that the border

²⁶ Chad Richardson and Rosalva Resendiz, *On the Edge of the Law: Culture, Labor, and Deviance on the South Texas Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); Chad Richardson, *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture on the South Texas Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

²⁷ Eithne Luibheid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Pablo Vila, *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Border: Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the U.S.-Mexico Frontier*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Ana Elizabeth Rosas, *Abrazando El Espiritu: Bracero Families Confront the U.S.-Mexico Border*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014); Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Canady.

is more than just a physical demarcation, but a space where multiple identities are forged and are under constant renegotiation.²⁸

What is the Valley?

When discussing the ways in race and class were constructed along the border in the 1970s and 1980s, it is important to reconstruct the world of the Valley in this era. The Valley consists of Hidalgo, Cameron, Willacy, and Starr Counties, but the scope of this thesis highlights mostly Hidalgo and Cameron Counties. The major towns of the 1970s were McAllen in Hidalgo County, and Harlingen and Brownsville located in Cameron County. Many of the other towns in Hidalgo County like Edinburg, Mission, Pharr, and San Juan would grow in the following decades as more people and businesses begin to spread out of McAllen.²⁹ Despite its name, there are no valleys in the Valley; it gets the name for being the delta at the Rio Grande, which divides the U.S. (Texas) with Mexico. And depending on what part of the Valley you live in, you could either be a few minutes or about an hour away from the Mexican border. This proximity to the border makes the relations between the U.S. and Mexico a constant factor in the lives of Valley residents as some claim citizenship from both countries, while others are citizens of one side but also

²⁸ Lamia Khalil Hammad, "Border Identity Politics: The New Mestiza in Borderlands," *Rupkatha Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* Vol 2 (2010): 303-307, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://rupkatha.com/v2/n3/BorderIdentityPolitics.pdf>. Olivia Cadaval, "United States-Mexico Borderlands/Frontera," last accessed April 27, 2016, <http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/migrations/bord/intro.html>.

²⁹ Alicia A. Garza, "Hidalgo County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hch14>; "1990 Census: Population of Texas Counties, Arranged in Descending Order," Texas State Library and Archive Commission, last accessed May 26, 2016, <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ref/abouttx/popcnty3.html>. 1970 census data had Hidalgo County at a population of 181, 533 and in 1990 that number roes to 383, 545.

claim a heritage to the other. As well, the Valley conducts plenty of business with Mexico's neighboring communities whether its Mexican residents traveling to the Valley to shop or vice versa.³⁰ This intimate, economic connection between the Valley and Mexico continues to grow, especially as more businesses open in the Valley and as Mexicans send their children over to the Valley to attend local universities.³¹

The racial makeup of the Valley has been predominantly Mexican-American, but Anglos, even as the minority population, have held much of the economic and political power in these counties. These populations differed between towns as some were more racially balanced, while more Anglos or Mexican-Americans populated other towns.³² This is most visibly seen in the towns, major roads, and schools named after these Valley Anglos like the city of McAllen named after the McAllen family and Sharyland High School in Mission named after John H. Shary. These families continue to hold considerable economic and political sway in the Valley; however, this story is less about them and more about the people who reside in these towns.³³

Mexican-American Labor and Poverty

³⁰ "Rio Grande Valley of South Texas," last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://riograndevalleytx.us/>; Jose Joaquin Lopez, "Dynamic Growth of the Rio Grande Valley," *Southwest Economy* (March/April 2006), last accessed May 26, 2016, <https://www.dallasfed.org/assets/documents/research/swe/2006/swe0602c.pdf>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Alicia A. Garza, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hch14>.

³³ "McAllen Ranch: A History of Quality Cattle and Horses," last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.mcallenranch.com/history/ranch-history/>. For Brownsville name see John Mason Hart, "Stillman, Charles," *Handbook of Texas Online*, last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fst57>. For Donna name see Alicia A. Garza, "Donna, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hfd05>.

In the 1970s, Mexican-American families primarily lived humbly and their labor was often tied to farm work. Many were migrant workers and likely undocumented immigrants too. These working-class families often lived lives of poverty or made just enough to ensure a sense a stability for their families.³⁴ In some cases, when Mexican-Americans did have some professional work experience, it was just enough skill to perform a job, but they lacked the formal education or training that would cast them as professionals. The medical field has represented the most chronic problem in the Valley's history because of the tremendous impact it has on the poor and their standard of living.³⁵ Starting in the 1980s, though, the growth of Mexican-Americans in professional fields became more visible in the region. Some started opening their own businesses, while others entered careers that they were previously excluded from, which gradually allows for an increase in their economic power.

Since the 1960s, there have been two levels of poverty operating in the Valley.³⁶ A standard narrative of poverty that we are often familiar with in the national discourse describes families who have been residing in the low-income, often racially divided areas of town where resources from the city and county were very limited. However, there has also been a more extreme form of poverty which is seen in the Valley's *colonias*, which is made up of undocumented immigrants and their families who set up their own housing communities in plots of land in remote parts of the Valley. These areas have acquired zero aid from local government and have been cited for high crime rates because the

³⁴ Richardson, *Batos*, Location 128.

³⁵ Ron, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, Lubbock, February 1, 2016; Richardson, *On the Edge of the Law*, 17-19.

³⁶ Maria-Cristina Garcia, "Colonia," *Handbook of Texas Online*, last accessed May 31, 2016, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/poc03>.

people living in *colonias* live so far away from police stations that they lack the means to receive protection. Their absence of legal status in the country leaves them vulnerable to deportation and thus serves as a deterrent in reporting crimes.³⁷

Education and Language

The children of these migrant and farmworkers often lived in a bilingual world; they communicated to their parents, relatives, and possibly their neighbors in Spanish, while speaking English in public, especially when at school. Speaking Spanish in public schools has long lead to disciplinary actions. Along with oral history interviews, Chad Richardson and Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez's research reveals that the policies designed to punish students for speaking Spanish in schools, outside of Spanish language classrooms, did not change until the late 1970s and did not alter the punitive culture within these schools until the 1980s.³⁸ Along with the interviews and other sources, I recall hearing my *tios* (uncles) who went to elementary school in the Valley during the 1970s, describe vividly how their teachers would hit them with a ruler or a paddle if they spoke a word of Spanish in class and they would also suffer a similar punishment from the principal or anyone else in the administrative office with the authority to discipline students. This unjust discipline was extremely difficult for many Valley children and teens since they were part of this bilingual world in which their parents only spoke Spanish. It was not easy for them to switch their tongues completely back and forth between languages since

³⁷ Richardson, *Batos*, Location 246 and 963.

³⁸ *Ibid*; Richardson, *On the Edge of the Law*, 264-267; Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, *Texas Mexican Americans and Postwar Civil Rights* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 18-23.

it was so natural for them to use both Spanish and English in the home.³⁹ Perhaps even worse, when bilingual students accidentally spoke Spanish in class their Anglo teachers sometimes felt that they were being threatened. Ironically, due to the teachers' inability to translate, students faced corporal punishment and were labeled troublemakers if not violent.⁴⁰

However, there exists a second problem for those coming of age in this bilingual world. Translating English for Spanish-only speakers often fell on the youngest of children. To be sure, sometimes children may purposely mistranslate. For example, at an elementary school student at a parent-teacher conference kids might translate to their Spanish-only speaking parents that they are doing wonderful in school, while their English-only speaking teacher is trying to explain why the child is struggling in school. Even if the child is making an effort to translate as accurately as possible, they may lack the words/concepts that their parents and teachers are exchanging. While not exclusive to the Valley, children and teenagers translating for their parents, teachers, and other adults found it difficult to understand some of the vocabulary necessary to process complex conversations. This caused these young people to (un)intentionally provide adults with inaccurate information that undermines the child's well being.⁴¹

³⁹ Part of this comes from discussions with my relatives on growing up in the Valley during the 1970s and how they were treated at school, coming from Spanish-speaking families.

⁴⁰ Mario A. Garcia, *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 22; Richardson, *Batos*, Location 2931.

⁴¹ Misha Kratochvil, "Urban Tactics; Translating for Parents Means Growing Up Fast," *The New York Times*, August 26, 2001. Last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/08/26/nyregion/urban-tactics-translating-for-parents-means-growing-up-fast.html>. Cara Nissman, "Innocence Lost in Translation," *Salon*, August 4, 2004. Last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.salon.com/2004/08/04/interpreters/>. Chris Hedges, "Translating America for

Youth Sport Culture in the Valley

Sports often serve as a tool that both normalizes male youth behavior, but also provides an arena of leisure that challenges the status quo. For young men, they turned to sports as a means of escaping the economic situations and tensions families and communities faced. While in Texas football stadiums represent the pinnacle of community and youth masculinity, the Valley was more complex.⁴² When it came to maintaining family traditions, soccer was a sporting tradition that young boys adopted from their fathers. Soccer like football retained an affirmation of masculinity especially for transnational residents of the Valley. It would be hard for young boys, coming of age in such close proximity to Mexico, to be unaware of this country where the popularity of soccer rivals American obsession with football. Soccer was a Valley tradition and football was not only an American sport but, regardless of interest, was often inaccessible to many young men in the Valley. First of all, many Valley schools in the 1970s were often not large enough to form a competitive team.⁴³ For individuals, football required a lot more investment and sometimes fees to play were outside the family budget. Also the migratory experiences of so many young men prevented them from having the time

Parents and Family; Children of Immigrants Assume Difficult Roles,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 2000. Last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/19/nyregion/translating-america-for-parents-family-children-immigrants-assume-difficult.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁴² Jorge Iber and Samuel O. Regalado, eds., *Mexican Americans and Sports: A Reader on Athletics and Barrio Life*, (College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 2007). 123-125.

⁴³ The high schools in the Valley were guaranteed to have a football team, but it was not as consistent for the elementary schools and junior high schools to have one. Now, it is almost impossible to find a public, primary school in the Valley that does not have a youth football program.

commitment necessary to continue playing the sport. Finally, the blatant racism that Mexicans experienced from their Anglo classmates and administrators undermined their embrace of the sport.⁴⁴ Soccer's popularity amongst Mexican-Americans has spread to Anglos who were once not huge fans of the sport.⁴⁵ Similarly, for some individuals, football in the Valley like the rest of Texas considers the sport to be as important as church even as other sports like baseball, basketball, and hockey are becoming increasingly popular. Thus making football also feel like a family tradition.⁴⁶

Movies

Movie theaters perhaps more than any other form of leisure reached out to families and crossed gender and generational lines, while also providing a space where cultural interactions could occur through the ability of films to disseminate messages on normative culture, political, and gender performance.⁴⁷ While movies would become an important component of shaping youth culture they were less divisive than many other commercial leisure spaces. On the one hand, Valley theaters played Spanish and English films, providing the opportunity to appreciate films from both sides of the border. On the other hand, they were accessible. In the 1970s movie theaters could be found in the Valley's small, rural communities as well as sprawling, suburban centers. There were three theaters: the Cine El Rey was located in downtown McAllen and showed Spanish-

⁴⁴ Richardson, *Batos*, Location, 2691 and 2723.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ The Valley has a minor league basketball team (Rio Grande Valley Vipers) previously had a minor league baseball (Rio Grande Valley White Wings) and a hockey team (Rio Grande Valley Killer Bees).

⁴⁷ Paul Grainge, *Memory and Popular Film*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003), 72.

language movies. The Cine El Rey would exclusively show Spanish films until it closed in the late 1980s. There was also a movie theater in the La Plaza Mall in McAllen, and another movie theater inside the El Centro Mall in Pharr.⁴⁸ The theaters inside the local malls allowed Valley youth to act in ways that seem to reflect “American” patterns of consumption. There they would enjoy mainstream films that were popular nationwide. Meanwhile, the malls themselves served as important centers for the socialization of young people. However, like movie theaters, malls did not only cater to Valley teens, but also lured their parents into participating more in this consumer process that was nevertheless delineated by generational difference.

Fashion

For young people style has long been a way to define generational change. Valley youth coming of age also used fashion as a means of displaying or renegotiating the racial and economic differences that made what it meant to be or act American complex. How an individual dresses serves as a demarcation of their family’s economic situation and along with social status, style is as an identifier of race and one’s relationship to mainstream American culture. The works of Catherine Ramirez and Kathy Peiss help in bridging this concept of how fashion is used a tool to create this economic, racial identifier. Catherine Ramirez demonstrates, during the 1940s, how the zoot suit came to be “perceived as un-American” because it represented a mixture of queer, unfeminine,

⁴⁸ The Cine El Rey opened in the 1940s, while the El Centro Mall and La Plaza Mall theaters opened around the 1970s.

and non-American masculine values.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Peiss opens *Hope In a Jar* with a simple statement on how lipstick can transform our definition of a woman as a softer shade of lipstick could mark a woman as a lady, while a more glamorous color can transform her into a “hussy.”⁵⁰

Young women had to negotiate not simply what it meant to be American, but also what it meant to be respectable. Like the zoot suit era that Ramirez describes, Valley young women dressed in a way that preserved Mexican family and never, overtly, rocked the heteronormative boat.⁵¹ Thus, in the 1970s, they initially wore almost exclusively dresses or blouses with long skirts so not to reveal too much skin.⁵² However, there appeared some resistance brewing beneath the surface as young women began to drift away from heels to flats, wore dresses that showed more of their arms and shoulders, and styled their hair away from ponytails, braids, or having it completely straight. With their hair, they began to tease and curl it in a way that marked a turning point similar to Olivia Newton-John’s character Sandy Olsen’s sexualized transformation at the end of the popular movie *Grease*.⁵³ However, it would not be until the 1980s, the majority of young women adopted more casual boyish forms of dress. When they did, young women began

⁴⁹ Catherine S. Ramirez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), xvi-xvii.

⁵⁰ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The making of America’s Beauty Culture*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 3-4.

⁵¹ Ramirez, *Zoot Suit*, xvi-xvii.

⁵² Erika, interviewed by Michael Rangel, telephone interview with author, Lubbock, March 12, 2016; Edinburg Junior High, [The Wildcat '76](#), (Edinburg, Tx: Graduating Class of 1976); Edinburg High School, [Edinburg High School Bobcats On Stage '79](#), (Edinburg, Tx: Graduating Class of 1979); Edinburg High School, [Soaring into the '80s](#), (Edinburg, Tx: Graduating Class of 1980); Sharyland High School, [El Cascabel 1986](#), (Mission, Tx: Graduating Class of 1986).

⁵³ *Grease*, Netflix, directed by Randal Kleiser, (1978, Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2014).

to wear sneakers and jeans more often than dresses because of the comfort it provided them, and because as they began to enter sports, it made it easier to play.⁵⁴ This change highlighted a decline in the restrictions on women's dress, especially as women's labor began to change as many joined more traditionally, masculine fields.⁵⁵

When it came to men's fashion in the 1970s, the dominant look in the Valley was constructed around the *Tejano*-look. In other words, manly styles followed the traditions of *vaqueros* (cowboys). They often wore the collared button-up shirt, boot-cut pants, cowboy boots, and the Stetson hat (cowboy hat) whenever outdoors or in a public space. However, some young men also adopted more Anglo styles of dress that took on different aesthetics during the 1970s. Some of this fashion included a more modest look of khakis or jeans with a white, button-up shirt.⁵⁶ However, there were also Valley youth who adopted looks associated with eclectic 1970s and included colorful outfits like bellbottoms, flannel shirts, chinos, and pullover sweaters. Even the more sensual styles associated with Disco could be found in the Valley. Yet this was less common for Mexican youths, not because they rejected new music-inspired trends but rather because they could not afford these clothes as most of what they wore came from other relatives or stores that were more budget friendly.⁵⁷ What is most ironic about men's fashions from

⁵⁴ Erika interview; Edinburg and Sharyland yearbooks.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Cathy Crimmins, *How Homosexuality Saved Civilization: The True and Heroic Story of How Gay Men Shaped the Modern World*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 83. Aside from local yearbooks, I highlight Crimmins text as she demonstrates how men's fashion of the 1970s in the previous decade would have been considered inappropriate for straight men to wear and how gay men would dress. Erika interview. For a discussion on clothing, Anglos were mostly like the ones who could typically afford the really nice clothes, not that Mexican families failed to do everything in their power to dress professionally/appropriately.

the 1970s is how such hip-hugging fashions were considered to be overtly gay, straight, masculine, and feminine all at one time. While historians have pointed out that gay men of the 1970s were adopting ultra, masculine working-class forms of dress such as Levi's jeans, tight-fitting white t-shirts, and boots and other working-class masculine dress, this was also similar to the traditional *Tejano*-look in the Valley.⁵⁸ This crossing of gender norms that seemed so "natural" for youth, however, served to produce more anxieties over what Disco came to represent especially in terms of sexuality. Queer men presenting themselves in a more masculine manner, while heterosexual men were dressing increasingly feminine crossed all kinds of imagined borderlands in the Valley and in the nation.

Música

Changes in style go hand and hand with music trends. In the Valley, American country music and Tejano music (Texas-Mexican country folk music, which combines elements of pop, rock, and traditional Mexican music) has remained a dominant genre of music in the region as it continues to produce new Tejano musicians. Although in the 1970s there emerged competing sounds. Tejano music in particular is important to the Valley as it is seen as the birthplace of many famous Tejano musicians and the Valley often serves as the performance cite for new Tejano musicians in their rise to fame.⁵⁹ Two majors Tejano musicians include Valley natives, Ramon Ayala (in his former band Los

⁵⁸ Crimmins, 83; Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*, (New York City, W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 121-130.

⁵⁹ Juan Tejeda, "Tejano: Local Music, Global Identity," *GIA Reader* Vol 25 (Fall 2014), last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.giarts.org/article/tejano-local-music-global-identity>.

Relámpagos del Norte) and Freddy Fender who started their rise to fame in the 1950s and 1960s, before exploding at the start of the 1970s. Tejano music saw a great deal of popularity with migrant workers and their families as the music served as a connection to their new homes in American and their old lives in Mexico as Tejano music combined both worlds. Even as young people began to gravitate towards these new sounds they continued to support Tejano artists that gave rise to fame like the “Queen of Tejano Music,” Selena Quintanilla-Perez with her hits like “Como la Flor,” “Bidi Bidi Bom Bom” and “Fotos y Recuerdos” continue to play at every community event, nightclub, and family gathering.⁶⁰

Younger people in the 1970s found other genres appealing as well including Disco and Rock music. Disco was particularly popular amongst the younger crowd and especially for queer people. This genre of music unlike some Tejano songs created rhythms in disco and styles of dance that encouraged more provocative dancing between men and women as well as homoerotic interactions. The dancing became more sexualized as men and women danced differently from the Mexican ballroom style that dominated the region, which had men and women dancing at least a few inches apart. In sharp contrast, Disco encouraged erotic touch and grinding.⁶¹ Like elsewhere in the country, the Valley would get swept up in Disco as more nightclubs like Duffy’s Tavern

⁶⁰ Biography.com Editors, “Selena Biography,” A&E Television Networks, Bigoraphy.com, last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.biography.com/people/selena-189149>. When Selena first entered in the Tejano music scene it was with her band called Selena Y Los Dinos.

⁶¹ Echols, 42-43.

in McAllen (to be discussed in Chapter 4) began to play tracks from Disco icons like Donna Summer, Gloria Gaynor, and the Village People.⁶²

The 1970s also saw the embrace of Rock, Metal, and by the 1980s Hip-Hop's growing popularity with younger crowds was unmistakable. The Valley mirrored the rest of the country with regard to tensions produced from edgier lyrics and harder beats. These genres worried Valley adults that teenagers may become violent. As these music scenes grew in popularity, the Valley—already well known for featuring live performances of Tejano musicians—eventually began to attract well-known musicians and bands from these other genres who would perform in the area, expanding the popularity of national trends in the Valley. For fans of Rock'n Roll, Aerosmith was one of the first major musicians to perform at the Dodge Arena in March 2004, located in the town of Hidalgo, one year after the stadium first opened.⁶³

Youth Leisure and Tensions

All of these changes in music and fashion trends were happening against the backdrop of changing household economies. Historians have long understood that the desire to control the realm of leisure is tied hand in hand with the desire to control labor.⁶⁴

In the Valley, concerns over the rise of a youth culture and autonomous leisure time

⁶² Duffy's Tavern was a local bar in Downtown McAllen that catered to local and tourists during the day, but served as Hidalgo County's sole gay bar during the 1970s and the first couple of years of the 1980s. Chapter 4 focuses extensively on this history of this bar.

⁶³ Daniel A Flores, "Aerosmith returns to Hidalgo on June 30th," *The Monitor*, March 23, 2015. Last accessed May 26, 2016, http://www.themonitor.com/life/valley_life/aerosmith-returns-to-hidalgo-on-june/article_ffa10dfc-d17e-11e4-b342-4383aa573b7d.html. The Dodge Arena has since been renamed the State Farm Arena as of February 2010.

⁶⁴ Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3-5.

reflected generational change as well. In the 1980s, as Valley residents move away from farm/ranch work into factory, construction, and other forms of labor parents were in less control over their children. Valley families may have still been dependent on the contributions brought from their children's labor but new service jobs allowed children to earn money for themselves and in occupations identified with American consumer habits.⁶⁵ More teenagers were allowed the flexibility of participating in extra-curricular activities in school or they had enough leisure time to socialize with their peers in town and adopt or reject a range of behaviors. And if they worked, then they were able to keep their paychecks for themselves opposed to sharing it with the family. This increased income for teenagers is important for mapping the cultural shifts in the Valley.⁶⁶

More leisure time for young people and their ability to keep their earned income allowed them to adopt, reject or reinvent traditions and identities as did other teenagers living in the suburban/urban centers or in the Valley's middle class neighborhood.⁶⁷ As we will see in Chapter 3 and later on in Chapter 6, for young people this allowed them to adopt more queer behaviors: young men began to explore queer sex and non-masculine roles, while young women ventured into non-feminine activities like sports and community activism. Mixing Anglo-American culture and norms with Valley traditions had a double-edge effect given that there was no singular Mexican or American culture. It seemed as though their teenage children were not attending church as frequently and

⁶⁵ Richardson, *Batos*. Location 1270.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Mary Beth Norton, Carol Sheriff, David W. Blight, and Howard Chudacoff, *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States, Volume II: Since 1865, 9th Edition*, (California: Wadsworth Publishing, 2011), 810; Eric Anderson, *21st Century Jocks: Sporting Men and Contemporary Heterosexuality*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 27.

they were becoming more financially independent, and they at least in terms of perception were less engaged with the family.⁶⁸ At the same time that these changes worried Valley parents, there were larger issues shaping national discourse.

Above all else, Valley parents, as did parents across the country, began to worry over issues ranging from drugs to sexuality; but living in borderlands of national identity added even more complications.⁶⁹ The War on Drugs took off during the Reagan Administration and dramatically increased a collective sense of anxiety over the state of young people and in the Valley these issues were complicated by fears regarding tradition/familial responsibility and what it meant to be American. Parents began to worry especially about drugs and alcohol and other illegal activities as well as the influence of an American youth culture that was suspect.⁷⁰

In the 1970s and 1980s a Valley youth culture emerged that began to reflect national trends and this created new concerns over what it meant to be or act American. While speaking English might be a sign of respectability, listening to certain bands or adopting their dress was seen as startling for Valley families. There was this increased paranoia over the rebellious state of young people that came especially with the growing

⁶⁸ Ricky Pence, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, McAllen, August 7, 2015. Justin Flores, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, McAllen, July 7, 2015. – Finance not relevant to this decade but follow the spirit of parents. Gerano, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, McAllen, August 7, 2016 – sold newspapers and worked at a bakery: Hector, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, McAllen, August 8, 2015.

⁶⁹ Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*, (New York: Anchor Books Editions, 1983), 57-60; Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle Edition. Location 607 and 617.

⁷⁰ Erika Interview, not in her case, but this type of dialogue was becoming more common. Peter Sterns, *Anxious Parents: A History of Modern Child Rearing in America*, (New York: New York University Press, 2004), Kindle Edition, Location 27, 34, and 43.

popularity of Metal and Rap music, new styles of dress such as baggier clothing for men and more masculine dress for women, and a youthful embrace of leisurely freedom away from the watchful eye of parents and family. The fear in the Valley focused on a youth who now seemed to be becoming “too American” and thus perceived as losing or rejecting their Valley culture or worse adopting the wrong kind of American attitudes and on a downhill path to delinquency.⁷¹

As the nation saw a backlash that gave rise to the Religious Right, the Valley created its own version of this conservative backlash that centered the fear of Valley youth’s drug use and sexuality as a sign that they were becoming too American.

Playing up these parental concerns in the Valley were Anglo-controlled newspapers like *The Monitor* in McAllen and *Progress Times* in the neighboring town of Mission. Both newspapers dramatically increased the number of articles that featured reports of crimes committed by juveniles during the 1980s.⁷² Comparing these articles to those in the 1970s, it appeared that youth culture was becoming for the first time a problem—at least in the minds of local residents. In the 1980s an increased number of reports specifically suggested teenagers were robbing houses, stealing cars, and in some cases committing sexual assault or murder. This is a stark contrast to the 1970s when there were very few reports of local teenagers committing such crimes.⁷³ Whenever such crimes were

⁷¹ Ricky interview; Justin interview; Gerano interview; Hector interview.

⁷² Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 190-195; Kembrew McLeod, *Pranksters: Making Mischief in the Modern World*, (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 94, 183, and 195. While not a literal representation of the Valley since *Pranksters*’ timeline is prior to the 1980s, it does offer a theoretical representation of parental anxiety over the rise of juvenile offenders and the supposed link to Satanism.

⁷³ Although I do not list all these articles, I wish to provide a little more context to my claims. Going based on what was available on microfilm from these newspaper archives,

reported in the previous decade, they usually took place outside of the Valley: either in another part of the state, the country, or in Mexico.⁷⁴

Juvenile Detention

It is no surprise that with the rise in parental anxiety at the local level along with nationwide fears that arrests in the Valley became more conspicuous, that youth would attract more attention. With these other issues like the War on Drugs becoming increasingly visible, the 1980s Valley reacted, as did the rest of the country. As Michelle Alexander discusses in *The New Jim Crow*, the War on Drugs reinforced this racial caste system that unjustly targets people of color when it comes to drug and other criminal offenses. This anxiety over the drug war and crime heightened the Valley's gaze on young people as they were seen as the ones most vulnerable or the most likely culprits for crimes.⁷⁵

In some instances, the Valley responded positively to this changing tide on adolescent problems as we will see in Chapter 3 with the organization of sex-education classes to help educate teenagers on issues of sexuality, but the Valley also saw a rise in youth incarceration as plans were drawn up to construct a juvenile detention center in

the reporting of juvenile crime easily tripled in the 1980s. Based off these microfilms, the viewer is left to assume that this was due to an actual rise in youth crime and/or in the newspapers making a conscious effort to report juvenile crime. For more information see *The McAllen Monitor* microfilms at McAllen Public Library in McAllen, Texas and *The Progress Times* Archives microfilms at Speer Memorial Library in Mission, Texas.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.

1984.⁷⁶ Local arrests reflected a redefinition and increased attention on juvenile crime that ranged from minor misdemeanors to more serious offenses such as grand theft to physical assault. The proposal to construct the juvenile detention center was, aside from simply housing offenders, designed to keep juvenile offenders within the Valley since the nearest facility was in San Antonio, a four-to-five hour drive north.⁷⁷ And in keeping them local, there was also an idea that the institution's very presence could act as a deterrent and thus diminish what now was seen as a dangerous mix of American and Mexican youth cultures gone wrong.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Just as easily as being American could be cast as progress, it was also associated with immoral cultural influences coming from outside the Valley and familial traditions. Thus there was widespread support to lock up and reform juvenile offenders before they became a true menace to society. Such responses were not limited to the Valley, but there was new regional and national dialogue on how to contend with the latest incarnation over unruly young people.⁷⁹ As Valley residents tried to regulate youth culture to preserve Valley notions of respectability, we will see as the following chapters acknowledge the need to contain straight sex and mask queer sexuality in the name of

⁷⁶ "2 major items on Edinburg's agenda," *The Monitor*, March 8, 1984. (Microfilm, *The Monitor*, March 1984, McAllen Public Library).

⁷⁷ In Chapter 4, I introduce the significance of the transportation in the transformation of sexuality, but transportation also offers a crucial factor in housing juvenile offenders. The lack of public transportation and the affordability of a car prevented many Valley residents from reaching San Antonio.

⁷⁸ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, (New York: The New Press, 2010), 124-125.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-13 and 133-135.

family tradition and cultural pride. Meanwhile, the resistance from these queer people demonstrates a similar conflict with the changing youth culture in the Valley as queer people begin to renegotiate cultural norms and public spaces to make more accommodations for themselves.

Chapter 3:

Virgins, Machismo, and Queer Youth

The geography of the Valley and the development of its youth culture must also be understood in terms of a long history of sexual anxiety. The Cult of Virginity and machismo have served as two social institutions that regulated the behaviors of young people in Latino communities like the Valley. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Cult of Virginity assumed through a tradition of silence and avoidance that women would remain virgins until marriage,⁸⁰ yet an embrace of machismo demanded men engage in sex with women before marriage or risk themselves being labeled as queer. In the 1970s and especially the 1980s, Valley silence and hypocrisy came into sharp relief as the growth of teen pregnancy and the STD rates shaped national and regional discourse. At the local, state, and national level, schools began sex education programs, which had a double-edged effect. While it broke the silence on sexuality and encouraged discussions and a level of acknowledgement never before seen, it reaffirmed a heteronormative image that marginalized as well as targeted queer youth. This chapter reveals how queer youth responded as they carved out relationships and sought safety in a place where both tradition and contemporary regulation tried to ignore them.

⁸⁰ The concept of the Cult of Virginity in the Latino sense originates from Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez's *Erotic Journeys* as an offshoot to the Cult of Domesticity/True Womanhood that defined the nineteenth century.

Female Sexuality

Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez's *Erotic Journeys* does an excellent job of revealing sexuality differences and inequalities between genders. More specifically, she looks at how the "Cult of Virginity" harmed women. As she engages in conversations with Latino immigrants, she boldly tackles the "Cult of Virginity" and the toxic nature of such obsessions with female virginity in patriarchal-driven cultures. More specifically, she traces how it has harmed the development of female sexuality because women became too afraid to explore their bodies and sexuality. Instead, women live in fear that they will devalue the family's status and all too easily be labeled a whore.⁸¹ Indeed, this trope is common in studies that center on Latinas/Chicanas. Much of her analysis reflects the works of famed, queer Chicana scholar and Valley native, Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Gonzalez-Lopez and Anzaldua both discuss how the toxicity of a macho culture heavily restricts female sexuality yet at the same time requires women to be sexually active for the emotional and economic profit of men.⁸² This is not new, but comes from a long tradition of exploitation of female sexuality. Anzaldua for example, describes how during the fall of the Aztec nation, the narratives that label women as whores were a means to deflect popular discontent away from the problem of socio-economic strife, towards a toxic structure of gendered conflict.⁸³ And, how this effort to strictly regulate female sexuality into an exclusively heterosexual form, ignores the intimate relations that women would forge with other women.

⁸¹ Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez, *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and Their Sex Lives*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 38-39; Rafael M. Diaz, *Latino Gay Men and HIV: Culture, Sexuality, and Risk Behavior*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 92.

⁸² Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 103-104.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 56.

In the more recent past, border towns like Brownsville and Harlingen in Cameron County would carry on the tradition of dismissing women and regulating morality a means to ignore serious economic problems. These towns expressed serious concerns with regard to curbing prostitution during the 1950s and 1960s although prostitution had flourished since the formation of these towns in the 1800s.⁸⁴ As early as the 1960s, McAllen had a particular reputation for prostitution. Downtown McAllen's 17th Street was interesting in that along this strip you could experience spiritual healing from the local *yerberías* (shops that specialized in Latin folk healing) before bedding a prostitute.⁸⁵ However, even when Valley officials criminalized prostitution or regulated strip clubs during the 1960s and 1970s, Valley men could still cross the border into Mexico where prostitution was legal.⁸⁶ And prior to the Post-9/11 regulations on border crossing, Valley residents and sex tourists could easily cross back and forth without experiencing any hassle. Often, all one needed to say was that they were an American citizen or resident to return since most border officials rarely checked for proper identification.⁸⁷

Despite the fact that a significant number of Valley women in Mexico turned to prostitution for income, the Cult of Virginity masked the dire situation of working-class women and simply assumed they were naturally immoral. Respectability in the form of a sexual doubled standard not economic autonomy rested on the shoulders of young

⁸⁴ David C. Humphrey, "Prostitution in Texas: From the 1830s to the 1960s," *East Texas Historical Journal* Volume 33, Issue 1 (1995): 27 and 36.

⁸⁵ Robert Ontiveros, "Party Time in McAllen," *The Texas Observer*, October 24, 2011, accessed May 26, 2016, <https://www.texasobserver.org/party-time-in-mcallen/>.

⁸⁶ Humphrey, 35.

⁸⁷ Jeremy Roebuck, "Proof of citizenship required at border crossings starting today," *The Monitor*, January 31, 2008, accessed May 26, 2016, http://www.themonitor.com/proof-of-citizenship-required-at-border-crossings-starting-today/article_2542f5a0-bb30-5cd7-b4b6-dbe9a2ef0139.html.

women who were expected to remain sexually pure until marriage. Beth Bailey's *Sex in the Heartland* focuses on the era between WWII and late 1960s, and looks at anxieties over Anglo women exerting their sexuality in the Midwest. During WWII, these women were perceived as leading lives "outside of the bounds of 'respectability'" and were labeled hazards to the public health.⁸⁸ Thus many of the problems women faced were not unique to the Valley.⁸⁹

Regulating Male Sexuality:

The Cult of Virginity often turns on the assumption that male and female sexuality was exclusively heterosexual, but it masked a more complex understanding of sex. Lionel Cantu's *The Sexuality of Migration* suggests that too often male sexuality has been exclusively assumed heterosexual. His interviews with queer men often reveal that many of their partners were straight-identified men and Gonzalez-Lopez finds a similar narrative in her interviews with Latino men.⁹⁰ Straddling both American and Mexican ideas of respectability meant that on the one hand, Euro-centric middle class norms reinforced this image of heteronormativity.⁹¹ On the other hand, queer bodies were

⁸⁸ Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), Kindle Edition, Location 368 & 370. And this discussion on Latinas being health hazards appears in Eithne Luibheid's *Entry Denied* and Margot Canady's *The Straight State*.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Lionel Cantu Jr., *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossing and Mexican Immigrant Men*, eds. Nancy A Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (New York: NYU Press, 2009).; Gonzalez-Lopez, 62-63.

⁹¹ K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), Kindle Edition, Location 656 and 673. Euro-centricity is common in American discourse, but it is also present in Mexican discourses too. In the case of Mexican culture, the specter of Spanish norms that linger from colonial rule as to the driving force of their Euro-centricity, while in the American case it is often British in origin.

always closely but quietly policed and their sexual expressions marked as deviant and perverse in Latino cultures.⁹² Any behavior that did not represent mainstream masculine behavior automatically was considered deviant so much so that even performing gendered labor could fall into this category as Phil Tiemeyer's *Plane Queer* demonstrates with the shame associated with the history of male flight attendants as failed men.⁹³

In the Valley, this obsession with virginity and sexuality that bred a culture of shame in young women simultaneously harmed young men who have felt forced to actively engage in heteronormative behaviors. A man who displayed his sexual prowess with women in public could not possibly be thought of as gay under machista culture. For some men, their first time having sex often came as an effort to avoid experiencing harassment from their friends and to escape scorn of their male relatives who would view these young men as challenging their ideas surrounding manhood based on sexual conquest.⁹⁴ In order to preserve a cultural masculinity, heterosexual sex was key to prevent men from sparing the cultural shame of being labeled a *maricón* (faggot).⁹⁵ Thus borderlands should not be romanticized as a space where anything goes.

⁹² Here I offer this reflection from the works by Latino/Chicano scholars featured throughout this thesis like Gonzalez-Lopez, Cantu, and Anzaldua.

⁹³ Peter Hennen, *Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen: Men in Community Queering the Masculine*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), Kindle Edition, Location 810. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), Kindle Edition, Location 449, 1262 and 2620; Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDs in the History of Male Flight Attendants*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013), 16.

⁹⁴ Gonzalez-Lopez, 62 and 70-71.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48; Anzaldua, 105.

For Valley residents, masculinity and manhood is rooted in a *machismo* that permeates in Latino communities.⁹⁶ Although, machismo is not exclusive to Latino communities, it is important to note that in the 1970s and 80s, male exploitation of women, and the harassment and bashing of queer men was prevalent. For many heterosexual men, bashing a queer man was seen as a sport where the queer men had no choice but to accept the beatings or hide in the shadows because there was no legal recourse available to them.⁹⁷

The complexity of machismo requires a level of flexibility to understand the differences between its various incarnations that range from a chivalry to misogyny and homophobia.⁹⁸ For example, psychologist David Abalos examines the presence of machismo and how it differs from the U.S. and Latin American countries. He argues that to a large degree the significant role that racism plays in the U.S. society compared to Latin American countries triggers a loss of “agency” and “power” that injures Latino men who act out their loss of power through violence.⁹⁹ And while this trope of Latino machismo lingers within the culture, more recent studies and polls suggest that Latinos as a whole are becoming more progressive as a voting block, especially in the case of the Valley.¹⁰⁰ Latino culture is not static, and some of the more abusive and homophobic

⁹⁶ Richardson, *Batos*, Location 3231; Michael Hames-Garcia and Erneso Javier Martinez, eds, *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 121-122.

⁹⁷ A more in-depth explanation to follow in the next chapter.

⁹⁸ Alfredo Mirande, *Hombres Y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 143

⁹⁹ Abalos, 11 and 21

¹⁰⁰ Lauren Gray, “New Poll says Latino/a voters in Texas hold supportive views on abortion, believe health insurance should cover birth control and abortion services”, Latinainstitute.org. Last Accessed May 10 2016. <http://latinainstitute.org/en/new-poll->

associations with Latino men have faded mitigating often assumed differences between the U.S. and Latin America.¹⁰¹

Yet machismo held profound influences in the Valley during the course of the 1970s and 1980s, an influence that lingers to the contemporary Valley. Rafael Ramirez lists machismo's characteristic types as "aggressive, oppressive, narcissistic, insecure, loudmouthed, womanizers, massive drinkers, and persons who have an uncontrollable sexual prowess, and...*parranderos de parranda larga* (don't-stop-'til-you-drop partiers)." ¹⁰² Ramirez excludes the mention of homophobia that is often recognized as being part of machismo as well. ¹⁰³ Latino culture is different from Anglo-American culture, which should go without saying, but it is important to recognize that machismo is not exclusive to Latino men as men from different cultural backgrounds also have their own variations of machismo. To put it in the simplest of terms, the perceived difference between Anglo and Latino masculinity may turn on the racist perception that men of color are more violent. Alfredo Mirande, argues that "the Mexican macho oppresses and coerces women, whereas his Anglo counterpart appears to attract and seduce them," which reflects the popular understanding of Latino masculinity/machismo as an oppressive force when compared to Anglo masculinity, which is used by media representation as the more appropriate form of masculinity.¹⁰⁴

[says-latinoa-voters-texas-hold-supportive-views-abortion-believe-health-insurance-should.](#)

¹⁰¹ Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), XV.

¹⁰² Rafael L. Ramirez, *What it Means to Be a Man: Reflections on Puerto Rican Masculinity*, trans. Rosa E. Casper (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Mirande, 66.

Queer Desires

However, despite the sobering effects of machismo, queer residents (primarily men) in the Valley still acquired opportunities to meet other queer people and explore their sexual desires. Men coming of age in the Valley in 1970s and 80s remembered how many of the high school boys that they had sex with identified as straight. According to oral history interviews, it was often not the first time that these straight high school or college boys engaged in queer sex. Older male sex partners were usually married and these straight men also engaged in sex with multiple women.¹⁰⁵ The desire to maintain an illusion of respectable heterosexuality in the Valley proved as deceptive as it has elsewhere in country.¹⁰⁶

There were degrees of difference, however. In the Valley, the Cult of Virginity and machismo overshadowed the need to overtly discuss or regulate male queer sex and by the 1980s sex education and drug use reaffirmed that queer behavior was not a top concern. In much the way John Howard sees the quest to retain segregation in the deep South diverted the attention away from same sex intimacy, the church, parents along with the schools were obsessed with regulating heterosexual norms such as teen pregnancy that could damage their families reputation far more easily.¹⁰⁷ Thus the 1980s reinforced

¹⁰⁵ Rod, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, McAllen, July 5, 2015; Michael, interview by Michael Rangel, personal interview, McAllen, July 7, 2016; Manny Lopez, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, McAllen, July 6, 2015; Luckie, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, Mission, July 8, 2015; Gerado Reyes, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, Edinburg, July 14, 2015. Also, Luckie, Michael, and Gerado's interviews benefit from featuring personal discussions on family *machismo* and active resistance to these structures.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, 28, 79, and 105; Johnson, 53-54 and 130.

¹⁰⁷ Howard, *Men Like That*.

the fears surrounding teenage celibacy and hetero norms that afford the queer Valley a veil that masked and marginalized their behavior.

Introducing Sex Education

Starting in the 1970s and especially the 1980s, public schools began to break down the façade of female virginity. Although discussions of queer sexuality were still ignored, the powers that be could not mask the growing teen pregnancy rate for Latinas and a rise in sexually transmitted diseases as these problems saw increased news coverage during the 1980s.¹⁰⁸ The community needed to act in a way that at the very least mitigated the climbing teen pregnancy and STD rates before it could become a serious problem and initiated sex-education programs to help combat both pregnancy and transmitted diseases. Prior to the introduction of these sex-education classes in the 1970s, any official discussions of sexuality matched what many young Latinos would have heard in traditional Catholic teachings. Messages reinforced through parents included above all else the notion that you were to wait until marriage before having sex and a belief that you are only supposed to have sex with the intent of producing children, not for the experience of personal pleasure.¹⁰⁹ Sex without the intent of having children had long

¹⁰⁸ “Disease Count,” *Progress Time*, June 23, 1982, pg 6. (Microfilm, Roll 2, Speer Memorial Library, Mission, Tx). When comparing to articles from the 1970s and at least part of 1980s, there was a spike in reports about gonorrhea and syphilis. The microfilm in this current citation focuses on one example that was prevalent in the *Progress Times*’ reporting in their “Disease Count” column. At this stage, I cannot claim if the post-epidemic years saw a serious outbreak in STDs (with the exception of AIDS/HIV) or if the system for reporting these numbers became more effective.

¹⁰⁹ Gonzalez-Lopez, 51. A majority of the interviews hear featured a similar tone that sex is meant for producing children, but Latino men were also given another context that allowed justifications for them exploring their sexuality unlike Latina women who needed to remain pure until marriage.

been frowned upon in the culture, but it is important to recognize this is not exclusive to Latinos or Catholics but to other racial and religious groups too.¹¹⁰ It is only one of many cultural norms that get highlighted specifically in the Latino family, but it is also something that needs to be acknowledged considering the racial/ethnic and religious population of the Valley and its proximity to Mexico as motivators for this cultural heritage.¹¹¹ Combating the issue of teenage sexuality, however, encouraged discussions that undermined the long tradition of silence.

These programs in the 1970s and 1980s were comprehensive in that they provided information on birth control and condoms as preventative tools before the infamous abstinence-only education trends would swept the state in the 1990s.¹¹² Discussing (heterosexual) sexuality in the public schools allowed for an opportunity to address medical concerns and ensured that more teenagers made it to adulthood before becoming a parent.¹¹³ One of the methods for combating the problems with the growing STD and teen pregnancy rate was increasing the effectiveness of sex-education programs in public schools and these programs would go through a drastic shift when the AIDS Epidemic was at its peak. There were more resources available to Anglos who were more often coming from middle-class backgrounds and could afford the preventative measures,

¹¹⁰ Paul Taylor et al., “When Labels Don’t Fit: Hispanics and their Views on Identity,” Pew Research Center, April 4, 2012, last accessed May 8, 2016, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/04/04/when-labels-dont-fit-hispanics-and-their-views-of-identity/>.

¹¹¹ Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association, last accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.valleybaptists.com/strategy>.

¹¹² When asking the people I interviewed in their 40s and 50s, most of them recalled these sex-education programs with having more information about sexuality, pregnancy and STDs compared to what is given to most public school students in Texas which is virtually nothing.

¹¹³ “AIDS Prevention Program To Be Implemented by MCISD”, *Progress Times*, December 9, 1987, (Microfilm, Roll 7, Speer Memorial Library, Mission, Tx).

while Latinas were not so fortunate since they were more often coming from working-class families with far less access to any kind of health care.¹¹⁴ Also the combination of cultures meant that sex-education in public schools was limited in their ability to disseminate messages about reproductive health, because there was still a desire to preserve traditional norms that hampered the ability to effectively provide necessary information and services to Latinas.¹¹⁵

Getting pregnant was a sin but it was not considered the greatest threat to young people by the middle of the 1980s. The police, schools and parents all seemed much more content to focus on drugs and alcohol than to discuss sex, a factor which also placed limits on the kind of education youth obtained in school.¹¹⁶ The unevenness of priorities did not mean parents openly encouraged their teenage children to engage in sex but that is was never consistently their top priority as concerns over drugs took precedence, at least within the Valley.¹¹⁷ Bobby, a native of Mercedes, was coming of age in the 1980s and recalled numerous times where he and his peers were having sex all the time and nobody seemed to care. It was to the point where he called Mercedes the “San Francisco of the Valley” because sexual activity was seen as something so normal that it was not a problem unless drugs, alcohol, or non-consensual sex was a factor.¹¹⁸ The Mercedes police themselves had little interest in monitoring adolescent sexuality outside of the home, allowing teenagers to engage in sex in public spaces like citrus fruit fields because

¹¹⁴ Both of Richardson’s books helps support this claim.

¹¹⁵ These two forms of cultural collisions return during Chapters 5 and 6.

¹¹⁶ Bobby, interviewed by Michael Rangel, telephone interview with author, Lubbock, January 6, 2016; Luckie interview; Michael interview.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ A similar discussion on youth sexuality and the presence of drugs/alcohol in *What It Means To Be A Man*, 7.

the police like parents seemed more concerned with the prevention of teenagers using illegal drugs and engaging in underage drinking and becoming pregnant. During the 1970s and 1980s, the bars in Mercedes would accommodate queer people, however, this was done on an unofficial level unlike Duffy's Tavern in McAllen.¹¹⁹ Even if schools were more willing to talk about sex education, there was a willful blindness towards adolescent sexuality because of the emerging war on drugs. Police had limited resources and thus ignored sexual misconduct and was left that to parents and educators who were also often more engaged in preventing crimes that could lead to jail sentences.¹²⁰

Latinos Gender Norms Meets Unwilling Straights and Queer Teens

Drugs, pregnancy and STDs drove newspaper headlines, police reports and school curriculums that emphasized proper heteronormative values as the means of dismantling these conflicts. However, straight and queer youths who did not fit into these norms found their own paths of resistance. For queer youth, there was a significant amount of acting to hide their sexuality and maintain the expectations imposed upon them by family and peers. This performance remained prevalent through much of this study. Queer Valley residents were more optimistic in the 1990s, but still felt the need to be closeted and to put on a heteronormative act.¹²¹ However they would perform only within certain limits. To be sure, some queer boys would deflect any accusations of being gay through dating and engaging in contact with girls that included kissing as well as sexual acts to

¹¹⁹ Bobby interview.

¹²⁰ See juvenile detention section in previous chapter.

¹²¹ Here I mainly refer back to my interviews and the tone that they take when comparing their experiences in the 70s and 80s to what happened in the 90s. They portray the 90s as a little more optimistic decade despite the political backdrop of the Clinton Administration's policies of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and the Defense of Marriage Act.

preserve the masculine order prevalent in the Valley. At the same time, this performance was not exclusive to queer youth, straight youth too were afraid to challenge the normative script imposed by parents.¹²² In his memoir, Valley native, Domingo Martinez recalls feeling uncomfortable and disgusted whenever his dad brought up sex as an effort to bond with his son: “His mustachioed upper lips curls when he forms the word *warm*, and for a moment his mouth becomes vulvular, creating the image of the female pudenda, and I think I might try to turn gay to get as far away from my dad as possible. It’s the only plausible solution. *Oh dear God, please*, I pray silently, turn me gay. *Please turn me gay.*”¹²³

Even if it seemed queer male youths used girls and hobbies as heteronormative props, they often found means to assert homoerotic desires. Sports, for example, have been a medium to mask queer sexuality and spare boys from being outed as *faggots*. As mentioned in Chapter 2, sports played an important role in the family and male traditions. Yet it was in locker room and on the playing field that queer youth found companionship with other men through these hyper-masculine areas like football and soccer. Since male student athletes were not probed on their sexuality as much as non-athletes it allowed them more room to engage in queer relationships. Boys that played sports were seen as behaving in such a normative fashion, which meant that it was not necessary to monitor or question their behavior, and for queer youths this meant that they could hide in plain

¹²² Rod interview; Gonzalez-Lopez, 70; Domingo Martinez, *The Boy Kings of Texas: A Memoir*, (Connecticut: Lyon Press, 2012), 10-12; David Abalos, *The Latino Male: A Radical Redefinition*, (London: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2002), 2-3 and 10.

¹²³ Martinez, 10-12.

sight even if it meant both alienating and acting up their sexual identities.¹²⁴ And the opposite could occur for girl in certain forms of sport. As we will see in Chapter 6, queer women used sports as a space where they could meet socialize and exchange intimate connections with other women just as queer men did.¹²⁵ However, young women also faced the specter of being labeled as lesbians if they engaged in sports to be perceived as too masculine and that they were a threat to respectable female sexuality.¹²⁶

Not all boys had to be athletes to prove their masculinity. Non-athletes, however, were not necessarily viewed as queer or unmanly if they were helping with the family economy. Coming from poorer families allowed you no time for sports because an afterschool job was a family necessity. Yet, this need to work also allowed some of these queer youths a chance to explore their sexuality away from their families as they often met other youth and adult men at work. And in the case of farm laborers, the men that these youth met were most often married and at least a decade older. Boys who worked with their families on the farms/ranches often found comfort and sexual contact with the other laborers most of whom were at least a decade older and often married.¹²⁷ The story

¹²⁴ Anderson, 27 and 149; Brian Progner, *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex*, (New York: St. Marint's Press, 1990), 3-4; Melanie L. Sartorial-Baldwin, ed., *Sexual Minorities in Sports: Prejudice at Play*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013), 2-3 and 5.

¹²⁵ Sartorial-Baldwin, 12-14 and 20-21; ██████████ interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, Edinburg, July 13, 2015; Madelene Garcia and Valerie Yanez, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, McAllen, July 11, 2015. I will go more in depths in their stories in Chapter 6 as I analyze the way that their personal stories led to the development of their engagement in community outreach for queer persons.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Rod interview; Michael; Manny interview; Chris Girman, *Mucho Macho: Seduction, Desire, and the Homoerotic Lives of Latin Men*, (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004), 72; John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 42-43 and 46.

of Manny documents an experience of queer sexuality that was easily explored in the masculine work environment of the farm. Although his sexual experience with migrants did not take place until the 1990s, it reflected a similar scenario in migrant worker sexuality that Cantu and Gonzalez-Lopez found in their research. With Manny's story, we see that his family were migrant workers, and he spent most of his early years working with them. Yet he managed to find time to play sports unlike many other migrant boys. He came from a devout, Catholic family that was actively involved in the church and he even considered joining the priesthood. As he got older, he spent more time socializing with girls, and as a teenager would have sex with girls his age even as he was starting to notice his attraction to men. He describes his first sexual experience with a man when he was eighteen. It was just before he left for college the other man was a migrant farmer who worked the same ranch. Manny recalled that the migrant farmer was married at the time and just as he was leaving the man's house after watching a movie, the married man asks him to stay and began to touch him. Manny left because he was scared and also because he didn't want his father to catch them, but after leaving Manny describes how he watched the married man's house that night. "I'm looking out the window and going 'oh the lights are still on.' And I decided to go back because he's waiting for me. It was dark, everyone was still in their rooms, and you know we had sex."¹²⁸

Just as carefully youth acted on queer desire they also negotiated the constant threat of violence. The Valley is not unique in its history of gay or race based violence. The anxiety over protecting heteronormative masculinity often serves as the catalyst that

¹²⁸ Manny Lopez interview.

triggers acts of violence, the harassment of their non-masculine peers, and even government action to justify/preserve patriarchal masculinity.¹²⁹ However, what does make the Valley unique though is its proximity to the border, and before the restrictions enacted within the past decade, made it easy for people to cross the border and escape persecution, but this region naturally saw its fair share of violence, most of which was based on race violence on Mexican/Mexican-Americans.

Conclusion

In the 1970s and 80s, the Cult of Virginity and machismo were nothing new to the Valley. What was different was a willingness to discuss sexuality in schools that was quite different from past religious and familial teachings. In some ways, the discussion of sexuality opened up possibilities for far more open conversations but with limitations. These limitations came from these old traditions on sexuality that imposed stricter regulations on the behaviors of young men and women through these sex education programs.

Despite a discourse of anxiety that reinforced assumptions of heteronormativity and sometimes violence, queer youth found meaningful relationships even while being ignored and ostracized. Queer men and women started to find venues where they could explore their relationships with sports serving as a cover for queer youths, especially young men. The Cult of Virginity nor machismo would stop queer men from constructing a haven where they could laugh, dance, and, most importantly, explore their sexuality as we will see in the following chapter.

¹²⁹ Cuordileone, Location 760.

Chapter 4:

A Place of Refuge

The story of Duffy's Tavern is an intriguing one as it supports the overall purpose of this thesis in describing both a place where sexuality could flourish yet was tightly monitored.¹³⁰ Duffy's Tavern, owned and operated by an Anglo couple, Helen and George Bruton who were transplants from Oklahoma and Colorado, opened in the early 1970s and started as just an ordinary bar in downtown McAllen. It received a steady flow of traffic during the day where tourists and locals alike could relax from a day of shopping before the bar would close in the early evening. Downtown McAllen in the 1970s was the shopping center of Hidalgo County. It featured several local shops and department stores where locals bought their clothes, their jewelry, bedding, and housewares. Downtown McAllen also had several local bars and restaurants. It also featured the Cine El Rey, a Spanish-language theater that opened in 1947 and closed in 1988, but would reopen as a historic concert hall that now hosts different concerts, films, sporting events, and theatre performances.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Examples of a highly regulated gay bar culture includes George Chauncey's *Gay New York*, Alice Echols' *Hot Stuff*, Josh Sides' *Erotic City*, Allen Berube's *Coming Out Under Fire*, Scott Herring's *Another Country*, Susana Pena's *Oye Loca*, Brock Thompson's *The Un-Natural State*, and John Howard's *Men Like That*. Other scholarship includes: Joey J. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock, *Queen (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012); Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Frank Perez and Jeffery Palmquist, *In Exile: The History and Lore Surrounding New Orleans Gay Culture and Its Oldest Gay Bar*, (Scotland: LL-Publications, 2012).

¹³¹ "Cine El Rey," last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.exploremcallen.com/entertainment/shows/cineelrey.aspx>.

Duffy's was situated along 16th Street, near 17th Street that currently serves as the main strip of McAllen bars and nightclubs. However, at night around 8pm, Duffy's would assume a new identity. Helen would reopen Duffy's, making it a haven for the Valley's queer men. When a patron asked why Helen and her husband, George, agreed to operate an unofficial gay bar, she said that she wanted to create a safe space for these men, and it did not hurt that they would pay for drinks, which helped to keep the Brutons' business afloat.¹³² The steady traffic that they got during the day from locals and tourists helped them to break even, but by reopening at night as a gay bar allowed the Brutons to make a profit from the pink-dollar. This chapter argues that what made Duffy's unique was that it was the only gay bar in the region with the nearest one at the time being in Corpus Christi, which was a two-hour drive northeast and thus operated as a crucial space for the making of queer male identities in the Valley.¹³³

Gay Bars and Travel Guides in Texas

Duffy's and other gay bars appear in a series of gay travel guides and thus appeared to be well known. *This Week In Texas (TWIT)*, for example, which started in March 1975, first issue being only eight pages long but grew to twenty-four pages by the end of the year. Lyle Black initially worked as the editor and publisher of these guides in

¹³² Ron interview

¹³³ "This Week in Texas: The Official Gay Guide to Texas," *This Week in Texas* Vol 1 No 12 (1975), 19-20, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.houstonlgbthistory.org/Houston80s/TWT/1975/75-062175.compressed.pdf>. These travel books featured known gay bars throughout the state of Texas at the time. Duffy's Tavern was the only one listed in any town located within the Valley. Outside of the Valley, the nearest gay bar was in Corpus Christi, and after Corpus, there were others in San Antonio, Austin, and Houston, which would be towns that Valley residents would most likely travel to.

Houston, but later ownership was transferred to Jim Cagle and Jim Chappell. *TWIT* contained information on a host of bars like Duffy's, restaurants, shops, bathhouses, churches and organizations that cater to the LGBT crowd.¹³⁴

These businesses were scattered across the state including smaller cities like Abilene, Wichita Falls, and Beaumont, but since 1975, Houston featured the largest pool of gay-friendly businesses, which explains why the publication was founded there. This guide was particularly important as it offered a link to queer Texans to this hidden queer scene in their state, granting them the information to find places where they would be accepted for who they were and allowing them the opportunities to meet likeminded companions in such a conservative state. As for the popularity of *TWIT*, it was known well enough, at least within its home region in Houston, that the editors continued publishing the travel guide steadily until 2000 before going out of print in 2006. However, the last issue was not published until 2013, likely because of the advent of other gay travel websites and periodicals that filled the market pushed.¹³⁵

Duffy's as a Gay Bar

Duffy's was not the gay bar that most people envision, especially for a gay bar in the 1970s. Duffy's was very conservative in what men could and could not do. Duffy's did not follow the common stereotypes of hypersexualized spaces and dens of drug abuse that gay bars were associated during the time. Helen constructed strict rules for men in Duffy's because she understood that if these men got too wild or if law enforcement

¹³⁴ "This Week in Texas," Houston LGBT History, last accessed April 28, 2016, <http://www.houstonlgbthistory.org/twt75.html>.

¹³⁵ The final issue (<http://www.houstonlgbthistory.org/Houston80s/TWT/2013/13-051013.compressed.pdf>) offers no explanation for the sudden cancellation of *TWIT*.

perceived them as too wild then the bar would be shut down and the Brutons would have been arrested along with their patrons.¹³⁶ In this somewhat conservative scene, men were not allowed to dance together, kiss, hold hands, or show any signs of affection at all.¹³⁷ The only bit of entertainment that they had was a jukebox that most often played country or Tejano music singles that were popular at the time. It was also difficult for men to dance together at Duffy's especially as there was no proper dance floor. Instead, tables and chairs cluttered the space. However, as this was one place in the entire Valley where gay men could openly meet and interact with one another thus they were willing to play by Helen's rules.¹³⁸ The next closest gay bars required that queer Valley residents either travelled two hours north to Corpus Christi or crossed the border into Mexico and drive about an hour to Reynosa. And like the owners, these men did not want to risk being arrested and having their names shown in the local newspaper, like *The Monitor* in McAllen or *Progress* in Mission. Gay bars have a long history as being contested ground for policing. Places where the local law enforcement would make arrests often insisting that dancing together or engaging in any public displays of affection broke public indecency laws.¹³⁹

However, by 1975, the rules at Duffy's would change when Helen and George hired a former patron, Ron, as the bar's manager. Ron at the time was a serviceman in the

¹³⁶ Ron interview.

¹³⁷ Echols, 43. The situation in Duffy's similar to what Echols describes of gay bars in the 1960s like in Chicago.

¹³⁸ *This Week in Texas* Vol 1 No 12 (1975), 19-20.

¹³⁹ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 167-169; Josh Sides, *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40-42; Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*, (North Carolina: University of Chapel Hill Press, 2000), Kindle Edition, Location 2824; Howard, 94-97; Echols' *Hot Stuff*, 43-44.

Army and was on medical leave in the Valley. During his vacation time, he took over managing Duffy's for about a year as the Brutons relocated to San Antonio to attend to George's health after he fell ill due to heart complications and needed the superior medical care that the city offered. Ron maintained Helen's rules for the bar, but began to loosen the restrictions on the gay men, as he too is a gay man. The rules were modified to allow men to become more intimate as they were finally allowed to dance together and initiate, light physical contact like hand-holding and hugging.¹⁴⁰ These new rules were especially important by 1975 as disco was rising in popularity in the Valley, especially amongst Duffy's gay patrons. While they did not dance too suggestively compared to contemporary standards across the country, the performance of dancing to disco allowed gay men more liberties to share intimacies while popular disco tracks of the time played in the background. Across the country, disco itself became the genre that represented the gay identity. Disco culture, as Alice Echols describes in *Hot Stuff*, was often paired with drugs and created a connection to a "timeless, mindless state" that allowed gay men to cut themselves off at least temporarily from the oppressions of the real world.¹⁴¹

While drugs were hard to come by at Duffy's, the act of dancing provided them with a sense of liberation from the outside world similar to what gay men across the country began to experience thanks to the liberating space of the disco floor.¹⁴² Although the *worst* behaviors were still kept at bay such as kissing, sexual play, prostitution, excessive and underage drinking, and drug use, a newfound freedom allowed Valley men a greater deal of independence to become more intimate with one another than they ever

¹⁴⁰ Ron interview

¹⁴¹ Echols, 57-59.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

could before.¹⁴³ Through something as simple as dancing and holding hands, feelings and sexualities of gay men in the Valley were legitimized, giving them the sense that they were equal to their straight counterparts. However, even with the liberalization of Duffy's rules, gay men's sense of liberty inside the bar was still threatened by the local law enforcement which at any time could raid the bar and shut it down, and take away a space where they could be their true selves without fear.¹⁴⁴ However, while this never happened, judging by the passivity of the Valley's queer community during the 1970s, it can be assumed that they would not rally around Duffy's closure as the queer community of Greenwich Village did around the Stonewall Inn.¹⁴⁵

Oddly enough, police raids simply did not occur. Even though the freedoms within Duffy's could be seen as bohemian, at least when compared to the past, the cops never threatened to shut Duffy's down, despite this being a constant fear for Duffy's patrons. Ron credited part of this to both his and Helen's familiarity with the officers in the McAllen Police Department. These officers trusted Ron and Helen to maintain a sense of control and keep these gay men from acting out of line. Yet the objectives of the police also changed around the same time as the liberalization of Duffy's barroom culture.¹⁴⁶ The police became less concerned with overtly harassing queer bodies in the Valley because they found more profits from the incarceration of people for drug

¹⁴³ Drag performances were also listed in these "bad" behaviors. It wouldn't be until the late 1970s/beginning of the 1980s that drag performances were allowed in public, but none of these performances took place at Duffy's. Instead, they were held at neighboring bars like PBDs off Daffodil and Ware Road in McAllen.

¹⁴⁴ Ron interview.

¹⁴⁵ "The Historic Stonewall Inn, last accessed June 5, 2016, <http://www.thestonewallinnnyc.com/StonewallInnNYC/HISTORY.html>.

¹⁴⁶ Ron interview.

offenses.¹⁴⁷ So as long as the Brutons and Ron kept the drugs out of the bar the police did not bother harassing Duffy's customers. Simply put, there was no money to be made from queer arrests, especially in comparison to the profits and prestige that came from infiltrating heavier drug neighborhoods.¹⁴⁸ However, this safety for queer bodies at Duffy's would not last. Once more gay bars began to appear in the Valley starting in the 1980s, the police increased their presence around gay bars.¹⁴⁹

Containment/Protection of Gay Men at Duffy's

Part of the police's disinterest in queer arrests also turned on containment. There is an argument to be made that if all the gay men hung out in this one bar then it might limit the numbers of queer bashings that occurred downtown that would in theory demand much more police attention.¹⁵⁰ George Chauncey, John Howard, and Josh Sides all discuss instances of gay bashings and racial violence in their works on New York, Mississippi, and San Francisco in the twentieth century.¹⁵¹ What helped to fuel violence against the gay community was this cultural obsession with hyper-masculinity, particularly seen in studies on *machismo* and thus it really is not that different with white misogyny and other acts of homophobic violence. However, these books also highlight

¹⁴⁷ For the increasing incarceration rate see: Sarah Childress, "Michelle Alexander: 'A System of Racial and Social Control'," PBS.org, April 29, 2014, last accessed April 30, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/michelle-alexander-a-system-of-racial-and-social-control/>. For the spillover effects of U.S.'s drug demand and Mexico see: Helen Redmon, "The political economy of Mexico's drug war," *International Socialist Review* Issue #90 (July 2013), last accessed May 15, 2016, <http://isreview.org/issue/90/political-economy-mexicos-drug-war>.

¹⁴⁸ Alexander, 124-125.

¹⁴⁹ Michael interview; Bobby interview; Hector interview.

¹⁵⁰ Ron interview.

¹⁵¹ George Chauncey's *Gay New York*, Josh Sides' *Erotic City*, and John Howard's *Men Like That*.

how the queer nightlife of these cities was often contained to certain parts of town. This allowed queer men to find these spaces easily, while the police could closely monitor these areas when organizing their raids and homophobic men could find queer men to target.¹⁵²

In the Valley, there was always this history of racial violence that started with the Spanish conquest of the Natives in the region, which eventually evolved to Anglo violence against Mexicans. This racial violence was a noteworthy problem during much of the first half of the twentieth century. Many of the young people coming of age in the Valley or anywhere along the American Southwest either experienced or heard stories of violence done to their families by the State Troopers, Border Patrol and local police.¹⁵³ The Valley had another problem though with violence because of the border being more open during the 1970s, all you need to cross was a simple picture ID like a driver's license to cross back and forth. This open border made it exceptionally easy for homophobic men from either side of the border to bash a gay on the opposite side and get away by crossing back to their country.¹⁵⁴ In the Valley, it was often perceived to be homophobic men from Mexico who would cross over and bash a gay man or any man

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Richardson, *Batos*, Location 330, 332, and 349; Richardson, *On the Edge of the Law* 155-157 and 187-188; Luibheid, *Entry Denied*, Chapter 5.

¹⁵⁴ This article focuses specifically on Border Patrol Agents and their racialized violence. Vicki B. Gaubeca, "Time to End Impunity for US-Mexico Border Killings," American Civil Liberties Union, December 19, 2013, last accessed May 20, 2016, <https://www.aclu.org/blog/time-end-impunity-us-mexico-border-killings>. This article's discussion on Chicano/as aware of the violence on the border and its trigger coming from a hyper masculine culture that benefits from the abuse of women and queer people. Kelli Lyon Johnson, "Violence in the Borderlands: Crossing to the Home Space in the Novels of Ana Castillo," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* (March 2004), last accessed May 23, 2016, 41-43 and 45-46, <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=3908c54e-d74b-446c-95cb-56486b0db4ac%40sessionmgr4002&vid=0&hid=4213>.

that they perceived as such, then cross back to Mexico to escape prosecution. Certainly men from the Valley committed these crimes, but more likely, the blame was placed on men from Mexico committing acts of violence in the Valley before returning back to Mexico.¹⁵⁵

However, the police investigation of such attacks often lacked any thoroughness because of police homophobia and/or gay men who rarely reported such crimes in order to avoid being outed as gay.¹⁵⁶ This only sought to reinforce the helplessness and lack of power that queer men often felt in the Valley.¹⁵⁷ Thus the benign neglect of the local

¹⁵⁵ See Ron interview for context during this time. Also, for a discussion on how men of color are typically blamed for anti-gay violence see: Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop – And Why It Matters*, (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2008), 8 and 237-239.

¹⁵⁶ Again, I use Ron's interview only to talk about the local context, which I connect to scholarship from Josh Sides' *Erotic City*, Susana Pena's *Oye Loca*, John Howard's *Men Like That*, and Phil Tiemeyer's *Plane Queer* who talk about police investigations of gay bashing in San Francisco, Miami, and Mississippi. However, an article featured by the *Dallas Morning News* discusses the threat of homophobic murders experienced by queer men in the Valley: "4 recent slayings alarm gays in Rio Grande Valley," *The Dallas Morning News*, September 9, 1990, Record: DAL1153950. Also see Crystal Olvera article, "Gay nightlife in Valley busts out of the closet," *The Monitor*, August 6, 2010, last accessed April 28, 2016, http://www.themonitor.com/entertainment/gay-nightlife-in-valley-busts-out-of-the-closet/article_55d4eb32-484f-5fed-b763-53934f1d5a80.html.

¹⁵⁷ Ron interview for the example of border crossings and gay bashings; I also use Luibheid's *Entry Denied* and Richardson's *Batos* for violence associate with border crossings, particularly on the part of Anglos and Border Patrol agents. However, I also note on articles from *The Guardian* and *New York Times* that highlight this history of lynching of Mexican and Mexican-Americans in Texas. Tom Dart, "Life and death on the border: effects of century-old murders still felt in Texas," *The Guardian*, January 22, 2016, accessed April 3, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/22/texas-rangers-killings-us-history-life-and-death-on-the-border-mexico>; William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, "When Americans Lynched Mexicans," *The New York Times*, February 20, 2015, accessed March 3, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/20/opinion/when-americans-lynched-mexicans.html?_r=1; Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. Garcia, eds., *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012), 197 and 198.

police was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it afforded a flourishing gay experience at Duffy's but it also turned a blind eye when it came gay bashings and assault.

New Gay Bars and the Transportation Problem

Around the same time that Duffy's flourished, a second gay bar opened in the city of Brownsville, located about an hour southeast of McAllen. When this bar opened around 1976-77, it catered more to a younger crowd as it was a dance-oriented club, but it did initially hurt Duffy's business. However, there is a reality that affects all young people in poorer parts of the country—limited transportation—a problem that continues to haunt Valley people and one that many queer historians document in their histories of queer people in rural spaces.¹⁵⁸ Transportation is a crucial component to sexuality in general as it allows people the opportunity to leave their homes and engage in sex with others through travelling someplace else or the car being the spot where sex is engaged. John Howard's *Men Like That* opens this discussion on the significance of the automobile in creating a gay identity in Mississippi because men no longer needed to rely on who was available within their towns but could find other men in their county and state. Brock Thompson's *The Un-Natural State* continues this discussion on the cruising language that gay men developed that was used to signal each other for sex.¹⁵⁹ Recognizing the significance of cars in the transformation of sex, particularly gay sex, there must be recognition of the problems finding transportation in the Valley. Most people in Hidalgo County could not afford to drive all the way to Brownsville or they could not find a ride from someone willing and able to travel so they returned to Duffy's as it was closer to

¹⁵⁸ Howard, 78, 100, and 101; Johnson, *Just Queer Folks*, 192-193.

¹⁵⁹ Thompson, Location 811-827.

them. And with the alternatives being to drive all the way to Corpus Christi or cross the border to Reynosa even when the border restrictions were almost non-existent compared to 2016, these alternatives were not feasible for a majority of these queer residents. In a sense, a matter of convenience is what saved Duffy's Tavern.¹⁶⁰

However, despite its popularity the bar would eventually close. After Helen passed away in 1983, George could not manage it on his own so he sold Duffy's Tavern. The new owners would not keep Duffy's open as a gay bar, but for queer people in the Valley that was not as serious a blow as it would have been in the 1970s. On February 1984, PBD's Lounge opened in McAllen about two miles west from downtown, allowing the Valley's queer population a new home where they could dance, drink, and meet other queer people.¹⁶¹ By the time PBD's opened, the restrictions on the Valley's queer scene were absent, which allowed queer people the space where they could openly display their affections for one another while dancing underneath the strobe lights.¹⁶²

Conclusion

The uniqueness of Duffy's Tavern came from its dual roles as its daylight role operated as a family-friendly space, while at night it functioned as a haven for queer men. And its centralized location guaranteed that it would earn enough profits to survive the 1970s, while others bars including straight bars closed their doors. And the loyalty of Duffy's queer patrons guaranteed that they would adhere to the rules of the Brutons and Ron so not to lose this precious space to a police raid, which would either push queer

¹⁶⁰ Ron interview.

¹⁶¹ "About Us," PBD's, last accessed May 10, 2016, <http://pbds-mcallentx.com/>. On February 2016, they celebrated their 32nd anniversary.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

residents to flee the Valley for places like Corpus Christi or Reynosa if they had the means to travel so far, or force them to retreat deeper into the closet.

Police regulation of sexuality is somewhat different than the narrative that dominates much of the historiography of sexuality. Once the latter half of the 1970s and 1980s saw the increased revenues from drug offenses, the needs for police to monitor sexuality especially queer sexuality declined in the Valley. This differs to other histories of police raids of gay bars and any public space where queer sex/activities appear like in Alice Echols' *Hot Stuff*, which focuses on the rise of disco in the U.S. but also offers a broad picture of police raids on gay bars in the Midwest. Meanwhile, Brock Thompson's *The Un-Natural State* takes this discussion on raids to another space as Arkansas police targeted highway restrooms for surveillance due to queer men using it as a space for sex. Both books pointed to enforcement of anti-gay and sodomy laws for justifications for raids, but also the general lack of legal protections that made queer people easy targets for policing.¹⁶³ Entering the 1980s, what will follow is a more familiar, historiographical trajectory with the Valley reacting to the start of the AIDS Epidemic. Although the disease and its effects on the rural populations remain understudied, the following chapter helps to illuminate the treatment and discussions that AIDS took in the Valley.

¹⁶³ Echols, 43-45; Thompson, 54; Sides, 40-41.

Chapter 5:

AIDS In The Valley

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) became visible in the Valley as early as 1981 as it did elsewhere in the country, but since it was initially labeled as a gay disease, it was not until 1987 that its severity was fully recognized outside of the queer community.¹⁶⁴ As a response to the epidemic, sex-education programs in the Valley needed to evolve to accommodate lessons on preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS, but even as schools adjusted to accommodate such programs, other institutions in the community were not as well prepared, which cost the lost of lives of many residents.¹⁶⁵ Unlike other cities which saw a higher percentage of positive patients from queer people and people who engaged in queer sex, many of those who died in the in the Valley in the 1980s caught the disease from straight sex or drug use. This chapter uncovers how the spread of AIDS in the Valley led to a value shift in how this disease would be fought that followed a trajectory

¹⁶⁴ Books on the history of AIDS include Brock Thompson's *The Un-Natural State*, Josh Sides' *Erotic City*, Susana Pena's *Oye Loca*, Lionel Cantu's *The Sexuality of Migration*. Others works in the field include: Elizabeth Pisani, *The Wisdom of Whores: Bureaucrats, Brothels, and the Business of AIDS*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009); Hector Carrillo, *The Night is Young: Sexuality in Mexico in the Time of AIDS*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, (New York :Simon and Schuster, 2015).

¹⁶⁵ "AIDS Programs To Be Implemented By MCISD," *Progress Times*, December 9, 1987, Pg 3. (Microfilm, Roll 7, Speer Memorial Library, Mission, Tx). Daniel A. Flores, "HIV/AIDS education key for Latinos," *The Monitor*, October 29, 2015, last accessed May 23, 2016, http://www.themonitor.com/life/vidahealth/hiv-aids-education-key-for-latinos/article_0c4e6c42-7e5a-11e5-b458-839c2c8b57ed.html. The current director of education at Valley AIDS Council stated that they have seen a spike in HIV transmission since 2012, especially amongst people under 24, ranging around 300 new positive cases a year with 1 out of 5 of those being under 24 years old. They have not seen numbers like this since the 1980s.

more similar to developing countries than the urban United States. For example, nuns from the local Catholic churches and lesbians began to organize early AIDS hospices to care for the infected.¹⁶⁶ Also, medical institutions in the Valley constructed organizations and advocacy groups in screening, treating, and caring for AIDS patients. However, this chapter also unveils how even with the community and religious institutions gathering to combat the disease after it was no longer associated as the gay disease. And once the disease was perceived as contained, the regional problems of the Valley recreated a regression in discussions on sexuality. Like its issues with poverty and its rural location, the Valley operated under its previous tradition of silence on the subject of sexuality as seen in the 1970s.

AIDS History Overview

The history of the AIDS Epidemic in the U.S. is one that often focuses on metropolitan centers like New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco due to the prevalence of queer communities. These spaces are important to the history of AIDS because these cities were where the disease was most visible and many early victims were affiliated with the LGBT community or engaged in recreational drug use, which reflected a significant segment of the population that came back as HIV-positive. The disease also disproportionally ravaged communities of color and the poor. As Phil Tiemeyer argues in *Plane Queer*, AIDS profoundly shaped the image of gay men and myths surrounding the AIDS Epidemic.¹⁶⁷ In *Plane Queer*, Tiemeyer traces the early AIDS history surrounding Randy Shilts' *And The Band Played On* labeling queer, flight

¹⁶⁶ Michael interview.

¹⁶⁷ Tiemeyer, 136-138; Bronski, 225.

attendant, Gaëten Dugas, as the patient zero for bringing AIDS to America, and how Dugas' sexuality became the subject for debate, which in turn filtered down to the sexuality of all queer men and reignited a culture war in which the Religious Right attacked queer people.¹⁶⁸

Queer men prior to the epidemic were already labeled as sexual deviants and potential child predators because of the actions and attitudes of conservative politicians and activists like Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" campaign. The epidemic marked all queer people as diseased individuals that were not safe for public spaces.¹⁶⁹ Urban spaces received an increased amount of media attention that shaped much of the early dialogue on the nature of the disease, while the rural centers were often ignored or downplayed in importance. With such media attention, it allowed for scholars to gather a considerable amount of sources on the early medical care, community organizing, and legislative initiatives that sought to combat the disease in the country but again the focus has been on urban areas.¹⁷⁰

Although we can date AIDS as far back as the 1960s, the first cases were not released to the public until 1981 when five, gay men in Los Angeles were reported to suddenly have failing immune systems by the Center for Disease Control (CDC).¹⁷¹ From the announcement of these initial reports, more cases from across the country would

¹⁶⁸ Tiemeyer, 137 and 168-169.

¹⁶⁹ Pena, 10 and 15; Luibheid, 77; Cantu, 50-51; Howard, 19; Berube, Location 663; Canady, 12.

¹⁷⁰ There are exceptions to this statement. Works like John Howard's *Men Like That*, Nadine Hubbs' *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* and Brock Thompson's *The Un-Natural State* look more at this rural AIDS History, but even this is limited mostly to queer, Anglo men in the countryside.

¹⁷¹ "A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," AIDS.gov, last accessed March 30, 2016, <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline/>.

follow with similar diagnoses. The *New York Times* would initially report this disease as a form of cancer, citing the common correlation for infection was in queer men who had multiple sexual partners.¹⁷² However, the *Times*' article also made the connection to the disease's primary location in Africa, with the cases being more common in young adults and children.¹⁷³

In 1982, San Francisco established the first AIDS clinic to increase the effectiveness of testing for individuals who were HIV-positive, while the CDC established a working definition of AIDS from their research and estimated that tens of thousands of Americans were possibly infected.¹⁷⁴ Hosts of organizations would appear to help with the hospice care and the diagnosis of AIDS, while the CDC received funds from Congress to continue the investigation. Also, officials in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York City closed bathhouses in effort to minimize the risk of AIDS infection due to the prevalence of sexual activity in these spaces.¹⁷⁵ While local groups and other government agencies acted against the epidemic, it would take until 1985

¹⁷² Lawrence K. Altman, "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals," *The New York Times*, July 3, 1981, last accessed May 5, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/03/us/rare-cancer-seen-in-41-homosexuals.html>.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*; Tiemeyer, 139-140; Craig Timberg and Daniel Halperin, *Tinderbox: How the West Sparked the AIDS Epidemic and How the World Can Finally Overcome It*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 2.

¹⁷⁴ AIDS.gov; Altman; Bronski, 220-225; Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 5-9.

¹⁷⁵ When one follows queer histories, the prevalence for sexual activity in bathhouses is often seen almost as a right of passage for young gay men and an important scene for queer socialization, especially since it preserved an individual's anonymity compared to gay bars/clubs see: Sean Strub, *Body Counts: A Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival*, (New York: Scribner, 2014), 117-118, 148; "Gay bathhouses across US face an uncertain future," *The Guardian*, August 23, 2014, last accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/aug/23/gay-bathhouses-us-face-uncertain-future>.

before President Reagan would mention anything on the subject of AIDS, and it would not be again until 1987 when he established the Presidential Commission on HIV.¹⁷⁶ The lack of action on President Reagan's part is cited as one of the greatest failures in the history of the U.S. AIDS Epidemic. The Reagan Administration's inability to discuss and support research on AIDS is viewed, particularly by the LGBT and communities of color, as a form of unforgivable neglect that aggravated the devastation wrought by the disease.¹⁷⁷

The goal of this chapter is not to criticize or debunk the history of AIDS in New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and other major urban centers, but rather to look at the history of the epidemic in a borderland region where international travel and news is a daily occurrence for its residents. Like the works of Howard, Johnson, and Thompson which privilege rural spaces in the AIDS Epidemic, this chapter highlights the borderland and its relationship with the epidemic. The Valley absorbed American and Mexican coverage of the AIDS Epidemic and through the cultural differences between media, it allowed for a unique reaction to AIDS in the community. The Valley initially treated AIDS as a gay disease. Perceptions, however, were altered as increasing numbers of people getting infected were not gay or men who had sex with men. Instead, many of the local residents were straight and coming from impoverished families. As a result the community treated the disease in a way similar to that in developing countries.¹⁷⁸ They

¹⁷⁶ AIDS.gov; Brier, 8-11; Bronski, 220-225.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Desmond Cohen, "Poverty and HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa," HIV/AIDS Electronic Library Series, Issues Paper No. 27, last accessed May 24, 2016, http://library.unesco-iicba.org/English/HIV_AIDS/cdrom%20materials/Poverty.htm; Timberg, 116-118.

began to see the disease less as a gay issue and more of a communal one that could affect anyone regardless of their sexuality and their socio-economic background.

AIDS in Texas

As mentioned, part of the regional dialogue did deem AIDS a gay disease—a label popular in the news coverage from both sides of the border.¹⁷⁹ In the Valley, Anglos and Latinos accepted this simplified stereotype of AIDS and in some circles it was considered more specifically a white gay disease, but because the presence of gay Latinos was more noticeable than gay white men, who never made up a large percentage of the Valley’s gay population, this white stereotype was not as prevalent in the Valley.¹⁸⁰ In large part this was due to the reality that Latinos made up a majority of the Valley’s population and they were relegated to the margins of popular consciousness. On the one hand, as the AIDS Epidemic spread across the country, the Valley also saw its queer population become more visible as patients and activists. On the other hand, several more gay bars opened during this decade, mostly in McAllen, Brownsville, and South Padre Island.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ J.E. Relly and Jim Wright, “HIV in Mexico: A Status Report on Efforts to Battle the Disease South of the Border,” *Tucson Weekly*, September 21-27, 1995, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.tucsonweekly.com/tw/09-21-95/cover.htm>.

¹⁸⁰ More of a personal reflection of the Valley’s gay scene as well as an inferred conclusion from the interviews themselves when these men discussed the men that they met as well as the information I acquired while volunteering with local clinics that were open during the late 1980s/early 1990s.

¹⁸¹ “This Week in Texas,” *This Week in Texas*, January 13, 1984, last accessed May 27, 2016, 83, <http://www.houstonlgbthistory.org/Houston80s/TWT/1984/84-011384.compressed.pdf>; “This Week in Texas,” *This Week in Texas*, January 2, 1987, last accessed May 27, 2016, 96-97, <http://www.houstonlgbthistory.org/Houston80s/TWT/1987/87-010287.compressed.pdf>.

By 1987, as the public became more aware of the capability of the disease to cross gender, sexual, racial, and class boundaries, the discussion on AIDS shifted to how to combat the disease. In Mexico City, for example, the government began to develop a series of agencies with the task of studying and spreading education on how to prevent the spread of the disease, something that reflected what was happening in the U.S. when Reagan finally broke his silence on the disease.¹⁸² The Valley underwent similar discussions on combating AIDS that were no longer focused exclusively on the gay issue, but how to treat and prevent its spread regardless of sexual identity, before it could have as devastating effects onto the Valley population as it did in the cities.¹⁸³

This section tries to reflect part of the messages that the Valley absorbed from the state as different messages on the nature of AIDS came from these Texas cities as many residents travelled and had relatives living in these cities. Crafting a single narrative on the state's reaction is difficult to accomplish because of the multitude of voices, but certain attitudes did permeate. Each city rallied around combatting the disease in different ways, but all of them started different AIDS-related organizations to help diagnose and care for patients. Due to the vast size of the state and the diverse population in its major metropolitan areas, the AIDS Epidemic in Texas affected communities differently. Dallas and Houston's African American population, for example, made up the majority of

¹⁸² Patricia Uribe Zuniga, Carlos Magis Rodriguez, and Enrique Bravo Garcia, "AIDS in Mexico," *International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care*, November 1998, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.thebody.com/content/art12264.html>.

¹⁸³ "Free AIDS Testing Made Available," *Progress Times*, November 18, 1987, pg. 3, (Microfilm, Roll 7, Speer Memorial Library, Mission, Tx); "AIDS Prevention Program Implemented by MCISD."

people who came back HIV-positive. In Austin it was more often white gay men.¹⁸⁴ In San Antonio, like the Valley, the Latino population shared the larger percentage.¹⁸⁵

Emphasizing the care for HIV-positive patients offers insight into how these programs operated and who were most likely to get involved. *This Week in Texas* was particularly important in disseminating the message of how AIDS affected queer people nationwide, but also provided statewide messages and listed the organizations that were popping up in each city like the Austin AIDS Project and the San Antonio AIDS Foundation.¹⁸⁶ The Houston-based magazine presented queer Texans with a non-judgmental source of information on how the disease affected their communities, while also providing them with visual representations of how the community was also coming together and gave hope for queer Texans even in the face of this uncertainty. However, Texas also suffered from having some of the highest rates of infection in the country during the 1980s, rivaling that of New York and California, yet it was one of several states that spent the least on AIDS-related funding.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Ashley Womble, “The Faces of AIDS in Austin,” *Austin Monthly*, September 2, 2014, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.austinmonthly.com/AM/September-2014/The-Face-of-Aids-in-Austin/>; Dan Quinn, “Back to Baths?” *Austin Chronicle*, Vol 16, last accessed May 27, 2016,

<http://www.austinchronicle.com/issues/vol16/issue21/pols.bathhouse.html>.

¹⁸⁵ In San Antonio, the Latino population like in the Valley is greater. While the rate of infection was high for white, gay men in San Antonio, the general Latino population carried the greater rate.

¹⁸⁶ *This Week in Texas*, January 2, 1987; “History,” AIDS Services of Austin, last accessed May 27, 2016, www.asaustin.org/about-us/history/; “Our History and Heritage,” AIDS Services of Dallas, last accessed May 27, 2016, www.aidsdallas.org/about/history/; “About Us,” San Antonio AIDS Foundation, last accessed May 27, 2016, www.sanantonioids.org/about/board/.

¹⁸⁷ Bruce Lambert, “In Texas, AIDS Struggle is Also Matter of Money,” *The New York Times*, January 5, 1990, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/01/05/us/in-texas-aids-struggle-is-also-matter-of-money.html?pagewanted=all>.

In Austin, queer people took advantage of residing in the state capital and began to organize various campaigns to get state legislators involved in the AIDS struggle. One of the most important moments in Austin came in 1988 when the first AIDS Walk in the city was hosted with then Texas Secretary of the Treasury Ann Richards speaking to the crowd. Upon winning the governorship of Texas, Ann Richards continued to support these programs while also moving more women and minorities into seats of political power in the state.¹⁸⁸

Further away from the capital though, people living with AIDS spearheaded organizing in Dallas as they sought to provide housing and employment for those who lost them due to their illness.¹⁸⁹ The People with AIDS (PWA) Coalition of Dallas (PWACD), assisted by Daryl Moore and Michael Merdian, led the organizing even as some in Dallas opposed their efforts. The main resistance to the PWACD came from when they housed PWAs in Ewing Center located in the North Oak Cliff neighborhood in April 1987.¹⁹⁰ Protestors rejected the Ewing Center because they did not want “gay/AIDS colonies” because they feared the disease would spread and infect everyone in the suburb.¹⁹¹

In San Antonio, Robert Edwards (Papa Bear) founded the San Antonio AIDS Foundation (SAAF) in 1986 in response to the growing AIDS crisis in Bexar County. Edward witnessed firsthand the seriousness of the epidemic for he was also the owner of

¹⁸⁸ AIDS Services of Austin; David M. Brown, Christina Lively, Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, “Exploring one LGBT organization’s impact on those living with HIV/AIDS in Austin, Texas,” *Harvard Health Policy Review*, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://hhpronline.org/exploring-one-lgbt-organizations-enduring-impact-on-the-lives-of-people-living-with-hiv-aids-in-austin-texas/>.

¹⁸⁹ AIDS Services of Dallas.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

a local bar. SAAF also provided full hospice care for patients in their Casas de Care, suburban looking homes that offered discounted and free housing.¹⁹² Edwards was not the only bar owner in San Antonio that organized care for AIDS patients, other owners of local gay bars across the city followed in suit too as they all witnessed the devastating toll that the disease took on its patrons. One of these owners “converted a back room of his bar into a small hospice for people with AIDS.”¹⁹³

Statewide, the efforts to combat AIDS revolved around this community organizing to provide local relief and support. Most of this relief came in the form of testing and educating the community on the nature of the disease while providing as much information as was available at the time. The Valley, eventually, followed in a similar fashion: simultaneously providing education on the disease and care for those who were positive.

AIDS and Sex-Education in the Valley

The Valley would confront AIDS at two fronts, in both the schools and the community. In 1987, the sex-education programs in Mission Consolidated School District (MCISD) were redrafted to accommodate AIDS/HIV prevention into the pre-existing programs on STDs, but it did not last when the epidemic was viewed as contained. The discussion on AIDS in MCISD sought to provide factual information on how AIDS spread and the seriousness of the disease to combat against misinformation that was popular during this decade, specifically the fear that casual (non-sexual), physical contact

¹⁹² San Antonio AIDS Foundation.

¹⁹³ “San Antonio Express-News Features History of AIDS Awareness, Prevention in City,” *Kaiser Health News*, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://khn.org/morning-breakout/dr00006135/>.

with an infected person would spread the disease.¹⁹⁴ In hindsight, the honesty and transparency with regards to HIV along with the other MCISD programs is particularly surprising considering that sex-education programs were abandoned by the late 1990s-early 2000s in MCISD as well as other school districts in the Valley. This reduction in sex-education can partly be seen as the fear of AIDS and its spread began to decline, which suggested to the powers that be that the need for sex-education in public schools was somehow no longer necessary. However, since the 1990s and early 2000s, the most common example cited by residents and faculty in these local school districts when pressed on the subject of sex-education follows a religious narrative.

Across the country, religious and moral objections were coming from parents who feared that their teenagers learning about sex would lead them to have sex.¹⁹⁵ This misconception continues to linger despite all the data from third-party research groups that shows that proper sex-education leads to a reduction in teenage sex, teen pregnancies, and teen STD rates as the information that young people receives empowers them to make better decisions.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ “AIDS Prevention Program To Be Implemented By MCISD.”

¹⁹⁵ *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, “The Religious Right,” Youtube.com, 10:04, May 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz4AmUaLbUQ>. Samantha Bee’s segment gives a comical description of the formation of the Religious Right and their paranoia over teenage sexuality. You may need to put in a legit book, but I’m good with this.

¹⁹⁶ “Protecting Teen Health: Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Condom Availability in Program in the Public Schools,” American Civil Liberties Union, last accessed May 27, 2016, <https://www.aclu.org/protecting-teen-health-comprehensive-sexuality-education-and-condom-availability-programs-public>; Patrick Malone and Monica Rodriguez, “Comprehensive Sex Education vs. Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs,” American Bar Association, *Human Rights Magazine*, Vol 38 No 2 (Spring 2011), last accessed May 27, 2016, http://www.americanbar.org/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/human_rights_vol38_2011/human_rights_spring2011/comprehensive_sex_education_vs_abstinence_on_ly_until_marriage_programs.html; Pamela K. Kohler, Lisia E. Manhart, and William E.

Along with the practical nature of sex-education programs and the effort to prevent the spread of the disease amongst young people, there were great strides taken within the Valley to help care for those who were already HIV-positive. However, the Valley lacked the infrastructure necessary to construct organizations dedicated to help combat the AIDS Epidemic prior to 1987. Part of the complacency reflected a belief that AIDS was an urban problem. Also, unlike the rest of Texas, the Valley's queer population was not as politically active in the fight against AIDS, making it harder for community organizing to organically occur. Aside from county health departments, there were no organizations exclusively dedicated to AIDS prevention, but that did not mean that there was not some form of structure. The local Planned Parenthood clinics scattered cross Hidalgo and Cameron County carried much of the burden on combating AIDS in the Valley alongside the county health departments.¹⁹⁷

Planned Parenthood and AIDS

Planned Parenthood became part of the Valley community in April 1964 through the work of Rev. Bruce Galloway and his congregation at the First United Methodist Church in Mission.¹⁹⁸ Rev. Galloway's objective was to provide access to family

Lafferty, "Abstinence-Only and Comprehensive Sex Education and the Initiation of Sexual Activity and Teen Pregnancy," *Journal of Adolescent Health* Vol 42 Issue 4 (April 2008), last accessed May 26, 2016, [http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(07\)00426-0/abstract](http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(07)00426-0/abstract).

¹⁹⁷ "Mission and History," Valley AIDS Council, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://valleyaids.org/about-us/mission-history/>.

¹⁹⁸ "About Us," Planned Parenthood Association of Hidalgo County, Texas, Inc., last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://planithidalgo.com/about.html>. Note that the Planned Parenthood clinics in Hidalgo County disaffiliated from Planned Parenthood in the fall of 2014 and became Access Esperanza Clinics, while the clinics in Cameron County remain

planning services for low-income women for there was no other service available in the Valley that could help these local women. The Mission Planned Parenthood clinic was located on Conway Road in Mission's downtown with its services helping to provide local women with the ability to gain low cost and free birth control. More clinics would open across Hidalgo and Cameron County by the 1980s, providing low cost/free birth control and STD testing/treatment for Valley residents. And because of Planned Parenthood's non-discrimination policies, it was seen as a refuge for sexually active women and queer people who need to get access to the care without fear of retaliation such as that they would often experience at other clinics and hospitals.¹⁹⁹

Nuns, Lesbians, and AIDS

Even with the efforts of organizations like Planned Parenthood, the clinics were limited much like the entire Valley. The Valley was also more dependent on federal and charitable aid than larger cities. The Valley's need for aid helped them to receive aid from some organizations, but since they lacked the concentration of wealth of larger cities that could afford to provide more aid to these charities, it did harm the Valley's ability to assist people with AIDS.²⁰⁰ In the Valley, this charity often came in the form of aid from the Catholic Church and other local churches, which assisted in organizing some

affiliated with Planned Parenthood as they are part of Planned Parenthood of South Texas with the headquarters located in San Antonio.

¹⁹⁹ During my time as an undergrad, I volunteered and interned at the McAllen Planned Parenthood Clinic. A lot of my work involved community engagement projects where I interacted with Valley residents. Those who were coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s constantly referred to the safety that they felt at the Planned Parenthood clinics because they did not have to worry about being shamed for their sexuality.

²⁰⁰ Herman Curiel and Helen Land, eds., *Outreach and Care Approaches to HIV/AIDS Along the US-Mexico Border*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), Chapter 5.

of the earliest AIDS hospices. Much like San Antonio, the Catholic Church was part of this effort to care for AIDS patients, a story that the Church is not often officially associated with because of its strict policies on homosexuality and sex outside of marriage.²⁰¹

In the Valley, however, the Church was more open to caring for AIDS patients because the disease was not exclusively associated with gays or sex-workers. Instead, many patients were drug addicts and people coming from poverty and this allowed the local churches the flexibility necessary to care for these people. The Valley shared many characteristics similar to the developing countries in which the Church was actively helping in African and Latin American communities during this time.²⁰² Nuns often worked in these early hospices with lesbian volunteers assisting or organizing their own hospice care to help care for the overwhelming amount of patients.²⁰³ The actions of nuns in hospice care were not always Church approved. Early AIDS care in the Valley with nuns at the helm was organized by Mother Teresa's The Gift of Peace, a nationwide initiative to care for AIDS patients founded in 1985. Like in other parts of the country, lesbians would play a significant role in providing care for AIDS patients. Local lesbians often worked alongside the nuns or formed their own hospices as mentioned earlier because for many queer women, the people who were infected were their relatives and

²⁰¹ "San Antonio Express-News Features History of AIDS Awareness, Prevention in City."

²⁰² Michael interview; Timberg, 116-118; For a case in El Salvador see: Mary Jo McConohay, "Nuns in El Salvador Fights AIDS One Village at a Time," *New America Media*, January 2, 2015, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://newamericamedia.org/2015/01/aids-activist-educates-salvadorans-a-village-at-a-time.php>.

²⁰³ Michael interview; For a case in Washington state see: Sandra G. Boodman, "Neighbors are Fearful of Nuns' Caring for the Dying in Convent," *The Washington Post*, January 12, 1987, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/teresa/stories/aids.htm>

close friends. In the case of Michael, an army veteran who served in the late 1980s and 1990s, he appreciated nuns and lesbians working together to provide this hospice care. This unity was significant to him because his trans brother was HIV-positive (from sharing needles) and amongst the early wave of people who passed in the Valley from AIDS-related complications. The work performed by this early hospice effort helped provide the care that Michael's brother needed at a time when their family could not afford to provide that care themselves. Similar stories of hospice care are shared throughout the history of the epidemic of individuals who found themselves in need of hospice care because their loved ones were also unwilling or unable to afford to pay for the necessary healthcare.²⁰⁴ While not coming from the Valley, but matching much of the stories that came from throughout the state, Ruth Coker Burks of Little Rock, Arkansas opened her own hospice center in her home to provide a refuge for PWAs who were abandoned by their families and local hospitals who were all too terrified of risking infecting themselves while caring for them.²⁰⁵

Valley AIDS Council

In 1987 the Valley gained an organization dedicated to combating AIDS like those seen across the country. Through the combined efforts of Hidalgo and Cameron Counties' Health Departments, Planned Parenthood, and the Texas Department of Health, the Valley gained its first organization dedicated to AIDS/HIV prevention. The Valley

²⁰⁴ David Koon, "Meet the Woman Who Cared for Hundreds of Abandoned Gay Men Dying of AIDS," *Out Magazine*, May 19, 2016, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.out.com/positive-voices/2016/5/19/meet-woman-who-cared-hundreds-abandoned-gay-men-dying-aids>.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

AIDS Council (VAC) would continue to grow during the remainder of the 1980s and into the 1990s, and still serves as an important part of the Valley community offering diagnosis and help with the prevention of AIDS/HIV.²⁰⁶ VAC would join Planned Parenthood as a particularly important agency in the Valley because a large portion of their patients would be queer, young, and most often coming from working class and immigrant backgrounds. VAC's ability to diagnose and treat patients in McAllen, Harlingen, and Brownsville clinics helped to turn the tide on AIDS in the Valley along with the efforts of Planned Parenthood and sex-education programs in the public schools.²⁰⁷

Despite the strides the Valley made in combatting the AIDS Epidemic, the damage done to the young and queer people left a mark that would last through the 1990s. For queer people, their stories are times quite similar to those in New York City and San Francisco in that they saw many of their loved ones die from this disease, which helped to silence this community at a time when they were beginning to gain positive strides through their growing visibility.²⁰⁸ For young people, they came of age at a time when there was so much misinformation about how AIDS spread that it led them to engage in different forms of sex in an effort to prevent infection, especially if they were heterosexual, often without using condoms or failing to use them properly.²⁰⁹ The Valley mirrored a nationwide embrace of abstinence-only programs and their failure to provide

²⁰⁶ Valley AIDS Council.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Bronski, 224-229; Sides, 182-185; Strub 139-140; Tiemeyer, 136-137.

²⁰⁹ "National Survey of Adolescents and Young Adults: Sexual Health Knowledge, Attitudes and Experiences," Kaiser Family Foundation (2003), last accessed May 27, 2016, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200604/200604_2sex%20health%20know.pdf.

medically accurate information about safer sex practices. Placing exclusive education on abstinence from sex until marriage continues to create havoc for young people.²¹⁰

As the AIDS Crisis began to “calm down,” many Valley residents attempted to recreate the old, status quo when it came to minimizing discussions on sexuality and say nothing. Since the late 1990s, this lack of discussion not only maintained an abstinence-only education in public schools, but others took on more extreme forms such as protesting the efforts of the local Planned Parenthood clinics in providing birth control and STD testing/treatment or preventing women from entering Whole Women’s Health, the abortion clinic located in downtown McAllen.²¹¹ Harlingen native, Robert reflected back on the passivity of his parents during the 1990s. When it came to educating him and his sisters about sex and drug use, his parents said nothing. Robert comes from a middle-

²¹⁰ Jessica Fields, *Risky Lessons: Sex Education and Social Inequality*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008), Kindle Edition, Location 81–96; Sue Alford, “Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs: Ineffective, Unethical, and Poor Public Health,” *Advocates for Youth*, (July 2007), last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/597-abstinence-only-until-marriage-programs-ineffective-unethical-and-poor-public-health>; “Abstinence-Only Education,” Planned Parenthood Action, last accessed May 27, 2016, <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/issues/sex-education/abstinence-only-programs>. For a history of abstinence only education – “A History of Federal Funding for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs,” Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=1340&nodeid=1>. For an explanation Texas’ abstinence only education – “Gail Collins on Texas’s Abstinence Sex Education Problems,” *The Daily Beast*, June 4, 2012, May 27, 2016, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/06/04/gail-collins-on-texas-s-abstinence-sex-education-problems.html>.

²¹¹ “Tribpedia: Women’s Health Program,” *Texas Tribune*, last accessed May 27, 2016, <https://www.texastribune.org/tribpedia/womens-health-program/about/>. The protesting around both clinics only became more severe starting around 2011 when the Texas legislature removed Planned Parenthood from the state’s Medicaid Women’s Health Program when then Governor Rick Perry and the Republican-led legislature denied Planned Parenthood access to these funds over issues regarding birth control and abortions.

class, Mexican, Catholic family where education, physical, and creative stimulation were the top priorities in his household. These values he attributed to his parents' careers as public school teachers in the Harlingen school district, which makes their silence even more ironic. His father was working as an athletic coach and his mom an art teacher. When asked what his parents said to him and his sisters, he said, "No. [We] Don't talk about it...At the time, my mom was kind of prudish and my dad was passive, reserved. Sex was something we [him and his sisters] educated ourselves on with our friends and lovers...Our parents were hands off on sex and drug issues" and this created problems.²¹²

Indeed, Robert suggested that not talking about sex was Catholic family tradition. When remembering the inaction of his parents, he reflected on how both his older sister as well as his mother became teen moms, something he thought his mother would want her own daughter to avoid. While his mother was not ashamed of her pregnancy or the end of her first marriage, (she later married Robert's father) much to Robert's surprise, she never passed on what she learned from her experience as a teen mom to her own children. Her eldest daughter, Robert insists, would struggle with so many similar experiences yet any discussions about sex were off limits. Robert assumed that his mother's *mistake* would have at least motivated her into giving the sex talk to his sisters, but the sex talk never happened. He never received the talk from his father either, who was a high school coach and would have been well informed on how teenage boys act upon their sexuality. His father's passivity still bewilders Robert. He also reflected on how he and his sisters all experienced some form of drug dependency/abuse and increased sexual promiscuity that may have otherwise not happened or been as severe if

²¹² Robert Robledo, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, McAllen, August 11, 2015.

his parents pushed aside their own anxieties about these topics in order to exchange in an open discussion with their children.²¹³

The actions of Robert's parents were similar to the national solution to sex, drugs, and alcohol through abstinence-only education programs and the "Just Say No" campaign, and in hindsight, we understand the failures of such approaches.²¹⁴ Perhaps Robert's parents wanted to return to this sense of normalcy in the name of middle-class respectability and religious traditions. However, as seen in the case of Robert and his sisters, they all engaged in more promiscuous activities and recreational drug use something Robert feels in hindsight could have been prevented. In his older sister's situation, she repeated the teen pregnancy cycle, while Robert's drug use eventually became so severe that he was arrested and had to return home to the Valley in order to get sober.²¹⁵

Conclusion

AIDS disrupted the Valley in ways that were both similar and different from the Nation and the region. At times, the region would adopt policies and construct institutions to help combat the severity of the epidemic. The Valley was the perfect spot

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ University of Georgia, "Abstinence-only education does not lead to abstinent behavior, researchers find," *Science Daily*, November 29, 2011, last accessed May 27, 2016, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/11/111129185925.htm>; Scott O. Lilienfeld and Hal Arkowitz, "Why 'Just Say No' Doesn't Work," *Scientific American Mind*, January 1, 2014, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-just-say-no-doesnt-work/>; Michael McGrath, "Nancy Reagan and the negative impact of the 'Just Say No' anti-drug campaign," *The Guardian*, March 8, 2016, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/mar/08/nancy-reagan-drugs-just-say-no-dare-program-opioid-epidemic>.

²¹⁵ Robert interview.

to absorb state, national, and international news that shaped how they built programs and organizations to combat the disease. However, as the severity of the epidemic was on the decline, the conflict between religion, rural location, and poverty eventually in the role of regulating sexuality lulled the region back into a traditional set of values. As the next chapter unveils queer narratives, we see how activists dramatically challenged the tradition of silence in the Valley.

Chapter 6:

Queer Voices from the Valley

Agreeing with John Howard's history of Mississippi, queerness starts in the family but so too does sexual abuse.²¹⁶ It is in the family home where young people are initiated into sex be it from discussions and/or arguments on proper gender roles and sexual expressions to actual sexual acts. The Valley's Latino culture, just like the Deep South, has long offered possibilities for queer interaction and abuse in the name of respect, family, and tradition. Latinos have sacrificed and felt compelled to protect the family even if it means allowing themselves to be victims of an abusive family member.²¹⁷ Using oral history, this chapter privileges the queer voices that complicate all borderland binaries. In other words, abuse and desire were not always easy to separate as there exists rigid distinctions between excitement and fear. Some memories of abuse view that as initiations into queer experiences just as John Howard found in Mississippi.²¹⁸ Oral histories make it challenging to reach overarching conclusions on the distinctions between abuse and desire, however, they do provide a tool to highlight the assumptions surrounding Queer Anti-Urbanism. The oral histories demonstrate how we

²¹⁶ Howard, 42-43 and 46.

²¹⁷ Marcia Carteret, "Cultural Values of Latino Parents and Families," *Dimensions of Culture*, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.dimensionsofculture.com/2011/03/cultural-values-of-latino-parents-and-families/>; Sara Villanueva Dixon, Julia A. Graber, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, "The Roles of Respect for Parental Authority and Parenting Practices in Parent-Child Conflict Among African American, Latino, and European American Families," *Journal of Family Psychology* (February 2008), last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3125601/>; Hames-Garcia, *Gay Latino Studies*, 159.

²¹⁸ Howard, 19 and 20.

must recognize the multitude of reasons for queer, urban migration and queer relationships to their rural homes. The stories featured in this chapter reaffirm how queer men migrated away from the Valley for self-expression, but that was not the prominent purpose for their urban migration as economic opportunities were a crucial component for this migration. However, urban migration was not the end of the story. Instead of remaining in queer metropolises, queer men and women often return to their small town for safety, satisfaction and a sense of self. Their stories not only reveal that economic and educational opportunities rather than queer desire motivated them to leave home, but that they often returned to the Valley for the comforts of home and family. I conclude here that while the Valley masks abuse often in the name of patriarchy and respectability, it also nurtured queer desires, community and activism. The significance of the community and activism most apparent with the roles that queer people took, primarily queer women, in the construction of queer friendly spaces like those we saw with Duffy's Tavern, except these spaces harness that energy to promote queer people into fighting for their place in the Valley.

Familiar Contractions

Rod is a Valley man in his fifties who came of age in the Valley during the 1960s and 1970s. He identifies himself as a bisexual man and is married to a woman. Rod describes himself as more of an artistic guy while he was in school and he constantly hung around guys more athletic than himself. His story, however, is one of abuse. In his oral history interview, he recalled visiting his aunt and uncle during the 1970s in Corpus Christi, Texas. He admitted that his first sexual experience was when he was fourteen and

it was with his uncle. Rod shared how his uncle took him to a barn that was further away from their house and locked the door behind them before telling Rod:

He said, ‘You’re going to like it.’ I said ‘like what?’ So I was going to push him aside, but I decided not to, why I don’t know why. So he started caressing me and kissing me and unbuttoned my shorts and pulled it down. He took his pants off and turned me over...He told me to take my underwear off, and he said ‘you’re going to like it.’ And back then, aunt and uncle, you’re not supposed to say no to them out of respect so I said *ta bueno* (okay).²¹⁹

When describing this scene from his youth that was without question an act of violent abuse, Rod admitted that he enjoyed the experience. His story followed a tradition of familial deference. He did not fight off his uncle’s advances because of the *respect* that he had for him. When thinking about rape and power, family traditions led to his abuse and serves as a reminder of who has long held power in families. In this case, Rod’s uncle used the familial hierarchy to exploit Rod and ensure his submission into a sex act. The consequences of saying no to an older relative seemed unimaginable to a teenager like Rod. Despite the abuse, Rod took the experience and the satisfaction he got from sex with a man to pursue his classmates in high school and as he got older other men.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Rod interview

²²⁰ *Ibid*; For a discussion on hypo/hypersexuality after sexual assault see: Mark F. Schwartz and Lori Galperin, “Hyposexuality and Hypersexuality Secondary to Childhood Trauma and Dissociation,” <http://www.castlewoodtc.com/wp->

Similarly, Michael's story begins when he was nine years old and molested by a teenage, male cousin of migrant parents. However, he did not see himself as a victim insisting that he was always "knowing what I was doing" and that when the opportunity came up "I took off my clothes right away."²²¹ Unlike Rod's situation, physical or verbal force was not necessary to motivate Michael into complying, nor did he feel there was an immediate need to respect the familiar hierarchy even though his cousin was a teenager. Instead, he confessed that he tore off his own clothes when the opportunity to have sex appeared since he described himself also as always being "boy crazy." Even years later when talking to his cousin, Michael admits that he enjoyed the experience and was grateful for it even though his cousin was still anxious as an adult that Michael might report him, especially since when they had this conversation Michael's cousin was married with kids.²²² Although this happened in the 1970s and 1980s, the Valley was reminiscent of the 1950s world John Howard describes when queer desires were not necessarily identified with a gay identity.²²³ The men that Howard discusses point to their own sexual initiation with men often through sexual abuse from an elder, male relative: uncles and cousins often being the initiators who may or may not have seen themselves as gay.²²⁴

Not all stories of familial abuse in the Valley turned on patriarchy, however. Rubén's story is unique in itself because during late 1980s, an older, female cousin raped him when he was around eight years old. This story highlights sexual abuse that is not

[content/uploads/2011/07/hyposexuality-and-hypersexuality-secondary-to-childhood-trauma.pdf](#) 8-9.

²²¹ Michael interview

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ Howard, 19 and 42-46.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

often shared because of the infrequent number of female-on-male rapes, the lack of reporting²²⁵ and it violates normative understandings of abuse. Rubén originally blocked the experience out until he was an adult: “I was maybe seven years old...I didn’t start having flashbacks about it until I was older.”²²⁶ He also said, “that it pretty much amounted to me lying down on the ground, frozen. I was afraid of her seeing her on top of me, pulling my pants down, sitting on top of me...I remember thinking this was so gross, but I was afraid too push her off me because she was so overpowering.”²²⁷ He continued to describe how the incident happened in a shed at home, and that when his mom found out what was going on she managed to stop his cousin without physically barging in on them. His mom did not overtly call out the behavior, but instead kept him away from his cousin. Thus she did not disrupt or embarrass the family, but quietly prevented the abuse from happening again. In the name of preserving the family, nonnormative sexual abuse was swept under the rug. He did not understand why until he was an adult and began to have flashbacks of that day. In Rubén’s case, he was not seeking to obey but since his cousin was older than him and he did feel powerless and too afraid to do anything to resist her actions. As for Rubén, he followed the path that so many survivors of sexual assault take and repressed the memories of the experience.²²⁸

²²⁵ Sarah LeTrent, “Against his will: Female-on-male rape,” *CNN*, October 10, 2013, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/09/living/chris-brown-female-on-male-rape/>; Hanna Rosin, “When Men Are Raped,” *Slate*, April 29, 2014, last accessed May 27, 2016, http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2014/04/male_rape_in_america_a_new_study_reveals_that_men_are_sexually_assaulted.html.

²²⁶ Ruben, Ruiz, interviewed by Michael Rangel, personal interview, Edinburg, August 10, 2015.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ “The Truth About Repressed Memories,” *The Ranch*, January 24, 2013, last accessed May 27, 2016, <https://www.recoveryranch.com/articles/trauma-and-ptsd-articles/the->

This mentality of the Valley on sexual assault does not differ wildly from other places but the Latino and Catholic context cannot be ignored. There exists a culture that is repulsed but thrives from this hierarchical, familiar exploitation as seen with a Cult of Virginité that turns female virginité into a commodity. In these cases, it displays a pattern where male innocence is ripe for the exploitation from elder relatives. Even with these cases of sexual abuse and the defense of patriarchal traditions in the region, it did not mean queer people lived passive lives. As we saw with Duffy's Tavern, queer people founded spaces where they could live openly.

Finding San Francisco in the Valley

Although families, religion, and tradition often created anxiety and alienation, the Valley, however imperfect is often the place where queer people return for comfort, support and community. Some choose to return to care for aging relatives, while others decide to start businesses or build queer enclaves within their rural homes to help provide a safe haven for other queer people.²²⁹

[truth-about-repressed-memories/](#). J. Douglas Bremner, "The Invisible Epidemic: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Memory, and the Brain," Pandora's Project, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.pandys.org/articles/invisibleepidemic.html>; James Hopper and David Lisak, "Why Rape and Trauma Survivors Have Fragmented and Incomplete Memories," *Time*, December 9, 2014, last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://time.com/3625414/rape-trauma-brain-memory/>.

²²⁹ Colin R. Johnson and Brian J. Gilley, eds., *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 25; For a comparison on the South Asian experience see: Alok Vaid-Menon, "Coming Home: Queer South Asians and the Politics of Family," *Returnthegayze*, July 28, 2014, last accessed May 27, 2016, <https://returnthegayze.com/2014/07/28/coming-home-queer-south-asians-and-the-politics/>; Mary L. Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*, (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 15-18.

We saw Michael's story of sexual awakening/assault earlier in the chapter, but his story also provides an important context for the reasons queer people leave the Valley. He joined the Army immediately after high school as a means to escape family conflict, especially his abusive father. He calls his father a *machista* who used his masculinity to justify his alcoholism as an excuse for abusing Michael's mother. Michael thus enlisted in 1985 to escape his family and to gain economic freedom. He openly explored his sexuality while serving and experienced the first year of President Clinton's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, the landmark act that allowed queer service members to remain in the military so long as they did not disclose their sexual orientations to anyone.²³⁰ Despite the restrictions on queer service members, Michael described how easy it was to meet men while serving, especially when he was stationed overseas. He described the barracks as open season for men seeking sex with men, and he shared a story from the first Iraq invasion of such open sexuality, "a guy and I just had sex right there in the middle of the cots, and no one said anything about it."²³¹ This story is particularly interesting as Michael mentioned that there were over twenty men in there who could have reported them that night, but did not. He claims that most of them did not care enough to report or

²³⁰ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT)", , last accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/event/Dont-Ask-Dont-Tell>. President Barack Obama signed a repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" on December 22, 2010, thus allowing all servicemembers to serve openly regardless of sexual orientation. For a description on the repeal of the policy see: U.S. Department of Defense, "Repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' (DADT): Quick Reference Guide," January 28, 2011, last accessed May 27, 2016, http://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2010/0610_dadt/Quick_Reference_Guide_Repeal_of_DADT_APPROVED.pdf.

²³¹ Michael interview

they too were engaged in sexual exploits with men and they did not wish to risk the enforcement of stricter regulations.²³²

He served for eight years before retiring and returning to the Valley, partially because he wanted to take care of his mother. And after he came out, his mother tries to set him up with every man that they meet. Also, he returned to resume his education at the local university, the University of Texas – Pan American (UTPA). And while enrolled at UTPA, he took a more active role in creating a more inclusive space for LGBT students as he served as a president for the university's gay student organization. He did this because he felt compelled to be more part of the community after his experiences in the military where the men he served with did not care about his sexuality and how his experiences abroad shaped his views on being gay in the Valley in terms of access to support for young, queer people.²³³

For Bobby, a Mercedes native coming of age in the late 1970s and 1980s, his family situation was not as unhealthy as Michael's family, but he too felt the need to escape. He too enlisted in the military after high school to get away from his family and the Valley, but in the name of economic opportunity, not sexual freedom. He served from 1984 to 1987 before being medically discharged due to a back injury. His story about sexuality in the military supports much of what Michael said about the ease for men to meet, although, Bobby was not as active of a participant as Michael partly because he is bisexual and would marry a woman around this time. After being discharged, he decided to stay away from the Valley and moved to San Antonio to pursue the economic opportunities available to him all while also putting distance between him and his family.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

Overtly, San Antonio remains a gay-friendly city compared to certain parts of the Valley, which did allow him to become a performer (singer) in the San Antonio club scene. He assisted in creating a platform for male performers that were not drag queens or dancers, but instead gave queer singers a stage on which to sing. Despite the freedom he found in San Antonio, he called his native Mercedes the “San Francisco of the Valley” because of the town’s more liberal ideas of sexuality.²³⁴ As he put it, nobody there cared too much about your sexuality and it was relatively easy to explore one’s same-sex attractions compared to other parts of the Valley.²³⁵ He claimed that McAllen and other parts of the Valley were more steeped in conservative traditions that left them unwilling to be as openly accepting of queer people compared to Mercedes even with spaces like Duffy’s Tavern and PBD’s in McAllen.

Justin’s story focuses on a young man that left the Valley for school, but returned to start his career. Justin is the middle child in his family and he grew up in a small farm in Weslaco during the late 1980s and 1990s. And in the Valley, Weslaco was one of the more rural and underdeveloped towns. He describes growing up on a farm as difficult, but fun. His family was also reasonably active in their church (Catholic) and he served as an alter boy for a time. However, as he got older, he naturally drifted away from the church since he no longer felt the need to continue the commitment as his parents became less strict about attendance. While it is often assumed that kids leave the Valley in pursuit of sexual freedom, Justin, had already engaged in sex with men before attending Texas Tech University in Lubbock starting in 2007. Before leaving the Valley, he mentions how his first sexual encounter occurred when he was a teenager working at the local grocery

²³⁴ Bobby interview

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

store, as an H-E-B cart attendant. He mentioned how a man in his thirties solicited him and another cart attendant in the parking lot. Justin joined the man in his car, while the other attendant refused to be part of it. Justin recalled there were no consequences in the encounter as the man drove away as soon as they were done. While in college, he mentioned how he had no trouble meeting men, especially in the dorms, university library, and student union.²³⁶ After completing his degree, he decided to move back to the Valley. He started to work in the Valley's growing tourist industry. He works out of South Padre Island now, which is a major tourist destination in the region. During Spring Break, the Island is a party center for college students across the country and Mexico.²³⁷ Here he continues to pursue men, which is made easier because of his work in the tourist industry, but also the availability of men travelling to the area who would be willing to engage in queer sex.²³⁸

Robert's story follows a similar chain of events as he too left the Valley for college. However, Robert's college experience took him much further away to the Pratt Institute in New York City, which follows the more traditional narrative of a small town, gay man leaving home for the big city. However, like the other men featured here, Robert left for economic opportunities and received a college education not sexual repression. His goal, like the others, was not to find a queer scene, but to expand his economic potential. Nonetheless, Robert did become an active participant in the gay scene in New York as he talked extensively about how there was something for everyone.

²³⁶ Justin interview.

²³⁷ The South Padre Island website features a section dedicated to spring break travel plans. "Plan Your Trip," South Padre Island, last accessed May 30, 2016, <http://www.sopadre.com/plan-your-trip/looking-for/spring-break/>.

²³⁸ Justin interview.

In Robert's case as mentioned at the end of Chapter 4, "my drug addiction got so bad that I moved back in with my parents in the Valley," and this same addiction would later get him arrested, which would harm his ability to pursue his advertising career and continue graduate school.²³⁹

Just as economic reasons not queer desire encouraged these men to leave the Valley, they also made the decision to return once they had the opportunity to build a life for themselves back in their childhood home. Michael, for example returned to care for his elderly mother and hence family traditions. Justin returned to work in South Padre Island's tourist industry, and Bobby returned with his family for the Valley's slower pace compared to the hustle and bustle of San Antonio. Meanwhile, Robert needed to return home in order to overcome his drug addiction so that he could recover his life and become better able to take care of himself. Also, these stories reflect how the Valley and families who shared a Catholic background were openly accepting of their queer sons in times of need. Michael and Bobby's coming out stories occur in the late 1980s/early 1990s, while Robert and Justin focus on the late 1990s/early 2000s and thus it seems family dynamics were in constant flux—offering both alienation one moment and a sense of comfort the next.

Women's Sexuality, Community and Activism

Like the stories of queer men, queer women in the Valley also negotiated and overcame familial traditions. Rather than leaving the Valley, they have created new traditions of political activism. While Chapter 3 demonstrated the damaging

²³⁹ Robert interview.

consequences of the Cult of Virginity and the doubled-edged effects of sex-education, young queer women in the 1990s and 2000s complicated gender normativity in the Catholic faith and Mexican culture.

In this chapter, the stories of three queer women who also engaged in community organizing reveal hidden family struggles as well as the importance of queer communities. The first two women, Valerie and Madeline, have volunteered with the Valley's chapter of the Stonewall Democrats, a political group affiliated with the Democratic Party led primarily by queer people that seeks to further queer rights and queer-friendly policies across the country. Meanwhile, [REDACTED] is a member of an LGBT student organization at UT – Pan American.²⁴⁰ These women used their experiences and continue to work to change the Valley in a way that has allowed for more acceptance and equality for other queer residents.²⁴¹ Their stories highlight examples of how Valley women are making significant homegrown strides in changing the dominant, heteronormative culture of the Valley.

Valerie's story stands out from this trio, in part because her story does not focus exclusively on the Valley. She identifies as being bisexual. She grew up in a Baptist family with her father working as a pastor at their church, which required that they move frequently so that he could preach his sermons across the southern U.S. However, her family is native to the Valley and they ultimately chose to relocate towards the end of her father's career. She played basketball when she was a teen in a Christian-based, youth league that would enforce the same kinds of Christian values that her parents viewed as

²⁴⁰ The University of Texas – Pan American in Edinburg, Texas has since been renamed to the University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley since August 2015 after merging with the University of Texas – Brownsville.

²⁴¹ Madeline and Valerie interview.

appropriate. The congregation that she was part of was Latino, a majority of whom were of Mexican descent, allowing her to share and embrace cultural ties that would inform her activism. Part of this development came from her church's anti-gay doctrine, but also because the majority of the congregation were Latino and many were migrant workers, she also developed stronger ties to fighting for rights that certainly benefit a significant portion of the Latino community. So in embracing her cultural ties with the congregation, even when they were engaging in anti-gay speech, it assisted significantly in her development. Yet the preaching also carried layers of hypocrisy.

For Valerie the quest for respectability became a façade and thus she came to embrace a much more meaningful form of community activism. The preaching that went on at their church designed to enforce gender norms of heterosexuality, marriage, and having big families seemed shallow. Valeria labeled the congregation as a “brothel” that these adults, including her parents used for “hookups and group sex.”²⁴² Just as John Howard found hooks ups between queer men in the church, the church was also an erotic site for non-normative heterosexual interactions. Finding this hypocritical, her angst encouraged her to embrace a life of political activism. Most of this is seen through her work with the Valley's chapter of the Stonewall Democrats, a wing of the Democratic Party that focuses heavily on the rights of the LGBT community.

Similarly, Madeline's experience also shows how heavy, religious traditions and upbringing can be a catalyst for rebellion. She grew up in a single-family household with her mother and siblings who were devout Catholics and children to be just as involved in

²⁴² *Ibid.* This story alone is worth greater discussion, but goes beyond the scope of this project, but can be beneficial for a dissertation or an article. The questions I would ask would focus on what other churches experience a hookup culture and just how common it is in congregations, regardless of faith that the group is affiliated with.

church life. For Madeline, she did not enjoy this religious upbringing because it made her live “a double life” and need to hide things like her sexuality in order to please the expectations of her mother. Madeline describes how even her athleticism placed her at odds with her mother. Sports required girls to step out of normative scripts and be aggressive, but this did not bother her mother. Instead, Madeline’s mother was horrified at the thought that her daughter might show some skin and be on display. “Any sort of sport that was covered up and I was able to cover up regarding legs, arms, or anything else was perfectly fine...In high school volleyball, it was short shorts and a tank, and she said no, you’re done.”²⁴³ Madeline’s mother was an example of unyielding family and religious traditions when it came to the body and sexuality. While some parents ignore their children’s sexual behavior in the name of respectability others demand complete control. She did not want her daughter to dress in *risqué* uniforms that were now accepted by most parents and communities. Madeline had no choice but to obey, until she turned eighteen at which point she began to make life choices that often placed at her odds with her mother, especially when it came to her sexual orientation.²⁴⁴

Once she enrolled in college though, Madeline like Valerie and the men featured earlier, began to develop the need to fight. She not only embraced her bisexuality, but she also began to work with UTPA’s LGBT student group before signing up with Valerie to volunteer with the Stonewall Democrats. She developed a platform for herself to resist the rigid standards imposed upon her by her family and community that sought to repress female and queer sexualities in the Valley.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

██████ story turns on another story of familial hypocrisy and abuse that centers the Mexican border town of Rio Bravo, which is directly across from Donna, Texas.

██████ is the oldest of two and comes from an upper middle-class family. Her parents work as medical doctors in Rio Bravo and have maintained a strict Catholic household. Like Robert's, ██████ family seemed filled with contradictions. In her case, because of their backgrounds in the medical field she thought such education would surely conflict with some of these religious values particularly when it came to sexuality. However, ██████ experienced a great deal of abuse from her father, which pushed her into moving to the Valley to live with relatives. After coming out as queer, "My dad hit me the first time I said it. So I got a black eye out of it and I've never tried again."²⁴⁶ Aside from his physical abuse, the father engaged in psychological abuse and his *machismo* was also directed toward her mother.

Tragically, the Valley's tradition of unyielding patriarchy often trumps safety and security for anyone who deviates from the norm. Even families with economic security can fall victim to the internal and external devastation. Even in households where women earn professional incomes, men often have full control of the family at the expense of women's agency and safety. Madeline recalls how her father's *machismo* has long been a source of conflict in their family. Like Madeline's example of how her mother's religious values put the two at odds, ██████ case may be even more troubling. Her father's *machismo* led to moments where he physically struck ██████ and even threatened to keep her from seeing her younger brother because of her sexuality. Yet it is not simply internal family dynamics that turn on *machismo*. Her mother and brother also

²⁴⁶ ██████ interview.

worry over [REDACTED] queerness because of her brother: “She lost one of her brothers to the Cartels so he’s been kidnapped and we don’t know anything. And it’s been more than a year. He was gay, but he never came out.”²⁴⁷

Ironically, the desire to control [REDACTED] only encouraged her to take on the patriarchal structure of her family and community. She too joined UTPA’s LGBT organization the moment that she started at the university because it allowed her the platform to stand against people like her father who sought to restrict her sexuality. It also provides a safe space where other queer people can safely interact with one another and learn to accept themselves.

Conclusion:

Despite their adversities, these queer people are proud of who they are and seek to construct a new Valley culture. This is especially true as we see queer women often standing at center stage in the formation of a new queer culture in the Valley with queer men gradually following suit. They have become more involved in activism as they see it as their means for challenging the status quo, while they also organize around strengthening the ties of the Valley’s queer residents. For some women, the means of strengthening these ties lie in the formation of queer friendly spaces. Sarah Saenz, the owner of a former gay bar, built Club 33 to recreate the queer spaces that she experienced while visiting San Antonio and Austin.²⁴⁸ She noticed just how unjust it was that the gay bars in the Valley were typically more secluded and how queer people felt unwelcome in

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Olvera, “Gay nightlife in Valley busts out of the closet.”

straight bars, especially in parts of town where queer people were often attacked.²⁴⁹ In making Club 33, Saenz joined a tradition of other Valley club owners in building a space where the Valley's queer residents could feel accepted and safe as they were in a space that was dedicated to catering to their needs. In making these gay bars more visible to the public, Saenz pointed to how queer people in the Valley "feel validated," which can only help in breeding a culture of acceptance.²⁵⁰ Although some may argue that gay bars offer nothing to queer culture other than a place for sexual interactions, gay bars are most importantly a place where a queer person can see that they are not alone. They can offer the first and most important steps in building a community and thus help create new kinds of familial traditions.²⁵¹

The activism and drive for the expansion of LGBT rights and spaces in the Valley continues to grow. In fall 2015, student activists like Sarah Chavez from UTRGV founded Pride Home, a homeless shelter for LGBT youth in the area.²⁵² Meanwhile, in August 2015, student activists formed Aquí Estamos, led by Dani Marrero, to organize the first LGBT conference in the Valley, focusing on the struggles for queer people of

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ As stated in Chapter 3, gay bars provided the one place where queer people were allowed to be themselves and meet others just like them. Gay bars were where the queer community formed and rallied around their rights, especially after the Stonewall Riots. For examples of gays bars and their significance on gay, community formation see Echols' *Hot Stuff*, John Howard's *Men Like That*, Brock Thompson's *The Un-Natural State*, George Chauncey's *Gay New York*, Josh Sides' *Erotic City*, Phil Tiemeyer's *Plane Queer*, Allen Berube's *Coming Out Under Fire*, John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, Susana Pena's *Oye Loca*, and Michael Hames-Garcia's *Gay Latino Studies*.

²⁵² Analise Ortiz, "Sanctuary home for LGBT youth to open in Edinburg," *Valley Central*, September 26th, 2015, last accessed June 2, 2016, <http://valleycentral.com/news/local/sanctuary-home-for-lgbt-youth-to-open-in-edinburg>.

color.²⁵³ And as this queer activism grows, so does the collection of queer spaces and possibilities. On 23rd Street and Nolana in McAllen, three official gay bars dot the road: Rehab, Element, and Recovery Room, while the other bars on the strip like Cigar Bar and Deloreans' are friendlier to queer customers than they were in the past. Meanwhile, PBD's remains open for business as it stands only five minutes west of McAllen's gay strip, all of which is crucial to the making of the queer Valley and social change.

²⁵³ "About," Aquí Estamos, last accessed June 2, 2016, <http://www.aquiestamosrgv.org/about/>.

Conclusion:

Continuing Forward

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Valley's queer history seems both familiar and unique to other queer histories. Its rural location and religious traditions often put it at conflict with queer bodies. However, the movement of queer people around and out of the region centered mostly around sought after economic opportunities compared to other queer narratives that overemphasize the significance of living in the queer neighborhoods of urban centers. Even in 2016, economic opportunity continues to affect the movement of queer people more in the Valley than the desire to live in the queer spaces of cities like San Francisco or New York City. Indeed, these queer spaces are steadily growing as older queer people are returning to the Valley to build these businesses and develop queer-friendly organizations alongside the young activists featured in Chapter 6.

The growth of queer residents and the quest for equality in the Valley continues to follow a trajectory that moves in multiple ways that defy simple categorization because the Valley has long operated as a contested space where Mexican and American cultures intersect, affecting the intimate lives of its residents, especially its queer residents. Leisure, school, and AIDS have reshaped the cultural traditions of the Valley with its queer residents standing at the foreground of this transformation, surrounding the Valley's traditions and the queer experience on the borderlands. The geographical and cultural background of the Valley helps to shape our understanding of the Valley's queer landscape and it is inseparable from the gendered understandings of religion, sports, education, and the ambiguity surrounding what it has meant to be an American youth.

The anxieties surrounding youth culture allowed for moments where queer interactions and spaces could develop without interference as with Duffy's Tavern operating as a haven for queer men during the 1970s. While queer students were allowed the opportunity to meet other queer people through sports and work, these spaces were crucial to the development of the privilege of privacy that they could not acquire without. As more gay bars opened and increased opportunities for the police to turn a profit by harassing bar patrons, the safety net for queer persons easily crumbled.

Like elsewhere in the country, the AIDS epidemic also marked a turning point. Even as tragedy struck the community, taking away many loved ones and some of the strongest voices in the gay rights movement, it revitalized queer activism. For a brief time in the Valley, like in other rural spaces, it united religious institutions, public schools, and the community to combat the spread of the disease. And this new tradition of activism continues to fuel the Valley as organizations like the Valley AIDS Council and the gay-straight alliances at the local universities developed to combat the harassment of queer persons in the region.

Ultimately, this is a region that undergoes constant renegotiation as Mexican-American identities forge new paths. The patriarchal traditions of the Valley are steadily fading as more non-heteronormative expressions become more visible. Pockets of resistance in the region continue to grow in their visibility in light of last year's Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriage that legalized marriage equality.²⁵⁴ And as trans visibility grows, the current discussions surrounding transgender access to the restrooms

²⁵⁴ Elliott C. McLaughlin, "Most states to abide by same-sex marriage ruling, but...", *CNN*, June 30, 2015, last accessed June 6, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/29/us/same-sex-marriage-state-by-state/>

plagues not only national debate but are present in the state and local levels.²⁵⁵ Yet backlash often makes it impossible for queer people to have a marriage ceremony or even find a caterer all in the name of religious liberty. Indeed, trans people now face increased harassment in public spaces.²⁵⁶ Meanwhile, other hot topics like abortion remain a charged issue that does not appear to be going away anytime soon.²⁵⁷

In many ways, this project is designed to challenge heteronormative structures within and beyond academia, and it is also a continuation of my own activist work and a reflection of the dedication of other community leaders I have come to know. My goal with this thesis is more than just the inclusion of the Valley into the academic discourse on borderlands, gender, sexuality, and youth culture. It even goes beyond dispelling some of the stereotypes surrounding the Latino community and queer people. What I truly have aspired to do with this thesis is spotlight the story of a community that is often ignored and forgotten. And I hope that by telling the stories of the people who felt that their

²⁵⁵ See this article for a national representation of the trans bathroom debates: CBS News staff, “States push back on transgender bathroom use,” *CBS News*, May 13, 2016, last accessed June 6, 2016, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/states-push-back-on-transgender-bathroom-use/>. For Texas’ response see: Tim Madigan, “What happened when a room full of Texas parents took on transgender bathrooms,” *The Washington Post*, May 11, 2016, last accessed June 5, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/05/11/transgender-students-rights-the-debate-becomes-loud-and-heated-in-texas/?utm_term=.404e5771efca; Claire Ricke, “Transgender bathroom debate gears up in Austin,” *KXAN*, May 31, 2016, last accessed June 5, 2016, <http://kxan.com/2016/05/31/parents-of-transgender-students-advocate-for-lgbtq-community-at-capitol/>.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ For abortion in the Valley see: Danielle Paquette, “South Texas’s only abortion clinic is battleground for major Supreme Court case,” *The Washington Post*, March 1, 2016, last accessed June 5, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/south-texas-only-abortion-clinic-is-battleground-for-major-supreme-court-case/2016/03/01/b93adc00-da5e-11e5-81ae-7491b9b9e7df_story.html.

experiences were not worth sharing, you can now see just how worthy they are to the making of such a unique and dynamic community.

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