Fraternal Masculinities:
Dancing, Performing, and Queering Brotherhoods

by

Sergio G. Barrera

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(American Culture)
in the University of Michigan
2022

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Ashley E. Lucas, Chair
Associate Professor María Cotera
Associate Professor Clare Croft
Associate Professor Alexandro J. Gradilla
Associate Professor Colin Gunckel

Sergio Gael Barrera

sergiogb@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-0169-5700

© Sergio Gael Barrera 2022

Dedication

Este proyecto se lo dedico a mis padres, Sergio Barrera y Mayra L. López, que me han apoyado incondicionalmente en todas las etapas transformativas de mi vida. A mi padre que me enseñó cosas que por mucho tiempo de mi vida no las pude ver y a mi madre que constantemente me recuerda que el amor es lo más grande que podemos ofrecerle al mundo.

To my fraternity brothers: Carlos Laureano, Christian Ureña, Diego Don, Felix Zavala, Ian Pérez, Jor-El Santos, and José Barajas for trusting me with their stories, for allowing me to be part of their journey, and for helping me create the home away from home when I most needed it.

And to all the men that showed me the possibilities of being, or not being, a man.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Ashley E. Lucas for her continued support throughout my academic, intellectual, professional, and personal journey in these last six years. Not only were you able to be a resource when I first stepped foot to the University of Michigan, but you were able to teach me about finding joy and love for performing again. Ashley, you will forever be part of my *familia*. *Muchísimas gracias*!

To my committee members María Cotera, Clare Croft, Alexandro J. Gradilla, and Colin Gunckel for the formal and informal chats and mentorship both in person and virtually about my project. Thank you for believing that the narratives shared in this project are worthy of being written about and for believing that the men in this project are worthy of nurture, care, and love.

A la Dra. Stephanie Álvarez for graciously introducing me to Mexican American Studies as an undergraduate student at the University of Texas Pan American. Stephanie, you taught me more than I thought I would about my community, my family, my history, and myself. May your mentorship, love, and care continue to change other student's worlds as you have done mine.

The faculty and staff in the Department of American Culture who welcomed me and my ideas with open arms and that ensured that they could provide the best advice and most resources possible while navigating a politically divisive time and a world crisis.

Lastly, to the wonderful men I met at the Federal Correctional Institution, Milan—Ali, Big Mike, Todd, Moon, Jim, Dre, Jamal, and many more— for being vulnerable, creative, joyful, and loving in every one of the workshops. I will always remember your smiles and laughter as we worked through our creativity and bonds

Preface

Like many Latino men I encountered in college, I never intended to be in a fraternity. My knowledge of fraternities was limited to tropes I had seen in movies: hazing, binge drinking, homophobia, sexism, and violence. I didn't even know my undergraduate campus, the University of Texas Pan American, which later became the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, had any fraternities. I was not aware that Latino fraternities existed.

As an undergraduate, I stuck to my "gay" things: dancing, cheerleading, and performance. A closeted queer Chicano from the Texas-Mexico borderlands, I found a sense of belonging through my talents and always thrived in effeminate spaces and activities. However, my success in these spaces drastically changed when I could not continue college cheerleading due to a series of injuries and surgeries. After that, my value as cheerleading captain decreased, and the "family" I thought I had created during my four years of undergraduate studies dissipated. By this point, the members of a historically and predominantly Latino fraternity on campus, Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., had reached out to me because of my participation in activism in the Rio Grande Valley. We were always at the same Cesar Chávez rallies, marching for undocumented students and farm workers. In their eyes, I was already doing the work they believed in as a Latino fraternity in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. Because of this, they constantly invited me to their barbecues, recruitment events, and informational sessions. I never attended any of their activities until the last semester of my senior year, when I was injured.

Hungry to fill a void left by the community I missed in cheerleading, I decided to go to their recruitment events in 2014. Every member was surprised because I had promised to attend

so many times in the past but never showed up. I went to every event during recruitment week and began the education process to be inducted into the fraternity. Every night throughout the semester, I had tremendous anxiety. I thought that the brothers would call me in the middle of the night to be their designated driver. I thought they would force me to do things that I would not be proud of.

I thought that they were going to hit me with the paddles they always showcased. The fraternity/sorority paddle has no clear history of its incorporation to Greek lettered organization. These paddles are often displaced as decorations in new member presentations, recruitment events, and sometimes in fraternity/sorority member’s homes. The paddle, I found out later, is a gift that is typically presented to the new members during the time of their initiation. Oftentimes, sororities and fraternities will have paddle exchanges and can represent friendship, brotherhood/sisterhood, and admiration. The wooden paddles have no uniform design but can be in the colors of the organization and adorned with the Greek letters of the organization, the person’s name, or other fraternity related icons. My vivid and horrid imagined scenarios of being beaten or abused never manifested, yet even though I was not physically punished, there were many times in the education process when I felt humiliated and dehumanized for activities that they called rituals and traditions.

However, every day we met with the brothers, it got weirder—queerer. One day we learned about each other's heritage, and another day we were singing about our *patrias* (motherlands). Towards the end of the educational process, almost everything I thought I knew about fraternities had changed. The brothers had cried multiple times while sharing their failures and saying that they felt they were letting their loved ones down. Some shared that being undocumented in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands was difficult because they could not find a job

after graduation. All these issues—things that men never dare speak about in public settings—liberated us, and brought us together as a homosocial family, a brotherhood.

I stayed at the same Texas university to pursue my master's degree and was actively involved recruiting members, educating them, and helping as much as I could. Throughout those two years, I received multiple institutional, regional, and national awards for my contributions to the fraternity's mission to celebrate and promote Latino pride. Those years made me feel like an important part of the brotherhood, and I finally felt comfortable in a group of men. Their care and love were things that I had not witnessed before, not even with the men in my family.

In 2016, I left for Michigan to pursue a doctoral degree, but every chance I could I returned home to the Rio Grande Valley because I had never lived away from home, and I had no one in Ann Arbor. The positive thing about no one knowing me was that I was able to be openly queer. The downside was that being closeted in Texas and out in Michigan was exhausting. I often filtered my behaviors, dress, and speech to "pass" back home. This coming in and out of the closet led me to think about masculinities among Latino/Chicano men, and my fraternity brothers in the Valley were the best informants for the final papers I wrote in the first semesters of my doctoral coursework. Those papers were the starting ground of my thinking on these topics but are not incorporated in this dissertation.

To live a transparent life, I came out to some of my Texas fraternity brothers in a private setting at the end of the fall semester in 2016. I texted the ones to whom I was closest, telling them that it was urgent that we speak. Nine brothers showed up at my home in the Valley. I told them that I did not understand my sexuality yet but that I did know I was not heterosexual. They all had questions for me, particularly, "How come you never told us?" My response was that many of them acted *joto* (gay) as mockery, and their appropriation of queer behavior made me

uncomfortable. They apologized and promised to stop *joteando*—acting queerly in a mocking way. One of the most conservative brothers even told me, "If you need me to be there when you tell your family, let me know." His comment left me speechless. The coming out stories I had seen in movies had the boyfriend in the background while the main character confronted his parents, but I had never seen a straight fraternity brother supporting a queer brother through his coming out journey. Coming out to my fraternity brothers marked an important moment in my life. After receiving their acceptance, I felt sure that my family would accept me, too.

After that break, I returned to Michigan, and at the beginning of the following semester, I was asked to dance with a group of Latinx students on campus. In the group, I met undergraduate Latino men who were elated to perform but were struggling with choreography since they lacked performance experience. Being the most experienced dancer, I stayed after every practice to continue teaching them. Through these practices, I became close to two freshmen who were best friends: Christian Ureña and Ian Perez.

After one practice, a Latina sorority was having a new member presentation, and I attended wearing my fraternity letters. I did not have a chapter of fraternity brothers on the Michigan campus, but the Latinx sororities and fraternities had welcomed me when they found out I was part of a Latino fraternity. When they greeted my fraternity, as is tradition to welcome every organization present, I chanted alone. Christian, who was standing in front of me, sharply turned and asked, "You're in a fraternity?" That night he asked so many questions, and even though I answered them, I told him I had arrived at the University of Michigan to finish my PhD and not to start a fraternity expansion project. But the hope that I could have an extension of the brotherhood that I had developed with the men back home convinced me to make some calls, send some emails, and prepare an informational session. In a couple of days, I had gathered a

group of young men of color who were interested in Latino fraternities but not the ones that already existed on campus. They sat in my apartment learning about the Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

During the informational session I told them that if we were to bring the fraternity to the University of Michigan, we had to think about what could distinguish us from the other two Latino fraternities on campus. At the time, La Casa, which is now the largest Latinx student organization in the history of the university, was being formed by a group of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff, and at the time of this writing in 2022 La Casa serves as an umbrella organization for all Latinx students on campus. It is not a fraternity or sorority and supports both graduate and undergraduate students with mentorship from faculty and staff. In early 2017, when we were thinking of forming our fraternity chapter on campus, La Casa was still trying to establish itself. Thus, Latinx fraternities and sororities on campus were still the main avenues to find community among other Latinx students.

That semester, winter of 2017, was the first semester that Donald Trump served as President of the United States of America, and men of color across the nation were enduring rising levels of hate speech and violence against them. Thus, our goal was to provide a third space for Latino men at the University of Michigan who did not want to associate with *machismo*, binge drinking, party culture, and hazing that the other two Latino fraternities represented. In essence, our chapter's goal would be to resist and reject heteropatriarchal structures that permeate fraternity men's behaviors in private and public. We believed that as men of color, we had to counteract pervasive stereotypes of Latinos as *bad hombres*, narcos, and rapists, as Trump had called us (Ross 2016).

That summer I returned to Texas and communicated constantly with Christian and other interested undergraduates who were considering joining the fraternity. I answered questions about the benefits of joining a fraternity and about the possibilities of establishing a new organization on campus. In my undergraduate experience, I had been able to find a community of Chicano men on the border who understood my struggles as a first-generation college student, and I wanted that kind of community for these undergraduates at Michigan who were looking to me for guidance. Since the organization would be new to campus, the founding members would be involved with setting the foundation for future generations of brothers to come even after their graduations. The desire to leave an imprint within the Latinx community on campus was one of the main attractions for the young men. That summer Christian and I had recruited nine additional men of color.

When we returned to campus in the fall semester of 2017, things were looking great for the Latinx community. We had acquired the university administration's support for La Casa, and there was a celebratory energy leading up to the beginning of the semester. The weekend before the semester began I, as a graduate student, was invited to have lunch with some of the first year Latinx students through ALMA (Assisting Latin@s to Maximize Achievement). ALMA is a program by the Multi-Ethnic Student Affairs (MESA) office on campus that paired older undergraduate Latinx students with first year students. One afternoon during the program, as is tradition with every ALMA cohort, the students painted a boulder on the edge of campus (known simply as the rock) with encouraging messages in both Spanish and English.

That night, our GroupMe app, which had many of the Latinx members of La Casa, was flooded with messages about the campus rock. When a group of students was passing by the rock, they realized that it had been vandalized with anti-Latinx phrases. The rock is a space for celebration and is often painted by student organizations for various festive occasions. Students paint the rock repeatedly but usually will not paint over recent work. ALMA's message, however, had been vandalized within a matter of hours, and although there was an investigation, there was no clear answer as to who might had done it. Many speculated that it was people outside of campus, but as the Latinx student body, we did not buy that argument.

Image 1: The University of Michigan's rock vandalized with anti-Latinx and pro-Trump messages over Latinx student's initial painting. Image from *The Michigan Daily*, September 2, 2017.

The following morning students, faculty, and staff joined as we saw things such as "MAGA" and "Fuck Latinos" on the rock. The new students from ALMA had not begun classes yet, and many Latinx students asserted that the white-nationalist welcome they had received would not intimidate them from occupying space and celebrating their cultural heritages on campus.

That morning Latinx people on campus and other students of color showed up with paint and brushes to reclaim the defamation of the rock and to make it known that intimidation would not work when we came together. As a result, this racist occurrence brought many people of

Image 2: Sergio G. Barrera paints "Familia" on the rock while wearing a Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. t-shirt he designed in 2015 for his chapter in Texas. Photo taken by Jonathan Camargo. September 4, 2017

color on campus to discuss the treatment of Latinx students at the university and in Ann Arbor. These conversations resulted in the demand of a needed space and institutional backing to make sure that we, as Latinx students, would not be forgotten by the university's administration.

For many of us who had been talking about the creation of a new fraternity chapter on campus, this event solidified why we needed to continue creating spaces for Latinx students. For Christian Ureña, a first-generation Ecuadorian American and first-generation college student, establishing a new Latino fraternity represented an opportunity for change on campus. Christian, who was raised in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, says that other fraternities reached out to him, but he felt their appearance was "ghetto," which was something he was trying to distance himself from. In addition, he felt like the two existing fraternities for Latino students were more interested in tailgating and partying and less about brotherhood. However, what really pushed Christian away from joining one of the existing Latino fraternities was that during his first year he had been invited to a party, which he felt obligated to attend to be among other Latinx students. At this party, a student who was trying to recruit Christian to his fraternity promised he would reach out the next morning. That student never did, and Christian felt like he did not want to belong to a brotherhood that would not follow through with their promises, especially if it was as simple as sending a text the following morning.

Despite not knowing much about fraternities, what drew Christian's attention to establishing a new Latino fraternity on campus was that he, alongside the other brothers, would have the opportunity to set a strong foundation for the future brothers in the organization—one that truly valued brotherhood, professionalism, and community service and that would dare to be different. Ian Pérez, a Mexican American first-generation student, says he became interested because his best friend since high school, Christian, was excited about it. Their long-lasting friendship made them both strong recruiters for the organization, bringing seven additional men of color, all of whom had connections to the Noble Network—a group of charter schools in Chicago. Because they all came from the same school system, they shared an unquestioned trust. Thus, eight out of the nine founding members of the organization had many things in common. They were men of color from Chicago in their first or second year of college, who had attended the same schools, left their families to pursue higher education in Michigan, and, like me, were longing for community and belonging.

In a study on why Latinx students join Greek lettered organizations, Lucy Arellano finds that social isolation plays an important role in this decision: "Some causes of this include the following: geographically not having family close and creating a support system from scratch; learning for the first time to develop cross-racial friendships; a lack of physical engagement on campus; the loss of childhood friendship groups; and not finding Latin@ peers on campus initially" (2020). In addition to this, Arellano finds that through fraternities and sororities "students experience a sense of belonging throughout their educational journey and beyond" (2020). However, experiencing a sense of cultural and institutional belonging at the University of Michigan is a difficult task because only 6% of enrolled students are of Latinx or Hispanic descent (University of Michigan. DEI Data & Records 2016). Therefore, the minimal Latinx

visibility on campus and the fact that the Latinx fraternities already on campus were not appealing to us led us to believe that we could establish different types of brotherhood in our own organization.

At our first informational meeting in the first week of school in fall of 2017, I highlighted the things that my fraternity brothers at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and I valued. I told them that as a PhD student with an educational background in Mexican American Studies, I placed a high emphasis on academics, on being professional, and in serving the Chicanx/Latinx community. For many, this was the first time that they had met a queer Latino pursuing a PhD who could pinpoint the impacts of belonging, focusing on one's studies, and serving the community from a culturally consciousness perspective as determining factors in his successful career path. Thus, as many discussed with me during their educational process for the fraternity, I represented a version of Latinx masculinity that felt achievable through creating a sense of brotherhood during their years at the University of Michigan.

Table of Contents

Dedication ii

Acknowledgements iii

Preface iv

List of Images xv

Abstract xvi

Introduction Stumbling Upon Brotherhood: A Latino Fraternity as a Site for Exploring Intersectional Masculinities 1

Chapter 1 *Un Nuevo Amor Fraternal/*A New Fraternal Love*:* Working Through Brotherhood to Practice and Perform Vulnerabilities 31

Chapter 2 Choreographing Gendered Liberations: Introducing a Fraternity to Dance, Sequin, and Drag 74

Chapter 3 *Los Teatro Traficantes*: Decentralizing Hypermasculinity and Brotherhood in Prison and Fraternities through Theatre 114

Conclusion Transcending Brotherhoods and Masculinities: Past and Future Reflections of our Fraternal Love 151

Bibliography 163

List of Images

1. The University of Michigan's Rock vandalized with Anti-Latinx and Pro-Trump messages over Latinx student's initial painting. Image from The Michigan Daily, September 2, 2017. x

2. Sergio G. Barrera paints "Familia" on the rock while wearing a Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. t-shirt he designed in 2015 for his chapter in Texas. Photo taken by Jonathan Camargo. September 4, 2017. xi

3. Eighteen members of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. at the University of Michigan pose for a yearbook group photo. Source: Hathi Trust Digital Library. University of Michigan. Michiganensian v. 53. 1949. Pg. 227. 6

4. The nine fraternity members stand shortest to tallest in line after they have marched in. Sergio Barrera stands stage-right. 31

5. After the presentation, the nine fraternity members wear their red fraternity rugby's while carrying me. 69

6. The fraternity members pose fiercely at the end of their performance. Photo by Christian Ureña. 74

7. Screenshot of recording during the rehearsal of "Lento" in one of the campus dormitories. Photo by Sergio G. Barrera 88

Abstract

Fraternal Masculinities: Dancing, Performing, and Queering Brotherhoods looks at the shared experiences of eight male students of color between 2017 and 2019 as they established a newly formed chapter of the Fi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc.—a Latino fraternity on the University of Michigan campus. In an effort to establish a "different fraternity" from the ones that were on campus, these students developed a culture of public performances. By singing, dancing, and performing improvisational theatre in public, the group challenged the intellectual, emotional, and physical limitations that they felt intergenerational masculinities had placed on them as men of color. In intimate and private spaces, they practiced a culture of care, nurture, and love that allowed them to be open about their feelings, share their traumas, embody effeminate choreographies, and develop a culture of unity that lasted even beyond graduation. Through this culture of performance and love, they were able to volunteer as facilitators in theatre workshops in various prisons in the state of Michigan. *Fraternal Masculinities* offers an outlook to the potential of new masculinities that can be found from within homosocial spaces.

Fraternal Masculinities builds on Alfredo Mirandé's *Hombres y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture* (1997) by continuing to highlight Latino men who do not identify with the problematic stereotypes of *machista* behaviors and the hypersexualization of men of color's bodies. This project also works through understanding a feminist centered masculinity among Latino men that Aida Hurtado and Mrinal Sinha allude to in *Beyond Machismo: Intersectional Latino Masculinties* (2016). This project highlights the use of *jotería* pedagogies and praxis that

allows us to see brotherhoods as spaces where behaviors, men, and community can be radically queered

Introduction
Stumbling Upon Brotherhood:
A Latino Fraternity as a Site for Exploring Intersectional Masculinities

I never intended to join a fraternity nor to write about the performances I had done with my fraternity brothers in Michigan. I began thinking about masculinities on the Texas-Mexico borderlands during my first year in Michigan because of the drastic shifts in behavior that I felt I had to conform to when I returned home, moving in and out of the closet as I did so. I became more serious about my studies of masculinities once I realized that I could find archival, anthropological, and sociological projects in the Rio Grande Valley that could be funded by the University of Michigan.

As an economically struggling graduate student, I applied to research grants that allowed me to return home so that I could spend summers with my family because I was going through some serious mental health issues, and I missed my loved ones terribly. In these applications, I promised that I had research questions and theories that I wanted to take a closer look at, which was half-true at that time. Thus, I credit my intellectual curiosities of masculinities and fraternities to my working-class background and my inability to pay for the expensive journey to the Rio Grande Valley from Ann Arbor, Michigan. Through these projects, and my *rasquache* mentality of finding many purposes to one plan, I had an excuse to be with my *familia* and my chosen family (my Texas fraternity brothers): both supportive systems that had helped me thrive as a student in the Texas-Mexico borderlands and that were missing in Michigan.

I applied to grants through my home department in American Culture and the Rackham Graduate School, and when I received these, I was able to fly to the Valley during summers and sometimes during the holidays and our spring break. When I returned home, I used the time to think about gender, sexuality, and community formations in the Valley, but by that point I had begun my own community formation at the University of Michigan through the sororities and fraternities on campus, the Latinx undergraduate students I met, and the folks who loved to dance *salsa* and *bachata* in Ann Arbor.

I also knew that I was able to leave the university for research purposes after I passed my qualifying exams and had defended my prospectus. Thus, during my third year in the program in 2018-2019, I was mentally preparing to draft a project and consult literature that was strong enough to make a case for my intellectual *retorno,* return, to the Texas-Mexico borderlands. My project was a mixture of men's roles on the border: protector, soldier, father, and brother. I intended to look at behaviors and attitudes that would inform the masculinities that these roles required. However, the one that I knew the best was the role of the brother. I was not interested in sibling roles, but rather the role of fraternity brothers in chosen families.

During my prospectus defense, Dr. Ashley Lucas said that it seemed like I was doing a project that I was not entirely sure about. To be honest, that project could have been four books, and the scope was too large. One thing that my committee members pointed out was that I was the most passionate about the section on fraternity brothers. Dr. Lucas suggested that I look at the fraternity that I had established at the University of Michigan because we had done some interesting things with dance on campus and were part of the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) as fraternity brothers. Meanwhile, Dr. María Cotera shared that she found it interesting

that I would want to write about home on the border, when I had established a new home and family in Ann Arbor. They were right.

The reality was that the Sergio who left in 2016 was not the Sergio from 2019. I had come out of the closet, had a male partner, had explored my feminine side, and had learned to adapt my authentic behaviors to various communities which accepted me for who I was and who only knew the new out and proud Sergio.

The three days after my defense, in March of 2019, I wrote a new prospectus; one that focused on the various creative projects that we had done on campus. This idea was driven by the fact that Dr. Lucas told me that what was interesting is "how you got a group of Latinos to dance to drag music." To me the answer was obvious at that point, we wanted to be a different fraternity on campus, and queerness was not something that the other two Latino fraternities displayed in public. The real answer, which is explored in this project, was much more nuanced once I began to talk to each of my fraternity brothers.

Brothers, Performers, and Informants

Throughout this project I interviewed seven of the nine founding brothers of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. at the University of Michigan, who later became the founding members of the Beta Upsilon Chapter of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Of these seven, six identified as Latino: four of Mexican descent, one Ecuadorian American and one Puerto Rican. The other brother was of Filipino heritage and the only Asian American brother in the fraternity chapter in Michigan thus far. Of the seven that inform this project, only four (Christian, the Ecuadorian American; José, a Mexican American; Diego, a Mexican American; and Felix, a Mexican American) spoke and understood Spanish and were connected in some way to their cultural heritage and homeland. All seven brothers were first year-undergraduate students at Michigan

when I met them in 2017 and were either eighteen or nineteen years old. Four were first year students and eighteen years old when I met them in the academic year of 2016-2017, who then became second year students when I met the other five in their first year during the academic year of 2017-2018 (when the fraternity was established officially on campus). As mentioned, the fraternity had more brothers than the seven brothers (nine founding brothers and some brothers that had joined in other universities and were in the area or doing graduate school in Michigan). However, not everyone is highlighted here because some declined an invitation to share their reflections, and others were not in the performances or activities that I highlight throughout the chapters of this project.

Understanding Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc.[1]

Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., also knowns as *Fraternidad Fi Iota Alpha* or *Fraternidad Ibero American* (Iberian American Fraternity) was first established in December 26, of 1931 in Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. The organization is currently known as the oldest Latino fraternity in existence. However, the organization's founding was specifically for elite Latin American men who had the financial and political backings to study in U.S. colleges and universities.

Despite being established in 1931, Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., traces its roots to 1898 when a group of Latin American students organized the *Unión Hispano Americana* (UHA) as a cultural and intellectual secret society that centered Pan-Americanism as its ideological, social, political, and cultural framework. The UHA would later join Pi Delta Phi (founded in Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1916) and Phi Lambda Alpha (founded at the

[1] This section brings together histories that I learned as a fraternity member that are unpublished, things in official fraternity websites (some of which have been deleted by the fraternity's national management team in the last years), information from Wikipedia, *pláticas* with older brothers, and my own archival research.

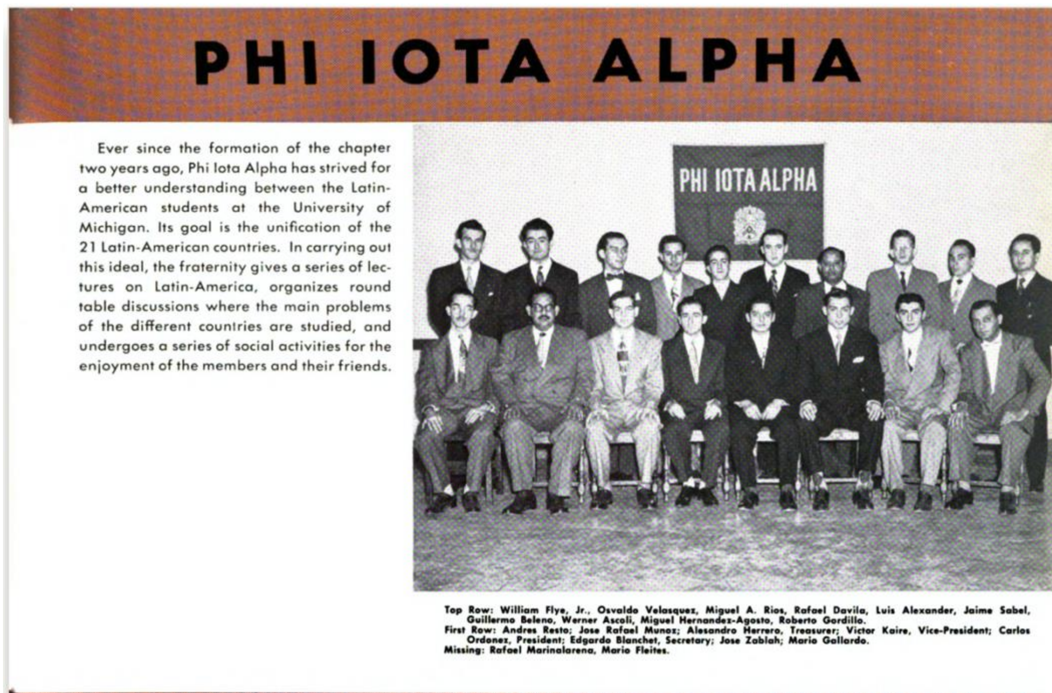
University of California, Berkeley in 1919) under the same ideals. The three organizations would merge to become Phi Lambda Alpha. At Louisiana State University the *Sociedad Hispano-Americana* would become Sigma Iota in 1912, becoming the first recognized Latin American-based fraternity in the United States. They quickly expanded throughout the United States, Central America, and Europe however their lack of structural foundation destabilized their operations.

Both Phi Lambda Alpha and Sigma Iota needed each other for survival purposes and in December of 1931, after a three-day convention, Phi Iota Alpha was born when both groups merged and agreed to take the Phi and Alpha from one organization and the Iota from the other. (Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Website).

The organizations pillars are five Latin American revolutionaries: José de San Martín (an army general from Argentina), Bernardo O'Higgins (a navy general from Chile), Simón Bolívar (president and general of La Gran Colombia), the first indigenous president of México Benito Juárez, and Cuban revolutionary poet and intellectual José Martí. Unlike other fraternities and sororities, Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., reveres men and their legacies instead of words such as community, service, and respect.

The founding mission of the organization was to form a secret society in the United States with goal to return to Latin America and be able to help each other's countries, economies, and republics towards a steady growth. Pan-Americanism advocates for the unification and promotion of the Americas as the ideological motto of the organization and can be seen historically since Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., has identified early fraternity brothers who were presidents of their countries. Notable brothers include Eric A. Delvalle, former President of Panama, and Carlos L. Restrepo, former President of Colombia.

According to the University of Michigan yearbook the *Michiganensian*, the members of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., were on campus from 1947 to 1956. However, there is only one group picture of the members that can be found in the 53rd volume in 1949. Due to the racist nature of American colleges and universities, Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and other fraternal organizations for people of color such as Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.—a historically and predominantly Black fraternity—were under the organizations section next to the Glee Club and the religious based groups, not under the section for Greek Lettered Fraternal Organizations.


PHI IOTA ALPHA

Ever since the formation of the chapter two years ago, Phi Iota Alpha has strived for a better understanding between the Latin-American students at the University of Michigan. Its goal is the unification of the 21 Latin-American countries. In carrying out this ideal, the fraternity gives a series of lectures on Latin-America, organizes round table discussions where the main problems of the different countries are studied, and undergoes a series of social activities for the enjoyment of the members and their friends.

Top Row: William Flye, Jr., Osvaldo Velasquez, Miguel A. Rios, Rafael Davila, Luis Alexander, Jaime Sabel, Guillermo Beleno, Werner Ascoli, Miguel Hernandez-Agosto, Roberto Gordillo.
First Row: Andres Resto; Jose Rafael Munoz; Alesandro Herrero, Treasurer; Victor Kaire, Vice-President; Carlos Ordonez, President; Edgardo Blanchet, Secretary; Jose Zablah; Mario Gallardo.
Missing: Rafael Marinalarena, Mario Fleites.

Image 3: Eighteen members of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., at the University of Michigan pose for a yearbook group photo. Source: Hathi Trust Digital Library. University of Michigan. *Michiganensian* v. 53. 1949. Pg. 227.

During the early 1980s, the membership of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., sharply declined, and although graduate members still existed, undergraduate activity was nowhere to be found. In 1984, a group of young men at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute began to learn about

Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and it re-emerged as the Alpha Chapter of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Since, then the fraternity has expanded to eighty-two campuses across the nation.

The second attempt at establishing an entity of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., at the University of Michigan came in the early 2000s. Upon the founding of Phi Chapter at Michigan State University (MSU) in East Lansing, Michigan, the undergraduate brothers recruited students at the University of Michigan with the hopes that they could find more recruits and establish their own entity. For a couple of years, the brothers of the University of Michigan operated as a satellite entity of MSU and were never able to establish their own stand-alone entity on campus. Brothers from the University of Michigan claim that the recruitment environment was difficult due to the lack of Latino/Hispanic enrolled men on campus and to the fact that two other predominantly Latino fraternal organizations existed on campus: Lambda Theta Phi Fraternity, Inc., and Sigma Lambda Beta International Fraternity, Inc.

This brief history of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., both on a national level and at the University of Michigan allows us to look at systemic factors that influenced our experiences on campus. The first is that the long-lasting history of Latin American men and masculinities through the membership and the pillars haunt the national fraternal organization with limited perceptions of masculinities for Latinx men that are absorbed and taught intergenerationally. In this intergenerational Latin American masculinity, we find traces of hegemonic masculinity among Latin Americans, Latinx respectability politics, and a censorship of gender performance. The second, is that the brothers of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., at University of Michigan have historically experienced a hostile environment on campus. This hostility has been facilitated by a university structure that does not cater to the needs Latinx students. This failure to properly serve the Latinx community, creates toxic and aggressive ways of recruiting new members since there

is a limited number of Latino males who enroll and who are retained throughout their academic journeys on campus. Both factors influence mobility and movement: in a gendered performative sense and in an organizational sense.

***Pláticas, testimonios, y reflecciones* as Methodology**

After my new prospectus was approved in March of 2019, I began thinking about the things that needed to happen before I went back to Texas. In Ann Arbor, we had to sign the lease for the next academic year in the fall, and because in the fall of 2018 I believed my project was in the Texas border, I did not have an apartment past May 2019. Thus, at the end of April I scheduled the first *pláticas* with my Michigan fraternity brothers. In this session, the six brothers who were in PCAP (Carlos, Christian, Diego, Felix, Ian, and José) discussed our experience in the workshops and in Dr. Lucas's PCAP class. The session ended up being close to three hours of recordings, and I was happy to have provided snacks and beverages because it helped to pass time. I planned to think through our experiences in PCAP because we all had shared the previous semester (fall 2018) and knew that we could remember more details than about the performances we had done in 2017 and early 2018. In addition, *pláticas* as a methodological approach helped me to understand the common themes that would come up and that my fraternity brothers were interested in discussion: community formations, performance, and how this deepened our own brotherhood on campus.

The Chicana/Latina methodological framework of *pláticas* "allow us to witness shared memories, experiences, stories, ambiguities, and interpretations that impart us with a knowledge connected to personal, familiar, and cultural history" (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016). Through this method, I was able to have access to non-scripted conversations via text message or Facetime with my fraternity brothers to ask for clarifications and verify details. In addition,

scheduling more formal interviews with them was easy since they were invested in the project as it details an important component of their undergraduate years. Although most of the time I communicated with my brothers on a one-on-one basis, sometimes we sat in groups—in person pre-pandemic and virtually during the pandemic—to collectively remember and discuss how we felt at the time. In these *pláticas*, our shared comfort in being brothers that came from the fraternity allowed us to fact check each other, be humorous, be serious about certain topics, but most importantly allowed us a time to think back of the things that we had done together in various spaces and with various performance goals in mind.

As someone who had not previously engaged in *pláticas* as a methodological framework, I found out that ideas that would start as unstructured thoughts would spark more detailed recounts of what happened in others who were present. Many times, this resulted in a snowball effect of *memorias*, memories, that felt very much like a group of brothers sitting around a campfire remembering the good times. *Pláticas* allowed me to work through the power of community remembrance and see how everyone remembered details that mattered to them differently. As a result, this dissertation captures a more nuanced concept of the brotherhood that includes multiple and collective perspectives. These *pláticas* also comment on the theorization behind the pluralizing of "masculinities" which states that there are always multiple masculinities coexisting and influencing each other at the same time and in the same spaces (R.W. Connell. *Masculinities*. *2005*). This multiplicity of *reflecciones* allows this project to uncover some of the experiences associated with community formations, brotherhood, and belonging.

Despite using *pláticas* as a launching point for this project and sometimes throughout the years of writing, *testimonios* served as my primary form for data collection. *Testimonios*

resemble oral histories but differ from them in that they stem from a Latin American feminist approach to collecting memories, thoughts, stories, and voices that have been historically and systemically ignored. *Testimonios* highlight political work to overturn dominant and incomplete historical narratives and to provide autonomy to othered voices. Stephanie Álvarez states that "the construction of testimonios allows them [students highlighted in the article] to contextualize and develop a rich understanding of how their lifestyle and education are based on epistemologies that speak to a critical reflection of self, family, and community" (2021). In a similar context, the *testimonios* featured in *Fraternal Masculinities* allowed for my brothers to reflect on their journeys of survival in institutions that were founded under a patriarchal and phallocentric guise, which disidentified their understanding of family and self as it relates to their manhood. Therefore, in their own regard the *testimonios* serve as reminders that men of color are moving towards a willingness to resist some of the behavioral norms that society deemed appropriate for them.

I began scheduling the *testimonios* during the summer of 2019. These were conducted through FaceTime, and I would record the interviews on my phone. I would then transcribe them manually and analyze them as I transcribed them. During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom became a popular tool for meeting and socializing. Therefore, when the University of Michigan opened my license up, I made sure to schedule my *testimonios* through Zoom. As we spent time in the pandemic, the technology advanced, and I was able to record the meetings and later was able to have the software transcribe the *testimonios* for me. Although the transcriptions were not entirely accurate, especially since sometimes we spoke in Spanish, it did facilitate a speedier process. When something was not adding up, I would look through the audio or video file and double check, then manually write the quotes.

For some of the chapters, I had up to three separate *testimonios* per participant, especially since the literature that I was consulting and the conversations that I was having with Dr. Lucas made me think through things that I was initially overlooking. I collected the most *testimonios* from Carlos, Christian, and José. However, all my brothers were invested in this project and were always willing to chat. Overall, my archive consisted of twenty-five hours of audio/video recordings which I recorded from April of 2019 through April of 2022. Not only of the *testimonios* but also of the practices and performances that we had saved in our phones and in our group messages on Facebook.

Since a good number of videos about our performances were recorded, I was able to think through the multiple sides of masculinities that we showcased as a brotherhood to larger audiences. As a result, throughout this project I use textual, visual and performance analysis throughout my chapters to better understand the multiple moving parts of the events. I employ textual analysis specifically when I analyze the lyrics of the songs to which we danced, and the language used in speeches that the brothers gave at the new member presentation. These texts enable me to comment on the way that masculinities were at play via speech in our performances. I also use textual analysis as I worked through the transcriptions of the *testimonios* to situate context, feeling, and memory within our larger sense of brotherhood.

I use visual analysis during the chapters to specifically detail bodies in movement and the synergy that was created through formations, choreography, and play. The performances featured in chapters 2 and 3 were recorded on video, leaving a specific visual record of what we did. Observing the performances years later allows me to think of the reception of the audience, read the body language of other brothers, and notice when there are particularly important moments that I might have looked over because of how I or the other brothers might remember. In

addition, for those two chapters, I include screenshots of the video or photographs so that what I am describing in an ethnographic style can be joined by a visual representation. I could not do this in the theatre in prison chapter because prison administrators seldom allow cameras inside locked facilities. Instead, I analyze what my interviewees and I remember about staging, our bodies, and our movements in that performance. I also use performance analysis to bring together movement, music, choreography, speech, and other aspects performance.

Through this project I merge traditional Chicana/Latina methodologies with performance, textual, and visual analysis to discuss the complexities of putting a performance together and building community. This methodological framework also reflects a women of color feminist approach to disrupt hierarchical structures between the writer and the informant. Through these *pláticas* and *testimonios*, we collaborated in knowledge making. In addition, some of the one-on-one *testimonios* included revisiting sections of our recorded performances, which meant that both my brothers (as informants) and I were revisiting the performances and thinking through emotions and reflections together. Employing a Chicana/Latina feminist methodological framework also helps to decentralize the way that patriarchy and Euro-centered standards have been socially appropriated, whether willingly or unknowingly. Therefore, working through women of color techniques of knowledge making, especially those that Chicanas/Latinas have historically developed, serves as a commentary on the patriarchal structures that influence the ways we document history, the ways we talk about disenfranchised communities, and the ways men and masculinities are depicted in intellectual projects, especially as they relate to the homosocial environments and structures of fraternities and prisons.

Understanding and Defining Fraternities, Brotherhood, and Masculinities

Fraternal Masculinities, as an intellectual project, allows us to understand the shared sense of belonging those which men of color and other disenfranchised men feel when they establish a unified community. This sense of belonging allowed for a group of men to challenge traditional *machista* perspectives and behaviors because we felt the support of our brothers, who wanted to achieve the same goals. We found an opportunity to challenge masculinity from within homosocial spaces, which allowed us as members of this inner circle to feel protected in public spaces when our brothers are with or next to us.

Contrary to popular belief, men do feel vulnerable and need protection on college campuses and in many other public spaces. For example, when the rock was vandalized with anti-Latinx rhetoric, many of the Latinx students needed to express their concerns. While many of the young women voiced their frustration in our group, many of the men stayed quiet. My first year at the University of Michigan, in the fall of 2016, Trump was elected president. The floors of my home department in American Culture and the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies were vandalized with racist flyers attacking Black men.

The posters read “Why White women should not date Black men” and included racist comments such as: they are drunks, they will beat you, and you’re more likely to have less intelligent children. Although I knew that the images of the Black men did not represent me and my skin color, I was represented because of my status as a man of color. Even though my light skin could afford me some protection, everyone noticed my accent, my name in Spanish, or my extreme Latino mannerisms that are specific regional to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The comments regarding Black men’s lack of intelligence felt personal to me because of the anti-diversity arguments that many white people have made to try to end affirmative action. All those microaggressions and aggressions against those with whom I had intersectional experiences and

identities reinforced my own imposter syndrome even further than what I had when I arrived on campus.

That first year I witnessed and experienced many humiliating things. I kept quiet about them, especially with my family, because I did not want my family to feel like Michigan was not the right place for me, even when I knew that it was not. Therefore, I understood what many men of color on campus thought about and were experiencing, especially when many of them were eighteen and nineteen years old. I reached out to those with whom I had already spoken throughout the summer to check-in on them, and many were shocked but not surprised: a sentiment that many people from disenfranchised communities have gotten accustomed to feeling in these horrendous situations. But also, many of them did not want to dig deeply into the subject. I understood that. I was trying to recruit them into the fraternity, and they did not know me yet. However, reaching out to check in during a moment of trauma for us all goes a long way when we are looking for a community, for protection, and for care.

From an early age, we teach men, especially men of color, that to be the cool guy who is emotionally unphased and unwilling to establish an intimate relationship with other men is to be a tough man. Richard Majors writes that the "cool pose," for Black men is displayed as a "defensive strategy, a coping mechanism to deal with the emasculation of racism" (*Men and* Masculinities. 2004). Although the "cool pose" was theorized in relationship to Black men specifically, I have witnessed and performed our own Latino "cool pose" in dealing with situations and systems that deeply affect us but that we mask. The best way that I could describe this is as the performance of "*chale*" or the equivalent of a "hell nah" in English. However, brushing off situations we do not agree with or silencing our emotions works against establishing

intimacy among other men in fraternities where the main mission is to establish a form of brotherhood or family.

Men who join fraternities in college run the risk of perpetuating the harmful and toxic behaviors that have thrived in heteropatriarchal and traditional fraternity culture, which includes being emotionally frozen or distant from situations and other men. These cancerous behaviors could be catalogued as binge drinking, use or promotion of illegal drugs, rape, hazing, sexism, homophobia, and effeminophobia. But they can also take the form of negligence, bystanderism, *machismo*, and emotional distancing. All these toxic versions of fraternity culture that have been deemed acceptable through a "boys will be boys" rhetoric and are responsible for many deaths and rape cases across the United States. Esther Wright in a study on the horrendous aspects of Greek life says that "sexual aggression so permeated the language, lifestyle, and morals of fraternity members, [that] fraternity houses have become a virtual breeding ground for men indoctrinated into the ways of sexism and sexual harassment" (1996). Therefore, as Wright asserts, fraternities have also been used as a method for men to get away with incriminating acts that are destructive to individual people, families, communities, and overall society.

Understanding the physical, emotional, and psychological hardship that being a man of color in a predominantly white institution entails raises potential questions as to why men of color would want to join a fraternity—another system that reinforces some of the toxicity that harms them. However, in 2019 we—both my fraternity brothers and I—understood the complexities of what we were attempting to do. I believed that through the fraternity, we could begin to find a supportive network to help us deal with the horrendous things that were happening daily around us on tv, on social media, and in our campus. Therefore, when I proposed the idea of establishing a different type of fraternal organization, everyone was on

board. We did not know what the “difference” meant, but we had a positive attitude because we knew what and who we did not want to be on campus. We knew we did not want to be stereotyped further, we knew that we needed a safe space for us to express ourselves, and we needed to feel like we were part of something that was larger than ourselves because we could not take on the world alone. At that time, the fraternity was that platform that intersected all our different needs as men of color in Michigan during a presidency that divided everyone in ways that I had only read in history textbooks.

Although scholarship on fraternities is limited, at the surface level all fraternities are structurally similar: homosocial spaces, housed in universities, have a selection process, require monetary dues, and have minimum requirements. What differentiates fraternities are the types of brotherhoods and values that are practiced, performed, and created in the university. Some of these organizations such as Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and Black fraternities were created as counter spaces because white fraternities did not accept non-white students into their brotherhoods. Yet, within even these counter spaces of fraternities for men with disenfranchised racial/ethnic identities, there could be extremely sexist, transphobic, and homophobic cultures.

Resistance to these toxic cultures exists within the larger organizations. Much varies within each campus chapter of a given fraternity. There could be an extremely homophobic chapter at a university in California and an extremely queer friendly chapter of the same fraternity in New York. As I describe in this project, I encountered some hypermasculine behavior in my fraternity chapter in Texas, but by beginning a new chapter in Michigan, I created the possibility to subvert these customs so that I could rebrand a section of the brotherhood that I was part of. When the expansion at Michigan was suggested by Christian Ureña, for a second, I thought, “this is the chance for me to make the brotherhood that I needed

when I was closeted." That thought drove my mentorship style, my planning, and my care for these young men. I felt like they were my little brothers, but many people outside of our fraternity assumed that because I am openly gay, I must have some kind of sexual relationship with one or more of them. This could not be further from the truth, and such misguided assumptions deeply offend me. Straight fraternity mentors are not subjected to the same scrutiny or unfounded assumptions. These continuous misconceptions about my identity and intentions, made want to be involved deeply within the ranks of the fraternity and be vocal about educating people about what our purpose was.

As someone who has been an active member of a fraternity for the last eight years and who has helped to redefine several key terms in the public eye, I offer several definitions for concepts used in this dissertation. Fraternities have many structural similarities and are operated under a business model in which they charge new members for their membership and other undergraduate members for semesterly dues until they graduate, enabling them to retain "active" status in the fraternity. Being active, under the fraternity guidelines means that you are meeting the minimum GPA requirements, have paid dues, and can attend chapter and regional fraternity meetings. They also mean that you are allowed to participate during the new member education process.

Fraternities tend to be homosocial in nature. The concept of homosociality, although theorized in the 1970s, has existed, influenced, and permeated societal, political, economic, and historical standards of gender segregation. Jean Lipman-Blumen describes homosocial as "the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex. It is distinguished from 'homosexual' in that it does not *necessarily* involve (although it may under certain circumstances) an explicit erotic sexual interaction between members of the same sex" (1976).

Lipman-Blumen argues that the basic premise of homosociality and the establishment of sex roles suggest that “men are attracted to, stimulated by, and interested in other men. It is a process that is noticeable in early childhood and is channeled and encouraged by the entire range of social institutions within which males live” (1976). Although the words “attraction” and “stimulation” could be interpreted via a homoerotic nature. For us, as men who were battling imposter syndrome at the University of Michigan, racism because of our *latinidad*, and a lack of of family, what attracted us to each other was our disenfranchised identities or as Gloria Anzaldúa would call it, our status as *atravesados*.

Anzaldúa says that in the borderlands live *los atravesados*, “the squinter-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’” (1987). We—my fraternity brothers and I—at the University of Michigan were *atravesados* because of our racialized identities, because we were first-generation college students, because Michigan was not our home state, and because our working-class families did not allow for us to aesthetically fit in with the average student on campus. Therefore, our *atravesado*-ness, which could only make sense in English as something that is there but that should not be there, brought us together. That otherness compelled us to form this brotherhood and stimulated our sense of manhood, the masculinities that we performed in private and public, and the way that we thought through traumas both past and present.

In our efforts to bond over our *atravesado* identities and experiences, we began to establish a sense of brotherhood and belonging. Brotherhood as an intimate space—although sometimes it can also be a physical space like a fraternity house—allows men to behave in accordance with what is acceptably valued in that group. For us, it meant that we did not want to

perpetuate binge drinking, hazing, or rape culture but also that we did not want to be emotionally frozen among each other. The fraternal bonds of brotherhood can radically impact young men's behaviors, especially when they are away from home and experiencing "freedom" from their parents. These freedoms and room for exploration allows for men to enact both positive and negative behaviors, especially if they grant you access to belonging to a brotherhood. Nicholas L. Syrett, who writes about the history of white college fraternities and the violence within them, says, "I see men behaving in ways they would not normally have behaved on their own, doing things not only because of the influence of the company they kept but also in order to ensure that they could continue to keep that company" (2009). Syrett refers to this "company" when he alludes to the type of brotherhood that certain men find appropriate and that oftentimes is an unfortunate extension of the types of hypermasculine behaviors that they see at home.

While Syrett focuses on the problematic behavior that these men perform through the fraternity, I focus on the possibility of exhibiting a healthy and inclusive type of masculinity within the same structure of the fraternity. The goals of the fraternity shape the acceptability of such behaviors and the inclusion of men to a specific brotherhood. As Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., at the University of Michigan, we became a different kind of organization because we understood the problematic behaviors of the other two Latino fraternities that valued party culture, engaged in the use of illegal substances, and did not publicly denounce members who had been alleged perpetrators of physical and psychological violence. In addition, because I had experienced our chapters across the nation, I had insight as to the various problematic cultures, from which we wanted to stay away. As brothers, we discussed these issues in private when we met and had deep conversations about who we wanted to be known and remembered as. Through our series of artistic performances, we then demonstrated our preferred form of masculinities and

brotherhood, which challenged the representation of our organization, of Latino fraternities, and of Latino men.

The biggest threat to our efforts came from the multiplicity of systems that we were among—fraternal culture, *latinidad*, and *machismo*. All of these, in one way or another, informed beliefs that fed into a patriarchal culture and to a hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity was theorized in the 1980s, the most detailed description or interpretation of this masculinity was provided in sociologist Erving Goffman's classic text *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963). Goffman offers a window to the multidimensional standards which dictate that a man is the most desired and revered being in the United States. These standards privilege a white, cisgender, heterosexual, educated, and middle-class man. Goffman also asserts that "any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself during moments at least— as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior; at times he is likely to pass and at times he is likely to find himself being apologetic or aggressive concerning known—about aspects of himself he knows are probably seen as undesirable" (1963). This ultimate desire, for a nearly impossible social standard on masculinity becomes elevated within homosocial spaces such as fraternities, prisons, sports, and even the military. In effect, the homosocial environment becomes a catalyst to a hypermasculine ontology.

Masculinities studies scholars argue that the reason we have an issue with masculinity and patriarchy is because its power as a gendered institution has only been questioned recently. Jonathan Katz, an anti-violence educator, states, "Making masculinity visible is the first step to understanding how it operates in the culture and how definitions of manhood have been linked to dominance and control" (*Tough Guize*, 1999). Since at least the 1980s, gender studies scholars have questioned the institution of masculinity, but older canonical texts in the field focus on

hegemonic masculinity, which centers the white male in the U.S. However, since the 1990s, women of color, queer people of color, and some men of color have devoted their scholarship to expanding the conversations on men of color, intersectional masculinities, queer masculinities, and other subordinate forms of masculinities.

The intersections of *mexicanidad*/*latinidad* and masculinities have almost always been historically associated with *machismo*. Latinx/Chicanx sociologists and anthropologists, however, have rejected these terms as they were constructed under a racist description of the Mexican American family in the early 20th century. In the 1970s, Miguel Montiel critiqued these same conventions, saying that "Mexican family studies have consistently lacked both methodological sophistication as well as an empirical verification. Specifically, they have relied almost totally upon a psychoanalytic model in which there is an uncritical use of concepts like *machismo*" (1973). Decades later, Alfredo Mirandé wrote that "though much has been said and written about machismo or 'excessive masculinity' among Latinos in general and Mexicans in particular, until recently such generalizations were based on meager, nonexistent, and misinterpreted evidence" (1997). This racialized way of describing sexism and patriarchal structures within the Mexican American family theorized Mexican and Mexican American men as pathological drunks, lazy, and wife beaters, which set the foundations for the problematic representations of the Latino/Chicano man that still carries weight in the 21st century.

Mirandé also writes:

> despite increased interest in men's studies, the topic of Chicano/Latino masculinity remains neglected and virtually unexplored both within the so-called new men's studies and feminist scholarship. No less surprising, I think, is the fact that the study of Latino men and masculinity has been equally neglected within Chicana/Chicano scholarship. (1997)

In effect, little to no scholarship has been dedicated to understanding the concept of masculinities for men of color within homosocial spaces created by men of color and predominantly occupied by men of color.

There has been, however, expansive literature—some of which is problematically charged with racism, classicism, and colorism—that details how Chicano/Latino and Latin American men have adopted the performance of the *macho*. Despite this, scholars also find that performing *macho* varies by generation. Gloria Anzaldúa, Alfredo Mirandé and Matthew C. Gutmann, to name a view, find that older men worry about being providers and to be accountable for their families. Younger generations, like the men described in this dissertation, tend to have a sense of pride and have to prove their masculinity, strength, virility, or other things that influence their social capital as men.

Latino masculinities are also complex in nature because, as Alexandro J. Gradilla and Rodolfo D. Torres state, "'Latino male' is not confined to a single ethnicity, and encompasses African, Asian, European, and indigenous ethnicities, so that traditional demographic thinking does not capture the full extent of diversity subsumed by the cover term *Latino*" (*Men and Masculinities*. 2004). To add to this, the ways that we experienced *latinidad* and masculinities vary depending on regionalism and other forces. For example, as a first-generation Chicano from the Texas-Mexico border, the complexities of my masculinities and gender performance are influenced by the conservative nature of the border and my own hypervigilance to pass as straight. My fraternity brothers from the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, say their perceptions of masculinities and Latinidad are also informed by Black masculinities and a more ethnically and racially diverse population. These specifics are sometimes overlooked in studies of masculinities and have certainly been missing within Latinx masculinity studies.

Another limitation that this project tries to address is the gap in scholarly literature on fraternities, which generally appears in analyses of higher education and student activities. Although there are some monographs on fraternities, such as Nicholas L. Syrett's *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* (2009) and Lawrence Ross' *The Divine Nine: The History of African American Fraternities and Sororities* (2000), the premise of these works is to historicize the foundations of White and Black organizations. No complete monograph or edited volume, however, has been dedicated to Latino fraternities, and the limited existing literature regarding Latino fraternities seeks to underscore multiculturalism, student activities, cultural consciousness, belonging, and retention rates in higher education rather than analyze more social components such as brotherhood and performing gender.

This dissertation does not address the overall histories of Latino fraternities in the United States or even provide a comprehensive history of the founding of this one fraternity chapter at the University of Michigan. Instead, it explores a small historical window, from February 2017 to December 2018, in which the nine founding members of the University of Michigan chapter of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and I, created a new cultural space for us on campus that pushed the boundaries of accepted forms of Latino masculinity. We established a brotherhood that made us feel safe, supported, and loved enough to publicly perform identities that we had previously been encouraged to reject or suppress. This became possible only because of the solid foundation of trust that we established during our founding semester, detailed in Chapter 2.

Fraternal Masculinities, thus, works through the concepts of homosociality, *machismo*, and hegemonic masculinity by centering the experiences of a group of Latinos and other men of color in spaces where they shared brotherhood bonds through the performative arts. Through an intersectional and borderlands theory framework, I analyze the tensions between a traditional

hypermasculinity and an acceptance of vulnerable masculinities, both of which operate within the public and private experiences of the men who inform this project. These tensions allow us to decolonize the theories in sociology, anthropology, gender studies, and cultural studies about homosociality, fraternities, *latinidad*, and the potential *machismo* found in these spaces. *Fraternal Masculinities* aims to continue the work of Third World Feminist, queer performance theory, and intersectional masculinities, by providing an outlook to the potential of a new movement for the new man and with it a new form of masculinity found within an all-male space. *Fraternal Masculinities* also continues the work of masculinities studies scholars by contributing examples of a multiplicity of Latinidad and masculinities that are not always in competition with each other but that are simultaneously coexisting with each other.

Queer Positionalities and Theoretical Frameworks

I approach this intellectual project as a fraternity brother, choreographer, performer, observer, and writer. In addition, I approach this project—both the establishing of the fraternity and this dissertation—as a queer Chicano who had been studying the works of radical queer Chicanx theorists since 2011: six years before establishing the chapter at the University of Michigan. Although at the time, the theoretical framings of the organization were less theoretical and more practical, it is the work of queer Chicanx/Latinx individuals that help me work through these resisting gestures.

Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the *puente extendido*, extended bridge, between two cultures that clash. In this case the culture of a hypermasculinity expected of men of color and of men in fraternities and the need to be vulnerable with each other. I see this project, and myself, as *puentes extendidos* because within both my body and this body of writing I exhibit and describe how both clashing masculinities could coexist. As a *puente extendido* myself, I offered

my fraternity brothers a gateway into the traditions of the fraternity and the new visions that were possible under a queer and women of color feminist praxis. Our bodies, thus, became *puentes extendidos* to queer embodied masculinities when we vocalized our pains, when we stood up to others who tried reinforcing their conservative views on gender, and when we dared to move on stages in ways that are not typically masculine.

In this clash of the *puente extendido* and the communities and concepts it bridges, the politics of disidentifications flourish. José Esteban Muñoz's disidentifications, as he articulates, is a politics of survival that works with and against systemic oppressions against queer and marginal subjects or as I previously referred to us: *atravesados*. Throughout *Fraternal Masculinities*, I describe specific moments where there are literally clashes of masculinities between other fraternity brothers and me as is described in Chapter 2 or between us as a new organization and older brothers on social media as described in Chapter 3. In these moments, I highlight how vulnerable or queer masculinities are met with the hypermasculine behavioral expectations that other people—family, friends, or fraternity brothers—have of us as members of a Latino fraternity. Yet, as brothers, we continued to resist the outside perspectives and voices, even when they hurt us, by continuing to share our stories, perform, and practice being vulnerable with those whom we chose to be brothers. These queer gestures come in the forms of public speaking, non-sexual physical touch as affirmations, and even releasing our emotions through tearful eyes and broken voices.

These clashing masculinities are what Muñoz describes when he mentions that disidentifications is meant to be a description of the survival strategies that marginal subjects practice to reject the hegemonic and acceptable systems and structures that are continuously out to get us, to brand us, or to punish us because we do not want to exist conforming to the

normalized behavioral standards (1994). Although masculinities are tied to a set of standards, they are also the gatekeepers of certain acceptable behaviors in men that tell us that we should be aggressive, dominant, and apathetic. Therefore, our resistance to these inscribed masculinities were queer gestures as per Juana María Rodríguez. Rodríguez states that "thinking about queerness through gesture animates how bodies move in the world, and how we assign meaning in ways that are always already infused with cultural modes of knowing" (2014). For us, as men of color, gesturing to traditional masculinities came naturally but also was unnatural when we signaled that the purpose of the brotherhood was belonging and community. How do you establish an intimate bond without breaking through that exterior shield that we put on every day to face the world? How do we become brothers by saying "*chale*" and acting unphased? For us, establishing a long-lasting brotherhood required queer gestures that actively clashed with the hegemonic, with the acceptable and easily digestible, masculinity.

Although at the time of these performances and of working through this brotherhood, these queer inspirations were not evident, my *theory in the flesh* that allowed me to bridge queer epistemologies and theories to bring about what we envisioned as "different." This project comments on the necessity of a queer politics, pedagogies, and praxis in the new masculinity and the new man's movement. Anzaldúa never forgets men in her writings and says that, "We [as a community] need a new masculinity and the new man needs a movement" (1987). The movement in this project is not only about a collective group of people wanting to act against hegemonic norms but also involves physical and literal movements.

All of us moved from our home states to Michigan to continue our educational journeys. We all carried our histories, the influences of our families, and the hauntings of intergenerational masculinities. Yet, we all knew that physically moving away from those environments was not

only an escape of these traditions but also an opportunity to explore new ways of living. For me, leaving the Texas-Mexico borderlands meant that I could be queer without fear of repercussion, persecution, and shame from those whom I loved and who loved me.

The new movement of masculinity, as detailed in this project, also required us to move our vocal cords in ways that we were not used to. It was not enough to use our voices to say "Chug! Chug! Chug!" at the party but also to say things that we did not previously imagine. To say the words, "I love you, bro," or "We're here for you, brother," even in whispers and for only a group of nine other men to hear. In this practicing of moving our bodies to say things we did not imagine, we also embraced other men in private and in public without shame or sexual implications. We began to hold hands, to wrap our arms around our brothers when they were crying, to lift someone off the ground for a picture, and to trust that your brothers would not drop you.

This new masculine movements meant that we moved in ways that we had been scared to move in public. It meant that we shimmied to the beat of the drums, that we body rolled without the need of a woman in a chair in front of us, and that we vogued with hand performances to queer music. It meant that we turned and smiled when there was an audience, both physical and virtual. It also meant that in this movement we sometimes were coordinated and other times we were acting without a rehearsal. In this dissertation, the new masculine movement, through a Latinx queer theoretical approach, is working though the acceptance of moving our bodies, our voices, our beings, our minds, and our souls. Most importantly we moved our hearts to care for other men and for ourselves as men.

This new masculinity movement also means that the "new" serves a departure from the traditional and hegemonic versions of masculinity. Thus, queering masculinities and

brotherhoods in this project, comments to the possibilities and the politics of difference, rather than it be inextricably tied to the sexualities of the men in this project since most identify as heterosexual. Although, for men such as myself, queer serves as a sexual identity, a theoretical approach, and a departure of ways that I had to mentor, choreography, listen to, communicate with, and embrace other men in my life in caring and intimate ways.

Performing *Fraternal Masculinities* in Parts

At its core, *Fraternal Masculinities* is a project of resistance, which highlights how a deliberately cultivated type of brotherhood can allow men to be openly vulnerable with one another and to disidentify with the hypermasculine behavioral expectations that inform many of us from birth. This resistance comes up in a multiplicity of ways such as when one of the brothers began crying in the living room of my apartment talking about his pains or when a brother decided to give a rose to his best friend, who was a young man, at a fraternity performance. These moments of resistance against heteropatriarchal behavioral standards, to the outsider could be interpreted as "queer" (in the sexuality sense) or effeminate, yet because it happened within the boundaries of homosocial solidarity, masculinity protects us, to a certain extent.

In Chapter 2, "*Un Nuevo Amor Fraternal/*A New Fraternal Love: Working Through Brotherhood to Practice and Perform Vulnerabilities," I describe various components of the educational process that granted the new brothers membership into the fraternity in the fall of 2017. Throughout the semester, we were able to practice the components of the new member presentation, which was ultimately performed at the end of the semester in front of the fraternities and sororities for other students of color as well as family and friends and streamed virtually for a larger national audience. In this chapter, I focus on the way that the months we

spent preparing for this presentation helped us find comfort in sharing stories of pain, injury, and loss. Our vulnerabilities in the private rehearsal space helped us develop a sense of *confianza,* or trust, that we needed to sing, chant, and give emotionally driven speeches in front of an unknown audience at the end of the year.

In Chapter 3, “Choreographing Gendered Liberations: Introducing a Fraternity to Dance, Sequin and Drag,” I focus on the first public dance performance of the organization at the Multicultural Greek Xhibition on campus in the winter semester of 2018. Throughout the chapter, I describe the process of creating a dance routine and analyzing its aftermath. As we prepared for the performance, we studied LGBTQ+ history and the art of vogueing, identifying parallels between our own group’s identity formation and queer people of color creating families and belonging through ballroom houses and drag performance. Our queer dance performance disturbed the established norms for masculinity practiced by the governing body and other chapters of our national fraternity. After a video of our performance was posted online, we received heavy criticism from our family members and older fraternity brothers, inciting a conversation about why queerness is disruptive and the stakes of preserving a national fraternal identity rooted in patriarchy. In this chapter, I find that our use of more traditionally masculine movements in our dance allowed us, as a fraternity, to be comfortable dancing and performing drag-inspired choreography. Our performance raised questions of agency and identity surrounding gender and sexuality.

In Chapter 4, “*Los Teatro Traficantes:* Decentralizing Hypermasculinity and Brotherhood in Prisons and Fraternities," I describe how through a theatre workshop with the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP), we extended our brotherhood into a prison in the fall semester of 2018. This expansion of our intimate university brotherhood, which I describe as a transfraternal

brotherhood, allowed us to serve as a model of movements that the other men in the prison could also assimilate within our performative space. This chapter draws on interviews two of my fraternity brothers and some of the men who were in prison at the time of the workshop but have since been released. The theatre activities we did together that semester not only brought my fraternity brothers and me closer together but also made us meaningful collaborators with incarcerated men who had no reason to trust us as the beginning of the workshop. The trust we built together that semester allowed us to rethink our masculinities, our homes, our families, and ultimately our capability of performing a playful and joyful sense to masculinity not only in the private space of our workshop but also in front of other incarcerated men, prison staff, and our theatre colleagues at the end of the semester.

My conclusion addresses the continuance of a performance culture in the fraternity and the ongoing yet markedly different sense of brotherhood that this chapter's founding members feel after leaving campus. The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, shifted our perceptions of fraternities and intimate brotherhood. It also moved all our activities to a digital platform, which was necessary for our survival as Latinx men at a PWI. In addition, I reflect on the fact that even though fraternities could be structurally outdated in the context of 2022, they are still extremely important for the survival of disenfranchised men because they can create meaningful bonds—brotherhood. This brotherhood allows men to defy what they had internalized as acceptable masculine behaviors and allows them to embark in a journey of vulnerability where they feel supported, heard, and cared for in physical spaces that do not tend to their needs.

Chapter 1
Un Nuevo Amor Fraternal/A New Fraternal Love*:* Working Through Brotherhood to Practice and Perform Vulnerabilities

"I want to start off by thanking all my LBs. They've been there for me. They help me redefine what it means to be a man and that's something I can't thank them enough for."

(Ureña. Facebook Live. 2017.)

Image 4: The nine fraternity members stand shortest to tallest in line after they have marched in. Sergio Barrera stands stage-right.

Thump, thump. Thump, thump. A line of nine men in white long-sleeve button-up shirts, red ties, and blue slacks marched on stage in an aggressive cadence. Their left hands, in closed fists, clenched on the left side of the chest of the man in front of them. Their right hands rested on the right shoulders of the same man. After the first man in the line, everyone's heads are

tucked so that their foreheads are pressed on another's back. The thunderous echoes of their black dress shoes hitting the ground filled the lecture hall. Every chair in the audience was occupied. Some viewers stood on the side. Others sat on tables, and many more gathered by the entrance doors at the back of the room. There was excitement and anticipation in the air. The unveiling of the newly inducted members of a new Latino fraternity on campus was happening that night. No one in the multicultural fraternities and sororities wanted to miss it. The event brought family, friends, alumni from the fraternity's Midwest region and other multicultural fraternities and sororities on campus and neighboring campuses to be in attendance. Everyone celebrated the new members of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., at the University of Michigan.

"*Se siente. Se siente,"* [You feel it. You feel it.] I chanted following the tempo of the marching. The men responded "*Phiota*[2] *está presente!"* [Phiota is present!] "*Tú no tienes corazón,"* [You don't have heart.] I continued, and the men replied, "*Si tenemos corazón, y tenemos una meta. Nunca vamos a parar porque Phiota se respeta!"* [We do have a heart, and we have a goal. We will never stop because Phiota should be respected!] As they marched through center stage, Felix Zavala, the leader of the line, yelled, "*Leones*, halt!"

The nickname "*leones*" or lions, is given to the members of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., as it represents the official mascot of the organization, found in the fraternity's crest. Although the origin of the lion as the mascot of the organization is unclear, there are connections drawn to regality, kings, and nobility. These associations reflect a 19th century understanding of intergenerational hypermasculinity in colonial Latin American and Spain.

The men behind Felix stopped marching. "*Leones*," Felix continued, meanwhile the men took a choreographed step back to step away from the person in front of them. "Unlink!" he said.

---

[2] Phiota is a shortened name given to the members of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Everyone took a ninety degree turn to their left to face the audience (see Image 4). The nine men stood in a line shoulder-to-shoulder with their line brothers. Their heads were tilted upward, avoiding eye contact with the audience. Their chests were puffed up, backs straight; their faces wore an emotionless “game face” expression. This tough act is a character that older brothers tell new brothers to practice throughout the educational process as they stand in line. They are told they are “soldiers” and should not show emotions or acknowledge distractions; reinforcing traditional conventions of hypermasculinity perpetuated by systemic issues of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy. Since I was leading the new members' presentation as the new brothers’ educator, I walked in front of each brother fixing their ties, combing their hair, cleaning off sweat from their foreheads and reminding them to breathe and remain calm.

When I turned my back to the audience, I publicly presented a “behind the scenes” moment that disrupted the public theatrics of a fraternity performance by centering physical and emotional care between brothers. My back served as a “curtain” that momentarily blocked the audience’s view of the nuances of my care. However, as I moved through the line of nine fraternity men everyone could see that I was helping them in some manner. My body, serving as a physical shield, allowed us to engage in a vulnerable representation such as the one that we had experienced in private throughout the fraternity’s educational process. But on this stage, for the first time, we showed the audience the possibility of fraternal vulnerabilities and fraternal masculinities that we had arrived at through a journey of *confianza* and fraternal love.

This *confianza* and care that I displayed on stage, which was my obligation as their PM or Pledge Master[3], was the same that we had mutually engaged in daily for that entire semester.

---

[3] In this fraternity, the title of Pledge Master is given to an older fraternity brother that takes on the responsibility of mentoring and educating the new members through their educational process. I volunteered to be the PM because I was on campus and had access to both the fraternity’s management team and the Office of Fraternity and Sorority

Therefore, practicing brotherhood and cultivating *confianza* within the confines of my apartment prepared us to be comfortable expressing and receiving care from a man in a public setting. I disrupted the stylized military aggression prescribed by fraternity tradition by offering care, and when I did so, I interjected an unexpected element into a performance of predictable hypermasculinity found in fraternities, especially those that are predominantly for men of color. The opening of the performance served as a template for what we would later do on a larger scale. We displayed familiar and accepted forms of masculinity and used them as a safe backdrop for us to act in unfamiliar ways that unsettled many traditional expectations of who we ought to be.

These contradictory public faces of our fraternity frame the new member presentation described in this chapter by highlighting "the dramatic variation in how different groups define masculinity, even in the same society at the same time, as well as individual differences" (Kimmel 2004). Latinx fraternity culture, as is tradition with most fraternities for men of color, demands physicality, cultural knowledge, and aggression that could be seen when the fraternity brothers marched in chanting in Spanish. However, the less told narratives of care and nurturing that happen behind the scenes develop a *politics of confianza*, allowing for a vulnerable representation of Latinx masculinities to appear in public under the guise of brotherhood.

In this chapter, I describe the behind-the-scenes process of creating this new member presentation to understand how *confianza* is built in a private space (my apartment, which served as our meeting place) and empowers these men of color to represent themselves in a public setting (a stage in a lecture hall on campus). I also highlight some components of the performance to think through the clash of masculinities found within the fraternity and its

---

Life on campus. In addition, I had educated new members in Texas and had served as part of the national management team.

members. Throughout this chapter, I argue that masculinities for men of color that embody a queer gestured performance, have the possibility to exist alongside, within, and through the codified heteropatriarchal structure of manhood that informs hypermasculine behaviors in fraternities. In essence, a radical queering of masculinities can occur in public spaces without tremendous pushback because the multiple codes that enforce masculinity (dress, tone, posture) remind the audience that the performers are all men in an all-male space. As a result, I find that this performance, which introduces the fraternity brothers to the University of Michigan, is a place where masculinities aggressively clash but harmoniously coexist.

Following the traditions of José Esteban Muñoz's *disidentifications*, which reminds us about a politic of survival that is worked through sociocultural tensions, I argue that the toxicity of *machismo* haunts those of us with intersectional masculinities in a Latino fraternity. Yet, there is willingness and possibility to queer and actively challenge/resist traditional gestures and behaviors associated with hypermasculinity and hegemonic masculinity. I think through these queer public/private gestures through Juana María Rodríguez's theorization which suggest that "gesture functions as a socially legible and highly codified form of kinetic communication, and as a cultural practice that is differentially manifested through particular forms of embodiment" (2014). These queer gestures range from standing in physical proximity (as seen on Image 4) to the moments in which I wiped sweat off the brother's foreheads and fixed their hair. I use queer to understand the departures from traditional depictions of masculinity that this photograph represents.

If I were to compare both images of the fraternity brothers in Michigan in 1949 (as seen in Image 3) and the brothers in Michigan in 2017 (as seen in Image 4) we see a difference in performed masculinities. Both groups are wearing a type of business attire, yet in the newer

generation everyone wears the red, white, and blue uniform and there is an intention to appear hypermasculine in front of audiences. It is unknown whether Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. had new member presentations in the 1940s, however, the new identity of the fraternity has departed from that which was revered as acceptable masculinities for the fraternity with the integration of singing, new member performances, and even having dance numbers be part of the presentations. The traditional masculinities of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. were driven by the effort to give back to Latin America and to be secretive in nature. Meanwhile, the newer generation of Latinos in the fraternity have only the desire to go to Latin America to vacation or learn about their culture, with less interest in helping Latin American economies or politics develop. It is this historical departure of the acceptable forms of masculinities that I work through when I think about a performed queerness through this image.

Both the 1949 and the 2017 pictures involve men standing or sitting next to each other, but the occasions were different. In 1949, the purpose was to fit everyone in the yearbook picture in a professional manner while in 2017, it is to appear in militaristic-like postures to represent unity, assertiveness, and power in front of an audience. Everyone in the crowd knew that the brothers in 2017 were not soldiers, they were undergraduate men at a university, dressed in the same clothes, and standing next to each other on a stage. Through this performance, there is a level of camp or masculine drag that appropriates traditionally associated postures of hypermasculinity and subverts it when we understand the subjects in line, the intent behind the performance, and understand that the aspirations of the fraternity are not to drill them into being soldiers. As pledges, or recruits, we are often told to think of ourselves as Simón Bolívar's soldiers, but the reality is that I do not know what soldiers, that put their life on the line for their

country's democracy, go through. To be an intellectual soldier of Pan-Americanism means something different than being a soldier that would pick up a gun and kill during war.

These queer gestures, or departures from the normalcy of masculinities, inform people that the performance of the members of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc, is after all, rehearsed performance. We embody characteristics of hypermasculine roles that we will never be, we sing in unison, and we chant about being the best and greatest. These conventions of hypermasculinity and queerness clash throughout the performance on stage in order to inform the audience of new masculinities brewing in a new man's movement that have the potential to occur in private spaces.

Phiota New Member Presentations and How We Get There

New member presentations in fraternity and sorority life are also called probates, showcases, or reveal parties. The presentations vary not only by fraternity and sorority, but also by chapter/satellite in the fraternity. In Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., a satellite is a newly established organization at a university, whereas a chapter is an entity that has met the minimum qualifications with the number of active members, new member intake, community service, programming, and grade point average. In addition, some entities of the fraternity have the option to use to "new member reveal" videos or to create a post on social media where they share pictures and information about the new members instead of having a formal, live event. Though there is no single way of hosting a new member presentation, much of our performance on this occasion drew from national fraternity traditions.

The history of these presentation begins in the mid-1900s through Black fraternities and sororities. However, Walter M. Kimbrough finds that "the performances of the probates began to take on more sophistication in the mid-1960s," (2003). Kimbrough also finds that the term

“probate” was initially used to describe the new members, but that over time Black fraternities and sororities began calling their shows “Probate’s Greek Show.” The purpose of these performances, whether from Black or Latinx organizations, has been consistent throughout time: to culturally celebrate new members on their completion of the education process through music, performance, and community. Some of the older alumni of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., claim that in the 1990s the organization, alongside other Latinx fraternities and sororities, began using new member presentations to introduce their new brothers. But even with Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. partaking in this performance culture that is particular to Greek Lettered organizations for students of color, there is no national uniformity that tells us what should be included or how things should be managed.

This lack of uniformity allows for a creative freedom by the various chapters throughout the nation. Yet, this creativity and performances have been overlooked as sites of performance and gendered rituals by scholars. Despite the limitation of these works, fraternity and sorority members share their *testimonios*, memories, and observations about these performances when they get together at fraternity conferences or retreats. This cultural phenomenon, which is an extremely memorable part of a student's experiences within fraternities and sororities for students of color, led me to think specifically about the components of the presentation at the University of Michigan. Especially because trying to theorize the differences between organizations, their unknown histories, and fraternal traditions, could lead me to a different type of project.

In the fall of 2017, the University of Michigan had their founding line and were introduced as the University of Michigan Colony of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. A founding

line is the first group of fraternity members to establish an entity on a particular campus.[4] The presentation followed the pattern that I had experienced at the University of Texas Pan American/University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The presentation consisted of the members marching in, greeting the other sororities and fraternities present, reciting fraternity history and facts, singing several different national anthems, giving speeches, gifting red carnations to significant loved ones, and chanting. Our chapter in the Rio Grande Valley was established with the help of alumni from Michigan State University. Therefore, the performance at the University of Michigan was a culmination of the migration patterns of students at universities. Especially those that leave home for an education, find a home through the fraternity on campus, and return to their communities after graduation wanting to mentor other young men in universities.

Tracing the migrations of these Latino men throughout the country in search for education and community is imperative within the framing of new masculinities and a new man's movements as described in the introduction. Having these men experience manhood and brotherhood outside of their homes and then returning home, allows us to think of intergenerational masculinity as something that carries possibilities for positive change at times, rather than intergenerational masculinities being things that only limit the experiences of men. These men also partook in their own forms of physical and emotional movement that opened the door for a newer generation of brothers to continue working through their sense of belonging.

---

[4] There were some debates about recognizing the fall 2017 line as the founding line because the first known presence of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., at the University of Michigan was in the 1940s according to fraternal records and university yearbooks. A second group of members appeared in the early 2000s but joined through Michigan State University, making them a satellite or extension of Michigan State University's chapter. However, the satellite entity died out because of low intake numbers, failure of being recognized by the university, and other institutional policies. The fall 2017 was the first group in modern fraternal history to be educated and trained separately from other entities and with students who attended the University of Michigan.

This presentation, for Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., serves as a ritualized celebration since it is only after they are introduced through some sort of reveal performance (virtual or in public) that the new members of the organization can wear fraternity letters in public or be seen with their fraternity brothers. Although a strange culture for those outside of Greek life, wearing fraternity letters is a way to represent one's type of sociocultural wealth within the university ranks. For example, if a certain organization is known for throwing the best fraternity parties on campus, the letters grant you that "prestige." At the University of Michigan, there was no previous reputation established by the organization. People only knew me as a graduate student who loved to perform and danced. Thus, wearing the Greek letters on campus would mean that they were the first of their kind in the organization on campus and would elevate their status by being known as founders of the fraternity, without having to explain that they were founders. However, as mentioned above, the members cannot wear letters until their public reveal. This tradition is aimed to elevate the level of secrecy between fraternities and sororities for students of color, since white organizations do not have these shows for their members. Since multicultural fraternities and sororities tend to have smaller numbers than white organizations, building up anticipation through secrecy of the new members guarantees that a lively audience will be present to celebrate the new members during the time of the presentation. And since, this is the first time they will wear letters and the multicultural fraternities and sororities will get to meet them and hear from them, this presentation is one of the most important for a new members life because it sets a standard for them as members and for the organization on campus.

These high stakes are not only because this is where you showcase the fraternity and yourself as a member of the fraternity, but also because the type of personality you display during the performance can mean whether other organizations would be willing to collaborate

with the organization in future programming. Christian Ureña mentioned that to him the performance "was always a huge deal because I knew that I was going to be looked at as the face of the fraternity for at least that first year" (Ureña 2022). Christian also says that his parents had driven four hours to campus to witness the performance, and he had many close friends in the audience. Therefore, his communities both on and off campus were going to see a part of his legacy as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan as he held the highest leadership position within the organization on campus.

Another factor that elevates the stakes of these performances is that they are, often, preserved on social media platforms. Archiving the performance online does not only guarantee a larger audience and an increased reception, but also increases the amount of people who might share varying opinions about the nuances of the performance. And because social media platforms can share memories during the time of anniversaries, reposting in years to come opens the performance to be enjoyed years after they were uploaded. This also means that the chances of engaging in trolling or cyberbullying increases, especially if there were parts of a speech or performance were messed up or not as polished as the members could have wanted them to be. In addition, as with every sort of material culture that captures an experience, it captures the person in their state rather than their growth. This was a case with one of my brothers in Texas who knew very little Spanish before joining the fraternity. His Spanish was progressively better years after joining, but in his performance, he would always be remembered as the brother with the butchered Spanish throughout the new member education process and the presentation.

This new member education process also goes by the name "pledging" which is different from the "rush process" of many white fraternities and sororities. During the pledging process is where the members will typically learn and practices the material that will be presented at the

end of the semester during the new member presentation. However, the process is structures so that we take our time learning, discussing, and analyzing the material provided by the national management team. As a Latino fraternity we are conscious that the term “rush” can translate to rushing members through a rough short-term process. In Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the minimum process lasts six weeks, and all members must complete the process before final exams for a given semester. Some members have taken up to ten weeks to complete their process. This group process includes assignments given by an older fraternity member, and all members in training on a given campus advance as a unit.

Since the fraternity is historically and predominantly Latino based and Latin American inspired, the members take on the equivalent of an Introduction to Latin American and Latinx Studies taught by a fraternity member acting as an educator. In this process they learn about the history, culture, and national anthems of the *patrias*, motherlands, of each member of the group. It is important to note, that unlike me who had a borderlands experience of living on both the U.S. and Mexico side, all the new members in Michigan were U.S. born and were only affiliated through these *patrias* by ancestral association.

As mentioned in the introduction, only a couple of them spoke their native language and had physically been to their motherlands. Therefore, for many the process becomes a sociocultural awakening of the types of intersectional identities and intergenerational legacies of their ancestors. And because the organization is open to any person, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and other factors, the members learn about the things that characterize their ancestry. For example, if there are only Puerto Ricans one semester, the members will deeply discuss Puerto Rico’s cultures, history, music, and other factors. However, if there are seven members of seven different ancestral cultures, the members must learn and discuss all of them.

Carlos Laureano—one of the new members I trained in the founding group in Michigan—says that the educational process was an opportunity for him to learn more about his culture and to find pride in his Puerto Rican heritage. At the same time, he says that "learning about my line brother's heritage and national anthems and their culture made me feel closer to them. I had a deeper understanding of where they're families came from and how they were raised" (Laureano 2022.). This cultural understanding that the fraternity promoted through the educational process allowed for an opportunity to discuss intersectionality and establish a diverse sense of brotherhood. Although the fraternity is historically Latino based, it includes members who are not Latinos. As a result, groups including members who are not of Latin American descent also learn about nations and cultures from other parts of the world. The University of Michigan's founding line included an Asian American member: Jor-El Santos. Jor-El has Filipino ancestry, and the group of men, and I as their mentor, learned about the Philippines and sang their national anthem in Tagalog. The other eight members represented four Latin American countries: the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, México, and Puerto Rico.

Throughout his active years in the fraternity, Jor-El has repeatedly been asked why he is in a Latino fraternity, especially since he could have joined one of several Asian American fraternities on campus. For Jor-El it boiled down to the fact that he was surrounded by more Latinx and Black people in his hometown of Chicago than Filipinos. He knew that most of the men interested in establishing our fraternity came from a Chicago charter school network. Therefore, the aspects of familiarity and friendship that were easily accessible to him in a Predominantly White Institution of higher education led Jor-El to be comfortable in a brotherhood that represented where he came from. In addition, Jor-El says that Christian and I both offered him a sense of how he wanted to navigate his college experience: "We [the

fraternity] always relate to you and Christian. You guys are both very social people. Always introducing yourself and getting to know people. That's something I do, and a lot of people don't. All of you guys contributed, a lot, in a positive way to how I am right now in college" (Santos 2022). Like many other young men of color on predominately white college campuses, Jor-El was looking for friends and role models that resembled the types of men, masculinities, and mentorship that he had growing up in Chicago. He found them in our multiculturally based Latino fraternity.

The fraternity, in its multiculturalism, acknowledges that some members cannot trace their ancestry to a specific group of people or country due to complex histories of enslavement and displacement. I discovered this when I traveled to Western Michigan University for a new member presentation. One of our Black fraternity brothers being introduced opted to sing the U.S. national anthem, and this surprised me. Since I had only educated Latinx and Asian American men, I did not know that this was an option. In addition, for brothers who culturally identify themselves with a country other than the U.S., claiming the U.S. as their national anthem is not a common option, even if they were born in the U.S., which forces young men to learn about their cultural heritage, to learn a national anthem in its original language, and to claim the flag of their country in fraternity gear. For example, my fraternity jacket has a Mexican flag on the sleeve and Carlos has the Puerto Rican flag on his.

Through learning about the histories of our ancestors, we are also able to understand the complex history of the fraternity's pillars; all of whom are prominent Latin American figures. The pillars are Benito Juárez, Bernardo O'Higgins, José de San Martín, José Martí, and Simón Bolívar. Throughout the process the members learn about the childhood, the accomplishments, the downfalls, and the legacies of these pillars. These prominent men contributed to Latin

American liberation through war, politics, economics, human rights activism, and even literature. Through studying these pillars, the members get to see a range of masculinities employed with the unified vision to serve their people and elevate their communities. Ian Pérez says that besides learning about the history of the fraternity, "learning about the five pillars was one of the most interesting things. You can relate to them in your day-to-day life with the ways they approached things and liberated countries" (Pérez 2020). One of the stories that really resonated with Ian was through learning about Bernardo O'Higgins, who was never recognized by his father until later in his life, was raised by a single mother, and did not resent his father. Both Carlos and Ian had been raised by a single mother in Chicago and had struggled all their childhood because they did not have a father figure. However, in the conversations about Bernardo O'Higgins both Ian and Carlos said that they learned to be more appreciate of the love of their mother and learned to find male mentors outside of their homes, like O'Higgins. Thus, nuances about intersecting experiences between the pillars and their lives, helped them discuss deeply personal stories with their brothers and began to heal by vocalizing their pains.

In my pedagogy, I learned that connecting the pillars to one's life, helped to humanize the pillars and to discuss universal experiences that have happened throughout time for men like us. However, having witnessed various education process in various schools throughout the nation, I realized that reflexivity was not in everyone's pedagogy. As a member of the fraternity, I—like all my fraternity brothers—am allowed to sit through educational sessions, both virtual and in-person, of other universities or my own alma mater even if I am not involved in the educational committee. In witnessing other process, I found that the recruits rarely reflected on the material they were learning and instead were memorizing information and discarding once the sessions were over.

This style is heavily influenced by the brother in charge of educating the members. The educator or Pledge Master (PM) is volunteer-based position in the chapter and those that excel during their process with the knowledge portion, tend to serve as PMs. However, a select few aspire to become educators and many are in non-teaching centered fields such as business, pre-med, or engineering. Similarly, our members tend to come from more male-dominated fields that tend to be non-humanities or non-social sciences. In my chapter in Texas, I was the only person who aspired to be a professor and someone who studied Latin American and Latinx studies. In my eyes, this is a disservice to the members for in cultural and historical *reflecciones* is where we can understand the past of masculinities and look forward in a new manner. Felix Zavala says that through his reflections he thought about the educational process as a quest in search of his own identity and cultural pride, which was something that the curriculum and social environment at a Predominantly White Institution had not otherwise given him especially because his curriculum limited his options of taking courses outside of the field of exercise science. This pride found in the brotherhood improved his confidence and his ability to find pride in where his family came from (Zavala 2020).

Indeed, the educational process is a time for multiple findings: about the fraternity, about the other fraternity members, and about yourself. However, the process is also a time and place where negotiations and conflicts arise. Because there were nine founding members and me, Ian says that understanding where everyone came from was a difficult task: “We all think differently. We all have different perspectives. We were all different in ages. That’s what made it kind of hard” (Pérez 2020). For me, having to tend to the needs of nine men of color with different upbringings, learning abilities, and physical/mental limitations meant that I had to think about the tensions and negotiations before they occurred. In addition, part of my role as their

educator was to be a borderland between the various masculinities in the room because some were more aggressive, while others were soft spoken. In this role, I had to negotiate internal conflicts, especially how things were being discussed and said when we met. Their different backgrounds and life experiences gave them all different triggers, for example, about family, identity, culture, and even their bodies. Thus, I tried to facilitate conversations and making sure that everyone was being heard and was empowered to speak up. As a chapter, we had an ongoing joke that instead of me hazing the recruits, the recruits hazed me because of how difficult it was to educate a group of nine, very different, young men in my apartment.

Similarly, to Gloria Anzaldúa I had to embody a *fronterizo* methodology and identity as a *puente extendido*, an extended bridge, to mediate *confianza* between everyone. One of the stories I vividly remember is when one of the members kept making fatphobic remarks and jokes. As a formerly obese person, I grew up with body shaming and low self-esteem. I knew that when I heard things such as my body jiggling when I danced, I would shut down. Thus, I addressed the member making those remarks. Later, one of the members who felt affected by the comments shared about his experienced being fat shamed at home with his family and that he had tried multiple ways of losing weight; all of which were unsuccessful. Once we all shared our troubles with image, we were able to understand each other and be sensitive about the types of jokes that we would make. In addition, there were sincere apologies that came out of that conversation, but it took expansive deconstruction of these comments and concrete examples of how they affect us, in order for those that did not have weight problems to understand. Therefore, within the educational process and practicing for the new member presentation we were able to begin our fraternal *politics of confianza* that allowed us to understand our working styles, modes of communication, and the masculine behaviors that we each brought to the brotherhood. Through

this *confianza*, the members were able to find comfort in singing, reciting poetry, and displaying emotional vulnerability that later would end up on a stage.

Singing National Anthems as Brother Bonding

One of the central components of the educational process and the performance comes from singing the national anthems. Learning the national anthems, for a Latin American based fraternity, is about knowing the anthems of the countries of your ancestors because there is a belief that this could help combat the whitewashing of education in the United States. In addition, the fraternity wants people to understand and know their roots so that they could have a better sense of their community's struggles and histories. For the recruits, this was an opportunity to learn a song in a language many did not speak but also be closer to their families. Both Christian and Jor-El say that when they told their families that they knew the Ecuadorian and Filipino national anthems, that they were pleasantly surprised and proud of them.

We began learning the national anthems at the beginning of the educational process to think through everyone's cultural identities. For many of the members, this was the first time that they had been allowed to study or been exposed to history and culture of their specific mother country, especially since most K-12 schools lack ethnic or Latinx studies courses. José Barajas mentions that he had visited Mexico a couple of times before joining the fraternity and that "all my knowledge [of Mexico] comes from my parents and going back home. It's not really like I had taken a course" (Barajas 2022). Therefore, opening the learning process with the question, "Where do your ancestors come from?" is an opportunity for sociocultural revelations, which can often lead to moments of appreciation.

As someone who was born and raised in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, my understanding of not being from one place or the other is something that I lived through when learning about

culture, language, and the concept of home. My physical proximity to Mexico both during my childhood and in college gave me self-esteem and an appreciation for my culture since I was surrounded by other Mexican Americans and by Spanish. I would listen to the Mexican national anthem played at midnight on the Spanish-language radio stations. For the members of the fraternity, all of whom were born and raised in Illinois or Michigan, their concepts of *latinidad*, Filipino culture, and their ancestors' homelands are distant. José says that "a Mexican that lives in Chicago compared to that in Texas or California… there's definitely a cultural difference" (Barajas 2022). This geographical and generational difference oftentimes was a sociocultural hoop that we had to jump through, as brothers, to begin thinking about each other as brothers.

In addition to the geographical differences, our group possessed widely varying levels Spanish proficiency. I had grown up speaking Spanish at home, and it was also part of my K-12 education. Therefore, my bilingualism made the fraternity process easier for me because I understood the significance of everything we covered. In Michigan, many of the Latino members—including Ian (Mexican American), Carlos (Puerto Rican), and Timothy (Dominican American)—did not speak Spanish at home or know the language. This made the process difficult for them, particularly when learning the national anthems in Spanish.

As we began learning the national anthems, we discussed them line by line. I would read them in Spanish, and as a group, we would try to translate the anthem to English and analyze what it meant in the context of that country's history and culture. Although I knew that my brothers would not remember what every word meant, I wanted them to understand the larger concepts that the anthems depicted: pride, war, courage, and, often, death. As a group, we discussed how the anthems were written by men and reflected the characteristics of what it meant to be "manly" at the time of their creation.

After we discussed the significance of each anthem, I would play it on my computer connected to the living room TV. We sat on the couches and floor and sang along together. When I was pledging the fraternity in Texas, and my brothers and I did this on our own time. When we would meet, we were told that we were there to perform and not to practice; otherwise, we were taking up the older brothers' valuable time. This aggressive and individualistic approach sometimes made me resent the process and the brothers. Incorporating a group karaoke style of learning into the fraternity process when I became an educator promoted community cohesion and enabled us to have fun together. Many of the members knew that if they stumbled on a word or sang off key, their voices would be drowned in the sea of the brothers singing. In effect, singing together allowed them to grow together, enjoy the process, and rely on each other for support.

I learned all the national anthems with them. My Michigan brothers were surprised when they heard brothers from other chapters talk about not learning the national anthems of new brothers. I wanted to make sure that my brothers knew I was as invested in learning about them during the process just as they were invested in hearing what I had to say about the fraternity. Carlos says that my dedication to learn with them inspired him: "I knew that you were going above and beyond, so I had to put all my effort into learning. You were expecting and setting a high standard for yourself, and that's what we were trying to meet" (Laureano 2022). Therefore, my dedication to their education and their process inspired many of them to work through the things like the anthems that caused them discomfort and uncertainty.

Carlos came into the fraternity not knowing Spanish because his family rarely spoke it at home. He said that the educational process, because of its heavy emphasis on bilingualism, was challenging for him. However, he says that practicing and "getting help from people who were

more comfortable with the language was a big help. It was a challenge at first, but I got better as the process progressed" (Laureano. 2022. 01:51). One of the personal conflicts that Carlos faced was claiming his Puerto Rican identity when he did not grow speaking Spanish or eating traditional dishes from Puerto Rico. However, being in the fraternity allowed him to explore Puerto Rican music, dance, and food in the company of us as his brothers. Carlos became so inspired in learning about his culture that he later took a Latinx Studies course on campus and was also one of my students (three times) when I was a graduate student instructor.

Similarly, José and Diego took classes with me in American Culture, some of which had a heavy focus on Latinx communities. Therefore, the fraternity not only allowed them a space where they could learn about where they came from and their identities. It also inspired them to continue their education and take courses outside of the fraternity process so that they could learn about who they were and be more assured of their cultural identities and the communities that they belonged to on campus and in the United States.

Learning Filipino Culture in a Latino Fraternity

Although my knowledge of Spanish helped me with most of the anthems, I was lost when we were learning the Filipino national anthem. Luckily, the fraternity offered a vast network of brothers, and I knew a brother who was Filipino. He had been my mentee in Texas. In my two years of being active in the Rio Grande Valley chapter of my fraternity in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, I had overseen the new member education process for four semesters. In this time, all the members who joined the fraternity were of Mexican descent, except one who was Filipino: Lawrence Pabalinas. Coincidently, or by destiny, when Lawrence was in the new member education process, he chose me to be his *padrino*. In Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., a *padrino* or godfather, serves as the equivalent of a "big" in white fraternity/sorority culture. The

padrinos' responsibilities vary depending on the commitment that the older brother wants to have. However, the basis is that the *padrino* should mentor the *ahijado*, godson or little, throughout the fraternity process and as a new brother once the education process is over.

Throughout the new member education process of the brothers at the University of Michigan, the brothers from my home chapter at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley were emotionally invested in our success. They were proud of me for pursuing a PhD in Michigan and that the cultural traditions of our chapter in the Rio Grande Valley would follow me to Michigan. In essence, I became another type of *puente*, bridge, between the fraternal love and culture we had established in South Texas and the one I was trying to create with the young men in Michigan.

When I told Lawrence that there was a recruit who was of Filipino descent, he immediately made himself available to us. On many occasions, I put up the lyrics to "Lupang Hinirang" on the TV in my living room as Lawrence, speaking over the phone from Texas, walked us through the enunciation of the words in the national anthem. None of us in Michigan knew Tagalog. Therefore, the language barrier united us in a common struggle to try to memorize sounds at specific times in a certain pattern. José says that learning the Filipino national anthem was different from the other four because he could not picture the anthem in words: "The only one that I actually practiced was the Filipino one because it was thinking about the sound at the right time. Whereas the other ones that were in Spanish, it was just memorizing words" (Barajas 2022). Even though the process of learning the Filipino national anthem was difficult for those of Latin American descent, remembering how we learned these "sounds" is what makes it a memorable experience. Our struggle with the Filipino national anthem also made

those that identified as Latino that did not speak Spanish better for we were all working through these issues together.

Jor-El, our Filipino recruit, did not know Tagalog either. However, his experience remembering when we learned the Filipino national anthem was more uplifting. For Jor-El learning the anthem in Tagalog "was really cool. Singing in a new language for a lot of the guys was just funny to see and a fun experience. Then, seeing people surprised or shocked about us in the new member presentation made me believe that the work had paid off" (Santos. 2022. 19:50). Jor-El and I remember the crowd cheering louder when we began singing the Filipino national anthem, especially because it came after three national anthems in Spanish. For the brothers, singing the various national anthems in Spanish and Tagalog represented the types of diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies that many groups on campus were discussing but were finding difficult to execute. Learning and performing the various national anthems was an opportunity to think of the multiculturalism and the respect that we had for each other's cultures as brothers.

Through the educational process and learning about each other's cultures, histories, and music, we learned that we had many things in common. Both the Latin American countries and the Philippines shared histories of Spanish colonization and resiliency against oppressors. To many people outside of the fraternity, Jor-El's position within a predominantly Latino brotherhood raised questions about his belonging. For us, behind closed doors, Jor-El was another first-generation student and man of color at a PWI, trying to make sense of his future, his past, and his present on campus. This was something that we all were working through independently and being a part of our brotherhood made it more bearable to navigate.

As a result, the specific choices I made to help us think about our cultures and the way we learned about each other's heritage via karaoke, for example, queered the knowledge sharing

we established as brothers. We all felt out of place dealing with cultural insecurities, not fitting in with other people of color on campus and being in a university environment that was not conducive of our individual success. As a result, because the public space of the university was not made for us, we transformed my apartment as our safe fraternal haven. In this apartment we were able to sing, learn, laugh, and share many vulnerable moments that defined our fraternal bond and brotherhood. These practices help us queer our understanding of what happens in fraternal spaces and challenges the stereotypes that inform fraternity culture. Especially when these cultures have been historically defined and portrayed by white-cis-hetero men who have privilege, while simultaneously ignoring the existence of multicultural spaces for and by men of color. In this subversion of fraternal culture via a queer of color pedagogical approach to the educational process of fraternities, which tend to depict party and rape cultures, we can begin to appreciate the vulnerabilities that we practiced in an intimate space. This culture helped the recruits be vulnerable in public spaces such as the new member performance at the end of the semester.

Practicing Brotherhood *con Corazón* (with Heart)

Establishing a space of knowledge production within a hypermasculine, patriarchal, and homosocial space was a difficult challenge for us at the University of Michigan because of the way our fraternal education processes have been established. As is tradition in fraternity expansion projects, such as this one, brothers from around the nation are invested and willing to contribute their knowledge and mentorship in various mediums. When I met with the brothers I was educating at the University of Michigan, some of our fraternity brothers from distant parts of the nation would call in to our meetings, while those that lived nearby would visit during their

practices. The downfall to having other brothers visit was that often they would not agree with my methods of educating new members.

The traditional culture behind the educational process can be dehumanizing and discouraging. This is because at the beginning of the process the older brothers want to establish a hierarchy of power between those that have gone through the process and are part of the fraternity and those that are not. In this separation of power, new members are forced to speak only when spoken to, cannot look an older brother (from the time they joined the organization not necessarily age) in the eyes, and can even be told to engage in physical activity as a form of punishment. Our expansion to the University of Michigan gave me an opportunity to design the fraternity that I envisioned would be the most constructive and supportive for everyone, including myself. This meant that I would have to employ a feminist and queer pedagogical approach, that tried to undo the power structure between them as recruits and myself as an educator. For example, I would tell them to speak freely and did not use physical exercises as punishment if they did not know something. If they did not know something, then I would teach it to them or allow them to teach each other since there were a couple that always knew more information about a certain topic than the others. With this approach, I helped to develop a culture that would rely on each other to collectively educate everyone instead of wasting their time, and mine, by forcing them to exercise in front of me.

Some brothers from other chapters critiqued the idea of having fun while learning and discouraged me from displaying things the recruits had to memorize on a screen and reciting them together. Visiting brothers said they felt “disrespected” by the recruits when they were not following protocols when addressing older brothers. I, as their mentor, stood behind the recruits, who were not yet my brothers during the process, rather than siding with my fraternity brothers. I

remember one specific meeting in which I told the brothers from Michigan State University, "You are our guests, and this is our home." They were welcome to attend the practices to see the recruit's development, but I did not allow them to question the ways that we did things that we knew worked for us. As their educator, I stood in front of my brothers while the "brothers to be" were present because if I, their mentor, would not stand up to them publicly, who would? In addition, one of the things that I have always critiqued since I joined was the hostility that I experienced in my process and the way that brothers said the only way to build us up was to break us down. As a result, I despised the brothers that positioned themselves as know-it-alls because they lacked humility, which made me lack *confianza* in them.

In a study conducted by Brandon A. Jackson and Mary Margaret Hui about Black male bonding in a Predominantly White University, the authors find that the men looked for brothers because of personal and emotional reasons. The reasons included the fact that "they lacked friends, wished to recreate family and family-like relationships, and wanted to associate with successful Black male peers. In sum, they wanted to bond, both socially and emotionally, with others like themselves and others that inspired them, regardless of the campus climate" (2017). Similarly, to the Black men in this study, the recruits and I all wanted to belong to something larger than ourselves and have a group of people with whom we could hang out and study and on whom we could rely during good and bad times. Therefore, "traditional" fraternal pedagogies were, in my eyes, not conducive of the things that we were looking for which was an intimate connection with people that could support us.

When I realized that the brothers from other universities were not open to establishing the type of brotherhood we wanted and needed, I began closing the doors of my home. To those that accepted the shifting pedagogical approach, I would detail guidelines of what was acceptable

behavior and what was not. Although it took a while, the brothers who were invested in a chapter thriving at the University of Michigan slowly began changing their positionalities. When visiting brothers slowly became supportive of our group's culture and educational practices. In effect, the recruits benefitted and were able to have some emotionally vulnerable breakthroughs in front of those other brothers that had initially disrespected them.

One of the first such moments we had as a brotherhood was when Jor-El shared that he had lost his father in 2016, a year before he was in the educational process. It took many of us by surprise because he was the youngest out of the nine recruits and had never shared that. When Jor-El spoke about his love for his father and wishing he had more time with him, many of us reached out to touch him as we wiped away tears. We were talking about what love meant to us, and Jor-El remembers,

> A lot of us men in the room weren't used to sharing emotions. I remember vividly that nobody was talking, and then I mentioned my father passed away. I remember getting teary eyes and being very sad about the situation. But it was great to get that off my chest because that's what I felt in the moment. I definitely felt that everybody else opened up after that moment as well. (2022)

Jor-El says that the fraternal space and practicing vulnerability made it acceptable for him to share his story, and this encouraged others to share theirs as well (Santos 2022).

In response, Christian opened up about his injuries due to running. Christian shared that he was saddened because his body was slowly giving out on him, and he could not do anything about it. His injury prohibited him from competing in a marathon, and his Nike sponsorship was on the line. Christian says:

> I remember all the [Michigan State University] bros were there, and I was talking about running and how that had impacted my life. And how I was facing an injury. It was just really hard to deal with at the time because running had been part of my life since I was a little kid. So, to see that your body can't handle the expectation that your mind wants was something really difficult for my mind to grasp. I remember that practice a lot because it

> was the first time that I had cried in front of anybody in that room, even Ian who I had known for six years. (2020)

Many of us remember this conversation with Christian, who shared how much he loved running and how it had helped him deal with some harsh times in his life. Not being able to practice that which had saved him in the past was clouding his ability to imagine his future.

Both Jor-El and Christian shared extremely different stories about love, and that affected the way they were dealing with their fraternal experience throughout the educational process. When they spoke, they opened a door for others to talk about the ways that they were raised and how many of them were navigating the world in their bodies. That night we spoke about the fact that several of the members were raised by single mothers and that they always longed for a male role model. Others shared their issues with being the "chubby" or the "skinny" kid and dealing with body shaming all their life. That night transformed the way that we thought about my apartment as our fraternal space and our brotherhood as a bond of *confianza* which allowed us to share our most vulnerable and traumatic moments.

In voicing our traumas and vocalizing our pain through the brotherhood, we developed a practice that gave us the *confianza* to share part of ourselves to our brothers without having to worry that they would think less of us. Carlos remembers the conversation with Christian and recalls that "Christian always seemed like the guy who always had it together. So, to break down like that… I don't know, I just remember we were all closer, and we knew more about each other" (Laureano 2022). The reality for these young men and me was that listening to those that we thought "always had it together" open about their struggles made them more relatable, and it empowered others to begin using our voices in more than just singing and chanting. We discovered a movement from a stoic tone to a vulnerable voice that shifted our fraternal masculinities.

We also faced the realities of men dealing with mental health issues. Before a practice for our new member presentation, Ian alerted me that he was unable to practice everything because that week was extremely difficult for him with his exams. Ian has a learning disability, and his inability to speak Spanish gave him anxiety. I was on a call in another room during this rehearsal, but some of our fraternity's alumni were watching the new recruits practice. While singing the national anthems, Ian kept stumbling on the words and was asked by the alumni why he did not know the anthems, which the new recruits had been practicing since the first week. Ian became emotionally overwhelmed, knowing that some of the visiting brothers interpreted his responses as "excuses." Ian remembers:

> I wanted to curl up in a ball and get down on the floor and not wake up. I was losing my shit, and I didn't know what to do or think. You [Sergio] pulled me out, and it was you and John.[5] You asked me, "Okay, what is wrong?" and I was breathing heavy. And then I started crying. I was like "Fuck, I failed." I already started crying. We talked. The only line that I remember you telling me is, "You are stronger than you think." I was like, "Okay." Then you said, "Ian, look at me. You are stronger than you think, okay? You got this." And I was like, "Okay." I was trying to pull my shit together and trying to breathe. I went back out and we continued. (Pérez 2020)

I had forgotten about this incident until Ian mentioned it in the interview, and I was taken back to that moment. I heard a commotion in the living room and immediately went to see what was happening. When I saw Ian sweating and in tears, I walked him to the restroom and tried to calm him down. Amidst tears and shaking Ian repeated, "I can't breathe." He wore disappointment and anguish on his face. I grabbed Ian's hand, placed it on his chest, placed mine on top of his, and asked him, "Is your hand moving with your chest?" Ian in a confused tone replied, "Yes." I responded, "You are breathing. Focus on our hands moving." I do not know if this exercise helped him or if what mattered was the fact that both John and I were there for him, but Ian

[5] John was a fraternity alumnus and was the appointed assistant to the educational process.

began calming down. I had a history of severe anxiety attacks, and my therapist advised me to find something that would ground me, like a surface or something visual, and to concentrate on what was happening. I guided Ian through exercises that I had had used in the past.

Ian remembers this as an important moment in his life because the men he had met throughout his life had never been patient or comforting with him. As previously mentioned, Ian grew up with a single mother in the suburbs of Chicago and did not know he had a learning disability until he arrived at the University of Michigan. He had limited experience with Latino male role models who felt like family members. My care for him in a moment where he felt like dying served as a breakthrough moment for him. From then on, Ian said that I was a father figure to him, despite only being five years younger than me.

Unknowingly, at the time, I was following in the footsteps of women of color feminists whose care and activism was inclusive of men of color and their emotional vulnerabilities. My embodied experience as a queer Chicano from the border being mentored by Chicanas and Latinas taught me about human decency, respect, and humility. In my vision, this radicalizing of the intimate fraternal space was a necessary politics of survival amidst a racist, classist, and patriarchal institution such as the University of Michigan. Fortunately, the other men who founded this fraternity chapter with me saw the benefits in vocalizing their traumas and providing support when others were in need. bell hooks writes

> It is not true that men are unwilling to change. It is true that many men are afraid to change. It is true that masses of men have not even begun to look at the ways that patriarchy keeps them from knowing themselves, from being in touch with their feelings, from loving. (2004)

We need our fraternal space to be framed as a queered space where self-reflection, feelings, and love were at the center of our performances and relationships. By building our brotherhood around these values, we were not only able to begin the decentralizing of heteropatriarchy within

our fraternal chapter but also to feel comfort in performing fraternal disidentifications on stage during the new member presentation.

Performing Brotherhood through Culture and Vulnerability

It was eight days before the new member presentation that the recruits had become brothers. In those eight days, we practiced the format of the presentation and deeply went over all the moving parts of the performance. However, we had to be secret about where we practiced so that we did not ruin the surprise of their unveiling. Thus, because my apartment was too small to practice and everywhere else was too public, we would go to the track in the middle of snowy nights so that they could practice marching in and chanting. I made sure that we all had proper winter clothing and gear to be warm outside because I did not want them to get sick, especially days before their presentation. For those eight days, I could not get the brothers to leave my apartment. Carlos and Ian, who were struggling the most with the national anthems in Spanish would visit me throughout the day so they could practice in my living room. Other brothers would recite the Greek alphabet in front of me and asked for honest feedback. They all wanted to be sharp and loud during the day of the presentation and I saw the most polish in their performance once they found out that the educational process was completed.

During the day of the performance, and after I finished fixing my brothers' hair and ties on stage, I turned to the audience. I thanked them for being in attendance in a historic moment for the Latinx community at the University of Michigan and shared my excitement about this fraternity expansion project. Then, I commented on our mission to promote cultural heritage and diversity through the fraternity and announced that we would start by singing the national anthems.

One by one and in alphabetical order the flags of the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, the Philippines, Mexico, and Puerto Rico were raised by two brothers who had volunteered. With each flag the brothers and I sang the national anthems acapella, and on occasion the brothers in the audience sang along when they knew the anthems. Audience members who knew the anthems whispered along, but in these presentations the audience does not want to overshadow the performers by singing too loud because the presentation is about the new brothers. Therefore, there a politics of *respeto* that other Latinx students and audience members abide by without us, as brothers, stating that they cannot participate in the performance.

José, who is Mexican American, says that singing the national anthems, especially those in Spanish, was interesting because in "the United States, if someone speaks Spanish automatically people say, 'He's Mexican,' and the presentation of the other Latin American anthems proved it was not like that" (Barajas 2022). On a similar note, Christian says that he has a history of being mistaken for being Mexican because of how he looks (brown, short, and dark-straight hair) and because he speaks Spanish. Therefore, displaying the Ecuadorian flag, one of the less common immigrant communities in the U.S. and on campus, made him extremely proud (Ureña 2022). As a result, singing the national anthems and raising the various country flags allows for a decolonization of stereotypes that inform non-Latinx people that being Latinx or speaking Spanish is not the equivalent of being Mexican. This also enabled students in the audience to see themselves reflected in others, and at the end of the performance many students took pictures with the flags we had available.

After the anthems were sung, we greeted each fraternity and sorority represented in the audience. Their members chanted in response, as is traditional at every new member presentation. Then my new brothers on stage recited what is called "basics." The basics consist

of saying, in unison, certain facts about the fraternity including the colors, mascot, flower, names of pillars, and the Greek alphabet. In addition, because the fraternity is Latino-based the members recited the Spanish alphabet, and the names of all twenty-one Latin American countries and their capitals. For other fraternities and sororities, reciting information about their organization and saying the Greek alphabet is tradition. However, the members of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., includes aspects of Latin American cultures by singing the national anthems, reciting the Spanish alphabet, and listing Latin American countries and capitals—things that most Latinx fraternities and sororities do not include in their presentations.

In addition to the aspects of the presentation which celebrate Latin America, the members of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., are given an opportunity to step out of the line in which they are standing throughout the performance (as seen in Image 1). This distinguished our new member presentation from others on campus which do not allow the new members to introduce themselves and address the audience. When our brothers step out of line, they can look at the crowd, share words of appreciation, and give a red carnation to someone special in their life.

Receiving our fraternity's flower—a red carnation—during a new member presentation is seen as the highest form of recognition that someone could receive from a brother during a fraternity event. What makes this gift most special is that each member is only allowed one red carnation. Brothers are not required to give a red carnation, and some opt out of this tradition. Because this happens only during the new member's presentation, the gesture carries prestige. In their speeches, the newly inducted fraternity brothers can mention family members, friends, their significant others, mentors, or other fraternity brothers. During this speech, the brother can say whatever they want if they avoid giving specific details about the educational process that are not

already public. Members take different approaches to this opportunity to speak. Some write a speech and memorize it, some have an outline, and others speak.

The main reason that new brothers are asked to not detail things about the process for many is because they are hiding something whether positive or negative. For me, it was following the traditions of the fact that being in a fraternity—that has degrees of secrecy—feeds into the culture of fraternities and sororities. What makes one organization different from the other is that we each have our own practices, rituals, and traditions. Thus, if we were to share specific details, then most organizations would start to look alike. Within Latinx fraternity and sorority culture there have been rumors about organizations stealing educational manuals from other organizations and have been used against those organizations when recruiting members. In addition, the fraternity educational process can have such a transformative experience that the members must live through it in order to understand the context of learning anthems, singing together, or doing other non-traditional activities.

I called on Felix to step out of the line first. Felix swayed and danced, rallying the crowd. Typically, the brothers just walk to the front of the stage, but Felix took this opportunity to show his personality and shift the energy in the room. Felix thanked his line brothers, or LBs, for helping him throughout the process and thanked his *padrino* for supporting him. He picked up a flower and said that the *clavel rojo*, the red carnation, was an important symbol for the fraternity. He continued by saying, "This goes out to a person that has been with me since the summer. Rachel Rodriguez can you please come up?" (Zavala. Facebook Live. 2017). The crowd clapped and reacted tenderly to Felix's significant other. Rachel walked to the stage and the crowd cheered, "*beso, beso, beso*" (kiss, kiss, kiss). Felix smiled, gave her the red carnation, hugged her, and kissed her on her cheek. The crowd applauded.

Felix had recognized the three of the supportive networks that he had throughout the fraternity process: the brothers with whom he pledged, his mentor in the fraternity, and his girlfriend. Felix's choices of who to honor in his speech reflect expectations of masculinity in fraternities. Within the optics of new member presentations in fraternities, recognizing the *padrino*, the line brothers, and the educational committee are standard procedure. A man recognizing a girlfriend with a flower fall within heteropatriarchal norms. However, as fraternity men, recognizing a girlfriend or wife (as has been the case for older brothers) is something other brothers call a "danger zone."

I was introduced to the tradition of gifting red carnations in Texas during the fall semester of 2014, the semester after I had joined the organization. One of the prospective members in the process had seen multiple videos of new member presentations on YouTube and told us he liked the idea. As a chapter, we adopted it, and I carried the tradition to the University of Michigan. As members gave red carnations, they noticed tensions, especially among the new brothers who were acknowledging their girlfriends or their female friends. As a result, the tradition remained, but the older brothers promoted a toxic belief that younger brothers are "the new meat" in the fraternity and should cultivate the interest of many sorority women. The older brothers wanted to increase the pool of women that the young brothers could draw to their fraternity events. Therefore, recognizing a girlfriend during the new member presentation could harm the fraternity's appeal to sororities.

This belief, which I have heard repeatedly in many fraternal organizations, is a double-edged sword. You either sever your ties with the woman you love at the time of the presentation or cut the possibility of a connection with other women in the future. Although I did not advise

the young recruits on how to move forward, I did provide them with enough context to make informed decisions for themselves.

I was against this logic from the moment I heard it but knew that many would not unpack the sexism and harmfulness of longstanding traditions. This logic feeds into patriarchal understandings of men, especially of Latinos as “Latin Lovers” and *conquistadores*. Despite knowing the fraternal controversies behind gifting the red carnation, Felix opted for recognizing Rachel and displaying affection in front of a large audience. Felix’s rejection of fraternity heteropatriarchal culture, whether conscious about it or not, served as a reminder that gestures can reveal a set of social and cultural laws that can transform the ways that we develop an archive of movement and therefore new bodily practices (Rodriguez 2014). Although Felix’s gestures ascribed to the standard practice of patriarchal behaviors, they departed from the expected behaviors of the intersections of patriarchy and homosociality. Thus, queering the public performances of fraternity men of color by demonstrating that recognizing a loved one and displaying love and care in public is a strength to one’s character, not a weakness.

Another brother who went against the traditional conventions of gifting flowers was Jor-El when he decided to acknowledge his best friend Charles Chan. Unlike Felix, Jor-El did not give an explanation as to why he was giving the red carnation to Charles, he just called him out. I asked why he had chosen Charles. Jor-El said that his mother and girlfriend were not able to attend because they lived in Chicago, so he was unable to recognize them. Instead, he decided to recognize Charles because they were both first year students on campus, roommates, and friends since third grade.

Not many friendships that last that long, and Jor-El knew “that Charles has always been super supportive of whatever I do or whatever I have done in my life. . . That’s what he

deserved" (Santos 2022). Jor-El acknowledges that gifting flowers to other men is not common yet that was "something that never really bothered me [him] because Charles is a good friend of mine," (Santos 2022). He also states that rather than giving the carnation to any woman with whom he would have had a lesser connection, he went with someone who occupied a significant role in his life. As Jor-El acknowledges, a man giving another man a flower is not common and could be considered out of the ordinary. Despite masculine politics informing the gaze of the audience, his gift acknowledged the true friendship and support that Charles offered to Jor-El when his family and other loved ones were not on campus. Being able to recognize a long-lasting male friendship within a fraternity presentation created another acceptable avenue for men showing affection in public.

When Charles walked to the stage, Jor-El shook his hand like bros would and gave him a hug. The crowd clapped and cheered, but the reaction was different to when Felix and Rachel hugged. Despite observing two men exchanging affection, everyone in the room celebrated not only the individual members but the concept of brotherhood/friendship. Jor-El's carnation for Charles represented that even though fraternities could be "cult like" because we share secrets, non-spoken rituals, and follow a set of shared ideals, there is still room to acknowledge the friends who are not part of the group. A major issue in fraternity culture, that is yet to be explored in the scholarly literature, is how men act differently with men who are not in the same fraternity as them. Men sometimes abandon their other friendships to devote themselves entirely to the brotherhood of their fraternity. As a result, they cut the supportive networks that existed prior to the fraternity and often create resentment towards the organization or the specific individual.

The only other brother to gift a red carnation to another man was José, but his were for different reasons that the ones Jor-El had with Charles. A couple of days before the new member presentation José was torn between giving the red carnation to his mentor Nick or one of his friends. During the performance, José took the carnation and said to the audience, “I also want to give a red carnation to a very special person. He was my father figure in the summer, and he still is” (Barajas. Facebook Live. 2017). The crowd clapped, and José said that he did not know if Nick had attended. José stood in the middle of the stage with his hand clasped in front of him, saying, “Nick, Nick, Nick,” and for a second, we all thought Nick was not in the crowded room. Then Nick stood up. The crowd cheered the loudest they had cheered because Nick had a prominent role in the school dorms, had mentored other students and was a highly engaged student leader on campus. José let out a tremendous smile as he walked off stage to meet Nick.

Like Jor-El, José recognized a friendship that existed outside of the fraternity. José however, acknowledged someone that he had met through the University of Michigan who had helped him to navigate the university’s physical and political climates. Nick, a Black student on campus, had served as José’s residence assistant. They both shared a love for video games, television shows, and being racialized men on campus. Their intersecting identities and love for extracurriculars prompted them to develop a mentoring bond. José's red carnation represents the importance and necessity of intergenerational mentorship for men of color at Predominantly White Institutions, especially because Black and Latinx men are some of the groups with lowest enrolled throughout institutions of higher education nationwide.

After they gave the carnations, they each received their red rugby shirt with gold and white letters. The *padrinos* helped the new brothers get into their shirts, and for those whose *padrinos* could not make it because they were from other parts of the country, fraternity alumni

stepped in. Once everyone obtained their shirt, the new brothers chanted with the other brothers present, and they took pictures with everyone who had attended.

The speech section of the new member presentation remains the part of the event that the brothers remember the most vividly. The only part of the performance that was not scripted, the speeches reflected a multiplicity of masculinities and possibilities for men of color that could be found within the fraternity. In a part this was a sense of creative freedom by tailoring the gift and speech to their needs and wants. And in this freedom, we not only find creativity but also the freedom to release self and sociocultural prejudice that works against men and men of color. And because the stereotypes of Latinx and Filipino men is to thrive via emotional distance, the brothers queered the expected racialized masculinities that influence our behaviors.

The Real Work Begins Once You Become a Brother

Image 5: After the presentation, the nine fraternity members wear their red fraternity rugby's while carrying me.

One by one the fraternities and sororities that had attended took pictures with the new brothers. The educational process for multicultural fraternities and sororities tends to be extremely secretive. Therefore, this was the first time that the new brothers were able to talk

about the fraternity and be seen within a fraternal space in a public setting. The brothers looked like rock stars, receiving hugs and even gifts.

When they finished taking pictures with each organization, we took a group picture of just our new chapter's brothers. Then one of the new brothers proposed having a picture in which all the line carried me. I nervously laughed and ignored them, but they insisted. I was terrified of being lifted because when I was a cheerleader at the University of Texas Pan American, I was dropped from a pyramid and tore some ligaments in my knee. From then on, I promised myself that my feet would never leave the ground, especially to be lifted by other people. However, I knew that all nine of them had trusted me to guide them through the fraternity process, and I trusted them as well. We had gone through an educational process in which we shared our deepest fears and most vulnerable reflections, and I knew that they would not do something to harm me.

At the beginning of the presentation, I served as a physical shield between the audience and the line of brothers when I walked in front of them, and by the end of the performance, their nine bodies served as a literal shield between me and the floor. I was protecting them by reminding them that I would be there guiding them and helping them even when they would be in front of a large audience, and they were protecting me by not letting me fall.

The ways that we used our bodies to shield one another served as a direct representation of the politics of *confianza* that we had established throughout the semester in my apartment. We cared for one another and had each other's best interests at heart. As a result, we successfully guided each other through uncomfortable and unfamiliar situations and spaces. This *confianza* is what led them to share about their traumatic experiences in a private space and what helped them to share their vulnerable sides in front of an audience. Throughout the process we not only

practiced for the performance but practiced vocalizing our pain, which enabled us to embrace a more effeminate behavior than fraternities typically display in public. As Brandon A. Jackson argues "when men act in ways that are contrary to dominant views of masculinity, some groups of men may seek to reframe what it means to be masculine," (2012). This reframing was not only of the way we express ourselves with each other and others outside of our brotherhood, but how we presented a unified front in a public space.

In a more nuanced manner, I as their queer mentor, was being held and evlevated in a very public manner. Through this picture, they publicly claimed that they accepted me, my queerness, my *latinidad*, and the things that I had to offer to them. In this picture, we see that by centering me, the brothers did not fear to be "gay by association" which was things that later surged once our fraternity chapter became more active in our performance culture and our presence on social media. Thus, ending the ceremony with the queerest picture that a fraternity group could have, allowed me to feel—literally and metaphorically—in good hands because I had found them, and we had become brothers throughout their educational process.

As a production, the hypermasculine concepts of the performance: the suits, ties, fraternity letters, the primary colors of the fraternity, and the physical presence of men of color on and off stage reminded us that the presentation was produced and performed by men of color. Even when we shared our emotions and reflections, the surrounding atmosphere of brotherhood made us feel protected and masculine. We did not spend the evening worrying about the way that people perceived us as men of color on campus.

That last picture we took after the presentation was over (Image 5) reveals a stark difference from the one at the beginning of the presentation (Image 4). These pictures represent two contradictory and coexisting masculinities within this fraternity. At the beginning the

brothers were stoic, standing firmly, without emotion. In the second picture the brightness, big smiles, and our bodies reveal humor and closeness as we had fun together. The pictures also depicted me very differently. In the first one I am towards the back of the line standing behind them, and in the second they were behind me, carrying me. Both images represent kinds of trust needed to move forward to carry the mission of the fraternity to promote a cultural consciousness across our campus community.

I often felt as I guided the young brothers through the process that many of them needed a space to heal. bell hooks writes that "to grow psychologically and spiritually, men need to mourn. The men who are doing the work of self-recovery testify that it is only when they can feel the pain that they can begin to heal" (2004). What we did as fraternity brothers empowered me to become an avid listener and to also share my feelings about coming out to my family and struggling with my mental health. Many scholars still believe that men are unwilling to emotionally be open with other men, yet throughout this process, when the sociocultural conditions favored a place for these emotions to be openly shared without judgment, we men opened up to each other.

As a result, I believe that a reconceptualization of the space we afford to men should be queered through our pedagogical approaches which involved how we listen to men, how we speak to men, how we ask questions to men, and how we cater to the systemic needs of men which do not center love and care. By shifting these perspectives, because I had lived through them in my family and with my fraternity brothers in Texas, I was able to have radical intimate conversations that later became public queer gestures. Through these queer pedagogical practices, we began to collaboratively begin experiencing a shifting in our masculinities and how we simultaneously held each other accountable for the spaces and bonds that we needed for our

specific group. And in the end, we were able to reflect on a shifting of masculinities that was achievable through establishing intimacy and openness with other men.

Chapter 2
Choreographing Gendered Liberations:
Introducing a Fraternity to Dance, Sequin, and Drag

Image 6: The fraternity members pose fiercely at the end of their performance. Photo by Christian Ureña.

Clack! Clack! Clack! The soundtrack played while I strutted towards the center of the stage on my tiptoes, pretending to wear heels. My fraternity brothers waited for the music to begin, scattered throughout the stage in frozen positions. When I arrived at the center, I shifted my weight to my right leg with my hip out and pointed my left leg to the front, while I hugged myself with both arms. "Now they call… me…" RuPaul's song said. My brothers and I popped our hips and shook our shoulders while moving our fingers in ripples that began with our pinky and ended with our thumb. "Mother," RuPaul's intro continued as we thwarpped our colorful sequin fans to the beat of the song. The crowd roared loudly at the sight of the fans on stage, which we had made sure to hide in our hoodies throughout the entire dance number. We paused

in position waiting for the beat to pick up to begin dancing with the fans. Each member had a different color, which we had individually selected from the bulk we had ordered on Amazon and adrenaline rushed throughout my body.

The song continued, “na, na, na, na” as we moved with each beat. Our left hands were on our waist while the right one, holding the fan, covered our face when our arm went up then revealed our face as we brought our arm down. Our feet moved quickly, shifting our body weight between our feet while moving toward the front of the stage. We closed our fans, then we continued to the femme vogue section where we featured the hands component: broken wrists, flared fingers, and a mixture of precise and fluid body movement.

When the song ended, we posed fiercely (see Image 6). I placed both of my hands on top of my head to form a crown and squatted slightly while my legs shook from exhaustion. Some of my brothers had their arms up throwing our fraternity sign. Others had broken wrists and no regard for the way in which their bodies were positioned on stage. Many in the crowd stood up, clapped, cheered, and celebrated our dynamic performance.

I had never danced or choreographed a performance with a fan before. However, when we were brainstorming ideas about this performance, we came across a dance number on YouTube from *So You Think You Can Dance* that left my fraternity brothers and I amazed. This fan section of our dance included a fast-paced change of levels, ripples, formations, vogueing, and other non-traditional movements and embodiments that were not customary for men of color, especially among the other fraternities in the cultural show that night. Since this was the first time we performed a dance routine as a group, we wanted to convey versatility, have high-energy, and show everyone a fun time. As a queer dancer, and someone who had just come out as gay at the time of the performance, I always had the desire to vogue in public and use a fan.

However, I feared encountering homophobic comments both in person and online. Since my brothers were receptive to the fans and adding the vogueing elements, it excited me and gave me comfort in knowing that I could do this with a group of straight men of color I called brothers.

After holding for the crowd's applause, I began our traditional fraternity chant in the deepest voice I could muster as I wiped sweat off my body and tried to catch my breath.

"P-H-I!" I yelled.

"I-O-T-A," my brothers responded.

"Is the name of the brothers of…" I continued.

"Phi-I-A," they finished the statement.

"P-H-I," I repeated.

"I-O-T-A," they answered.

"Is the name of the almighty..." I yelled, losing my breath.

"Phi-I-A," they chanted.

"Phi-I-A," I said.

"Is the only way. Semper!" We ended our chant together? as we all walked off stage, where audience members greeted us with smiles on their faces, warm hugs, and congratulatory words. The room became silent as they prepared for the next group to take on the stage, but we as fraternity brothers were still full of adrenaline. In between side conversations, Christian asked the brothers who had been nervous leading up to the performance about how they performed and how they felt, and as we walked back to our chairs, their excitement was chaotic. The brothers had asked their friends to record the performance, and within minutes they were watching the video and analyzing how they had done while another fraternity performed on stage. When I saw

that they were all looking at their phones, I looked at them and said, “Don’t worry about how the performance went right now. If you had fun, then the crowd had fun with us.”

As a choreographer, and their older fraternity brother, I was proud that we had finished our first artistic performance as a brotherhood and enjoyed it. Much of our fun occurred during moments in which we negotiated their discomfort by embodying effeminate movements through the choreography. Throughout the rehearsal process, we studied the history of ballroom culture and drag queens to understand the significance of the last section of our dance. Therefore, this performance was more than a group of men “acting gay” as disgruntled online viewers later called our performance. This performance was an opportunity for me to teach my fraternity brothers about queer history and queer culture and for them to diversify how they saw other queer people, especially queer people of color. For my brothers, this was an opportunity to deepen our *confianza*, trust, as brothers, which proved that they were not only willing and able to accept me as a queer Latino, but other queer Latinos should they want to find a home in our fraternal organization and brotherhood.

Within seconds after finishing our drag-inspired queer dance, we changed, as is our fraternity’s tradition after every presentation. Our macho shouting shattered the fierce femme illusion that we had created with the sequin fans, vogueing, and shoulder shimmies. As we deepened our voices to chant in the militaristic style of our fraternity, we reminded the audience that we were, after all, a Latino fraternity for men of color. This brotherhood was what had made the queerness on stage possible.

These queer of color artistic traditions and aesthetics had never previously been employed by other fraternities on campus. Our own Latino fraternity has very little public history linked to queer traditions. As a matter of fact, our fraternity’s alumni discouraged queer

performances. A year before this performance, a queer brother who did drag posted a picture of him with other queer brothers doing the fraternity hand sign. Someone took a screenshot of the post and shared it on our national Facebook group. Many older brothers were outraged and had many negative things to say including that the picture did not depict who we were as a fraternity. While some interpreted the comments as homophobic, others said that fact that photo depicted the brothers in a nightclub was what reflected negatively on the fraternity. However, when some of the queer brothers posted pictures of heterosexual brothers holding drinks at the club and throwing the hand sign, these images did not provoke outrage.

In the context of our national fraternity's homophobic leanings, our performance marked a shift in the type of brotherhood that we were trying to establish at the University of Michigan. This dance commented on the possibilities of coexisting masculinities: queer masculinities (embodied in the dance) and hypermasculinity (voiced in our chant). The fact that we were comfortable performing both together marked our willingness to shift between different public versions of our masculine identities. In this version of our masculinities, we displayed that, queer men such as me and our historical contributions to artistry, could be accepted, celebrated, and elevated by brothers who identified as heterosexual.

This chapter analyzes the process of how my fraternity brothers, all heterosexual men of color (Latino and Filipino), and I, a queer Chicano from the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, negotiated choreographing effeminacy and masculinity in our first public dance performance on campus. Although the entire performance consisted of five different genres of dance put together, I focus on the first (reggaeton) and last (drag pop) sections I choreographed. We began with a music genre familiar to many college students accompanied by masculine dance movements and ended by dancing to drag? music and using effeminate choreography. This felt like a bold series of

choices for us given that we had never danced as a group in public. Working through various degrees of discomfort with the choreography and music allowed us to rethink the foundations of our brotherhood and brought us closer together as men of color taking risks together in public.

I interpret the creation and performance of our dance as a series of disidentifications that made it possible for us to collectively perform various versions of ourselves on a campus rife with racial tensions. Cultural theorist José Esteban Muñoz's notion of disidentifications highlights how those who do not fit within mainstream culture create a politic of survival that works within and through that culture. I take the reader through the process of creating this queer dance performance to highlight the ways that our masculinities, within the fraternity, were negotiated via our sociocultural, gendered, and fraternal politics as men of color. Through this performance we were able to capture the possibilities of gendered freedoms through dance, which decentralized how we thought and presented our brotherhood to a world that had specific beliefs about how Latino and Filipino men should act or perform in public spaces.

Muñoz, who wrote during the 1990s AIDS pandemic, says that "*the act* of performing and theatricalizing queerness in *public* takes on ever multiplying significance" (1998). Queer bodies, especially those belonging to people of color, were negatively portrayed and even feared during the 1990s. Therefore, performing queerness in public was an act of defiance and resistance during the AIDS pandemic. Our dance performance at the University of Michigan took place in March of 2018, during the Trump presidency when many men of color were repeatedly labeled rapists, narcos, and *bad hombres*. Our queer theatricalizing and performance in this political moment served as a choreographed counterpoint to the hate speech, heteropatriarchal conventions, and legacies of *machismo* that stereotypically defined our predominantly Latino fraternity.

In this chapter, I argue that through vulnerable conversations, *confianza* (trust), and our sense of safety in brotherhood, all of us were able to perform queerness and effeminacy without losing a sense of who we were and where we were headed as a unified fraternity. In our brotherhood, we found the support system necessary to publicly play with traditional conventions of hypermasculinity and effeminacy through our bodies, dancing, and gendered embodiments. We also found an opportunity to resist heteropatriarchal expectations by adopting queer forms of movement and dance. The brotherhood itself—the strength of standing in a group of ten supportive and loving men—served as an ideological/spatial shield that protected us from others' judgements of our masculinities and sexualities. Although this protection did not guarantee that our masculinities and sexualities went unquestioned, it helped normalize our idea of playing with gender through public performances. This way of playing with gender already exists in many homosocial private settings. (Think of the borderline homoerotic ways that male athletes play with one another's bodies in locker rooms while wearing only towels.) Our sense of *confianza* that we had established privately as we formed our brotherhood enabled us to be brave enough to experiment with our masculinity publicly.

Dance, as an artistic expressive method, allows us as brothers to negotiate, question, think through, rehearse, choreograph, and perform our understandings of queerness and heteropatriarchal masculinity. Dance allowed us to embark in a conceptual process that considers costume, set, music, choreography, movement, formations, kinesthetic, brotherhood, and individual identities within this queer performance. Furthermore, to dance, especially as a group of brothers on stage, deepens our conceptualization of the fraternal masculinities that we were able to explore as a brotherhood through the process of queering. Thus, dance as a tool of fraternal disidentifications, helps us navigate the negotiations of our gender, the identity politics

of our Latino fraternity, and the decentralizing of stereotypically portrayed men of color brotherhoods. Furthermore, the performed ruptures that occur in this third-performative space through dance, like Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands (1987), allows for a multiplicity of possibilities aimed to reframe Latinx masculinities, Latinx men, and Latinx fraternities. I interpret this third-performative space as one that brought together the performing space of queer culture and femme men through vogeuing and ballroom culture with the stereotypical cis-hetero-patriarchal cultures that inform men's behaviors found in fraternities.

In the same manner I position this dance piece as a continuation of the work of dance scholar Clare Croft who states that "dance, as it is taken up by artists, teachers, administrators, and scholars, produces a field for discussing and imagining how bodies in motion offer alternative meanings and ways of being" (2017, 2). I use queer, not in relation to sexuality, although my queerness and influences are clearly present, but to capture the "force of disruption that simultaneously draws on historical genealogies of queer and freshly imagines 'queer' in the contemporary moment" (Croft 2017). In this queer imagination, I envisioned heterosexual Latino men participating in queer culture without mocking or degrading queer people and their bodies as is historically customary.

Our purpose was not to use queer people and culture as something that reinforced our masculinities, but rather as something that we could respectfully participate in as a brotherhood. Therefore, describing a group of fraternity brothers working through the creation of a queer dance performance allows us to expand the stereotypical and limited perceptions that theories have shown when they speak about Latinx men, their bodies, their masculinities, and the ways they form brotherhoods as sites of sociocultural and gendered transgressions.

Personal Negotiations of Queerness and Choreography

The first time our fraternity, Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., made an appearance at the Multicultural Greek Xhibition (MGX), I was a first year PhD student at the University of Michigan. MGX is an event that brings multicultural fraternities and sororities to celebrate their talents on campus. The concept of "Multicultural" comes from the councils that these organizations belong to which is the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC). The councils are governing bodies that help to regulate the various chapters it houses, and the council is composed of members from various organizations under the umbrella council. The MGC is composed by Latinx, Asian, and Middle Easters organizations. The Black organizations have their own council, the white fraternities have their own, and the white sororities have their own.

Therefore MGX, is an event that tends to bring the Latinx, Asian, and Middle Eastern organizations to perform and celebrate their cultural differences on a public stage. The performances range from stepping to strolling, and sometimes have dance numbers. In addition, while some organizations think outside the box and create new content each year, others tend to stick to traditions and will perform the same performance tradition. One of the Latino based fraternities does their national salute every year, which is something they do during their new member presentations. In this salute, they chant the facts about the organization and other information. The other Latino based fraternity tends to perform their national strolls—a choreographed line dance—that consist of a series of eight counts, but they do it to different music each year.

For the members of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity. Inc, who do not have a signature and national dance, stroll, or step, participating in these presentations involves a higher risk and commitment because we do not recycle music or choreographies. Nothing is taught from our elders and instead we must create new engaging choreographies, pick out music, and find the

time to practice specifically for these performances. For other organizations, showcasing their stepping and strolling—which is something they do during recruitment events, new member events, or off campus events such as weddings—becomes a performance tradition. Thus, when we as an organization agree to perform, we are saying that we are committed to putting together a creative performance that we make ourselves. This elevates the stakes for it reflects the talent and the creativity that the members have, rather than something that you learn when you are brother to continue performing every chance you get.

That first year, I performed alone because I was the only brother on campus and there were no undergraduate students in the fraternity. Having experience with performing, I made sure to incorporate outfit reveals and variety by dancing cumbia, samba, and a jazz number into the mix. The crowd was surprised by my performance, and I knew that I would be invited back to represent the fraternity. During that same winter semester of 2017, I met the young men who would become the founding brothers of my fraternity on campus the next fall. In December 2017, when the brothers were introduced to the other fraternities and sororities on campus, I was already thinking of what we might perform as a group at our first MGX event. I volunteered to choreograph because I had the most experience. Since our fraternity was the newest on campus, we understood that MGX would be the perfect opportunity to promote our organization as being unlike any other.

During that holiday break, I returned to Texas to be with my family and spent the entirety of it thinking about music, genre, and movements, drawn from my training as a dancer. My mother tells me that I always had a passion for dancing and would pick up social dancing quickly as a child. Then, I took my talents to school. Since I was in elementary, I had been in dance groups and was awarded scholarships to train in a local dance studio. My dance studies focused

on Latin American genres like *folclórico, salsa, bachata*, and *cumbia*. I also trained in hip hop, flamenco, jazz, and ballet. I had experience choreographing dance and cheerleading for groups in South Texas. However, I had never choreographed for an all-male group who were new to dancing and performing on stage.

As I planned the choreography, I kept running into two limitations: a) the fact that none of the other fraternity men had dance training/experience and b) the fact that we had agreed to promote a different type of fraternity from the ones already on campus. Carlos stresses out whenever he makes any public appearance, but he found dance even more intimidating, saying, "It was something that I had very little prior experience, so I put a lot of extra stress and pressure on myself" (Laureano 2019). I wanted to make sure my brothers were comfortable performing, yet I also wanted to push them out of their comfort zones.

To think about what we meant by "difference," we observed and studied the other fraternities on campus and the performances that they had done in the past. We realized that they would, year after year, perform the same routines and label them traditions. Our fraternity did not have any traditional performance-oriented routines except for our chanting. Therefore, anything we performed would be different. But how could our performance clearly communicate our desire to be different? How could I ultimately queer the concept of fraternities through a single dance number?

These two limitations led me to think about the type of choreography that I would design. I thought through the interplay of formations and levels to compensate for the lack of intricate choreography, and I wanted to use this performance as another opportunity to demonstrate our willingness to embody nontraditional forms of masculinity. Our group had discussed the idea of rejecting hypermasculinity as I guided the new fraternity brothers through their educational

process. I shared the humiliating and dehumanizing process that I had gone through while joining the fraternity, but also spoke about the benefits of belonging to a brotherhood, including the moment when my fraternity brothers in Texas had supported me when I came out of the closet. I wanted to make sure that the audiences of our performances could get a sense of the vulnerabilities in which my Michigan brothers and I engaged in private settings. I wanted more people to associate Latino fraternities with alternate forms of masculinity. Some of our more private moments in fraternal settings included brothers crying with one another or playing with queer mannerisms. I wanted our audiences to feel that men could simultaneously be manly and still engage in behaviors often cataloged as effeminate. Men like us could decentralize the stereotypical hypermasculinity erroneously attributed to men of color in homosocial spaces. But could a single dance performance adequately represent a queered fraternal masculinity?

This internal struggle was primarily fueled by my knowledge as a dancer because I knew that "choreography resonates with cultural values concerning bodily, individual, and social identities" (Foster 1998). The movements that most men know in dance are almost exclusively choreographed in relation to women. Even I, as a queer dancer, had learned almost exclusively to dance as a woman's partner, especially since social dancing for Latinx people predominantly involves a female and male couple. In terms of all-male performances, the traditional movements tend to be hip thrusts, body rolls, and other movements associated with male strippers. Our performance could not include women and needed to represent our fraternity in a way that did not suggest that we wanted to be strippers. These constraints limited the repertoire of masculine dance movements that I knew because I did not want to present us as hypersexualized men of color.

As I pondered this, I felt troubled and struggled to begin choreographing anything. Something told me to shock people with an outrageously queer performance, but I had lived in the closet for a long time. My old and traumatic strategies of hypervigilance and body awareness had for many years prevented me from suffering overt discrimination in South Texas. As William A. Calvo-Quirós poignantly described his own life, I "kept my '*mariposa* wings' hidden in order to survive, but it was an exhausting affair that required a great deal of energy and vigilance on my part" (2014). In dance, I eliminated any sight of flamboyance when I did partner work with women because I was often told I overshadowed my female partners. Therefore, my experiences dancing with women and hiding my queerness reduced my confidence in choreographing something that was different from other fraternities. I had to do something very new for me if I was going to break away from a heteropatriarchal collection of movements.

I knew what effeminacy and queer movements were because I always tried to avoid them. I did not feel comfortable doing them, choreographing them, or making other men do them because of the fear of social and cultural retaliation that I knew we shared. David Buchbinder writes that "men who dance must negotiate the practices of masculinity carefully. Otherwise, they risk the stigma of being feminized or homosexualized, with social consequences that can range from ridicule and humiliation to violent and often fatal physical assault" (2012). Although I do not remember enduring physical assault, I have vivid memories of experiencing ridicule and humiliation at the hands of other boys and even some girls. I also remember being called a *joto*, or faggot, by male family members. Hypervigilance for my safety influenced the way I performed gender and moved as a dancer.

Since I was more comfortable with a more masculine performance, I sent the song "Lento" by Nfasis to my Michigan brothers. The song was being played in every club and radio

station on the border that year, and I had noticed that Michigan was behind on the type of reggaeton music that people were listening to elsewhere. This music selection could be an opportunity to distinguish ourselves from other organizations. The song, which had basic and catchy Caribbean beats, had the potential to excite everyone in the audience since we were a Latino fraternity and a group of men of color dancing to a Latino's song.

When the brothers heard the song and wrote on the group chat that they liked it, I began choreographing. The song "Lento" speaks about the "nailing" of a female being, which reinforced the sexist language and behavior that reggaeton and Latino men who perform it perpetuate. Although the song never mentions a woman, the artist uses the feminine "*clavala*" (to nail her) repeatedly throughout the song. I knew the song was sexist from the first time I heard it, but I also knew that many women enjoyed the song and that it was trending in the Latinx community at the time. Despite the sexist nature of the song, I decided to play with the way that we could move our bodies on stage. Throughout choreographing this piece, I consulted with Christian Ureña as the president of the organization on campus. The other members looked up to him. I would FaceTime him whenever I made progress with the choreography because I wanted him to know how I was thinking about the dance. He sometimes made specific requests but for the most part approved my choreography, even when it was difficult to imagine the group in motion as I danced alone through the video call.

Since Christian liked the choreography, and the dance would represent the fraternity entity that he led, I decided to stick with the traditional masculine movements that fit reggaeton, even though this betrayed what I thought of "difference" for a group of men. I added the male stripper movements I disliked, which played with the masculine acts that I knew the brothers and the audience would appreciate. Despite the motions being traditionally hypersexualized and

masculine, the formation I chose to perform the choreography flipped the script on the ways that our bodies were being read throughout the number. It is important to note that at the beginning I began choreographing or ten individuals, nine of the new brothers and myself. However, as we met through the practicing and we worked through the motions, two of the brothers decided to leave the performance. As with everything we did as brothers, performing was not mandatory. Therefore, I adjusted the choreography's formations so that it included only eight of us. I am not entirely sure why they did not want to perform aside from the fact that they just did not feel confident or comfortable to put their bodies in front of a public audience and to dance. This also shows the pressures and high stakes that it means when you are a man, especially a man of color, engaging in public performing and dancing.

Image 7: Screenshot of recording during the rehearsal of "Lento" in one of the campus dormitories. Photo by Sergio G. Barrera

As seen in image 7, I positioned us in a "V" shaped formation. I served as the point closest to the audience and furthest down the stage. The rest of my brothers stood diagonally to my right and left side. I choreographed myself in the closest position to the audience because I knew that I would be able to distract the audience, in case one of the other brothers forgot the choreography. At the same time, I knew that if the others were behind me, they would be able to

see how my body was moving and mimic the choreography. Symbolically speaking, many associated my role within the fraternity to be of the mother/father figure. Thus, choreographing myself strategically for the purpose of protecting and helping my younger brothers serves as a testament to the type of familial brotherhood we had established. They knew that no matter what, I would not forget the choreography and would be able to help them even when I was not consciously doing so, which gave them a sense of confidence and *confianza* (trust). Like the new member presentation that they had done the previous semester (more in Chapter 2 of this dissertation), my body served as a physical shield between the audience and the brothers. By standing in front, I hoped to make my brothers more comfortable dancing on a large stage.

When we returned from the holiday break, I began teaching the reggaeton piece. The first day of practice engendered mixed emotions. On one hand, we were excited to be in each other's presence after the break, and on another, the brothers were struggling to process the choreography. I slowed down my teaching and focused on those who struggled the most. I also showed them the basics and did rhythm exercises because some could not understand the intricacies of the music and were missing the movements that were choreographed to the music's more subtle beats.

While learning choreography, many of my brothers looked awkward. I could tell that they were not as in tune with their bodies as I had grown up to be. Some of them were even uncomfortable looking at their reflections in the studio's wall of mirrors as they danced and would ask me if we could face the blank wall instead. As a man, and a man of color, developing confidence to stand in front of a mirror is challenging, especially during the age of social media in which we are highly critical of how we move and the aesthetics of our bodies in comparison to fitness models. Standing in front of the mirrors and observing themselves move in unfamiliar

ways created tensions between achieving a good rehearsal and establishing a space that was conducive to their learning.

While some of the brothers felt uncomfortable watching themselves dance, Christian and I were living for our reflections and thinking of the types of personal flair that we could add. I remember Ian, José and Diego commenting on the fact that they would never dance like I would. When they all admitted to this, I told them that my expectation was not that they replicated what I did but that they learned the dance and added their personal style to it. Throughout many of the rehearsals I had to guide them through self-esteem talks, something that was not traditional within either the fraternity culture that I knew or the dance culture I had experienced.

Carlos told me that he remembers thinking, “Oh, man. I don’t think I can do this. But once we got into it, you were very patient with all of us, so it was very enjoyable” (Laureano 2019). Ian Pérez also echoed this sentiment when I asked how his experience was learning choreography: “I felt like you’re very good as a choreographer and just teaching the brothers that participated, especially with me, and had great patience” (Perez 2019). As I began teaching them choreography, I remember being frustrated that they could not move their bodies the ways that I—with years of dance training—could. However, as an older brother, I had to constantly remind myself that my experience with dance, movement, and performance, even as a closeted man, was greater than what they knew as Latino and Filipino young men. Men of color are often discouraged from participating in the performing arts, especially dance, because of stereotypes that call into question performers’ sexualities and masculinity. Understanding the systemic issues that deny men of color support and access to dance and other artistic spaces led me to rethink how I would approach teaching my brothers the choreography.

A more patient approach on my part led us to have successful rehearsals because it allowed the brothers to see past their lack of skill. Only when I interviewed them for this project did I realize just how limited their range of dancing and performance experience was. Christian says that his experience performing was limited to dancing at *quinceañeras* (Ureña 2019). José Barajas and Diego Don also mentioned that they had some experience with *quinceañeras*, which seemed to be a theme for young Latinx men in their teenage years. However, having danced and choreographed for *quinceañeras* in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, I knew that the traditional waltz for the *quinceañera* that they might possibly have danced before getting to the university was not preparation enough for what I was envisioning. *Quinceañera* dances pair up males and females. In my experience, the role of the man is downplayed to not outshine the female's dancing. In this fraternity's performance, we had no partner work with women, and the brothers had solos throughout the performances. We needed to be less like waltzing high schoolers more like a dance crew.

Even though at the time I did not know the limitations of their previous experience with dancing, I could tell that there was a disconnect between what I taught and how they embodied the movement. Some had awful timing and rhythm, while others were extremely stiff. It pained me to see them struggle, but I always made sure to highlight what they were doing right. Many times, while teaching choreography, I thought through different steps and changed the dance on the spot, especially when their struggle weighed them down. I observed that when they felt down, they continued to work through their insecurities because they loved the brotherhood and did not want to disappoint their brothers. Carlos says that he never wanted to quit in his moments of discouragement because "I didn't want to quit on my bros. I felt like I didn't want to take an easy way out, even though it was challenging for me. I wanted to persevere through it"

(Laureano 2019). Ian echoes Carlos' feelings by saying that it was truly discouraging when he was not picking up the choreography but that he felt comfort in knowing that the other brothers were also struggling. Ian says, "I didn't have the motions, so it was discouraging at times. Then I saw my other brothers doing it and no one had it. It was comforting" (Pérez 2019). We found comfort being in community with other like-minded individuals who were working through their insecurities and limited knowledge of dancing together.

When I saw my brothers struggle, I would freeze and look into a void thinking about the different dance steps I knew. This process of choreographing is highlighted by Susan L. Foster who describes choreographers as sometimes motionless and staring into space when they work. They think of where the arms and feet will go and whether the moves have been repeated—all at the same time. "The choreographer wrestles with these and related questions in no prescribed order and, quite probably, without ever articulating these questions or their answers verbally. She is sorting through, rejecting, and contrasting physical images. Her choices manifest her theorizing of corporeality" (1998). As a choreographer, theorizing with my body was influenced by my identity as a queer Chicano, my willingness to flip the hypermasculine script, and my love of my fraternity brothers. This positionality adds more layers to Foster's theorizing because I had to think through choreography under various intersectionalities: *latinidad*, masculinity, and brotherhood. These three concepts which consider gender, sexuality, culture, and relationships between choreographer and dancers informed our corporal kinesthetic in the dance studio.

At the beginning of the choreography process, I had to think thoroughly about how our movements would not only fit the music but also the lyrics, which many times alluded to hypermasculinity and hypersexualization. For instance, when the song said "*Toma. Dale. Toma. Dale. Toma. Toma. Toma. Dale*." (Take it. Give it. Take it, give it. Take it. Take it. Take it. Give

it.), the brothers wanted to imagine that they were grabbing someone's waist and thrusting their hips towards them. This hypersexualized movement sequence is something that was directly taken from the social dancing space where *perreo*, or twerking, occurred. Thus, the repository of movements that flourished as the result for the *reggaeton* piece were an intersection of traditionally masculine movements and of the optics and expected aesthetics of Latino men in social dancing spaces. As I look back now, I realize that this did not fit with our different vision for the organization. However, intersecting familiar concepts of *latinidad* and masculinity through the choreography allowed for a more relaxed environment in which we were able to later use subversive movements for the drag-inspired ending of our performance.

This practice space was oftentimes filled with joy and stress. Christian shared that he "would get frustrated cause the boys would mess around a lot, and they also didn't know what they were doing" (Ureña 2019). Here Christian uses the word "boys" to talk about his fraternity brothers. While some might interpret this as a term that infantilizes the brothers given the context of "joking around," young men of color in this social milieu refer to a man as part of the "boys" when they are indicating the intimate relationship that the person holds with another man. To be one of the "boys" is to be part of the inner circle. This intimate homosocial title can be achieved without a fraternity. However, because we all belong to the same fraternity, being part of "the boys" acknowledges the close brotherly relationship experienced between Christian and the other brothers.

This "messing around" to which Christian referred happened especially in the early practices, when the brothers were still uncomfortable and testing the waters. I imagine that many of them thought, at the time, that doing a spin, or a body roll was not masculine when you were in a room full of men. As a result, and as my experience working with homosocial environments

informs, many men have a tendency of using humor to camouflage their feelings of discomfort. Christian's frustration stemmed from being a leader in the fraternity and feeling a sense of responsibility to represent himself and the organization in a positive light: "I was just really excited. Like obviously, I was nervous, but I think I was just nervous because I cared a lot about how we would look in our first performance" (Ureña 2019). His care came for the fraternity, for himself, but also for doing something different, which was the entire purpose of the performance in community with a group of men he called brothers.

Christian goes on to say that having his brothers rehearse and perform something that others were not doing filled him with pride: "I know it's something that I felt a lot of pride for because like everyone else does the same shit. So, knowing that we are different and that we can create something that hasn't been seen before and then display it is something that I felt was really dope" (Ureña 2019). This pride in being different from what others would perform at the MGX event could be traced back to the sense of masculinity that Christian felt. However, within the scope of brotherhood, Christian was proud that we had put something together that we could claim agency in creating, rather than having performed something that was passed down.

Although this section of the dance highlighted the sexist tendencies of Latinx culture in *reggaeton*, entering the performance through a familiar genre and an easily recognized repertoire of movements allowed us to work through the discomfort of having to dance alongside a group of men and choreograph for just men for the first time. Through these first practices, we were able to deepen our brotherhood's trust and develop a trust in my ability as a choreographer. This came from understanding the potential that each of us had to contribute to the performance. Some of the brothers shared ideas for choreography, others shared leadership, and even those

who shared jokes helped us be comfortable while navigating the unfamiliar territory of dancing as a group of men of color.

All Roads Lead to Drag Queens

Throughout the semester, we continued practicing three times a week. Conversations about the performances even continued as we ate together, went to fraternity meetings, or got together to study. Because I was taking care of the choreography, the other brothers decided to split the tasks of looking for other songs for the dance, finding transition sounds, styling a costume, and finding a space to practice our performance. In these conversations, we made sure that everyone contributed something to the performance so that we could balance our duties to the fraternity and our coursework. At times, brothers had ideas that I had a difficult time incorporating because I did not want to compromise the quality of the performance. Thus, as a choreographer, negotiating my expectations and those of the other seven brothers was exhausting.

In one of these conversations, I introduced the idea of performing a drag-inspired dance. I had been watching the television show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, which featured drag performers from across the nation in a cutthroat competition. Since I was learning to embrace my queerness, I was both excited and terrified to even think of doing something as extravagant as dancing publicly in a femme way. However, from a young age, dancing on stages allowed me to tap into characters and performances that would shape the ways I walked through the world. Ramón Rivera-Servera states that "dance, as an act of self-presentation and community building, becomes one of the mechanisms through which Latina/o queers negotiate their place and membership within and outside the club" (2012). For me the stage, dancing, and my fraternity

brothers represented the mechanisms with which I could successfully negotiate my membership to brotherhood, masculinity, and performances.

While looking for inspiration online, I came across a video from *So You Think You Can Dance* using RuPaul's song "Call Me Mother." It was a performance that featured giant fans, vogueing, and exuded femme energy, even from the heterosexual dancers. I quickly became inspired and proposed the song to the other members. They all seemed to like how upbeat and fast paced it was. When I said I wanted to incorporate the fans as a prop, eyes widened, but no one opposed the idea. When I saw their physical reactions, I knew that I was proposing something extremely daring. I positioned it as something that I had not done in the past and that would also challenge me. Christian was the first to approve the idea, and the others agreed to learn the choreography. As Ian and Carlos said in their interviews with me, no one wanted to let the brotherhood down. We had already worked through many things together, including my choreography of the hypermasculine dance and Ian's determined struggles with learning the steps. Knowing that they supported my idea of doing a drag-inspired dance number empowered me to continue exploring my queerness alongside them as my brothers.

As part of our research, I showed them clips from *Drag Race* and spoke to them about the history of drag and ballroom culture. I wanted them to understand where these performative traditions came from and how they were meant to disrupt gender. We found parallels in the drag queens' goals about gender presentation as with our own when we established our fraternity chapter. On one occasion Carlos said, "Wow! She's really hot!" when he saw a drag queen walking the runway. All the other brothers laughed, and one told him, "Well, he's a guy." Carlos was extremely confused. I then corrected them because the contestant was transgender and had since transitioned into womanhood. We proceeded to speak about gender constructions and

about the difference between trans people and queer people. This conversation allowed me to humanize the person behind the makeup and wig, and I was able to correct the dangerous trope of trans people just playing dress up.

I studied the choreography of “Call Me Mother,” created by Mark Kanemura for the production number on *So You Think You Can Dance* and negotiated between the parts that really excited me and the limitations of what the brothers and I were able to perform. Unlike most student presentations that I had seen, I wanted to stay away from replicating the choreography to avoid copying a queer artist’s work. However, I took inspiration from the fans, ripples, levels, and the voguing aspects remained central to the dance number.

While thinking about how our bodies would move, I thought about capturing the essence of “old way” vogue and “new way” or vogue fem. In the film *Paris is Burning* (1990) Willie Ninja speaks about the inspiration of old way vogueing, which is defined by its sharp lines and still movements that could be seen as different poses if one were to snapshot someone while they were performing. Marcos Becquer and Jose Gatti state that vogueing “multiplies the fronts of struggle in alignment by repositioning breakdancing within an emergent history of black and hispanic gay pride, thereby critiquing certain (hetero)sexist current within hip pop” (2008). They also speak about Egyptian hieroglyphics, limbo dancing in the West Indies and the martial arts of *capoeira* in Brazil as elements that inspire the dance style (Becquer and Gatti 2008). Although a queer of color art form, old way vogue, as a movement, recontextualizes the hypermasculinity among men of color. This is done by deploying traditional forms of masculinity found in martial arts such as capoeira and sharp lines found in Egyptian hieroglyphics in tandem with signifiers of femininity and queer sexuality.

Old school vogueing highlights masculinity by using hands that are stiff and sharp like blades. The lines made with the arms, torso, and legs are forceful and precise and create geometrical shapes. The movement is slow paced, as if the performers were posing for a magazine photo shoot; the body produces an imagistic frame with every motion. In contrast, new way vogue, also called vogue fem, relies on fluidity of the hands, hips, and legs. New way is traditionally less concerned with sharp lines and more concerned with fast paced motions that engage the audience. It plays with costumes, moves other parts of the body like a person's breasts or chest, whips hair, and is typically performed in heels. New way has five elements: duckwalk, catwalk, hands, floor work, and spins and dips.

Despite being fascinated by the elements of new way, I knew I was not properly trained to choreograph or perform anything except for the hand component of vogue fem. I also knew that dancing and performing were key components of ballroom and Black/Latinx queer life. Teams of performers in queer ballroom culture form "houses" which operate like chosen families and provide communities of care, particularly for young queer people who have been cast out of their biological families. Though all my Michigan fraternity brothers are straight, many of them felt the profound absence of key members of their families—almost always men—who could not offer them the kinds of mentorship and support they craved. When we decided to incorporate vogueing into our dance routine, we honored and invoked the ballroom scene's tradition of queer community formation and recontextualized the hypermasculine Latinx optics we had introduced through *reggaeton*.

In a similar manner, adding vogue elements to our dance number as a Latinx brotherhood allowed for us, like ballroom members, to "expand gender and sexual possibilities by taking up multiple articulations and performances of both masculinity and femininity" (Bailey 2014).

Vogueing served as a tool for us to not only appreciate Black/Latinx queer culture as a fraternity but to publicly critique the rigid gender binaries placed on us as men of color. The latter was something that I had envisioned from the beginning of the performance but did not think possible when I began mapping out the choreography.

When we discussed incorporating the fans, several of the members were concerned. Some legitimately worried about having to think about an additional thing on top of already challenging choreography, but no one was concerned about the fan making them look gay. At least, no one voiced this. In his interview, Christian said that he was not concerned about the fan, because "it was just a fan." He was not questioning the fan's effect on the audience's perceptions of the brothers' gender or sexuality but saw value in the prop as something that would be flashy and distinguish them from other performers. Yet, I sometimes feel that no one opposed the fan because Christian and I, as leaders in our group, agreed with one another on this point. In a hierarchical fraternal organization, we represented the two male entities with the most power in the fraternity on our campus. Regardless of their reasoning, all the brothers were brave enough to dance with their fans.

When I began teaching the choreography, I thought about making it as simple as possible. The arm placements, feet and formations were not intricate because "Call Me Mother" was the fastest paced song we used and was the finale of our show, which meant that we would be exhausted by the time we started. Since this piece was the last to be taught, I also knew that some were struggling to remember choreography. All the members responded well to the choreography until I introduced new way vogueing.

In that section, I had told them to improvise motions for half an eight count to the lyrics of the song and that we would synchronize the last half of the eight count. In my mind, I

envisioned a Bob Fosse-esque section in which each member is doing a different pose as they move through this section. However, the fact that they had to improvise a femme-like series of movements troubled some. Even though it was only four counts which they had to do alone, the equivalent of four movements, the majority said, “I don’t get it.” or “I can’t do it.” For the first time in our rehearsals, I heard the words that any coach/teacher/choreographer dreads. Yet, I knew that their discomfort with the choreography stemmed from a fear of thinking about improvising effeminacy. Generating their own effeminate dance movements would acknowledge that the construction of effeminacy was within their own reach, rather than something dictated by biology or society that they had no choice but to follow.

Seeing that they were struggling too much, I showed all of them a couple of the movements that they could do to make the task easier, yet they were not able to process an unchoreographed section. Diego shared that throughout the process of learning the choreography of “Call Me Mother” he was preoccupied about how the audience would receive him:

> I knew that girls in general are down with accepting it because it’s something out of the ordinary and they kind of understand that performance aspect of it. But again, being in a fraternity, it’s an all-guy environment, so I was focused more on what other fraternities would perceive as. Since we are new on campus, what they would talk and label us as. So, I was very conscious of what might happen in the next couple of semesters. Not so much dealing with homophobia or anything like that, because these were definitely not traditional masculine moves, but just being mislabeled or misrepresented because this is performing. I was performing so I just wanted to put it out there because I had practiced. It’s not because it’s necessarily how I am or acted. (Don 2019)

Diego here says that he is not worried about homophobic rhetoric that might be placed on him and his fraternity brothers. However, his preoccupation over being “mislabeled” or “misrepresented” because of a performance stemmed from fear of being associated with queerness. Men’s fears of being questioned about their sexuality because of misrepresentation stem from experiencing or witnessing discrimination fueled by effeminophobia and homophobia.

Diego's worry also comes from knowing that the gaze of other men of color in fraternities specifically would be informed by heteropatriarchy and would catalogue these non-traditional masculine performances and movements as gay, queer, or effeminate. For my straight brothers, this dance was a performance rather than something that was tied to a sociocultural or sexual identity. For me, it was both.

By this point, I had noticed that the brothers had cultivated a high level of comfort and vulnerability regarding their identities and bodies in our private fraternal space. But the possibility that they could be misinterpreted because of this performance sunk in when it dawned on them that we would perform publicly. They became concerned about how this queer dance would reflect on or potentially erode their masculine capital as Latino and Filipino men in a Latino fraternity.

Carlos mentions that during the performance he remembers a couple of men in the audience laughing during and that it "rubbed me the wrong way." He said, "We're here bringing something new and fresh, and they're judging us based on how they think men should dance. So, I don't think that's fair" (Laureano 2019). *Latinidad*, heterosexuality, patriarchy, hypermasculinity, and homosociality all influence popular and stereotyped notions of *how Latino men should dance*. As Susan Foster claims, people have certain expectations for dancers that are informed by sociocultural, gender, and sexuality norms that follow dancers off-stage and after performances are completed. Carlos worried that the unfair perceptions of the men in the audience would follow him and his brothers.

Foster's theory of gendered choreography reverberated in Carlos' expressed fear that we would become known as "the gay fraternity." Even if the brotherhood dared to embody queerness in a performance on stage, that did not mean that that is who my brothers were off

stage. This homohysteria, described by Eric Anderson and Mark McCormack as men's fear of being interpreted as gay, became abundantly apparent within our group after one of the brothers expressed his concern. Anderson says that

> "a culture is homohysteric if it meets three conditions: (i) the culture maintains antipathy towards gay men, (ii) there is mass awareness that gay people exist in significant numbers in that culture; (iii) the belief that gender and sexuality are conflated. When these conditions are met, homophobia is used as a tool to police gender, as people fear the stigma of being socially perceived as gay." (2016)

Having experienced homohysteria as a closeted Chicano in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, I fully understood how the brothers, being heterosexual, would be worried about the persecution that queer people routinely face.

Once we acknowledged what could happen when we performed this number, our conversations about self-acceptance and not allowing others dictate how we viewed ourselves deepened. Through these rehearsals, our brotherhood and fraternity not only queered but strengthened. Ian Pérez admitted that "all my brothers were pretty down, and it's going to be honestly, a once in a lifetime type of thing. I don't know anyone in college who has done a dance performance with three different genres, using fans, and flipping someone. I just thought that was cool" (Pérez, 2019). This "pretty down" mentality was what got us through the entire process of choreographing, and once we all agreed that we defined how we viewed ourselves, our commitment to the performance and each other became unshakeable. Carlos mentioned that he did not want to give up on the performance "because I didn't want to quit on my bros. I felt like I didn't want to take an easy way out, you know, even though it was challenging for me. I wanted to persevere through it" (Laureano, 2019). The idea of "not quitting on the bros" reinforces a healthy type of masculinity found within our fraternity chapter because it spoke about the core principles that we were trying to share with others looking for a space to belong.

The loyalty, trust, and love that we had for our brothers and brotherhood allowed us to not give up even when the discomfort with choreography and potential judgment from the outside world threatened our identity as a Latino fraternity. In retrospect, in embracing queer choreographies, we opened the door to those queer Latinx students who feel pushed out of Latinx fraternities for their hypermasculine stereotypical tendencies.

All of us as dancers and brothers knew that brotherhood came above all else. Therefore, performing hand elements of voguing, which involve broken wrists, flared fingers, and hip movements, did not change how we related to each other on the stage. The sequined fans, through conversation, became detached of effeminacy and sexuality and instead functioned as a flashy prop that elevated the difficulty and skill required to perform. Furthermore, in understanding the conventions of drag, ballroom culture, performance, gender, and sexuality, we allowed ourselves to access a deeper fraternal kinship that was rooted in queer gestures.

Performance and Reception: Accepting and Policing Queer Embodiment

On the day of the performance, we met at the Michigan Union. Our fraternity was scheduled to perform in the middle of the lineup of fraternities and sororities, and while we sat in the audience watching the others perform, we grew impatient. When they called us up, my body filled with adrenaline, and a vein on the right side of my neck throbbed. Christian introduced himself as the president and us as an organization, and the music began. By the time we knew it, we were chanting, covered in sweat, and trying to catch our breath. As we walked back to our seats, one of the event organizers came up to me and said, “We don’t have a trophy but if we did, y’all would have taken it.” The comment excited me, and I was extremely proud of all our efforts. Christian asked everyone, “How did you do? Did you mess up?” Most of the brothers

answered that they did not remember. The performance had gone by very quickly, and they were still processing what they had just done on stage.

When the event was over, we were showered by compliments from various organizations. The Director of the Multicultural Greek Council Courtney L. Monroe came up to me and said how proud she was of us. She said that the campus needed something like us and that she was excited with how the performance would shake things up for the other organizations. I had developed a working relationship with Courtney since she was the person overseeing the expansion project on campus. I knew that her comment meant that we were changing the dynamics of the multicultural fraternities and sororities. During the preparation for the expansion, we spoke about the other fraternities on campus and the fact that they had become stagnant since other organizations were not challenging them to think outside the box. Thus, after having a strong showing the semester before in the new member presentation (as discussed in chapter 2) and showcasing a dance routine that was creative and dynamic, we were bringing exciting shifts to campus, particularly for students of color and the larger community involved in fraternity and sorority life.

To our surprise, some of our alumni brothers from Michigan State University and Kent State University in Ohio were in attendance. We had invited them but did not think they would make it since they all had full-time jobs. We also did not see that they were seated towards the back of the audience, since we sat in the front to have easier access to the stage. They all walked towards us in a group with cheerful smiles to congratulate us. We then took pictures so that we would post them on social media, and we went to have dinner afterwards. During the dinner, we discussed the positive reception by the alumni brothers and the audience, and to the surprise of some of the members, we did not hear of anyone calling the fraternity “gay.” Because of the

large amounts of positive feedback and encouragement by those in attendance, we were excited to share the video on Facebook and Instagram.

A couple of days after the performance, the brothers shared the video and in the online posting tagged everyone who was dancing. Uploading online and cross tagging amplified the reach that the performance had on campus, and it allowed for multiple points of views to be expressed: both positive and negative. The first couple of comments came from people who knew the brothers, whether in a professional setting or in fraternity life. Comments such as "Get that show on the road! So beautiful. So talented!" arrived from some of my academic colleagues, and others wrote, "Dope ass performance! Good shit bros! 🔥🔥," as some of the first comments. Alongside these comments, many reacted with the like and love reactions, which validated our efforts behind the performance.

Since this was our first dance performance as a brotherhood, the brothers frequently checked the online postings of the video and would tell others if anyone had shared it or if the number of views had increased. After the positive and affirming comments came the critiques and negativity. The comments ranged from questioning our role at the university as students to concerns about how we were presenting ourselves as part of a national fraternal organization. The online comments tended to follow a trend described in Ki Namaste's article on "genderbashing" which states that "bashers do not characteristically inquire as to the sexual identity of their potential victims, but rather make this assumption on their own" (1996). This genderbashing came from some of our own family members as well as fraternity brothers in other chapters, and some hostile conversations began online.

Diego Don mentioned that there were two comments on the performance post that bothered him. The first comment came from one of his cousins who posted, "So this is what you

go to college to do," and the second came from his mother who said that he "was too stiff to be on stage" (Don 2019). Although these are not explicitly related to genderbashing, they aim to discourage men from dancing. Doug Risner, who studies bullying and homophobia among male dancers, finds that if parents were more supportive and encouraging, more boys would study dance (2014). In Diego's case his skill and his choice of extracurricular activities were both implicitly being questioned by his family members. In effect, Diego mentioned in his interview that this hurt him because they did not understand the experiences of Latino men in a Latino fraternity at a Predominantly White Institution.

In addition, Diego was one of the brothers who struggled the most with confidence and self-esteem, especially on stage and with his body. Thus, as an older brother in the fraternity, I felt responsible to assure him that he these performances and the fraternity itself were helping him to grow and develop new skills. I also commended him for finding the strength within himself and with his brothers to dare to dance. Despite his family not fully understanding the experiences he had leading up to that five-minute dance performance, Diego says that the fraternity "was a supportive network that allowed me to dance even though I am not very good at it" (Don 2019). Through dance, Diego had found the support within the brotherhood that was missing in his actual family relationships.

In a similar family dynamic, José shared that one of his elder sisters wanted to have a conversation with him because she was worried about how he was behaving and concerned about the things he was posting on social media with the fraternity. José told me that he was having dinner with his family when:

> My sister asked me, "Are you gay?" And I'm like, "What?" And she's like, "No. It's okay. You can tell me." And she literally said that phrase over twenty times, and I was like, "No, I'm not." She's like, "Well…" and she brought up the fraternity and the dance. Then she brought you up. She's like, "He's very feminine, and he does a lot of these

> types of things." I don't know if she follows you, or she probably saw it on Instagram or something. So then she brought you up,, and I was like "Yeah. He's gay, but that doesn't mean we are all gay. Most of us are straight in the fraternity." (Barajas 2019)

José mentioned that she was aggressively insisting that he admit to gayness, and this frustrated him. José explained that there was a political purpose behind this performance, which was to "break masculinity" and portray us differently, but this was not enough for his sister.

José's sister's statements allude to various factors that were adding to her confusion: the fraternity, the dance, and me as a queer fraternity member. His sister's comments reminded me of my own family and how they felt regarding the fraternity. During one Christmas celebration *una prima*, a female cousin, told me, "*De seguro esa fraternidad es de puros jotos*," (I'm sure that fraternity is composed of all faggots). This conflation of the homosocial with the homoerotic is fueled by the fact that our families do not understand higher education. They are not aware of the history or power of fraternities in supporting men of color who have often struggled at PWIs. Because José and I are both first generation college students our families harbor homophobic misconceptions about the things that happen behind closed doors in fraternities. Intimate, non-sexual kinship among men can be difficult for some people to imagine when they have not experienced or witnessed it for themselves.

The second thing José's sister pointed out was the way that we danced and the theatricalizing of queerness on stage. Many families struggle in watching their family members exploring various parts of their identities after they leave home. Some family members who remain for generations in or near the same hometown or community feel like those who have left are hiding something. José's sister saw him online voguing and performing with a fan, and this caused her to question his masculinity and his sexuality. Risner states that "boys who do not adhere to dominant codes of masculinity are in peril, whether they identify as gay or are

perceived to be gay" (Risner 2014). Our dance required the embodiment of femininity and self-confidence for the performance to succeed, and traditional Latinx masculinities reject the juxtaposition of these qualities in men. In addition to the stigma surrounding males who dance which marks "them as effeminate, homosexual, and not real men" (Risner 2014), Latinx men interested in dancing find themselves in awkward situations with their families and friends having to affirm their heterosexuality.

The last thing that José's sister points out is my open queerness. My identity as a queer man, who is an evident leader and mentor in a Latinx fraternity, raises many eyebrows, especially because the men I was mentoring all identified as heterosexual Latino men. Thus, my ability to mentor Latino men who did not identify as queer raised concern in José's family. The fear of "gay by association" reminds me of the Mexican saying, "*Dime con quien andas, y te diré quien eres"* (Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are). The idea of being "gay by association" is not something new or exclusive to Latinx people. Eric Anderson, a sociologist who focuses on masculinity and homophobia in sports, writes about an incident in which his sexuality incited violence against one of the men he was coaching: "My status as the first publicly recognized gay male coach in the United States went relatively unnoticed until 1996, when a football-player assaulted one of my heterosexual athletes who he assumed to be gay because he was on my team" (2005). Although José's experiences did not result in physical violence, the hostility and frustration of being repeatedly questioned and not believed by his family members created a sour experience when he returned home.

Other critiques of our performance came from our fraternity brothers across the nation. I expected the older heterosexual brothers to express discomfort with the performance, and they did. What I had not expected was for the queer identifying brothers to disapprove. The older

heterosexual brothers made comments along the lines of "This is not who we are as a fraternity." and "Why aren't there any women in the dance performance?" These two comments raised concerns about the ways in which the brothers at the University of Michigan were representing the entire organization and the fact that heteropatriarchy is an unwritten tradition within Latinx fraternities. Their statements that the performance was not representative of the fraternity felt exclusionary, discriminatory, homophobic, and effeminophobic. The fraternity's bylaws, mission, and vision contain nothing descriptive about the "type" of masculinity or fraternity that we should be. There are, however, many comments about being inclusive and being a home for future leaders of the world. Thus, if the future includes gender diversity and gender fluidity, how do they see the future of masculinity within the fraternity?

The older fraternity brothers' comments serve as a form of policing gender and reflect the systemic heteronormativity which remains rampant in fraternity culture. As we learned from their comments, even the queer brothers help to police the gender norms within our fraternity, albeit from a different perspective. Some of their comments also included the idea that the performance was not representative of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and others said that the performance "would be more suitable for a sorority." Some queer brothers described the performance as "slutty" and wrote that "If it was a gay thing… it would have been cute." These comments caused me stress because of the hypocrisy among queer men in fraternities. However, they also reminded me that even gay, bisexual, and queer men help to maintain the hypermasculine and *machista* conventions that stereotypically inform the homosociality of Latino fraternal spaces.

As a queer Chicano/Latino, I understood the "if it was a gay thing" comment as policing queer culture. This policing, on many occasions, comes from wanting to preserve the queer

history, culture, legacies of struggle, and erased voices of marginalized peoples. I have learned about these sentiments from Black and Latinx ballroom members especially when they see white or heterosexual people teach vogueing workshops and monetizing an artform created by queer artists of color. Yet, some ballroom members believe that this culture should be for everyone because it was born out of discrimination and policing of queer people of color; in a culture meant to embrace everyone who has been outcast, all comers should be welcome.

In a similar vein, when my fraternity brothers from Texas found out I was queer, I was welcomed and embraced. My fellow Latinos had sought shelter in our fraternity because they understood the ways that racism puts us at risk, and when they learned about my sexuality, they continued to value me as a Latino and a man—as one of them. As I met other heterosexual brothers across the nation, I was always assured that queer brothers have a place within our fraternity. Yet, when they saw a group of heterosexual men embracing effeminacy and queer culture, they described it with words that did not align with what I had experienced up to that point. After the performance, I realized that the underlying philosophy of the fraternity with regards to queerness was that it was acceptable to be sexually queer if you were not gender queer, especially in public appearances. Therefore, the unwritten rule about queer people is that you can be queer as long as you do not make us look less straight. Especially because no one commented or critiqued the male stripper like choreography at the beginning of the dance number. Which shows how hypermasculinity, even in its cruder forms, tends to not be critiqued, questioned, or attacked when it conforms to the expected behaviors of *macho* men.

Nonetheless, we, as the University of Michigan fraternity brothers, discussed both the comments of affirmation and the critiques that wanted to limit our expressive nature. Jor-El says he did not mind "what other people would be saying. I know that there were other brothers

across the United States saying stuff, but we were all having fun. And at the end of the day that's all that matters," (Santos 2019). For us, the reality was that the community on campus were the ones we saw daily, the ones who supported our events, and the ones who appreciated what we were trying to do. We had to learn how to differentiate between the comments online from people who had only seen a video for which they had limited context on and the support we had by those we see in person on campus.

On a personal note, I had to grapple with the larger systemic issues with heteropatriarchy and gender policing that fueled these groups to make the claims that they did in public formats. At the beginning, I felt attacked because I had choreographed the performance and because we had all contributed to the entire production. However, as a brotherhood we were able to pull each other out of the doubt and backlash when we identified the communities which were making these comments (typically older Latinas/os) and realized our dance had the power to create conversations about gender and sexuality in our families and in our fraternity.

Using Dance to Queer Brotherhood in Private/Public Spaces

When I interviewed my fraternity brothers about the performance, they all remembered what happened leading up to the performance and its aftermath. The moments we shared on stage during the dance number were a blur, and our memories of the performance itself were limited to what we had observed in the recording. As an ethnographer, I think about the power of remembrance and process, especially when it came to the dance numbers that challenged the perceptions of who were designed and forced to be through the fraternity, our masculinities, and our *latinidades*.

Throughout the chapter there are various moments of tensions and negotiations that many times clash but that coexist. Like Gloria Anzaldúa's theorization of *borderlands* throughout this

performance I negotiated my positionality as a fraternity brother and a choreographer. I also negotiated traditional forms of masculinity and femininity via music, embodiment, and movement. As a brotherhood, we negotiated comfort with our idea of creating a different performance that ended up playing with gender binaries as well as negotiated the reception of various audiences. The moments of negotiation were determined by how we reacted to them as a fraternity. This process deepened our sense of brotherhood and the ways in which our masculinities simultaneously occupied roles that intertwined struggle, discomfort, patience, teaching, and fraternal love.

In addition, negotiating the components of this performance as they relate to space in the dance studio, on stage, virtually, and within our fraternity allowed us to engage in reflections about the performance's reception and enabled me to think about who has the agency to occupy and perform in certain public spheres. Ki Namaste describes this phenomenon as "attacks against lesbians and gay men interpreted in terms of a defense of the 'public' as that domain which belongs to men—heterosexual men, to be more precise" (1999). Therefore, when various communities chimed in after observing our performance on a virtual platform, they fed into the idea that effeminacy and queerness on male bodies did not belong in the public domain, especially those domains that have the opportunity to reach broader audiences such as those on social media platforms. I will also add that no one engaged those that were negatively commenting on the post, except for me when a brother threatened to "cancel" our chapter for doing something that alluded to stepping and strolling—something that our organization was against for we did not want to appropriate Black fraternal and sororal performance culture.

Queering movement made people uncomfortable because publicly displaying queerness challenges the heteropatriarchal gaze of both women and men. In queering fraternal

masculinities, we demonstrated the possibilities of coexisting intersectional and vulnerable masculinities that through a Latinx queer performance. We engaged with "past aesthetics and political legacies, as well as historical traumas and conflicts, to practice new ways of being and being together, Latina/o and queer" (Rivera-Servera 2012). Incorporating the past and political legacy of vogueing decentralized our expectations for ourselves as men of color, which made our possible masculinities and brotherhood queer components of our fraternity. Yet, we were also susceptible to harsh critics who had a liminal understanding of our goals as a brotherhood at the University of Michigan and our need to undo hypermasculine behavioral traditions from within all types of fraternities.

As fraternity brothers and men of color, regardless of our individual sexualities, standing in a unified manner behind queer gestures and embracing queer culture allowed us to navigate the positive and negative receptions of our performance while finding pride in the legacy of freedoms that we began within ourselves as future male leaders. This freedom was inspired by ballroom and queer culture, for they "remake the relationships on which family is based through a flexible and overlapping kinship structure, whereby LGBT members nurture and look after one another according to a logic of kinship that exceeds gender and sexual norms, age hierarchies, and biological ties" (Bailey 2015). Although not everyone in this performance and fraternity at the University of Michigan identified as LGBTQ+ themselves, I took inspiration from the kinship structure and performance nature of queer people of color in drag culture and ballroom houses to think about our chosen family through the fraternity. As a result, our brotherhood served as a "house" for those who found comfort and strength in challenging the normalcy of hypermasculine fraternal culture, and I, as the older brother and choreographer, served as the mother of this house.

Chapter 3
Los Teatro Traficantes:
Decentralizing Hypermasculinity and Brotherhood in Prison and Fraternities through Theatre

"It's important for those who are creative
To keep helping others realize their creativity.
So that we can build a better world…"

(Davis 2020)

On the day of the final theatre performance for our semester-long theatre workshop my fraternity brothers, the incarcerated men from the Federal Correctional Institute at Milan, Michigan, and I stood in the prison's day room. Dr. Ashley Lucas, our professor and then Director of the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP), sat in the first row with some of our classmates, cheering us on. In the sea of white plastic chairs behind her sat other incarcerated men who formed the audience for our performance, and on the second tier stood the prison's warden, the chaplain, and several security guards.

In the middle of a theatre game designed by the men at Milan, my fraternity brother Christian Ureña, was slowly lifted by the incarcerated men in his group. He portrayed a basketball player dunking a pantomimed ball through the arms of a tall, incarcerated, Black man who stood firmly with his arms in a circle in front of him to resemble a basketball hoop. Everyone in the crowd laughed at their creative tableau. The game was inspired by the various improv games we had learned throughout the semester, and it relied on ideas generated by the

audience, which made many of us performers nervous because we could not anticipate what would be said or done.

When I saw Christian being lifted, I panicked and then calmed myself because I knew my brother was in good hands. Many prisons in the United States have strict rules in place that do not allow volunteers to touch incarcerated people beyond a high five or handshake, and the act of a group of imprisoned men lifting a person from the free world could be read as a particularly transgressive or threatening act—one that could potentially cause our volunteer program to be canceled. Even as I registered the danger in how the prison authorities might react to this moment, I also saw this moment as a celebration. What we had done throughout our theatre workshop had created a brotherhood bond so strong that Christian felt comfortable enough to agree instinctively to being lifted by the participants in our workshop. I realized that we had created a brotherhood that connected the incarcerated men at Milan to the three of us fraternity brothers who had spent the semester with them. Through this bond, we bridged communities and cultures formed in a prison and a university while challenging the stereotypes of masculinity created by each of those environments.

This chapter describes a three-month journey in which my fraternity brothers Carlos Laureano, Christian Ureña, and I entered the Milan prison on a weekly basis to facilitate theatre workshops with a group of incarcerated men. Through PCAP, a curricular program at the University of Michigan which trains students to facilitate arts workshops with incarcerated people, my fraternity brothers and I went to the prison to make theatre and to see what kind of learning opportunity it would be for us. We all had our own insecurities about going into a prison. As a gay man, I feared encountering homophobia and sexism in a space that thrived on hypermasculine behavior. However, every week that we met to do our workshop, I realized that

our collaboration through theatre activities inspired humor, care, joy, *confianza* (trust) and vulnerability in all of us, despite the harsh environment of the prison where we met.

At the end of the semester's workshop, I realized that we had created memories that would last for a lifetime and proved that many stereotypes that the general public harbors about incarcerated men were false. Before we entered the prison, my fraternity brothers and I had created a queer type of brotherhood—one that defied hypermasculine stereotypes of Latinos and fraternity brothers—and through this theatre workshop we built yet another form of brotherhood with the men at Milan. We did not enter the prison seeking new forms of kinship or attempting to upend the tropes of toxic masculinity that surround incarcerated men, but much to our surprise, the men at Milan gave so much of themselves that we all felt that we had found new brothers in one another. Years later, when I decided to write about these experiences, my research renewed the sense of brotherhood among us and put me back in touch with men from the workshop with whom I had not been in contact since the workshop ended.[6]

I did not enter the Milan prison as an ethnographer. I went there with the purposes of finding a creative community, making theatre, and learning about prison culture and life. I had no intention of conducting a research project. When I realized that I wanted to write about these experiences and had no field notes from the time to guide me, I enlisted the help of the others who were in the workshop to describe what we had experienced together. Their *testimonios* helped to verify and correct my own fallible memories. In addition, following this methodological tradition allows for a multiplicity of perspectives, memories, and reflections to be highlighted while simultaneously centering the sense of community and brotherhood that we

[6] The prison prohibits volunteers staying in contact with workshop participants while they are incarcerated. By the time that I began writing this chapter I found out that all of the men in the theatre workshop had regained their freedom and they could speak to me without limitations.

formed together. It took all of us to create this workshop and our performance, and it feels only fitting that we should also collaboratively recollect and narrate these experiences.

The *testimonio* method is inspired by radical women of color feminisms who use autoethnography and *testimonios* to analyze "where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (Moraga and Anzaldúa.2015. As we revisited the experiences of our workshop through my research, Christian, Carlos, the (now formerly) incarcerated men, and I reformed our community and reflected collectively about how theatre unexpectedly gave us the tools to navigate and ameliorate the heightened tensions of hypermasculinity and patriarchy within the prison. Our differences in identities, performance, skill, and creativity caused us to work harder to understand and get to know one another and enhanced the brotherhood we experienced inside the prison—a place where artistry, openness, and vulnerability are often dangerous for men.

My fraternity brothers and I came to this work with training and support from the Prison Creative Arts Project at the University of Michigan. PCAP's community-based philosophy and the collaborative nature of our theatre work allowed us—incarcerated and free men alike—to engage in a disidentification of the hypermasculinity that fraternity brothers and incarcerated men are expected to perform. Our workshop included no grandstanding or intimidation tactics. We had no need to try to prove our toughness or manliness. We did not pretend that we had no emotions, that the tragedies witnessed every day in prisons and the wider world did not affect us. We approached one another as men who were interested in learning about improvisation, in having fun together each week without mocking or demeaning other people, in creating a performance together that would showcase each person's strength and creativity. This allowed us

to remove the many masks of masculinity and at times even to embody effeminacy and queerness without shame or reproach.

As queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz has taught us, oppressed people disidentify with the harmful stereotypes placed upon them by their oppressors to assert alternative forms of identity and citizenship (1999). People in prison have been stripped of many of their civil and human rights and are continuously portrayed in inhumane ways. However, the men at Milan, created a performance that complicated the harmful depictions of their nature, masculinities, and intersectional identities through joy, humor, and charisma. In a similar manner, as disenfranchised men in various degrees, we (my fraternity brothers, the men at Milan and I) created a space for those conventions to be challenged through theatre. In this chapter I talk about theatre as a tool of disidentification to hypermasculine performances associated with prison space, incarcerated men, men of color, and men in fraternities.

This chapter expands my theorization of *fraternal masculinities* by foregrounding theatre as a creative practice that enables men to disidentify the hypermasculinity found within the prison space, another homosocial environment. This work also provides a transfraternal approach to *fraternal masculinities* as it considers how a new and more complex form of brotherhood emerged when the worlds of a fraternity at a university and a group in prison who meet to do theatre.

PCAP as the Road to Prison

I first heard of PCAP in 2016 from Dr. Ashley Lucas, my mentor, dissertation chair, and the program's director at the time. I sought her out because Dr. Lucas is a playwright, scholar, activist, and performer, and those were the things that I wanted to do professionally. The first time I went to speak to her, she explained that PCAP is a multilayered project that brings faculty,

students, and staff from the University of Michigan into artistic collaborations with incarcerated people throughout the state. Dr. Lucas told me that I could even go to Brazil to do theatre in prison, which I eventually did as part of PCAP's study abroad program. Everything excited me; however, I was often told by other graduate students that there was no time to practice artistic hobbies if I wanted to keep up with coursework and the demands of my doctoral program.

As my relationship with Dr. Lucas continued, I grew to see performance as an integral part of my scholarship and to accept my own queerness which had I run from as a youth in Texas. Months after meeting Dr. Lucas, I came out to my family as I explored self-expression and building a Latinx community on campus. In the winter semester of 2018, I took Dr. Lucas' Theatre and Incarceration course which taught us about theatre in prison, the concept of atonement and about the impact that the creative arts have in the lives of currently and formerly incarcerated people. I was excited to learn about PCAP because I had never heard of anyone who would willingly go into prison, much less to do theatre. I was also interested in finding out what excited the other PCAP volunteers, and I wanted to experience that magic that all of them described when they shared their memories of doing theatre inside. In addition, I had been finding community through dance and performance, and I felt that PCAP could give me a sense of belonging at the University of Michigan and beyond.

As part of the class, I signed up to volunteer at Milan. The Federal Correctional Institute is a men's low-security prison located in Milan, Michigan, and the only federal prison in the state. Milan offers various types of programming, including religious, educational, and recreational programs. PCAP is one of the programs offered, through the Life Connections Program (LCP)—an intensive reentry preparation, faith-based program for a select number of Christians who are close to finishing their sentences. Though PCAP is one of the few non-

religious programs at Milan, we enter the prison with the support of the LCP chaplain and as a result work specifically with incarcerated men in LCP. PCAP sends a group of university students to the facility for an hour and a half each week for eight weeks within a semester. In these workshops we facilitate theatre games, check in with the men, and prepare a final performance at the end of the semester for an invited audience of other incarcerated men, prison staff, Dr. Lucas, and some of our university classmates.

All the PCAP volunteers I knew who had facilitated workshops at Milan in prior semesters were women. They spoke highly of the wonderfully talented men who had been in their workshops. I, on the other hand, anticipated that I would encounter homophobia, effeminophobia, and hypermasculinity in a workshop inside a prison. My stereotyped beliefs about incarcerated men were fueled by popular depictions of prisons, such as the film *The Longest Yard* (2005) in which queer Black and Latino were mocked and ridiculed and Miguel Piñero's play *Short Eyes* (1974) which depicts the character Cupcakes as a Puerto Rican "pretty boy" who is sexually harassed in prison.

In addition, I grew up surrounded by prison rape jokes, like the familiar admonition that men should never bend over to pick up a bar of soap in a prison shower. This joke has become a socially acceptable psychological weapon against men of all sexualities and cultivates a deep-seated fear that we might be assaulted and powerless while we are in a vulnerable state. Thus, hypermasculine spaces made me uncomfortable, and prisons seemed the most terrifying spaces to enter. In truth, we all should be terrified of prisons because they are places where people are forced to live in abominable conditions and where civil and human rights abuses are commonplace. Because I had never been inside a prison, all I could imagine was the litany of horrors that popular culture and news outlets had instilled in me.

Some of the horrors of prison that I imagined are described by Don Sabo, Terry A. Kupers, and Willie London in the introduction to their book *Prison Masculinities* (2001):

> Even if you do not feel tough enough to cope, act as if you are. Suffer in silence. Never admit you are afraid. Whatever you see "going down," whether it is the brewing of pruno (prison-brewed drinking alcohol), rape, or murder, do not get involved and do not say anything. Do not snitch—the penalty can be death. Unless you want to be branded a punk, do not do anything that will make other prisoners think you are gay, effeminate, or a sissy. Act hard and avoid any resemblance of softness. Do not help the authorities in any way. Do not trust anyone. Always be ready to fight, especially when your manhood is challenged, and act as if you do not mind hurting or even killing someone (This is sometimes the only way to avoid being put in a position of having to hurt or kill.).

If this was an honest catalogue of men's survival tactics in prisons, how would I as a queer Chicano be perceived by the men in the workshop? Would I face ridicule for my queerness and gender fluidity? I believed that entering prison would be like the spaces I had long avoided: locker rooms, gyms, and even the dinner table where my dad, uncles, and male cousins sat together to eat.

Oddly enough, my fraternity resisted all the negative ways that other men had policed my behavior in the past. My brothers respected queer members and had a less rigid culture of masculinity than I had ever previously experienced, even though most of them were straight and all of us were navigating a campus steeped in the machismo of Big Ten athletics.[7] I had found a haven in my fraternity that made the risk of walking into the intimidating and hypermasculine space of the prison feel less frightening. While navigating these feelings, I shared about my insecurity and simultaneous excitement about my upcoming prison work with my fraternity brothers all of whom supported me and hoped that I would enjoy the experience.

---

[7] Alexa Hankin. "MSU gymnastics team physician accused of sexual abuse." The State News. September 13, 2016. https://statenews.com/article/2016/09/msu-gymnastics-physician-accused-of-sexual-assault-allegations Date Accessed: April 18, 2022.

Despite my anxious feeling of entering prison because I feared being judged, I drove to Milan on a Wednesday morning in the winter semester of 2018 with two other PCAP students who would be my cofacilitators for the workshop. We went through our agenda which included introductions, checking in, establishing community guidelines, playing some theatre games, and then debriefing about the workshop to see how the participants were feeling as we closed the session. When I left the prison, I saw that Christian had texted me asking how things had gone. I called him and raved about the experience. I needed my fraternity brother to know about the constant jokes that Moon—a tall, muscled black man with a soft and nurturing voice and dread locks all the way down his back—had made and how he kept us laughing and the mood uplifted. I shared that Big Mike—a muscled white man—was a Michigan fan and kept asking me sports questions, which I couldn't answer because I know nothing about sports.

Big Mike wanted to participate in every game we had planned that day, and his excitement was infectious. I also told Christian about Ali—a tall thin man with a pointy mustache like that of the *revolucionario* Emiliano Zapata—who loved theatre, dancing, and singing. Christian was excited for me, and this call made me realize that my experience with men in prison, as with my fraternity brothers, made me feel appreciated for who I am and never criticized for failing to embody someone else's standard of masculinity. No one had told me that the men in either a fraternity or a prison would broaden my horizons of what acceptable forms of masculinity look like.

When I saw my other fraternity brothers, everyone was curious about my visit to the prison. I told them about everything we did and even taught them one of the theatre games we played at Milan. After each meeting from then on, I provided details of our workshop to my fraternity brothers. Carlos recalls, "[You were] really excited about the work you're doing. Like

you were having a great time with the guys. Like laughing a lot and it was basically the highlight of your day. And then that's what initially sparked our interest" (Laureano 2020). That next semester six of my fraternity brothers signed up for a PCAP class with Dr. Lucas so that they could do workshops in prisons, too. Long dominated by female volunteers, PCAP had never in its more than two decades of workshops sent so many male facilitators into prisons at once. Likewise, our fraternity had never previously thought taking a class and volunteering inside a men's prison could be a possible project that we did together as brothers. I returned to Milan in the Fall of 2018 to facilitate a new theatre workshop with my brothers Christian and Carlos.

Training Volunteers to Enter Prison: Contradictory Views of Incarcerated People

As PCAP volunteers, we must attend two separate trainings before entering prisons. One is facilitated at the university by PCAP staffers, volunteers, formerly incarcerated people, and scholars in carceral studies. The other is facilitated by staff in our respective prison.[8] Understanding these two sets of training as binary and contradictory in representing incarcerated people allows us to think about the philosophies with which we enter our theatre workshops. The PCAP training asserts that people in prison are like people anywhere else—as diverse, talented, intelligent, and creative as any population of over two million people anywhere would be. The prison volunteer training characterizes all incarcerated people as always and irrevocably dangerous and manipulative. Prison administrators believe that their training is focused on safety inside the prison, while PCAP walks a fine line between getting the authorities to let us in the door, obeying the facility rules so we can do our work, and earning the trust of the incarcerated people so that we can do meaningful and high-quality work together.

[8] PCAP, in a given semester and sometimes summer, tends to send student and community volunteers to facilitate weekly workshops at about five different prisons.

Since its founding in 1990, PCAP's mission has been to bring "those impacted by the justice system and the University of Michigan community into artistic collaboration for mutual learning and growth" (PCAP Website). PCAP's ethics include creating communities of people who come to respect each other and collaborate across the many boundaries and walls between those who live inside prisons and those who do not. PCAP strives always to treat incarcerated people with dignity and to give as much agency as possible to those who live in prisons. PCAP's daylong training includes a panel where formerly incarcerated people share their experiences with PCAP programming alongside scholars who describe the complexities of prison culture and how prisons affect communities, especially communities of color in the U.S. Encountering a mixture of *testimonios* and scholarship on the prison system allows new PCAP volunteers to think about how all people's lives are affected by prisons, even those who are not aware of it.

One of the stories I remember was from a formerly incarcerated Chicano painter named Martín Vargas who participated in PCAP's visual art programming in prisons for more than twenty years. Vargas stated that having his art selected multiple years for the PCAP's lauded annual exhibition on the university campus validated his creative work and gave him something to look forward to while in prison. Stories of incarcerated people finding worth, and community are eye-opening for new volunteers who might have a rigid perception of criminality and of those incarcerated. Hearing these *testimonios* at the PCAP training allowed me to heal resentment towards my father, who has served time in prison. Listening to people speak about the complicated circumstances and social issues that led up to their incarceration helped me to have compassion for my own father and many others in similar circumstances.

The other training, I attended, facilitated by Milan's staff, worked against the philosophies and ethics of PCAP. These trainings explicitly describe incarcerated people as

being in opposition to prison volunteers and staff. One of the several Milan trainings I attended was particularly alarming for volunteers. We were told from the start that the men in the prison were master manipulators and would always be trying to convince us to give them things they should not have or to help them to do things that are against the rules. Prison staff spoke to us about the dress code, history of the facility, types of crimes that men in this prison had committed, and number of men incarcerated there. The longest part of the training involved staff showing images of homemade weapons incarcerated people had made from everyday objects, including candy. We were also told what to do if we were ever taken hostage while inside the prison. (It's worth noting that in the more than three decades that PCAP has done workshops inside prisons, none of its facilitators have ever been threatened with physical violence, much less taken hostage.)

Carlos remembers the prison's volunteer training as being racist and insensitive: "They made the guys out to be so dangerous and hostile. I understand, they're all technically criminals. But they were making them seem inhumane and preparing us for the worst. When in reality, the guys are really good guys" (Laureano 2020). The popular assumption, reinforced by the prison itself and its staff, characterizes every incarcerated person as mean, defiant, self-absorbed, and unable to show kindness. This rhetoric, perpetuated by those in authority, serves to mask the civil and human rights abuses that happen daily inside prisons all over the world. If those we hold in prisons are not real people—or at least not the same as free people—then we do not have to treat them as fully human. The same rhetorical structures have justified slavery and genocide. Christian also remembers hearing the prison staff characterize incarcerated people as manipulative and dangerous: "They will hide drugs if you give them the chance. They'll kill you, and don't trust them because if they're nice to you, they want something from you" (Ureña.

2020. 18:45). What if what the incarcerated men actually wanted from us was the same thing that we wanted from them?

My fraternity brothers and I went to Milan to get to know men who lived very differently than we did and to find ways to collaborate with them on a shared project. We wanted to learn and to contribute to others' wellbeing. We found once we got there that we wanted to belong and have a community. We had no desire to live in prison, but we liked and respected these men and hoped that they enjoyed our time together as much as we did. Is it wrong for incarcerated people to want something from those they meet? The rhetoric of the prison staff implied that the imprisoned men had no right to want anything from us, even though we clearly wanted something from them. We wanted their participation in the workshop. The prison staff wanted the men's compliance—both in their work with PCAP and in their willingness to obey prison rules long enough to be allowed the privilege of participating in any form of recreational or educational programming. We all want things from one another, but we were being told before we ever met the men in our workshop that they were wrong and manipulative if they wanted anything at all from us. We were told to be suspicious of any behavior that could be characterized as nice. By that logic, all of us were suspect from the start.

The staff continued to warn the volunteers about the potential for us to become victims of scams and that we ran the risk of being brainwashed into bringing them cell phones, food, or even letters from loved ones. As Dr. Lucas reminded us outside of the training, incarcerated people have limited opportunities for classes or workshops, particularly for ones not connected to religion. Thus, people in prisons tend to place high value on educational and recreational programming and to protect the volunteers who labor to make these opportunities possible. In my experience, those prison volunteer trainings do more harm than good for the volunteers and

are highly misleading. The men at Milan were kind, funny, loving, and artistic. Our PCAP training and Dr. Lucas had given us a far more accurate depiction of what to expect in our work and far better preparation for the experience of being a prison volunteer.

While the staff at Milan taught us to expect the worst from incarcerated men, PCAP's training decentralized the notion of criminality and gave us an ethos of compassion, a framework for analyzing the power structures that control our lives, and appropriate professional boundaries to follow when we entered our workshops. In effect, PCAP's ethics of love and care for incarcerated communities also served as guiding principles which allowed us as fraternity members to deliberately challenge hypermasculinity in prison and to find common ground and a sense of brotherhood with the men at Milan.

The Power of Check-Ins as Spaces for Emotional Vulnerability

Preparing for our theatre workshop at Milan each week united Christian, Carlos, and me by giving us an opportunity to work with each other and to negotiate roles as brothers and volunteers. Through these roles we needed to plan thoughtfully and give the best of ourselves to this work and then men at Milan. The structure of the workshop remained the same every time, for the most part: we greeted everyone, did a check-in to see how everyone was doing that morning, played theatre games, strategized for our final performance, and had a closing activity for the workshop. We quickly realized the importance of the check-ins, especially for men who are rarely asked to speak about how they are doing.

Men in prison have plenty of reasons not to make themselves emotionally vulnerable, as scholars in prison masculinities have noted, "Prison culture breathes masculine toughness and insensitivity, and it impugns softness, caring, and femininity" (*Prison Masculinities* 2001). The prison's training explicitly prohibits Milan volunteers from developing friendships with

incarcerated men. Derrick Corley, described as a writer and prisoner in New York, wrote an essay about "Prison Friendships" in which he stated that generally, "Prison is not an environment conducive to building friendships" (*Prison Masculinities* 2001). In addition, for prison staff, guards, and volunteers, friendships with incarcerated people are "basically against official policy" because "a common belief is that friendly prison personnel may be smuggling contraband, or even worse, may aid a prisoner in an escape" (*Prison Masculinities* 2001). As volunteers, the limited time we had inside Milan each week and the rules that govern the prison constrained our ability to create friendships with individual people as we would in the free world, but they did not keep us from building a sense of collective community and brotherhood within the space of our workshop. Though we never spent time one-on-one with any man in the workshop, the group dynamic made each person special and valuable to all the others. Theatre makers call this ensemble work. A productive rehearsal process and a successful performance requires the presence, skills, and gifts of every member of the group.

Brotherhoods, like most homosocial communities, come together through a unified gendered experience. We were all men with the shared goal of making theatre, and our unity in this made it possible for us to take chances emotionally and intellectually with each other, even in the overtly hostile environment of the prison—a phenomenon which Brandon A. Jackson describes: "The idea of brotherhood enables men to violate some of the dominant cultural tenets of manhood" such as being tough and stoic (Jackson 2012). Our brotherhood within the theatre workshop served to reframe the perceptions of homosociality and masculinities found in prison and fraternities, which showcased the possibilities for men to be emotionally expressive and intimate with other men in ways that had nothing to do with sex or sexuality. In effect, our brotherhood allowed for stereotypically feminine qualities, such as vulnerability and openness, to

become “authentically masculine” among men who had explicitly been trained not to trust one another. Furthermore, our brotherhood and PCAP’s arts facilitation activities, including our check-ins, eroded the rigid and hypermasculine codes of behavior inside the prison, at least for the brief hour and a half we spent together each week.

The volunteer policy at Milan, like those in most U.S. prisons, forbids what prison administrators call overfamiliarity. Volunteers are expected neither to reveal much about themselves and their personal lives nor to learn much about the lives and beliefs of the people with whom they work in prison. This means that we are meant to go into the prison with the expectation of doing theatre and not of establishing any emotional connections with the men. This policing of human relationships reinforces heteropatriarchal structures that dominate men’s behaviors on both sides of the walls, and which only become more heightened in prison. bell hooks write that “If we cannot heal what we cannot feel, by supporting patriarchal culture that socializes men to deny feelings, we doom them to live in states of emotional numbness. We construct a culture where male pain can have no voice, where male hurt cannot be named or healed” (2004). However, through PCAP’s activities we found ways to discuss and express our feelings by engaging in lighthearted and productive theatre exercises together. Theatre makers have long known that the act of playing—be that playing a character or engaging in games—enables higher-level activities like problem solving and gaining intellectual and emotional insight into the lives of people who are unlike you.

In our first workshops we asked participants to check in by using a scale from one to ten to tell us how they were feeling today. Sometimes we asked them to describe how they were feeling by using a color. As we got more comfortable with speaking in codes about our feelings, we asked them to describe their feelings with a song or as a weather forecast. We used these

simple activities to help us read the room's energy and see how we could maneuver our way through that day of the workshop.

Despite having activities that told us a great deal without saying much, there were moments in which the men would open up more explicitly about things that were affecting them. In one such instance, Big Mike arrived late to our workshop. He apologized as soon as he opened the door and said his head was somewhere else outside the workshop. One of the other incarcerated men asked him if everything was alright. Big Mike shared that he had just received notice that he would be released from Milan in a couple of weeks. Although I wanted to say, "Congratulations, Mike!" I kept quiet because he seemed worried rather than happy. Big Mike said that although he was happy, he was concerned about returning "home." He shared that he had been incarcerated for such a long time that the concept of a home outside of the prison no longer exist for him. He had fallen out of touch with his family, lost his wife, and did not know how he would be able to reintegrate himself back into society.

When he finished, he apologized for emotionally unloading. He knew that our theatre workshop was not meant to be a therapy session, but he had just received notice of his release before entering the workshop and did not know with whom else he might share this significant news. In addition, he wanted us to know what had happened to him because he knew it would affect his performance for that day and the workshops to come. He thanked us all for listening to him. The men in the workshop thanked him for sharing and even made some jokes about his upcoming release. One of them said, "I'll exchange my time for yours," and we all laughed.

This conversation created a ripple effect with other men to be more open about how they checked in at the start of each workshop. Carlos remembers that in the first couple of workshops the men were more guarded, as if they "put on a mask and kind of not show any emotion or else

they may get taken advantage of" (Laureano 2021). This inability to want to express emotion was particularly notable among the Black participants in our workshops and reflects what psychologist Richard Majors and sociologist Janet Mancini Billson describe as "cool pose:"

> a distinctive coping mechanism that serves to counter, at least in part, the dangers that black males encounter daily. As a performance, cool pose is designed to render the male visible and to empower him; it eases the worry and pain of blocked opportunities." (1992)

Majors and Billson also attribute this choice as a way that Black men have historically fought racism and systemic oppression. Therefore, the intersections of masculinities, age, and race informed the way that some of the participants decided, or not, to engage with the workshop. Since emotional vulnerability could be potentially dangerous for anyone in prison, it makes sense that some men might perform a lack of interest in the activities of the workshop because they are navigating unchartered terrain in a familiar hypermasculine space. Especially when those men have been subject to systemic racism and oppressions that have worked against them in their most vulnerable states.

In spite of all the reasons that incarcerated men have to keep their feelings close to their chests, Carlos, Christian, and I noticed a gradual growth in vulnerability with each check-in as the weeks passed and as we learned about each other. Often, the college-age participants were curious about life as a student at the University of Michigan. My brothers and I would answer questions about attending a football game or going to a fraternity party. In doing so, we revealed aspects of our identities outside of the walls and allowed them to see more of who we were as Latino men beyond the space of the workshop. In turn, even if our check-in prompts could be concisely answered, the men would take the opportunity to share good news about their families or update us about upcoming court dates or other legal breakthroughs in their cases. The men shared that outside of our weekly workshops, they had only limited exchanges with one another

because they all had different schedules. Even while containing many people inside a small and closed environment, prisons do much to separate people from one another and frustrate attempts at forming or maintaining meaningful friendships. The men told us that because of the bonds they were forming in our workshop, whenever they could, they would sit next to each other during religious worship or during a meal. Their experiences in our group encouraged further bonding outside of the theatre workshop, despite the many logistical challenges they faced in spending time together within the rigid routines of the prison.

In a similar manner, Christian, Carlos, and I began spending more time together when we were not in our PCAP workshop. Planning for the workshops and driving back and forth to prison allowed us to deepen our brotherhood—how we understood and learned from each other—to the point that some of our other fraternity brothers thought that the three of us had formed a clique. Our time with PCAP changed the way we conducted business with the fraternity on campus because we often volunteered to be on committees to plan events together. For us, it made sense to continue working on fraternity-related things among ourselves because we had established efficient ways to get things done together. These extra roles increased the time we spent together at the gym, eating, attending events, and doing other things that students did together on campus.

In addition, Christian, Carlos, and I began incorporating check-ins into our time with one another because we were all struggling with mental health issues. Having the check-in activities in the PCAP workshop and amongst ourselves as fraternity brothers enabled us to be more open about our feelings with each other and to practice putting our emotions in words. As disenfranchised men—we as Latinos and they as incarcerated men—all of us often lacked spaces that provided adequate emotional support, a sense of belonging, and a community in which we

could safely be vulnerable. Therefore, the check-ins in the prison served as an important part of our workshop and solidified the *confianza* that we were building with each other.

This *confianza* transcended the weekly workshops and infiltrated our shared time as brothers because of our personal and fraternal growth through PCAP. Carlos remembers meeting in my apartment to plan the workshop and how we often used the group chat we had for our workshop to talk about other things that were not PCAP related. Christian recalls that getting to the first workshop was chaotic. We had reserved a car that was provided by the university, but because none of us understood the instructions of how to get the car, we decided to go in my car to make it to the workshop on time. Christian also says, "We started taking your car because we were not supposed to go get tacos [after workshop] in the other car" (Ureña 2020). Thus, the simple act of eating Mexican food every week after our workshops brought us closer together through the experience of volunteering at Milan.

In effect, these check-ins served as a way for my fraternity brothers, the men at Milan and I to create a sense of community where we began to feel empowered to vocalize our experiences and emotions. The check-ins also deepened how we related to each other, understood each other as members of various brotherhoods and spaces, and allowed us all to recontextualize, or queer, the prison space. For my fraternity brothers and me, the check-ins allowed us to hold each other accountable about our mental health and well-being, which affected our already established sense of fraternal brotherhood.

Theatre Games, Confianza, and Humor as Shifting Masculine Performances

Since the check-ins were among the first activities of each day of the workshop, they allowed us to transition into the theatre games phase with more ease. Check-ins enabled us to understand how we were all processing the prison space and our own well-being, which in effect

allowed for a more liberating experience when we began acting. In the first few workshops, we played games that were mostly meant to help us build an ensemble—to laugh, get to know one another, and gain trust. However, as we progressed, we began incorporating more difficult improv games and activities that required more acting and quick thinking.

These improv games allowed for a decentralization of power to occur within the prison space, instilling creative agency in the incarcerated men and leveling the play field between facilitators and participants. Because power is commonly associated with masculinities, shifting who has the power through acting, made all of us dependent on the other participants' creative choices and energy and created a *politics of confianza* (trust) needed for brotherhoods to function.

One of the games we often played was called freeze, which involves two people who must imagine a scenario and interact with each other in ways that enable both their scene partner and the audience to quickly intuit where they are and what they are doing. These scenes are short, fast-paced, and often very funny. Actors are encouraged to use their whole bodies and make oversized gestures. At any time, someone in the audience can yell, "Freeze!" causing the actors to stop and hold their physical positions. The audience member then excuses one of the two actors, assumes their place, mimics the frozen body position of the prior actor, and begins a new scene in which new characters are in a completely different place. This game cultivates higher level improvisational skills because it calls for actors to have an active imagination, an awareness of one's scene partner, and the ability to respond quickly to new situations.

In one instance in our workshop, Dre, a shy, tall, young Black man, jumped into the game to shift the scene from a barbershop to a street where he was a policeman stopping me for a traffic violation. We had one chair in the playing area, and in the prior scene I had been getting a

haircut. Dre decided to tap out my partner and transform the barber's posture into that of a cop. In real life I had been stopped by police, but none had intimidated me as much as Dre did in that scene. When I tried to speak, he sternly cut me off, and I felt anxious.

In improv games power dynamics shift constantly on stage as new ideas and people drop in and out of the performance space. This decentralization of power, particularly inside a men's prison, has the possibility to change the roles associated with masculinity and masculine figures. When Dre became a cop and I the detained motorist under his scrutiny, the roles of the criminal and institutionally backed agent switched. Within our daily lives, Dre was the detainee, and I was the person with freedom and agency, backed by the University of Michigan and PCAP and even sanctioned as an official prison volunteer. Our improvization game quickly shifted the dynamics that determined our positions of power. Rather than inhabiting the role of the incarcerated person who is perpetually policed, Dre became the agent who policed me.

In playing freeze Dre re-cast the conventions of power that had systematically affected him and the other men in the workshop. I, on the other hand, felt helpless but continued the scene because during improv the golden rule is "yes, and. . ." which means to always accept the conventions of the imagined world that your scene partner introduced and then add something to it with your own creative choices. In addition, my actual confusion with the scenario influenced how I reacted at the moment of the scene. Only days after that workshop did I realize the importance of improv and acting to momentarily and temporarily instill agency and power in those who have been stripped of theirs inside prison.

This game also allowed for each of our realities to be channeled through a safe environment that created a humorous undertone due to the space we had created via brotherhood. I associate these experiences with the *politics of chingaderas* that Jason de León talks about

when he describes the humor in his work in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands with immigrant men. De León says the humor in his book *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (2015) "happens within, and is shaped by, not just 'Mexican working-class culture'" but also the systems of federal immigration policy and capitalism. Humor in men's prison happens within the socialization of disenfranchised men, many of whom are men of color and working class and can become a way of establishing friendships/brotherhoods, especially under the dehumanizing systems of prisons and patriarchy. In his own field work, De León catalogs this kind humor and characterizes, "these *chingaderas* [as] not intended to insult me, but rather functioned as a form of speech play that signaled the *confianza* and *respeto* that the men I interviewed accorded me" (2015). Within the prison walls, because I was also a man of color and practicing theatre within a decentralized masculine structure, Dre's reversal of the roles opened a door of *confianza*, which enabled us to take the other participants to unfamiliarly imagined spaces and scenarios. In this journey, we all guided each other through scenes and identities that were not part of our everyday lives yet revealed things that matter about the world in which we live. In effect, it signaled that we could trust the other participants blindly and still be within good brotherly company.

After the scene had run its course, Jamal—a shy, short, Black man in his mid-thirties—yelled, "Freeze!" and took my place. Jamal got up from the chair and walked through the workshop space, saying, "Look at the bright flowers!" We all looked. Both Dre and Jamal spoke of yellow sunflowers and dandelions in a garden, which helped the audience picture the scene.

Jamal's interjection of the garden scene allowed for yet another shift of power and roles to occur within the workshop. Jamal moved us out of a series of hypermasculine and patriarchal settings, which included the barbershop and the traffic stop, to one filled with flowers. One could

say that the imagined space was queered to interrupt the aggressive masculinities that had been at play previously. This drastic change of imagery, tone, and embodiments was also a way to lighten the mood. In theatre we call this the reversal of expectation. When you expect an arresting officer and instead receive flowers, it creates humor and a sense of relief from prior tension. Through navigating familiar terrain in spaces and gender performances associated with heightened masculinity, with the barber and the cop during the previous scenes, we opened the door to decentralizing the other masculinities embodied that day in the garden and the scenes that followed. By working through the familiar, every participant was able to take on the strangeness and discomfort of acting and role playing in ways that they are not normally allowed to. In effect, this unfamiliar creative need was shielded by the concept of *confianza* and brotherhood which made it acceptable to imagine more effeminate scenarios without our masculinities being questioned at the end of the workshop.

When it seemed like Dre and Jamal were running out of things to say and began giggling, I yelled, “Freeze!” They froze, and I walked towards Dre but then shifted quickly to tap Jamal out. Jamal was in a squatting position as he tended to some plants on the floor. In this squatting position, I pretended to be a Zumba instructor and treated Dre as if he were a participant. In the cop scene, Dre had guided me through a scenario that I was not used to despite having some personal experiences with cops in my past. Thus, when he opened the door for us to bring our collective personal experiences moving through various spaces, I decided to walk him through a more familiar place for me through dancing. Everyone laughed as we kicked, twirled, and were shaking our booties. Dre was laughing nervously as he danced away. I purposely put us in a Zumba scenario because Dre had been reluctant to participate fully in the activities that involved dancing or moving around. As I saw Dre, he reminded me of the body language that my non-

dancing fraternity brothers expressed when I was teaching them choreography. There are certain movements that they want to stay away from so as not to embody effeminacy, but in a Zumba class gender lines are blurred with dancing and exercise. The Zumba scene allowed for me to show Dre what I was used to in the outside world and enabled me to instill physical humor through an evident queering of the body and of performances.

In the middle of our dancing, Ali yelled, “Freeze!” leaving Dre and me in another squatting position. Ali did the same thing of walking towards Dre but instead tapping me out of the scene. Dre released a groan because he had been playing for a while, and it felt like he could not catch a break. Ali took Dre and the audience to a ballet recital, an even queerer space and performance than where I had taken us. Ali mentioned something about their pink tutus on the stage, and Dre broke character and said, “Really, man?” and laughed.

The “yes and…” rule means that our characterizations must continue despite awkwardness and uncertainty. In improv we accept whatever conditions the others put upon us, and we collaboratively build a dynamic performance. When Dre said, “Really, man?” he not only broke character but also ruptured the imagined scenario that Ali had created. This crack in the participation served as a commentary to where he drew the line of acceptable queerness that Dre wanted to embody. He had been a good sport when he was observing the flowers and dancing Zumba. However, he paused the scene in a moment of vulnerability where his comment served as a reminder that we were still operating within masculine structures and identities. Despite this rupture, Dre and the other participants managed to imagine and create characters that challenged the imagined possibilities of men of color in a prison. While moving through these scenarios, it was evident that our level of *confianza* transcended the scenarios and characters we had created. We had to trust how the others would react and what they would do to

create a different scenario. But more importantly we had to trust the fact that whatever was performed in that space would stay in that space. Should this trust have been violated by discussions outside the workshop and rumors spread within the prison about one of them acting effeminately, the imprisoned men risked ridicule or perhaps even physical threats from the wider prison population.

The improv game finished after the ballet scene. I remember that series of scenes to be one of the most impactful moments of the workshop because several of us queered and feminized the scenarios so much that we were gender bending, especially with the embodiment of movement and the tone with which we were describing the scenes for our improv partners and the audience. This effeminacy and queer performance had become available and acceptable to us through our previous work, primarily our check-ins and working through familiar masculine spaces and roles. Our performance of effeminacy within this workshop demonstrates the willingness of men to challenge patriarchal structures and hypermasculine tendencies when they have trust among their peers. At the time that this sequence of improv scenes occurred, we had spent some time together, had an idea of what we were comfortable in doing, and knew how we could guide each other through uncomfortable situations. We had enough trust to know we would not have done something that could have endangered another's well-being.

My positionalities as a man of color, a Chicano from a working-class family, from the Texas-Mexico border, and the son of a formerly incarcerated father each had an impact on my interactions in this improv game and allowed me to see these moments as situations that cultivated brotherhood rather than mockery. Even though my skin color and my positions as a prison volunteer and a student at the University of Michigan set me apart from the incarcerated members of our workshop, my socialization performing masculinities in homosocial spaces

allowed me to trust the other participants and to be a trustworthy member of the same space. In building this trust and brotherhood, I too had to participate in the humor, banter, and interplay of masculinities that were required of our improvisation skills throughout the games.

For different reasons, all of us in the workshop needed a politic of survival in a world that had been frequently hostile to us. Ali talks about the need for a space like PCAP for creative people who are incarcerated: "Just imagine how difficult it is for a person who is totally like… you know just a creative person, to thrive in that environment [in prison]. You know? Obviously PCAP gave me and many others the ability to just be… themselves and exist. And I love it" (Davis 2020). This ability to authentically inhabit the space of prison, facilitated through the brotherhood established through PCAP among disenfranchised men—both those incarcerated and those in the Latino fraternity—became a needed survival strategy for all of us to enjoy and feel safe in the company of other men. Through these games we challenged perceptions of hypermasculinity and thought of ourselves as artistic creators.

I feel like prison theatre director Paul Heritage when he states that "the power of simple theatre games to transform the dehumanized spaces and relationships of a prison never fails to move or excite me…" (2004. 200). Theatre games and the ability to laugh and joke with one another provided a tool for us, as men, to establish a mutual understanding and respect that disidentified the patriarchy instilled hypermasculinity that we find in traditional performances of manhood such as in sports, the armed forces, and the prison. Christian echoes these sentiments when he says, "I think the theatre games were always a lot of fun, you know? Being able to just joke around and have a good time with people, it's something that we can always bond over, and I think that it allowed for deeper friendships, because in that space, you always want to be one of the funny people" (Ureña 2021). Perhaps none of us were theatre people, except for Ali who had

worked in theatre and film prior to his incarceration, but we all knew how to play games that made us laugh, enjoy a sense of community, and bring us together in difficult situations.

The Final Improv Performance with an Audience

The last several of the workshops involved strategizing for the final performance, which was an opportunity to bring the communities together: workshop participants, PCAP volunteers, the staff at Milan, and even Dr. Lucas. Performances for PCAP theatre workshops each look different because they grow organically from each group's improvisatory work together. These performances range from playing a series of theatre in front of an audience to more structured devised plays. The goal of the final performance is to bring people together, celebrate the work that was done that semester, and extend the community of the workshop to a viewing public. Our final performance at Milan that semester was also a culmination of the type of brotherhood and *confianza* that we had established throughout the weekly workshops.

During our workshops, we discussed various ideas for the final performance, including something that felt more like a play with a plot and characters. However, there were many weeks when we could not meet because of holidays, absent prison staff members, and restrictions on our status as volunteers at the prison. Even though we had attended the required volunteer training at the prison, somehow Carlos and Christian never received their prison-issued volunteer badges, which would have allowed them to enter the prison each week for the full semester. Without those badges, my co-facilitators were only allowed four visits to the prison each calendar year. In practice that meant that Carlos and Christian could only meet with the men in the workshop three times prior to the final performance. I had a volunteer badge and more flexibility but was not allowed to enter the prison without a co-facilitator.

We—participants and facilitators alike—agreed that because our time was cut short, the best option for a final performance was to play theatre games in front of an audience rather than attempting a more sophisticated performance that we would not have sufficient time to rehearse. The men at Milan explained each game to the audience before we played it. Ali stated that he "just wanted to hopefully do for those inmates who weren't familiar with PCAP, what PCAP was doing for us who were participating in it, you know? Give them a window of… like opportunity to just relax and release their tensions and the expectations and the personas and feel free and have fun" (Davis 2020). The men wanted to use this opportunity to educate incarcerated men who had not participated workshop about what PCAP does. Ali's reasoning was extremely important in this decision because other men wanted to outdo the previous semester's PCAP workshop performance which had a skit that revolved around the theme of forgiveness. The previous PCAP workshop (which I had co-facilitated with different university classmates who were not in my fraternity) met a total of ten times, versus a total of five with our current workshop. Although the minimum of workshops we could attend were four, there were three weeks where one of us could not attend. Therefore, we facilitated the workshop in pairs three times and with all three of us together twice.

When the performance ended, we went back into the classroom where we held our regular workshop and had our last check out. Christian said that before entering the classroom, he went to drink water from one of the water fountains in the community space, and one of the participants stopped him from drinking. At first, Christian was confused, but the man from our workshop explained, "He was like, 'Hold up, bro. Don't drink out of that one.' And he was like 'drink this one [pointing to a different drinking fountain].' And I was like, 'Okay?' And he was like, 'Don't worry dude I got your back'" (Ureña 2020.). This was the same young Black man

who Carlos, Christian and I remember to be the most hesitant to open up during check-ins or to fully participate in the workshops. He told Christian that the water fountain he was trying to drink from was where they washed mops, their shoes, and other things and that the men in the prison did not drink from that water fountain.[9]

Christian shared that this made him feel protected and assured him that the admonitions we had received in the prison's volunteer training that the men wanted to take advantage of us were misinformed and erroneous. Dr. Lucas often told us in class that the people we meet in our PCAP workshops would value our community and time together so much that they would ensure that the workshop space and the volunteers were protected from any potential threat in the prison. I personally had not witnessed something like this because the time we spent outside of the workshop space was limited to walking the halls from the door to the classroom. However, on this last day of the workshop we learned for ourselves what Dr. Lucas had told us all along about the importance of community for the men at Milan and that they do protect the workshop and the volunteers. On this occasion, the young man had information about the space that we did not, and rather than allowing Christian to sip water from a dirty fountain, he shared information to protect him from a possibly unpleasant and unsanitary experience.

After we finished handing out official PCAP certificates of completion for the workshop, we thanked everyone and said our goodbyes. The same young Black man, who told Christian not to drink from the water fountain came up to me and asked, "Are y'all coming back next semester?" My heart broke. I knew Christian and Carlos were not planning on doing the workshop, and I had to defend my dissertation prospectus; thus, it was not feasible for me. I told

[9] The name is not included since Christian, Carlos, and I have conflicting memories about the name of the participant.

him that we were more than likely not returning, but that PCAP would send another group of volunteers. I saw immediate sadness in his eyes, as he said, “Nah, it’s okay.”

When we performed theatre games in front of a diverse audience, we did so in the comfort of performing a disidentifying masculinity associated with Black and Latino men. However, the small incidents in which we did not have an audience, such as the water fountain moment and the conversation about the fact that we would not return, that truly marked the brotherhood that our workshop had engendered. We had developed a space where vulnerability, support, respect, and *confianza* was celebrated, which in the prison space is needed. Thus, the brotherhood concept was something that some of the members voiced out that they wanted to continue being part of in the near future.

Brotherhood Beyond the Walls of Milan

After our final performance at Milan, Christian and I went to Cotton Correctional Facility in Jackson, Michigan. Our other fraternity brothers, José, Diego, Ian, and Felix were part of a music and a theatre workshop there during the same semester, and we wanted to make sure that they felt supported. They were unable to attend our performance because our workshop at Milan was Wednesday mornings and they had class. Their performance was during the weekend, and Christian, and I drove with Dr. Lucas. Their workshop was wonderful. Both Christian and I were amazed that the music workshop had real instruments. The crowd at Cotton cheered loudly when Ian began the intro to Dr. Dre’s popular song “Still D.R.E.” Once the music performance, ended José and his group did a comedic scene involving a holiday dinner. Our fraternity brothers who facilitated other PCAP workshops that semester clearly gained as much from the experience as we did. They had profound and meaningful interactions with the imprisoned men in their

workshops and had grown emotionally and intellectually in many of the ways that Carlos, Christian, and I had.

The following semester in the winter of 2019, Christian continued his work with PCAP. He co-facilitated a community workshop in Ann Arbor for formerly incarcerated PCAPers and others, and I attended a couple of times to play theatre games with them. I also attended their final performance. To my amazement, the community workshop's final performance included food. Everyone was welcome to attend the event at a public housing community in Ann Arbor. Those of us who went truly appreciated the participants, community, and the performing arts. That semester, Christian and I returned to Milan for their final performance. We saw Dre and Ali in the performance, and Ali told me that would be his third and final PCAP workshop since the incarcerated men had a maximum of three workshops they could attend in their time at Milan. Ali's smile matched mine because we were excited to see each other.

As fraternity brothers, we continued to work with PCAP, outside of prisons, on various occasions. We felt like it was a unique experience that no other fraternity had gone through, and we were invested in the relationships we had cultivated. In addition, the people we had met through PCAP had impacted and shifted the ways we thought about criminality and about incarcerated people. Christian and I went to Brazil in the PCAP study abroad program that Dr. Lucas facilitated where we did theatre in various Brazilian spaces and communities, including prisons. On campus, our fraternity organized an event titled "Re-Entering Society" where we invited some of the formerly incarcerated people on campus to share their experiences of imprisonment and the difficulties of returning home and navigating life after incarceration. These experiences continued to broaden our understanding of currently and formerly incarcerated

people. This proved particularly meaningful for some of us who had family members who had gone through the system.

Carlos shared that going to PCAP and developing a relationship with the program allowed him to look at his older brothers differently. Carlos' older brothers had a history of gang affiliation in the suburbs of Chicago and had served time in prison. Carlos says, "It definitely helped me with my brothers. Like my blood brother at home because I feel like getting to know the prisoners… I didn't judge my brothers as harshly" (Laureano 2021. Carlos says that since his childhood, his mother told him, "I don't want you to end up like your brothers." This caused Carlos to look down on his brothers and judge them harshly. Carlos, who was predominantly raised by his mother, goes on to say that because of volunteering at Milan, "I understood that they were young, dumb, and a lot of circumstances kind of pushed them out of the house and pushed them to the streets" (Laureano 2021). Although Carlos had not lived with his brothers, entering Milan, and listening to the stories and experiences of the men of PCAP allowed him to be more compassionate when he thought of his own family.

My father was incarcerated in Texas and later deported to Mexico, and my godfather, who raised me like a son, has been incarcerated for over fourteen years. For most of my life, I was embarrassed to admit that both men who had provided for me and my family had experienced incarceration. I always envisioned that I had to be and do better, much like Carlos had done. We had bought into the stereotype that the criminalized are only capable of manipulation, wrongdoing, and evil. I thought that going to the university would guarantee that I would become better yet going to the university introduced me to PCAP and many men who reminded me of my father, like Big Mike.

When I heard Big Mike struggling with the reality that he would be released and thinking about what had become of his family, it reminded me of my own family. My father and godfather had both been incarcerated (for different reasons) because they were trying to provide for their families by working illegally in a foreign country, with a lack of formal education and little ability to speak English. Prisons and the courts routinely further disenfranchise already vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the men at Milan helped me realize that directing the provider role to a masculine figure comes with extreme pressures and a sense of failure if a man feels inadequately prepared to fulfill that responsibility. Thus, heteropatriarchy and capitalism, at least in what I have witnessed, have fueled a systemic pipeline that has taken many vulnerable men from their homes to prisons.

Understanding these larger systems and the stories of many currently and formerly incarcerated men through PCAP has allowed me to relate to my father differently and to have a *confianza* that we had not previously developed as a father/son. When I was younger, my father would often say, "*Todo lo que hago lo hago todo por ustedes, mijo*." (Everything I do I do it all for you all, son.) This sense of responsibility, combined with a heteropatriarchal and conservative understanding of gender roles within the Chicano/Latino family, cements a deeply rooted issue. The responsibility for a man to provide is something I knew. However, I had not been as aware of the silencing of men who might need help to provide for their families. This toxic demand that men cannot be vulnerable or in need of assistance feeds a thriving and deeply damaging hypermasculine society. PCAP allowed me to not only practice breaking these silences, but to listen actively when these silences were being broken by other men.

I recently reconnected with my godfather, after fourteen years of not knowing his exact conditions in prison. He called me one evening as I was driving to a store, and I almost did not

answer because the call was from Washington, D.C. When I heard the operator say the call was from a prison and heard his name, I smiled. His voice radiated happiness, and he sounded so different, yet the same. He did not know what I had done, so when I told him about my studies and my work, he was very proud of me. The call lasted a couple of minutes, and when we hung up, I began crying. I imagine that if I had not done my work in various prisons, I would have not been able to pick up that call, which both saddens me and makes me extremely appreciative of the lessons PCAP and the men at Milan taught me. My godfather told me he would get released to Mexico in November of 2023, and I could not help but be extremely happy for him.

This happiness was the same feeling I had when I spoke to Chaplain Cooper in the fall of 2020. He told me that all the participants in our workshop had been released from Milan. I spoke to him over the phone and asked him to give me the full names of our workshop participants because I wanted to get written statements from them. My intention was to write them letters I would mail to the prison, but Chaplain Cooper told me that none of them were at Milan anymore. He then gave some of the participants' full names. I looked them up on Facebook and sent them friend requests. This is how I was able to reconnect with Dre, Ali, and Big Mike.

I immediately messaged Big Mike on Facebook to see how he was doing. His reply exuded humility and happiness. Big Mike told me, "You guys really touched my heart and made me feel loved. You all were a great way for me to prepare to come home" (Muller. 2020). He also said he was a general manager at a store, was preparing to work on a film and was going to propose to his girlfriend. All these things—family, work, and love—were things that he struggled with when he first opened up to us during our check-in at Milan. On a similar note, when I interviewed Ali, he said that PCAP allowed him to break through what he had envisioned for himself: "We just have fun man. Just like developing friendship bonds with guys like me. I'm

saying, what? You are like I am, and this is so good" (Davis 2020). Big Mike and Ali both echo the feelings of love and developing friendship bonds "with guys like me." This sentiment, that Ali was not only like the other incarcerated men but also like Christian, Carlos, and me as Latino males is what fueled our appreciation of fraternal masculinities and the brotherly bonds we shared during the workshop. We had all arrived at the workshop through various journeys, but at the end of the day, we were all men with disenfranchised identities, doing theatre inside a prison and trying to create community while laughing in the process.

The type of community and brotherhood that we created at Milan has changed since our workshop ended, just like my fraternity brotherly relationship changed when I moved to Texas to write my dissertation. Perhaps that brotherhood that we experienced, shared, and worked towards ended the moment we left Milan after our final performance. Christian, Carlos, and I stopped seeing the men at Milan on a weekly basis, and we stopped doing theatre together. Therefore, actively sharing a space and a unified vision no longer defined our appreciation for each other. This does not mark the end of the care and appreciation that we developed for each other and for our creative freedom.

In 2020, when I found out all the participants had returned home, I looked up the ones I could find and added Dre, Ali, and Mike on social media. My excitement led me to share with some of my friends, who were unfamiliar with the work or care of PCAP. Some asked me, "Why would you add them to your social media accounts?" The question surprised me, but I knew that it came from a place of concern for my well-being. My thought process was that my father did not stop being my father when he was incarcerated or after his release and that these men did not stop being part of my PCAP family when our workshop was over. In the age of digital interconnectedness, social media was the best way to still be able to hear from them, even if

momentarily, and to keep them in my network. Their memories still live with me, and their stories influence the way that I have approached men in my life and my own masculinity. In addition, PCAP had helped me decentralize the shame I felt being a son and godson of formerly incarcerated men. Therefore, I had no shame in publicly having a formerly incarcerated person on my social media accounts.

When I shared with Christian and Carlos that the men had returned home, they replied with excitement. Christian also shared that he had added some of the participants from Milan and others from his community workshop who were formerly incarcerated people. The bonds that we had established through our theatre workshops continue through digital platforms. Although the weekly visits, check-ins, and theatre games are no longer part of our routine, social media has provided an avenue to stay connected with each other and to still be aware of the projects that we each have going on. In addition, the memories of the times we spent together at Milan and through PCAP are things that we will continue to cherish because they taught us things that we needed to return to our own families.

Conclusion
Transcending Brotherhoods and Masculinities: Past and Future Reflections of our Fraternal Love

Performing and dancing as a fraternity became a Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. tradition at the University of Michigan. The semester that we were doing our PCAP workshop, I choreographed a Latin American-inspired dance routine where we performed an Argentinian tango, a *bachata* from the Dominican Republic, and a dance inspired by a Brazilian drag queen named Pabllo Vittar. With each dance, one of the brothers walked with the flags of our various motherlands to continue the through line from the new member presentation and to respond to critiques from other students that our dance performances lacked a Latinx cultural heritage component.

We continued performing every opportunity we had, sometimes with multiple performance projects simultaneously. Sometimes we performed as a fraternity, and at other times we engaged in performances as individuals. Christian continued doing workshops with PCAP, and I joined the workshop on a couple of occasions because I missed the PCAP community but did not have the time to commit to a workshop of my own.

After that semester, in the summer of 2019, Christian and I joined Dr. Ashley Lucas and a group of PCAPers in Florianópolis and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to continue learning about *Teatro do oprimido* or Theatre of the Oppressed. In this program we did theatre in *favelas*, hospitals, and prisons. We also attended theatre classes at the local universities with our Brazilian colleagues. Throughout the three-week trip, Christian and I roomed together. In doing

so, our sense of brotherhood and our relationships as *padrino/ahijado* (big/little) in the fraternity drastically changed. Since I spoke and understood Portuguese better than he did, I always made sure that I was present to translate at restaurants or in meeting new people.

While in Brazil, Christian and I spoke about the fraternity's future and about how much we wished the brothers could all travel to South America. I had been to various parts of México, and Christian had been to Ecuador on occasions with his family. However, a trip with all the fraternity brothers would be special, especially since we studied so much of South American geography and historical monuments during our education process and continued to learn about Latin America through dance and music. In a sense, physically being on South American land elevated our sense of *latinidad* and the connection we had with other Latin American and US Latinx peoples and cultures. When we returned to the United States, many of the other brothers were excited to hear about our experiences in Brazil and asked questions about Brazilian culture and the things that we had visited.

Although the other brothers were excited to hear about our experiences abroad, they were also concerned about my departure from Ann Arbor. At the end of summer in 2019 and after achieving doctoral candidacy, I returned home to the Texas-Mexico borderlands in the Rio Grande Valley. This was something that I had discussed with them since I met them in 2017, but time had flown by quickly and the reality of my *retorno a la frontera*, my return to the border, became daunting. I had become a resource for the brothers on campus, and they were unsure about being left on their own. To help allay that fear, I would FaceTime them during the organizational meetings and advise them as best as I could from afar. I helped them think about their upcoming events and even helped them with choreography when they wanted to perform at a yard show on campus. This yard show was sponsored by a multicultural fraternity on campus

and had also become a tradition in the fall semester. That year my brothers performed *merengue*, *bachata*, and *cumbia*, and some of the brothers who had sat out in previous performances, joined. The fraternity on campus grew and became united, and I was twenty-five hours away from them. My priorities shifted to taking care of my biological brothers and parents at home, and the fraternity brothers and I slowly drifted apart.

Then on March 12, 2020, we received an official email from the University of Michigan stating that the university would temporarily cancel classes in response to coronavirus. What we thought was going to be a couple of weeks' cancellation resulted in a total shift to online learning. During that week, Christian and the other brothers of the fraternity at the University of Michigan were going through a new member educational process. As a result of the pandemic, the process had to stop being in person and pick up virtually. This was something that we had not previously experienced. I received a call from the brothers in Michigan asking for help. I did not know much of what was happening with the fraternity or on campus at that point, but my immediate response was, "Let me see what I can do."

I made some calls to the brothers in the national management team with whom I had a good relationship, and I informed the brothers at Michigan that there was no way around the online process. Everyone had to finish the process, just like they would have to finish their semester, through virtual modes of learning and teaching. When the fraternity began using Zoom for their meetings, I was invited to sit through the new member educational process, and I slowly began to become more involved with the fraternity again.

The following academic year all classes were remote and everyone in fraternity and sorority life was feeling discouraged. How would they recruit? How would they host events?

How would they be able to continue being a fraternity when many students had chosen not to live in Ann Arbor and were scattered across the nation?

Somehow, we figured it out, and through a virtual process, the brothers were able to recruit five new members including some from identity categories never recruited to our chapter of the fraternity. Throughout their virtual process, I was able to witness the growth of the new members and of the other members I knew. Only this time it was different: through a screen, while I sat in my living room, and they sat in theirs. I noticed that many of the conditions and concepts that I had experienced with the brothers in person, such as emotionally expressing ourselves in our intimate spaces, became a reality through Zoom. At times it felt therapeutic, especially since we were surrounded by our loved ones being sick and dying. Thus, throughout those semesters, I began to think about how we had invited each of our brothers into the private spaces where we slept, relaxed, and did our homework. Zoom, as a digital platform, became a window to not only experience a sense of brotherhood during a world crisis where isolation was mandated but also allowed us to look at the realities of our living conditions. In essence, through this virtual process we each opened the doors of our homes—some to the homes that we shared with our families and others to the homes that they had constructed on their own.

To capture the essence of this newly found brotherhood amidst a pandemic and through a virtual realm, I look forward to thinking through a different type of survival and how through this brotherhood we were able to find the soothing voices of our brothers in times where the world, as we knew it, was falling apart around us. This sense of brotherhood allowed for a familiar bond that many were missing and for which some had always longed. All of us were experiencing our intersectional identities as disenfranchised men at the time that we began that Zoom call sometimes two or three times a week. These intersections that occurred through a

digital platform brought in identities, trauma, and our physical homes to expand our concepts of *familia*. In one of our activities, I showed the brothers my room, decorated with lime green walls, fraternity letters and drag queen fans. I let them into my personal space on the border, in the home in which I had grown up and that shielded me from many realities. Therefore, as we ventured getting to know each other, we also were getting to know how each of us lived, moved around the space we called home, and even witnessed interactions with the people with whom we lived. This literal window into our vulnerable spaces expanded our sense of brotherhood and belonging as we created new virtual homes within our homes.

Sharing Letters, Not Brotherhood

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began and as I have continued to write through this project, my relationships with Christian, Carlos, and José have grown. During Christian and José's senior year, I helped them prepare their graduate school applications. They both returned to their home state for graduate school: Christian to the University of Illinois, Chicago, and José to the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). They tell me that pursuing graduate school in their home state, after being in Michigan, is quite different, especially since the intimate supportive networks we established through the fraternity were no longer within physical proximity to them.

Christian, who does not have fraternity brothers on his campus and who was selected as a *padrino* for a new member in the chapter we founded in Ann Arbor, often visits the University of Michigan. He sends pictures of him having dinner with the younger brothers or going to their events. José, on the other hand, is on a campus which does have a chapter of our fraternity. However, when I asked him about the fraternity brothers there, he replied, "*Wey!* [Dude!] I have met them, and these bros are wild. All they do is drink." José has told me that hanging out with

the brothers at UIUC is different because of the way that they work through their own brotherhood. He observes that they do not do performances or engage in many community projects or events; they focus more on socializing. Our chapter at the University of Michigan had not prioritized the social aspects of fraternity life, and José felt disconnected observing a branch of the national fraternity with different ideals and the absence of the mission that we shared during our years together.

Ever since I joined Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc., as an undergraduate in the spring semester of 2014, I have said something that has created tensions in the fraternity: “We might share letters, but that does not make us brothers.” At the beginning of my experience in the fraternity, it was more of a personality situation because there were some fraternity brothers who I could respect as human beings but with whom I did not agree with politically, socially, culturally, or ethically. This caused me to often say this phrase which created anger among the membership. I was often asked, “How could we not be brothers if we all went through the same process?” or told “We all got our letters at the end of the day.” For me, sharing letters meant just that we had the access to wearing the same letters in public and participating in chanting. It did not mean that we shared the same ideals, ethics, or political commitments.

Since the beginning, my perspective of brotherhood came from a deeper understanding of the types of bonds that we were establishing through the fraternity. Yes, the fraternity gave us a platform to experience brotherhood, but it did not grant us brotherhood. Brotherhood, to me and to those whom I called brothers, became an act of defiance against even our own national fraternity in the sense that we did things other men did not expect us to, like opening up about our vulnerabilities in private, dancing effeminately in public, or going into a space such as prison to include incarcerated men in our community.

When I asked my brothers in Ann Arbor about their definitions of fraternity, many of them spoke about "the brotherhood" because the point of reference that they had was the experience that we were trying to create on campus. Carlos says that a fraternity to him is a space where like-minded individuals try to work with a set of common goals. In this space, the other men have your back, have high expectations for you, and keep you accountable like any family member would. For Ian it was a place where he could fit and belong. The brotherhood was about the connection and the experiences, both negative and positive of a group of men. Both Carlos and Ian's response signal things that I try to highlight throughout this project. However, Christian's definition pointed me in a new direction that I had not yet imagined.

The following quote from Christian's interview was recorded early in 2020, before I had a full understanding of my project's scope and the intent of our fraternal experiences on campus:

> I would say the concept of a fraternity to me, at the basis is a brotherhood but it is so much deeper than that, which is something that is usually not advertised or talked about. This brotherhood is formed through different traumas that we happen to have experienced in a lot of the same ways just at different points in our lives. It is something that is rooted in the culture of what it means to be a Latino man for most of us. That is something I did not realize until we started talking about it through our sessions. That is when I realized my experience has unique aspects, but it is not unique at its core. We are all experiencing the same problems. The concept of the fraternity is more like how we can build bridges through these painful experiences in order to build up a better society and hopefully a better future for the culture that we belong to. In a lot of ways that culture is very toxic, and I started seeing that more when people started opening up. (Ureña, 22:34)

Christian's nuanced definition of what fraternity and brotherhood means to him surprised me. I never thought about the effects of men of color sharing traumas within a homosocial space, because that was something that I had experienced as a routine part of this process since 2014. However, Christian being a newly inducted member and not having any previous experiences with these types of brotherhood, he drew attention to shared pain and trauma to deepen the bonds

that we shared. As a result, sharing these painful experiences from our pasts allowed us to become more relatable to the other brothers.

This brotherhood, which created a family structure as we studied in a place that was not conducive to family togetherness or to the success of men of color, served as a space of resistance to intergenerational and hypermasculinity. bell hooks says that

> If we are to create a culture in which all males can learn to love, we must first reimagine family in all its diverse forms as a place of resistance. We must be willing to see boyhood differently, not as a time when boys are indoctrinated into a manhood that is about violence and death but rather as a time when boys learn to glory in the connection with others, in the revelry and joy of intimacy that is the essential human longing. (2004, 172)

Through the brotherhood in our fraternity, we were able to vocalize pain, support each other in ways that our families did not support us, and even say, "I love you," without having to disrupt the loving sentiment with common phrases like "no homo." Through this brotherhood we were able to practice what we all had longed for: joy, intimacy, relatability, *confianza*, and, most importantly, *amor*.

Fraternal Reflections and Reframing Positionalities

As I revisited these performances and our memories and have analyzed the testimonios, I rethought my positionality within the fraternity and my connection to fraternities in a broader sense. This project has allowed me to think about the problematic behaviors that fraternity culture can perpetuate that can go unnoticed. These problematic behaviors are often coded as "traditions" that many of us fear to question. However, when we fail to question sociocultural traditional norms, we continue not only to be trapped by them but also to perpetuate them.

When I wrote about the new member presentation, I struggled with the section that humanized and displayed Jor-El, Christian, and Ian in vulnerable states. I thought writing about when they opened up about the loss of a father, physical pain, or mental health problems would

question their masculinity, and I wanted to portray them as strong men. However, I had to rethink my positionality as a scholar of masculinities. If I silence the pain that they were comfortable vocalizing, then I am perpetuating, through my writing, the same social guidelines that told us that we should not speak about these pains. Therefore, writing about these vulnerable moments we shared was difficult to process, as my position is to take care of my younger brothers. In a road to healing from these hypermasculine expectations, I had to rethink my connections to care. I care for my fraternity brothers by using these transformational moments as moments that could potentially transform others and me in the process, rather than by continuing to silence them and pretending like they never occurred within our brotherhood.

Another thing that I learned through the dance chapter had to do with the ways that intergenerational masculinities within the fraternity inform harmful behavioral standards. As we welcome new members into these fraternal and sororal organizations, we as older members have to realize that sociocultural expectations are shifting. Our fraternity can only exist within 4-year universities, and college towns tend to be some of the most politically progressive spaces in the United States. Therefore, how can we ensure the survival of these fraternal organizations without being open to the ways that gender and community formations are being shaped by education, politics, and interconnectedness via digital platforms? Are fraternities doomed and outdated? Or is there space for them to exist within radical shifts in society? These are not questions for which I have answers. I have provided evidence of the good that can potentially come out of these brotherhoods. However, this good came because I, as the person responsible for educating my new brothers, was informed by radical women of color practices, ethnic studies, and queer studies. Should these foundational methods and people have been missing in my life, would I have perpetuated the same toxic intergenerational expectations of my brothers?

The last thing I take from this project is that the strategies to cultivate brotherhood within the fraternity were strategies that could be applied in multiple spaces. Not only were we able to transition into the prison space as facilitators, but as I returned home, the relationship I had with my father, my two younger brothers, and even my mother significantly changed. I became sensitive to their experiences, their traumas, and their journeys. When Mike said that we at PCAP had prepared him to return home from prison, I also thought about how PCAP and my fraternity brothers in Michigan prepared me to return home as well.

For me, just as for the men at Milan and my fraternity brothers, our brotherhood had the potential to revolutionize our masculinities from within an all-male homosocial space. This is something that has yet to be explored and understood from within despite homosociality being critically questioned from the outside by so many scholars. This work, for me, was emotionally taxing because practicing to share your emotions, establishing intimate relationships with other men, and showing gestures of care in public decentralized what many of our *padres* (fathers) and other elders had told us to stay away from to be tough. Yet, despite doing the work during the time and revisiting it with a different emotional, ideological, and theoretical approach convinced me that the work we did loving each other as brothers was work *que vale la pena*, is worth doing, as Gloria Anzaldúa states.

This work that each of us did has allowed us to enter homosocial spaces with a different energy. I, for example, am not afraid or full of misguided thoughts because I have witnessed that men, masculinities, and the spaces they occupy can be different. These all-male spaces can be supportive, can provide a sense of belonging, can be healing, and can provide safety in multiple regards. Through this brotherhood, we developed emotional intelligence and intelligent reception as we listened to stories and shared stories that broke our hearts, like when Jor-El told us about

the tragic death of his father or Big Mike described losing his wife because of his incarceration. Together we mourned our physical pain, our emotional bruising, and found a way to describe these hauntings that we carried as men who were just trying to survive in a world full of expectations that were difficult to live up to. In the meat of all that vulnerable work we also danced, acted, joked, and laughed. Practicing the repositioning of the body, mind, spirit, soul, and love of the members requires proper guidance of not only the older members but the younger ones, too.

Being able to know that we meant well led us to doing well, for each other and for our previous, present, and future selves. These types of brotherhoods, I now realize, are difficult to come by but are a wonder to remember because of the care and nurture we felt when we were next to each other. In this male-one-male intimacy, we did not develop a hypersexualized fetish that many have of homosocial spaces but instead experienced brotherhood through a radical act of love. Through this love, which we cultivated in the private space of our brotherhood, we were able to share our talents and our care for each other in public.

The intimate queer brotherhoods, such as the one I described throughout this project, serve as an ideological window of disidentifications into the futurities and possibilities of Latinx and other masculinities. In these futures we, as men, experienced vulnerability, nurturing, and intimacy not as things that deprived us from our manhood and masculinities but as a way that reconceptualizes how we saw ourselves as members of intersectional coexisting communities. In these fraternal masculinities, we had the possibility of practicing liberation from hypermasculine behaviors, and in a more practical sense, we had the possibility of practicing what many men never receive from other men: acceptance and love. With this brotherhood's acceptance and

love, we were able to survive institutional hostility; we survived being disenfranchised men in physical spaces that were not designed to see us thrive or survive: the university and the prison.

Bibliography

Álvarez, Stephanie, José L. Martínez, Annabel Salamanca, Erika Salamanca, and Roberto C. Reyna. "Cosecha Voices: Migrant Farmworker students, Pedagogy, Voice, and Self-Determination." Harvard Educational Review. Vol. 91 No. 3. P. 319-340. Fall 2021.

Anderson, Eric. *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity.* State University of New York Press. Albany, New York. 2005.

Anderson, Eric, and Mark McCormack. "Inclusive masculinity Theory: Overview, Reflection, and Refinement." *Journal of Gender Studies.* Vol. 27. No. 5. Pp. 547-561. 2016.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera*: The New Mestiza. 3rd Edition. Aunt Lute Books. San Francisco, California. 2007.

Arellano, Lucy. "Why Latin@s Become Greek: Exploring Why Latin@s Join Latino Greek-Letter Organizations." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*. Vol. 19 (3). SAGE. P.280-302. 2020.

Bailey, Marlon M. *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance and Ballroom Culture in Detroit.* University of Michigan Press. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 2015.

Bailey, Marlon M. "Engendering Space: Ballroom Culture and the Spatial Practice of Possibility in Detroit." Gender, Place & Culture 21:4, 489-507. 2014

Barajas, José. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Drag Interview-Jose Barajas. Recording. September 18, 2019.

Barajas, José. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Interview with José-Part 4. Recording. April 27, 2022.

Barrera, Sergio G. Facebook Live. New Member Presentation. December 9, 2017. https://www.facebook.com/100001625527640/videos/1588693164528186/ 29:32

Basha, Riyah. "Anti-Latinx, pro-Trump writing found on University Rock." *The Michigan Daily*. https://www.michigandaily.com/campus-life/anti-latinx-pro-trump-writing-found-university-rock/ September 2, 2017. Date accessed: February 20, 2019.

Becquer, Marcos and Jose Gatti. "Elements of Vogue." Third Text, 5:16-17, 65-81. DOI: 10.1080/09528829108576327. June 19, 2008.

Behar, Ruth *Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart.* Beacon Press. 1996.

Buchbinder, David. "Color and Movement: The Male Dancer, Masculinity and Race in Movies." *Communicating Marginalized Masculinities: Identity Politics in Tv, Film, and New Media.* Edited by Ronald L, II Jackson, and Jamie E. Mohin. Routledge. 2012.

Calvo-Quirós, William A. "The Aesthetics of Healing and Love: An Epistemic Genealogy of Jota/o Aesthetic Traditions." Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies 39:1. University of California Regents. Spring 2014

Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. Second Ed. University of California Press: California. 2005.

Connell, R.W. and James W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society*. Vol. 19 No. 6. Sage Publications, Inc. P. 829-85. 2005.

Croft, Clare. Ed. *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings*. Oxford University Press. New York, New York. 2017.

Davis, Olajuwon. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Interview w: Ali. Recording. July 21, 2020.

De León, Jason. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. University of California Press. Oakland, California. 2015.

Don, Diego. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Drag Interview-Diego Don. Recording. September 19, 2019.

Fierros, Cindy O, and Dolores Delgado Bernal. "Vamos a Platicar: The Contours of Pláticas as Chicana/Latina Feminist Methodology." Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social. Volume 15. Issue 2. P. 98-121. Spring 2016.

Foster, Susan Leigh. "Choreographies of Gender." *Signs.* Vol. 24, No. 1. The University of Chicago Press Journals. Pp. 1-33. Autumn 1998.

Goffman, Erving. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Simon & Schuster, Inc. New York, New York.1963.

Heritage, Paul. "Real Social Ties? The Ins and Outs of Making Theatre in Brazilian Prisons." *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice*. Ed. Michael Balfour. Bristol: Intellect Books Ltd. ProQuest eBook Central. P. 189-202. 2004.

hooks, bell. *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love.* Washington Square Press. New York. 2004.

Jackson, Brandon A., "Bonds of Brotherhood: Emotional and Social Support Among College Black Men." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* Vol. 642. Bringing Fieldwork Back In: Contemporary Urban Ethnographic Research. Sage

Publications, Inc. P. 61-71. 2012.

Jackson, Brandon A., and Mary Margaret Hui. "Looking for Brothers: Black Male Bonding at a Predominantly White Institution. *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 86, No. 4, Special Focus: Ethnic Differences, Experiences, and Connections for All Students in Education. Pp. 463-478. 2017.

Jhally, Sut (Director). *Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity*. The Media Education Foundation. 1999.

Kimbrough, Walter M. *Black Greek 101: The Culture, Customs, and Challenges of Black Fraternities and Sororities.* Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp. Cranbury, New Jersey. 2003.

Kimmel, Michael, and Amy Aronson. *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia.* ABC-CLIO Inc., Santa Barbara, California. 2004.

Laureano, Carlos. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Carlos Laureano-NMP Interview. Recording. May 1, 2022.

Laureano, Carlos. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Carlos Laureano-PCAP Interview 2. Recording. October 25, 2021.

Laureano, Carlos. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Drag Interview-Carlos Laureano. Recording. September 18, 2019.

Laureano, Carlos. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Interview with Carlos and Christian. Recording. July 23, 2020.

Levingston, Jennie (Producer). *Paris is Burning*. Off-White Productions. 1991

Lipman-Blumen, Jean. "Toward a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Explanation of the Sex Segregation of Social Institutions." *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Women,and the Workplace: The Implications of Occupational Segregation. The University of Chicago Press. Pp. 15-31. 1976.

Majors, Richard, and Janet Mancini Billson. *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America.* Touchstone. New York, New York. 1992.

Mirandé, Alfredo. *Hombres y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture*. Westview Press. Boulder, Colorado. 1997.

Montiel, Miguel. "The Social Science Myth of the Mexican American Family." *Voices: Readings from El Grito A journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought 1967-1973*. Octavio Ignacio Romano-V. Ed. Quinto Sol Publications. Berkeley, California. P. 57-64. 1973.

Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldúa. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color.* 4th Edition. SUNY Press. Albany, New York. 2015.

Muller, Michael S. Text message to Sergio G. Barrera. Nov. 27, 2020.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis, Minnesota. 1999.

Namaste, Ki. "Genderbashing: Sexuality, Gender, and the Regulation of Public Space." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space.* Vol. 12. Quebec, Canada. Pp. 221-240. 1996.

Pérez, Ian. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Drag Interview-Ian Perez. Recording. September 24, 2019.

Pérez, Ian. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Oral History-Founding-Ian. Recording. April 15, 2020.

Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. "Fraternal History." Wayback Machine. July 03, 2007. Date Accessed: June 16, 2022. https://web.archive.org/web/20070703103234://www.phiota.org/fraternalhist.php

Risner, Doug. "Bullying victimization and social support of adolescent male dance students: an analysis of findings." *Research in Dance Education*. Vol. 15. No. 2. Routledge. Pp. 179-201. 2014.

Rivera-Servera, Ramón H. *Performing Queer Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics*. University of Michigan Press. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 2012.

Rodríguez, Juana María. *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*. New York University Press. New York. 2014.

Ross, Janell. "From Mexican rapists to bad hombres, the Trump campaign in two moments." *The Washington Post*. Oct. 20, 2016. Accessed June 7, 2022. https:/www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/10/20/from-mexican-rapists-to-bad-hombres-the-trump-campaign-in-two-moments/

Sabo, Don, Terry A. Kupers, and Willie London. "Gender and the Politics of Punishment." *Prison Masculinities*. Ed. Don Sabo, Terry A. Kupers, and Willie London. Temple University Press. Philadelphia. 2001.

Santos, Jor-El. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Drag Interview-Jor-El Santos. Recording. September 19, 2019.

Santos, Jor-El. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Interview with Jor-El. Recording. May 4, 2022.

Syrett, Nicholas L. *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities*. The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill, North Carolina. 2009.

Wright, Esther. *Torn togas: The dark side of Greek life.* Minneapolis, Minnesota. Fairview. 1996.

University of Michigan-Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion. "Data & Reports." https://diversity.umich.edu/data-reports/ Date accessed: March 30, 2022.

University of Michigan. "Prison Creative Arts Project. Mission & Core Values." Accessed: May 14, 2021. https://lsa.umich.edu/pcap/about/mission---core-values.html

Ureña, Christian. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Drag Interview-Christian Urena. Recording. September 19, 2019.

Ureña, Christian. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Interview with Christian Ureña Pt 3. Recording January 6, 2022.

Ureña, Christian. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Oral History-Founding-Christian Pt. 1. Recording. April 15, 2020.

Zavala, Felix. Interview by Sergio G. Barrera. Oral History-Founding-Félix. Recording. April 24, 2020.