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How Do Queer Women from Mexico Experience the Influence of Societal Norms on Constructing Their Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in a Society Shaped by Machismo?

Unraveling the Complexities of Understanding the Link between Gender, Sexuality, and Culture

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CFBGR03610: Capstone

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June 5th, 2022

Abstract

This thesis investigates the experiences of queer women in Mexico and how they construct their sexual orientation and gender identity in a society dominated by machismo. The research explores the effects of machismo on their personal identity and the difficulties they encounter by taking an intersectional feminist perspective and building on the idea that "the personal is political." Discourse and narrative analysis are combined in the research methodology to elucidate the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ women in Mexico. The reflections of the participants were recorded through in-depth interviews, giving a comprehensive knowledge of their process of developing their gender identity and sexual orientation. Findings show that in Mexican society, dominant masculine ideas are both challenged and oppressed by queer women. The women often choose to conceal their sexual orientation and gender identity because they fear that their queerness adds an additional burden on their vulnerability as women. The study highlights the lack of visibility for openly queer women in Mexico, which is related to the oppression women experience due to hegemonic masculine ideals. Furthermore, the study identifies that men, whose beliefs are constructed around the idea of machismo, feel threatened in their masculinity when queer women express their gender identity in ways that defy what it means to ‘be a woman’ in society. By understanding the complexities faced by queer women in Mexico, this study paves the way for more inclusive societies that recognize and celebrate diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

Keywords: queer, LGBTQ+, gender identity, sexual orientation, machismo, feminism, Mexico, cultural influence

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to express my appreciation to my supervisor Meghan Muldoon. Your enthusiasm and empathy is something I cherished through our time working together. No matter your busy schedule, I could count on your support. Without your input, this study would not have been possible. Next, I want to thank my interviewees for their input. Your trust and openness characterized this research and I hope that my work depicts your lived experiences with utmost respect.

Lastly, my deepest gratitude goes out to my family and friends. You always had my back through the past three years' ups and downs and made me into the person I am today. Words cannot describe how thankful I am to have you in my life.

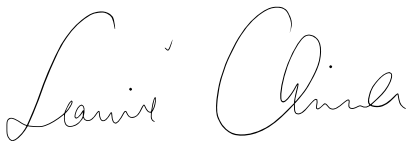

Table of Contents

Positionality

In my opinion, recognizing positionality is essential because it shifts and influences how and which narratives are and can be formed (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). It is important to note this because the study deals with a subject that cuts across contexts and geographical boundaries.

I am a white, pansexual, cis-woman who was born and raised in a predominantly privileged, safe environment in Germany. I was able to go to a highly regarded institution during my years up until joining academia. Although I spent a year in a semi-private high school in Chile, I spent the majority of my time in the Global North. During my undergraduate study program, I attended the UNAM in Mexico City for five months. Therefore, I have had the chance to experience the contrasts in Mexico's society and how people's identities, community, and cultural contexts define an individual's social status. I am currently in my last semester at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, where I enrolled in "Global Responsibility and Leadership," a study program that strongly focuses on interdisciplinarity fostering critical thinking when it comes to addressing global concerns.

How Do Queer Women from Mexico Experience the Influence of Societal Norms on Constructing Their Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in a Society Shaped by Machismo?

"The personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970) - this is presumably one of the most cited quotes in feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Enloe, 2014). However, how we construct the personal, how we see and identify it, remains a complex issue. International politics and power-structures rely heavily on the multiple meanings of masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1995; Enloe, 2014) and each person's experience in society is either shaped by acceptance of or resistance to socially accepted ideas about those. Every individual experiences gendered divisions in their daily life (Enloe, 2014). This can lead to the decision of whether to explicitly identify with a potentially marginalized group of society or to hide it due to awareness of power structures. Oftentimes, women belong to the oppressed group due to patriarchal structures in societies (Enloe, 2014). Here, hegemonic masculinity comes into play. It translates into a social system that restricts and influences behaviour in societies ultimately aiming at maintaining social hierarchies and to preserve male privilege (Connell, 1995). Closely connected to it stands a term coined as ‚machismo'. It supports the aforementioned, however its motives are inspired by the desire to rule over women and deeply-rooted gender stereotypes. As academics who are interested in gender as a problematizing category of our practices and fields of knowledge, we will have to question both the colonial gaze and the internalized machismo in apparently dispersed bodies and exercises of power. Disarming machismo, in the sense of leaving it without violent weapons, is important because it seeks to regulate what seems acceptable and legitimate (Lugones, 2010). This thesis takes on an

intersectional feminist approach, as it considers the intersection of multiple identities and experiences in regards to oppression. A more detailed explanation of the author's understanding of intersectional feminism is described in Appendix A. To identify the impacts of masculinity on the expression of self identity, the country setting of Mexico has been chosen due to its complex history of gender and sexual politics and the enduring effects of Spanish colonization, which imposed Catholicism, patriarchal gender roles, and heterosexual standards on the indigenous population persisting up to this day (Ellingson et al., 2001; Enloe, 2014; Garcia, 2016; Schmidt & Neto, 2021; Smith, 2009; Brading, 1988; Chavarría, 2010).

By examining the impacts of societal norms on individuals and the construction of gender identity and sexual orientation in contexts shaped by machismo, in this case Mexico, one can better understand the root causes of disparities that individuals face in their own cultures (Butler, 1990). Understanding the link between the construction of gender, sexuality, and culture has important implications for political action and scholarly examination around the queer community (Halberstam, 2011). This can help to advocate for change and affirm and support those who face long-standing struggles related to gender (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020) and sexuality (Foucault, 1978). While a lot has been researched about the impacts of machismo on queer men, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative research that includes queer women's embodied realities with it. This study will examine not only how queer Mexican women respond to and reject marginalization, but also the ways how they overcome such realities. Therefore, this study combines existing knowledge and connects it to women's experiences on how they came to terms with their sexuality, how they discovered their sexual orientation, and what influences, shaped, and obstacles they encountered as they attempted to identify and construct their sexual

identity and orientation in thir society. It does not establish that sexual orientation and gender identix are either a choice or inheritable in genetics. Both definitions can hold some truth and at the same time be debatable. The results can provide new understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity in different cultural contexts and help mitigate barriers to information on related topics. Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the research question of "How do queer women from Mexico experience the influence of societal norms on constructing their gender identity and sexual orientation in a society shaped by machismo?".

In order to do that, findings from an extensive literature review surrounding key terms in the paper and their implications will be explained. Next, the methods, including the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) and ethical considerations regarding the interviews will be discussed. Then, the results of the conducted interviews will be presented while exploring identified themes in the lived experience of the women. Lastly, the research question will be concretely answered in a concluding section.

Literature Review

Gender Identity

Gender and sex are two distinct concepts, with the latter referring to biological sex as the binary roles defining females' and males' tasks in reproduction. Sex refers to the unique genitalia that each person was born with (American Psychological Association, 2023). Standing next to it, is gender or gender identity. The consensus among scientists is that gender identity refers to psychological characteristics and behaviors that are 'typical' for a given sex. However, gender is

not biological sex, thus leaving a lot of room for individual definition (Mayer & McHugh, 2016). Gender identity, in the words of Fisher et al. (2010) and Cass (1984), is the subjective, socially imposed experience that causes a person to think they belong to a specific gender. The meanings associated with sex, a biological trait, and gender, a social construct, do not match in an unambiguous manner. There are varied degrees of masculinity and femininity that people concurrently display, and there are also people who are androgynous, which makes it impossible to categorize them into one of these two categories (Lamas, 1996). In her essay "Undoing Gender" (2004), Judith Butler provided a clear framework for constructing what it means to be a person. Instead, a female body can *"just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one"* (Butler, 1990, p. 6). Therefore, this paper will go from defining gender with a commonly used definition of 'gender' and 'sex', which is here reproduced from a booklet created by the American Psychological Association (APA):

> *"Sex, which is biologically determined at birth and designates a person as either male or female, is primarily determined by physical characteristics such as chromosomes, hormone levels, and exterior and internal anatomy. The socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and characteristics that a particular society deems proper for boys and men or girls and women are referred to as gender. These affect the behaviors, interactions, and self-perceptions of individuals. While features of biological sex are universal, there may be differences in terms of gender."* (APA, 2023)

This leads to the conclusion that social norms for men and women exist independently of biology and that they vary among countries and cultures. Although this was only later addressed, Simone

de Beauvoir stated in her book "The Second Sex" (1949) that *"one is not born, but becomes a woman"* - explaining the social conditioning of how a woman should act, behave, and do. Ann Oakley established the foundation for the separation of gender and sex in social science back in 1972. Kessler and McKenna (1985) then framed and hypothesized *"that a world of two 'sexes' is a result of the socially shared, taken for granted methods which members use to construct reality"* (p. 7). Gayle Rubin asserted in 1975 that if traditional gender roles are socially constructed, they can also be deconstructed and obligatory sexualities and sex roles can be eliminated in order to create an *"androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love"* (Rubin, 1975, p. 204).

In light that individuals might not express their gender identity in binary paramters set out by societies, it is crucial to distinguish between gender dysphoria and gender nonconformity. Those experiencing distress brought on by an incongruity between one's ascribed gender and gender-identity experience gender dysphoria (Cooper et al., 2020). A person who behaves in a way that goes against the gender-specific societal norms of their biological sex considered gender nonconforming (Vance Jr et al., 2020). It is important to also distinguish between the ideas of gender stereotypes, gender identity, and gender roles. According to each society and culture's biological definition of sex, gender stereotypes are inevitable since they describe the social representation that each civilization has developed around sex differences and serve as ideal models in the symbolic world of culture. These form a group of ideals for how men and women should feel, behave and think (Lara-Cantú & Navarro-Arias, 1987).

Gender norms essentially separate all elements of social and personal life. It is predicted that there would be a precise relationship between a person's genetics and the cultural superstructure that represents gender. Gender stereotypes dictate certain clothes, body language, gestures, postures, and poise for individuals (Bourdieu, 2001). Gender roles work at the level of social practices, and they are made up of an individual's personality, behaviors, and performance of sex-specific activities. According to gender stereotypes, women (or females) are supposed to be feminine, whilst men (or male members of the human species) are meant to be masculine.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is described by the APA as *"an ongoing pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to men, women, or both sexes"* (APA, 2008, p. 1). Additionally, the term 'sexual orientation' refers to a person's sense of self. A continuum of sexual orientation, *"from exclusive attraction to the other sex to exclusive attraction to the same sex"* (APA, 2008, as cited in Mayer & McHugh, 2016, p. 23), has been shown through research conducted over several decades. Researchers now recognize that sexual orientation is a *"multidimensional phenomenon"* (Laumann et al., 1994 as cited in Mayer & McHugh, 2016, p. 25), which ultimately necessitates the admission that these categories are frequently not universally applicable. However, it is recognised that one's sexual orientation has social and political implications, meaning that it is a term and phenomenon understood *"not only in scientific and personal terms, but in social, moral, and political terms as well"* (Mayer & McHugh, 2016, p. 16).

Kite and Whitley Jr (1996) coined a term called 'gender-belief systems', which are sets of views about men and women, about what is masculine and feminine, including behavior and

customs related to gender roles, stereotypes of gender, and views of those who challenge these roles (Herek & McLemore, 2013). Their theory explains that anti-gay attitudes are ingrained in these systems. This gender-belief system is a by-product regulating sexual orientation and body usage in general meaning that the gender system establishes limits between the acceptable and unacceptable forms of sexual orientation. Since the gender system holds that the sexes are complementary, heterosexuality seems to be the only acceptable erotic-affective expression.

As can be derived from the abstracts above, not only is sexuality hard to define, but also terms such as sexual orientation, heterosexuality or homosexuality have not yet been conceptualized on a widely acceptable or universal definition (Pruss, 2012, as cited in Mayer & McHugh, 2016) and are therefore ambiguous. This ambiguity is acknowledged as much as the possibility of subjective associations with the terms that each individual might have. This study rather flourishes from the recognition of varied uses and interpretations of the terms and does not try to narrow and reduce the different experiences that shape the definition of sexual orientation.

It is evident that even before individuals make their first experiences with what is associated with sexual desire, they are already integrated into social and cultural contexts that inherently involve other individuals, opportunities, emotions and feelings. All these are shaped by meaning-making because they are human experiences, and so is sexual experience part of meaning-making and vice versa (Mayer & McHugh, 2016, p. 20).

This research focuses on sexual orientation and gender identity related to the development of such in individuals and the underlying complexities of such a process. Terms with no singular empirical definition will be used interchangeably, and the author of this paper acknowledges the ambiguities connected to these terms. Continuing, this paper asks how sexual

attraction to other individuals is influenced by environmental, experiential or voluntary causes, and whether cultural and social factors influence the process of recognizing these traits. It will be investigated how these factors influence how individuals experience their impact in the construction and making of themselves in that regard.

Masculinity in Societies

This abstract will explain how the concepts of masculinity and femininity influence people's perception of individuals who are part of the LGBTQ+[1] community and commonly reject established conventions of gender identity or sexual orientation.

In 1995, Connell published a book on hegemonic masculinity, and ever since then, these definitions and constructs have been an inherent part of the sociology of gender. According to him, masculinity is the behaviors that men participate in to fulfill the social gender roles that are "assigned" to them, with the results of being displayed or "performed" through the body, personality, and culture. In the context of establishing and preserving power, masculinity plays an important role (Connell, 1995; Johnson & Samdahl, 2005). Masculinity and femininity have a dialectical relationship in which the former is often prioritized above the latter (de Beauvoir, 1949). This also signifies that oftentimes, males feel the pressure, often unconsciously, to perform in the sphere of how their culture and society ideologize masculinity (Butler, 1986). These dominating patterns and norms of masculinity are coined as "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1995). This paper understands hegemonic masculinity as referring to the dominant societal group in a specific cultural context, the prevailing male ideal of that culture, and a set of identification characteristics that must include heterosexuality. The hegemonic nature of this

[1] Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning and more

ideal is that it endorses patriarchy and heterosexuality and through that it dominates and devalues individuals or groups such as women and non-heterosexuals (Connell, 1995). Therefore, those that are male and heterosexual have fostered access to power and benefit from social practices and structures.

Consequently, one can see this hegemonic masculinity as something that is occupied to maintain the current social order, authority and practices. In their article, Johnson and Samdahl (2005) apply this hegemonic masculinity to non-heterosexual males, but in this study, I apply it to queer people broadly. Queer individuals, in their way of not being part of the heteronormativity, oppose these "accepted" dominant ideologies (unconsciously or unintendedly), which is often perceived as threatening the current status quo, the dominant group: heterosexual men. Important to acknowledge is that due to such power dynamics and the risk of receiving threats when showing one's queerness, queer people might work hard to conform with and re-inscribe these dominant ideologies and hence conceal their queerness for protection. People do not have any influence on choosing their sexuality, and even though individuals may have the privilege to choose how they perform their gender identity, they rather may not openly express their sexual orientation, as they do not blend in with the dominant and heterosexual picture of a society.

Eventually, I ask what happens to those individuals who do not obey hegemonic masculinity out of will or simply because they cannot? Here, it is interesting to look at how queer people are treated: violence, scare tactics or punishment are patterns of everyday encounters and relationships between a society with hegemonic masculinity patterns and queer people (Swim et al., 2007), even though the latter might not be actively engaging in any personal relationship to the former. Sedgwick (1993) already recognized three decades ago that *"gay men give up their*

everyday masculine privileges and styles of interaction by claiming a non-heterosexual identity" (as cited in Johnson & Samdahl, 2005, p. 334). However, the scope goes beyond gay men. While women are commonly in the "oppressed" group by hegemonic masculinity, queer women could be categorized into a group of people that is affected even more. While queer men give up their masculine privileges, queer women, trans women and people identifying as non-binary put themselves into a position where being faced with already less privilege, they "choose" to challenge the power structures they are suppressed by *even more* by simply claiming an identity that is feminine *and* non-heterosexual (Black et al., 2007; Koppelman, 1994; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Again, the free choice of openly identifying as not heterosexual is a privilege, and it is acknowledged that people oftentimes do not feel safe to resist through their visible identities. Masculinity is also "proved" through heterosexual desire [of men for women], and since the queer person's desire usually is not directly purely based on the sole desire for women, a queer person's identity and sexuality challenge the hegemonic masculinity in societies (Connell, 1995; Johnson & Samdahl, 2005). Authors say that gay men perform in various manners, such as self-segregation (Johnson & Samdahl, 2005) or adoption of hypermasculine qualities (Connell, 1995) to not suffer from stigmatization, queer women do so too, through trying to blend in with the accepted "heteronormativity" of a society. "Playing a part" in heteronormativity entails certain benefits and privileges, and therefore, queer people often repress their sexual identity up to the point of denial (Hubbard, 2008) or, when being aware, maintain this cis-hetero masculine privilege and oftentimes, then unconsciously reinforce the hegemonic ideologies and practices of masculinity. By fostering the systems that prioritize heterosexuality over homosexuality and masculinity over femininity and by associating those attributes together intrinsically, these dominant ideas enable heterosexual males to remain in

control. Following Connell (1995), hegemony is a term that describes cultural supremacy in a community. Essentially, not only is femininity subordinated to hegemonic masculinity, but alternative masculinities are also marginalized to maintain gender hegemony (Schippers, 2007). Schippers (2007) stated the following:

> *"[...] As individuals, groups, and societies use masculinity and femininity as the rationale for what to do and how to do it, and collectively do so on a recurring basis in different institutional settings, not just gender difference, but also the implicit relationship between genders become a taken-for-granted feature of interpersonal relationships, culture, and social structure"*. (p. 91)

Here, it is also important to mention that how and why hetero-masculinity is dominates other groups differs due to varying economic, political, social and cultural contexts (Dellinger, 2004). However, it is an astonishing realization that in the 21st century where female leaders, queer role-models etc. are present still,*"It is cultural insurance for male dominance that anybody who enacts or embodies hegemonic characteristics that do not align with their gender category is stigmatized as problematic and feminine."* (Schippers, 2007, p. 96, italics in original). As a result of femininity's (apparent) inherent inferiority to and desirability relative to masculine, it is susceptible to stigmatization and contamination (de Beauvoir, 1949).

Back in 1996, Kivel said that in order to realize how circumstances contribute to a hegemonic process and the significance of understanding these differences, scholars should focus not only on the individual but also on cultural ideals - this is exactly what this research aims at.

Machismo in Mexico

Findings by Gutmann (1995, 1996) show that the conception of masculinity is shaped by an individual's life-circumstances, and that this ultimately means that there cannot exist a superficial categorisation of Mexican men, or machismo. It has to be mentioned that scholars still know too little about gender relations in Mexico, and I do not discard myself from this argument. This study does not try to generalize, as there is no "fixed set" of essential and determining gender qualities *"[…] that can adequately capture the situation for the region as a whole […]"* (Gutmann, 1996, p. 9). Certain aspects of male sexuality and masculinity that seem to be essential and innate to being a man are being deconstructed daily, and new definitions of what it means to have a male identity are emerging not only in Mexico's states but also academia. There is no unique definition, no bound explanation to masculinity or machismo, as the perception of such varies a lot between cultures and even districts of a city such as Mexico City. As Gutmann said, *"gender identities […] are products and manifestations of cultures in motion"* (p. 14; 1996). Here, Gramsci's explanation of contradictory consciousness can help understanding this ever-developing and changing meaning of being a man in Mexico: *"One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and [...] in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed."* (Gramsci, 1929, as cited in Martin, 2002, p. 13). This translates into that although many men's ideas and behaviors do not fit fully into this one-dimensional image, men and women are frequently acutely aware of and influenced in some manner by the prevalent, "traditional" assumptions about men and masculinity. In other words, men and women have both an implicit

consciousness that links people with others in the active perception of the world and a consciousness inherited from the past—and from experts—that is widely and naively accepted (Gutmann, 1996).

Machismo was coined by Bermúdez in 1955 as a mental phenomenon connected to what nowadays is called fragile masculinity. In literature, machismo's features are often defined as 'exaggerated aggressiveness, tenacity in relations with other men, arrogance and sexual aggression in relations with women' (Stevens & Pescatello, 1973, p. 90). Applied to Mexican context, machismo portrays itself as 'a typical case of unconscious tendency compensation femininity in a Mexican man' (Tomczak-Boczko, 2023; p. 1). In 1961, Paz coined that, in essence, what the macho portrays or wants to portray is power. Soon it followed that machismo was not only connected per se to the hegemonic masculinity as described above but that it goes so far that it constitutes itself as power, ideology and *"social institution based on an insignificant relationship between masculinity and biological sex"* (Kaufman & Horowitz, 1989, p. 40), or as the *"central myth"* behind how Mexican men construct their identities (Melhuus, 1996, p. 241). What is similar between hegemonic masculinity and machismo is the relation to the "inferior" - aka the feminine. The relationship that a macho has with feminine bodies is a crucial aspect of machismo. Stevens and Pescatello (1973) explained machismo as *"the cult of virility"*and Gutmann (1996) found that the core of machismo, for many women and men, is brutal masculine physicality combined with men's sexual conquest of women. In Mexico as elsewhere, masculinity is unquestionably more nuanced, varied, and adaptable than is typically thought. Oscar Lewis (1959), claimed that a man must prove his manhood every day by standing up to challenges and insults (see Paddock, 1961). While this phrasing is over 60 years old, the aforementioned consciousness from the past is inherited in daily life and thoughts. *"Even if*

verbally denigrated by many, machismo is widely regarded in Mexico as constituting part of the national patrimony in much the same way as the country's oil deposits are considered a source of national if not necessarily individual self identity" (Gutmann, 1996; p. 27). Machismo has integrated itself into Mexico's larger political economy of cultural norms. As Roger Lancaster (1992) coined it, *"machismo is resilient because it constitutes not simply a form of 'consciousness,' not 'ideology' in the classical understanding of the concept, but a field of productive relations"* (p. 19). Men prevail and dominate in the political, economic, and cultural spheres as well as in academic and media institutions. Lastly, not only the social belief that masculinity and being macho are biological traits but also the constant urge of having to prove their dominance enforces the fragile masculinity in Mexican society. Male dominance perfectly illustrates hegemonic, taken-for-granted authority in Mexican culture.

As this paper is dealing with the queer community, there are some relevant findings to mention. Mexican men seem to categorize queer men in terms such as 'putos' and 'homosexuales/maricones' - many people in society hold them in poor regard, culturally (Gaytán & Basso, 2022; Lumsden, 2010). What is most interesting, though, is that some individuals define males who engage in sexual activity with not solely women as being completely outside the parameters of masculinity and as not even belonging to the masculine gender and not even constituting a different male gender type - which means they are ignored, suppressed and not included as a social human category (Carrier, 1976). The existence of machismo as a masculinity stereotype has been central to how Mexican cultural nationalism defines the future and past of the Mexican people (Gutmann, 1996). However, coinciding with the hegemonic masculinity in various societies, as numerous scholars have found, the gay and lesbian rights movements and grassroots feminism have both directly and indirectly posed an ideological challenge to

machismo, through not only actively fighting against it, but through their mere existence as human beings with different identities than the masculine.

As much of a myth machismo seems to be, there are some agreements of how this phenomenon translates into actions and how it manifests itself: dominance over others (and particularly over women), rivalry between men, constant pursuit of sexual conquests, *"opposition to attitudes and tasks traditionally assigned to the female condition"* (Lomas, 2003, pp. 22-23), verbal abuse as well as psychological and physical violence toward women (Lomas, 2003). Press reports and popular belief both hold that machismo is the primary cause of excessive violence (Kimelblatt, 2016), especially against women in Mexico. This is known as 'machista violence' (Barragán, 2021). The violence resulting from this urge to prove masculinity is a frequently discussed subject in gender studies focusing on Latin America (Basham, 1976; Garda, 1998; Jiménez-Guzmán, 2013; Kaufman & Horowitz, 1989; Mirandé, 1997; Stevens, 1965 & Torres, 1999). In line with the argument above that focuses on hegemonic masculinity, a factor that explains the growing violence is *"the fear of everything that supposedly threatens male privileges and the status quo, male unemployment and men's financial dependence on women"* (Garda, 1998, pp. 194–195). Academics also point out that it starts from a very young age, that young men and boys are "educated" into this expression of masculinity.

Scholars such as Mirandé (1997) have pointed out that their studied population of Mexican men did not identify as macho. Instead, they perceived it as a bad or manufactured version of masculinity defined by masculine domination and egoism. These findings cast doubt on the notion that machismo, at least as conventionally described, is some sort of desirable cultural value or attribute without disputing the prevalence of male domination and patriarchal ideas. It is important to note that although being a widespread phenomenon throughout Latin

America, the cult of machismo is especially significant in Mexico, where it serves as a defining characteristic of the country's identity. Machismo stereotypes are important parts of the symbolic capital that everyday Mexicans utilize (Berghegger, 2009). This is why it is imperative so to look at how queer Mexican women were and are able to create and sustain a not heterosexual identity, especially in a culture that is considered to be centered on heterosexual machismo and masculinity.

On Coming Out

As pointed out earlier, societies are structured around heteronormativity. According to Rotheram-Borus and Fernandez (1995), queer individuals, especially those in the process of coming out, experience stress surrounding their sexual orientation since it opposes the prevailing cultural norms. In contrast to heterosexual individuals whose attitudes, sentiments, and desires align with prevailing societal standards, the process of searching for a queer identity is even more central and a primary challenge to the pursuit of personal identity (Martin, 1982). Further, scholars pointed out the following stages of the dimensions of coming out: recognizing one's queer identity; discovering one's sexual orientation by learning about it and the queer community; revealing one's sexual orientation to others; and growing comfortable to and embracing one's sexual orientation (Rotheram-Borus & Fernandez, 1995). This builds on existing theories of gay development which show how coming out involves overcoming several developmental obstacles as people become more resilient and incorporate their sexual orientation into their social identities (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; De Monteflores & Schultz, 1978; Gibson, 1989; Lewis, 1984; Savin-Williams, 1990; Troiden, 1988, 1989 - as cited in Rotheram‐Borus & Fernandez, 1995). Deriving from literature (Sophie, 1986), one can

recognize that most individuals go through a stage of presumptive heterosexuality during which they define their sexual orientation in accordance with the norms of their culture at large. They then start to doubt their heterosexual orientation as soon as they experience feelings of attraction toward same-gender peers or adults, have same-gender sexual fantasies, or act in same-gender sexual ways (Ehrhardt & Remien, 1992; Klein et al., 1985). Some people followingly start to define their sexual orientation and self-identify as falling under the umbrella term 'queer'.

This causes tension since their presumptive heterosexuality and the prevalent conventional sexual behavior patterns (Paroski, 1987; Remafedi, 1987) are directly in tension with their ideas, feelings, and experiences. Individuals see the prejudice and violence frequently aimed at queer persons (Hunter & Schaecher, 1995). Adolescents are aware of the prejudice and violence frequently aimed at queer persons (Hunter & Schaecher, 1995). To deal with the pressure and anxiety brought on by these experiences and demands, many young people try to hide, deny, or otherwise avoid their feelings of LGBT desire and arousal (Ehrhardt & Remien; 1992; Troiden, 1988, 1989). The existence of queer individuals is increasingly being acknowledged by society, but it's unclear if this will lead to greater acceptance.

Methodology

Research Design

This study follows an intersectional feminism approach (see Appendix A) and employs a mix of discourse and narrative analysis to answer the research question: *"How do queer women from Mexico experience the influence of societal norms on constructing their gender identity and sexual orientation in a society shaped by machismo?"*. It adheres to guidelines on the

responsible use of intersectionality, including critical reflections on literature, study design, and the research process. Through qualitative research in the form of interviews, the study investigates the development of gender identity and sexual orientation within the Mexican context. In the case of Mexico, discourse analysis can help to identify the dominant discourses around gender and sexuality, as well as the ways in which these discourses are challenged and resisted by marginalized groups. On the other hand, narrative analysis focuses on the study of personal stories and experiences. By analyzing the narratives of participants, one gains insights into how gender and sexual identities are lived and experienced in everyday life, including their struggles, challenges, and moments of empowerment. By combining discourse and narrative analysis, this research comprehensively understands the construction of gender and sexual identity. Due to their suitability for exploring subjects that are sensitive, in-depth interviews were chosen (Elam & Fenton, 2003).

Participants

The participant pool consisted of 7 women of Mexican origin between the ages of 19-25 who identify as queer. The diversity of socioeconomic background, age, sexual orientation and gender identity were taken into account to ensure a variety of experiences. The study has been limited to these participants to allow for an in-depth analysis of each person's experience separately. The snowball method was used to recruit possible interviewees and to get a broad range of views from different degrees of experience. Once participants were identified, they then were contacted via their preferred messenger type. Following their initial outpointed interest, I informed those interested of potential dates and times I would like to interview them.

Data Collection

For the data collection, I aimed to use a method that would enable participants to interpret the questions in their own way and guarantee that each interview covered the in-depth telling of life experiences. In order to do so, I used the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method's (BNIM) three-phase interviewing process[2] as it proved to be a well-suited interview method for this research (Wengraf, 2008). As opposed to the original approach, I performed the second sub-session using a semi-structured interviewing technique (Interview Guide in Appendix D). With this alteration, participants were still free to ask questions and share experiences they thought were important, but I was able to go deeper into their stories and draw links to my study question.

I used Google Meets to do every single interview online. Given the possible sensitivity of the subject, I also gave participants the option of bringing a caregiver or trusted person with them to the interview. I audio-recorded each interview with permission and wrote down cue words for the following sub-session. The average interview lasted 55 minutes. Self-determination, informed consent, minimizing harm, anonymity, and secrecy were all taken into account when conducting interviews since themes covered can elicit strong feelings.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the material gathered, I translated and transcribed each interview verbatim. The transcriptions provided a list of keywords that I used to comprehend the participants' primary experiences and points of view. I wrote the most important insights from

[2] rationale and benefits for this method are explained in Appendix B

each conversation down and followed the analyzing technique according to the BNIM method as it "incorporates a collective interpretive approach through the use of interpretive panel analysis" (Corbally & O'Neill, 2014, p. 6) and mitigates 'biographic inevitability illusion' (Wengraf, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

This study deals with queer women in a society shaped by patriarchy, machismo, certain cultural, societal and religious values, discrimination, violence, and many more. Topics touched upon might be sensitive and are highly personal, particularly in a society where sexual orientation and gender identity are often stigmatized or taboo and subject to social and cultural pressures. Full ethical approval from the faculty's ethics committee was attained, and details on the reflection upon ethical consideration and on how the researcher aimed to ensure protections are attached in Appendix C.

Results & Discussion

Various themes were identified that influenced the process of the women's construction of their sexual orientation and gender identity. The first is their understanding of masculinity and machismo, the second is their life before coming out and the impacts on one's construction of a queer identity and the last one is the stage after coming out and the experiences of openly expressing that queer identity.[3]

[3] The author decided not to cite participants of interviews with their name, age, or any specific information In order to prioritize and ensure confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity, ultimately upholding ethical considerations and protecting the women's social safety.

On Understanding Masculinity and Machismo

Research has shown that hegemonic masculinity is a cultural ideal, and societal and cultural norms strongly influence gender roles (Connell, 1995). Therefore, these factors have an impact on how individuals see their roles in social, interpersonal, and personal situations (Simon & Gagnon, 2005). All participants said that in Mexico, masculinity is a strong ideal which contributes to a heteronormative thinking in their close surroundings but also the overall society. Machismo was explained as "*a deeply rooted inter-generational culture [...]",* and has been recognized to be something that Mexicans internalize since they were born which in the end also has been said to pose a certain blindness to the issue because it is normalized in everyday life.

> *"[...] in Mexico you grow up hearing that word, [...] maybe because of how it is in life within our behavior patterns and the way we interact with each other. And it's a culture that prioritizes men and their happiness or their well-being [...] I think if you ever lived long enough to remember, you probably have had experiences with it."*

When asked about machismo's impacts on specifically women, participants mentioned gender-based violence due to fragile masculinity and the thinking of men that women exist as sexual objects for men. One woman said:

> *"[...] in Mexico, there's a lot of femicide and the way they are treated and the way the government deals with them is, I think, is the biggest demonstration of machismo that we have in this country."*

Participants recognized that masculinity in Mexico is something that is very toxic for not only men, but especially those who do not fit into the parameters of what is attributed to "the

masculine and feminine". Findings from both the literature review (Frosh et al., 2017; Lewis, 1959) and the interviews show that

> "*the men in Mexico feel that they have this image and [...] it's like their archetype in some way in what they are governed by" (*and that these) "*want to step as much as possible into the gender role and or the like masculinity [...] and not as the prioritizing men sense [...] but making women less [...]".*

All participants had experiences that anti-gay prejudice or more extreme opinions against them were more common from perpetuators of traditional gender role ideas which is in line with literature (Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Kite & Whitley Jr, 1996). According to the women, being queer is likely to "violate" traditional gender norms as described by the idea of machismo and accepted societal parameters of the genders, which is in line with existing theories such as the gender-belief systems (Herek & McLemore, 2013).

Before Coming Out: On The Impacts of One's Construction of Queer Identity and the Process of Coming Out

According to Rodríguez et al. (2013), lesbian women choose not to "come out" until about five years after presuming a lesbian identity due to feelings of insecurity, fear, and uncertainty caused by a lack of social and family acceptance as well as a fear of being judged for not adhering to heterosexual norms.

This is in line with this study's findings. All participants expressed that they doubted coming out due to societal and cultural factors which influence how queer people are perceived. While the majority of the participants reported to not have any role models which encouraged

them to identify as queer, a small amount reported that youtube videos from queer individuals outside of Mexico helped in the process of making sense of their sexuality. There was only one mention of a national role model, which is Frida Kahlo. One individual reported that for her, the university setting had the biggest impact since there was a student organization specifically for people who are queer, which inspired her to be open about her sexual orientation. The impact on the participants' process would have been significantly greater had there been openly queer individuals, such as relatable classmates, who could have provided a sense of identification and insight into the surrounding's attitudes towards queer women. However, overall, for each of the participants *"it was more the issue of accepting my sexuality in terms of how I see myself and [...] experimenting little by little"*. In all interviews, the lack of visibility of openly queer women in Mexico has been identified, and all of the women reasoned this with the oppression of women through machismo. Moreover, an interviewee said that this effect was even stronger for queer women and explained this stating:*"Queer women do not fit into the men's macho picture of a woman as they can not conquer us because we are not attracted to them"*.

Queer people's discrimination should not be seen as solely psychological, but rather as a social-cultural phenomenon rooted in more extensive systems of values and ideas (e.g. Herek & McLemore, 2013). These can also be taken upon by the queer woman herself, which can be coined as self-denial caused by heterosexist norms that have the unfortunate side effect of making queer individuals have internalized homonegativity toward their own sexuality (Mayfield, 2001).

> *"It was quite a dark time because. It wasn't only myself that made me doubt myself, but also certain people, links, friendships that I had at that time[...]. Many people told me 'no, it's just a stage, you're just going through a moment in which you're letting yourself*

go'. So it was very difficult because [...] I doubted too much what I really wanted or could do. And when I met new people [...] I always said I was heterosexual because I was very afraid of how people would react to me."

While the majority of the participants reported a quick realization of them being queer, the journey of acceptance seemed comparably very long. As mentioned above, this is being explained by various reasons, and the women had several reasons for them hiding their sexual orientation, which not only can be explained by self-doubts, anchoring bias, the cultural norm, but also internalized homophobia:

"I repressed it for many years [...] to a point where I believed it myself, I really believed that [...] I didn't like girls [...] when it was time to go out, with guys or the whole vibe, it was like, okay. I knew it wasn't my thing, but I did it because it was the acceptable and culturally acceptable thing to do, right?"

Even though some participants have been reported to have experienced male-male relationships within their close family circle, it became clear that the women never projected it as a possibility for themselves or others, but that it seemed rather acceptable for only the men in their family and swept under the carpet within their circles. Asked about an explanation, one woman reported her own doubts on what would be in the parameters of accepted sexual orientation and the pressure to fit into the expectations for a woman in their family.

"[...] I think a lot of the fear comes just from how you see the general narrative about queer people around you [...]. If you are in a nice environment and a loving environment, the people around you won't necessarily be mean to you because they know you already, but that doesn't mean that the common thing to say isn't [...] 'Oh, do you already have a boyfriend?' and all those expectations from the people that love you around you. So you

> *want to fulfill these expectations, because you care about them and about how they see you [...]. The pressure just comes from what is expected. And even though they haven't, like, there's anything that's mean, it's more of a societal thing then."*

Another participant pointed out that she felt as if queer men were more accepted than women, which stems, according to her, from the fact that:

> *"The Mexican society has gotten to be characterized by machismo, by aggression against women, by superiority, by the patriarchy that has been formed for so long and that has been so difficult to overthrow [...]it has been very difficult [...] to make it visible that lesbian and bisexual women exist [...]. I also feel that it has had a lot to do with the fact that gay people, gay men, are more accepted in society, or at least that is what I have also seen, that lesbian or bisexual women have little visibility in Mexican society."*

Many participants kept their sexual orientation for themselves because they felt that openly expressing their sexual orientation would make them even more vulnerable in Mexican society than being a woman alone.

After Coming Out: On the Experiences of Expressing a Queer Identity

The macro- and exo-level systems, such as one's culture, religion, educational institutions, and media, are said to systematically reinforce the constructs of gender identity and sexual orientation norms (Thepsourinthone et al., 2022). This is in line with ideas that contend that a person's social systems, organizations, and structures contribute to the development and maintenance of such standards. Adding on to that, the participants claimed that these standards are governed and upheld by their parents, siblings, friends, peers, as well as members of their community and even complete strangers. The majority of the participants identified the family as

the context which, apart from society, had the strongest occurring male dominance or cultural ideals that played into the perpetuation of the oppressing of not only themselves, but also their queerness.

> *"So, regarding my sexual orientation, not many things changed because I did not not make it so public within my family, but with identity, with my gender identity, it has always been the same. Men have always been seen in my house as better or as if you have to do everything for them because they are men."*

Other participants were faced with neglect or gaslighting upon them telling their parents.

> *"I told them and my dad practically told me that I wasn't queer, that yes, it was practically wrong. That something inside me was maybe not working right or that I was just confused. They tried to kind of deny me or deflect me from my sexual orientation or what I had already said and discovered about myself. That was very difficult because he made me feel like I was doing something wrong, that I wasn't or just wasn't going to be enough if I decided to be part of the community."*

Rodríguez et al. (2013) mentioned that queer women have to put in a lot of work to become socially recognized in their family surroundings. This can be seen by the reaction of the mother, but also by reportings such as:

> *"I was scared, I didn't know how my mum was going to react. The only person I wanted to tell was my mum, because I felt that she was the only person who really or from whom I really needed some kind of approval."*

Literature suggests that identifying and being openly queer is likely to violate traditional gender norms as described by the idea of macho, and those with greater levels of machismo may be more prone to think so. Participants mentioned exactly that:

> *"I feel that my mother and her family grew up a lot with all these stereotypes of how a man and a woman have to be, because she comes from a small town in Guerrero and all that. So I feel like it's very much in their culture [...]"*

or:

> *"My brother also had rude attitudes. Since my dad left he saw himself as the king of the household. After I told him, he treated me differently [...] it's something that you know affects you because it's with the bonds you've had all your life, with the people you've loved all your life and it's very difficult sometimes to get over it."*

Furthermore, participants mentioned that the religious beliefs of the family, meaning the heteronormative ideals they have, are a major factor that impacts their free expression of their gender identity and sexual orientation when being with their relatives, since they face a lot of resistance and dismissal. Whitley Jr (2009) conducted a meta-analysis on the relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards gay men and lesbians and found a correlation between religiosity and anti-gay attitudes. This finding adds strength to the experiences of the participants which stated that religious beliefs of their families do not go hand in hand with queerness, ultimately resulting in conflicts. Also here, avoidance of talking about something that would go contrary to their beliefs plays a part and participants reported how, after their coming out to their parents, they never brought the topic up again and refused to accept it as a reality, neglecting the queerness of their daughter. Rodríguez et al. (2013) discovered that queer women frequently faced accusations of immorality as well as psychological abuse and expulsion from their family homes after coming out. This is in line with this study's findings.

If we go further, the social surroundings such as friends also show an impact on how the participants express themselves and feel safe to be openly queer. While for one participant,

especially male friends, adopted attitudes that were hateful and that bothered and hurt her, the majority of the participants reported that they felt safe around their friends. In fact, close relationships with lesbians and/or gay men are a major predictor of positive perceptions (Herek & Capitanio, 1996) and frequently one of the strongest correlations in cross-sectional research (Brown & Henriquez, 2008).

While findings from the interviews show that within their family, the majority faced resistance or nonacceptance, social spaces such as the university or their friends proved as tolerant and the women decided to express their queerness openly. Some of the women described that they were less likely to come out or be openly queer if the social atmosphere is viewed as being less accepting. The women reported that it heavily depends on context if they would show that they were queer.

> *"If I go to places where people are very conservative, very Catholic [...] it is definitely not something that I can express openly and say I am this, no? Because these places are very, very judgmental. So I think that in general, in a cultural context in Mexico, I feel not that welcome."*

The development of vulnerability among women is fundamentally influenced by sex and gender systems, which also lead to what was once known as homophobia but is now more commonly known as homonegativity or sexual stigma (Herek, 2004).

According to the women and academics (Lagarde, 1997), Mexico has a patriarchal gender structure where males and masculinity are regarded more highly than women and femininity. Women's experience of violence as a result of their gender serves as an illustration of this. When asked about how they experience vulnerability, the participants shared that they felt as if they can not express themselves freely with a person from the same gender, especially in public.

> *"I think, at any time where I am with my girlfriend. It's like a small moment of feeling vulnerable.[...] Everyone could know. [...] But I do feel like choosing to be close to one person is when I make myself very vulnerable. And [...] whenever you choose to talk about it, it is one moment of making yourself vulnerable."*

One woman reported to have experienced verbal violence in public:

> *"At the beginning it was like ... okay, they accepted it, but then they started to be rude.[...] In public, people started to say certain things to me, like the typical insults that are used in Mexico, which is like "tortillera, lencha, etc. [...]".*

Other situations in public were being sexualized by men when being with another woman, which led them to not express themselves freely.

> *"I don't usually feel vulnerable when I'm alone. But I have felt vulnerable when I date girls. [...] Because I feel like people judge us [...] for the simple fact of holding a woman's hand. Or for the simple fact of my physical appearance [...]".*

Women reported that it has been men that made them especially uncomfortable because:

> *"[...] The men here [...], if they see two women together, it is something that is very sexualized, they even like it to see us kissing or holding each other [...] and it is something that was very uncomfortable, so I stopped doing all that."*

This sexualisation and judgment might be very location dependent, since the negative tales stemmed from women who live in small towns or cities known for being religious. One woman who had positive experiences reported to be in Mexico City, where for her, queer visibility is much higher than in other contexts. However she also noted that two women engaging romantically might draw less attention because Mexico is *"a much more touchy country"* and due to the fact that there are many people in the city.

Some of the women interviewed described themselves as being masculine, emphasizing that their way of expressing being a woman is just more with more masculine attributes but not a neglect of their gender. According to Costa and Salinas-Quiroz (2019), when a woman acquires male traits, as many lesbians do, she exhibits traits that are seen positively by society, including independence. This is not in line with what participants experienced.

> *" [...] when I go to shopping malls it's like that and people especially, I think people [...] look at me strangely, because apart from the way I present myself, my gender expression tends to be very masculine, then I feel that it's also something that seeks attention in that context [...] So I feel that sometimes I have noticed a bit of discrimination [...]".*

Another woman reported something similar when expressing her masculinity, which is often stereotyped as lesbian.

> *"[...] I always go to buy clothes in the men's section,[...] I will try on clothes in the men's changing rooms. And, yes, it's very uncomfortable for me because they stare at me, [...]it's like a general feeling of discomfort [...] it's the way the looks or things you receive. Sometimes they are very obvious."*

Another interviewee described that for her, she does not dare to go to the public toilets anymore because people stare at her in an ugly way which makes her feel uncomfortable or even when expressing her hairstyle how she felt comfortable, she encountered situations of discrimination:

> *"[...] with my dad. I've received comments from him. Yeah, a bit like... you should leave your hair long. You'd be better off with long hair and like that kind of comments."*

In order to face less uncomfortable situations in public she stopped wearing her hair short and adopted more feminine traits when she knew she would go into public spaces where she could not evaluate whether they would be tolerant or not.

When being alone in public, especially those that expressed themselves as masculine faced discrimination, since they would not, according to a participant, pass as *"the female ideal men are so used to oppress"*. Bradley (2013) pointed out that heteronormative masculinity is constituted by the exclusion and subjugation of its outgroup actors—queer women and men—as these represent a danger to its own existence. Psychological violence by men that, according to the women, felt offended simply because a woman had masculine traits, were something they reported to happen almost daily. As a consequence, some decided to not express themselves as masculine as they would want to, but some also stated wanting to resist those aggressions: *"And these things, you don't want to give attention to, because they're kind of like doing what they want. And at the same time, if you ignore it, it's like you're giving them the permission to do it."*

Lastly, it became transparent that although the women were sure in their construction and expression of their queer identity, the fear of social rejection due to their non-heterosexual identification remained. In certain situations, especially when being with men, they would feel a need to pass as heterosexual or to assert to what some referred to as the male gaze, not only to decrease their vulnerability, but also to assert to societal standards for women set out by machismo.

> *"When I tell [...] even an unknown man about my sexuality, about my partner, I feel like this need (that they think) [...] that I could like them too. Or that they could like me too. I don't know. Maybe it comes from this need of like we have to be likable to men and that's like something that I'm battling with a lot."*

However, not only the society is influenced by gendered beliefs and machismo, but also the interviewed women themselves. According to the minority stress theory, queer individuals are more likely to experience chronic stress because of homophobic and heterosexist social contexts

(Alessi, 2014). As a participant coined: *"I think that here in Mexican societies this is still not accepted. Being a woman has to fall within these parameters and within these expectations. And if you don't meet these expectations, then what are you?"*

These findings show that machismo plays a big role in how queer women suppress their own identity, and that it exacerbates their lived vulnerability in Mexican society. The women feel as if they have a relatively strong internalized homonegativity due to the prevailing standards of what a woman's role is in their society and that th. It is also deemed impossible that the culture of machismo is deconstructed in the near future. Therefore, in order to support queer women in the different processes of constructing their queer gender identity and sexual orientation, it has been identified that the visibility and safety of queer women should be increased through support-networks, the normalization of queerness in popular media and its acknowledgement in public discourse. These strategies can help to mitigate machismo's dominance on norms set out for (queer) women and decrease internalized homophobia, ease minority stress and create a sense of belonging, and lastly, enhance mental health.

Limitations

This study entails some limitations that should not be unacknowledged. First of all, this study only examined the experiences of young adults, which restricts its applicability to the wider public. Furthermore, these women were all located in the State of Mexico (commonly known as Edomex), making the results unrepresentative of all of Mexico. Another shortcoming is the particular sample I used for analysis. It is obvious that the sample was not typical of all Mexicans, however it was chosen due to the possible time frame, accessibility and social security. I cannot rule out the possibility that experiences with constructing one's sexual

orientation and gender identity might be explained by certain gender ideas in the younger generation, whereas experiences in a wider age ranged population might be shaped by different factors such as religiosity, etc. Further research with a wider population group, whether that be geographical location, gender or age, is recommended since diverse socioeconomic experiences—along with those of race and ethnicity—can result in sometimes unexpected differences in understandings of femininity, masculinity, machismo and interactions with the system of a society.

Conclusion

This research examined the research question *"How do queer women from Mexico experience the influence of societal norms on constructing their gender identity and sexual orientation in a society shaped by machismo?"*. Findings show that queer women, through their mere existence, challenge societal norms for the genders set out by machismo but that societal norms have a big influence on their life. The participants went through stages of hiding their queerness and recognized the lack of visibility for openly queer women, attributing both to the oppression women face through hegemonic masculine ideals in Mexican society. Queer women often chose to hide their sexual orientation due to societal intolerance, fearing sexualization and verbal violence and the fact that expressing their sexual orientation would make them even more vulnerable in Mexican society than already being a woman alone. Findings show that men feel even more offended in their (fragile) masculinity if the women express their gender identity with physical attributes generally classified as masculine. The majority of participants chose to suppress their authentic selves, while others aimed to resist societal norms. The experiences of the participants of this study can be connected to similar journeys faced by queer women globally. While the specific cultural and social contexts may vary, there are common themes and

issues that resonate across different societies. This study emphasizes the importance of visibility, acceptance, and protection for queer women.

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Appendix A: Intersectional Feminism

Intersectional feminism serves as an example of a theory that considers widespread forms of discrimination and trends around the world (Crenshaw, 1989). As a result, it can show how power dynamics are kept, altered, and perceived (Hankivsky, 2014). The idea of intersectionality draws attention to the criticism that social identities are not just built on the basis of gender but also on other factors that can't be ignored. These factors include ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and others (Zack, 2007). It emphasizes that there is more to it than just increased gender prejudice by conceptualizing how various intersections of subjugation lead to distinct sets of experiences for the individual subjected to them (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw stated in 1989 that the feminist and anti-discriminatory movements have been heavily founded on *"a single-axis framework",* which sees various forms of oppression as distinct from one another (p. 139). A single-axis paradigm perpetuates the exclusion of Black, Latina, Indigenous, and queer activists and scholars in complex and multifaceted discourses like feminism by keeping the discourse focused on white women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Hankivsky, 2014). bell hooks suggests that expanding critical awareness and through that, eventually changing society can all be

accomplished by adding a multifaceted analysis of oppressive processes (Biana, 2020). The goal of intersectionality is therefore to deconstruct and rebuild the preexisting structures that analyze, theorize, and conceptualize social injustice and oppression because these structures perpetuate the profiting from certain privileges. As a result, intersectionality is now widely regarded as an essential and fundamental component of feminist academia (Davis, 2008; Crenshaw, 1989). It stresses that an analysis of one individual factor falls short of capturing the intricacy of human existence and therefore functions as an appropriate instrument for investigating gender or discrimination, just as this paper aims to do (Hankivsky, 2014).

Appendix B: BNIM - Method for Data Collection

In order to get a continuous tale from participants, BNIM employs a unique interviewing approach. This approach, which focuses on the person's entire life history or story (biography), how they tell it (narrative), and the social interpretation (interpretive), has shown to empower participants to articulate the ups and downs of their life and experiences while also giving the researcher a framework for data analysis and interpretation to give meaning to people's life stories (Corbally & O'Neill, 2014). This approach in light of Wengraf (2008) claims that "narrative expression" supports research into the lived experience of individuals and collectives by assuming that it is expressive of both conscious concerns and also of unconscious cultural, societal, and individual presuppositions and processes. Thus, this approach focuses on documenting and understanding the development of "situated subjectivity" (Wengraf, 2008). Furthermore, the methodology was particularly appropriate given the author's expertise as having studied social work in Mexico, a sphere which commonly uses narrative approaches when interacting with individuals (Fraser, 2004).

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Spanish (original) Version

En primer lugar, te hago una pregunta a la que debes responder. Contesta todo lo que quieras, toda información es válida y necesaria. Como sabes, quiero averiguar cómo la cultura moldea el proceso de encontrar la propia sexualidad, qué influencias puede haber, cómo son las experiencias de ser queer en el contexto en el que vives, y si hay grandes diferencias debido a cosas como el machismo, las estructuras políticas, etc.

Después, le hago preguntas más concretas que espero pueda responder. además, puede detener la entrevista cuando quiera sin consecuencias. ¿Te parece bien si grabo tu voz?

Presentación

- ¿Cómo te llamas, qué edad tienes? ¿Cómo te identificas? ¿Cuáles son tus pronombres?

SQUIN:

- "Por favor, cuéntame la historia de cómo viviste la experiencia de tener una identidad sexual/género queer en México (desde que te diste cuenta inicialmente) hasta ahora."

Preguntas estructuradas:

- ¿Cómo defines el machismo?

- ¿Has tenido alguna experiencia con el machismo? ¿Situaciones, otras?
- ¿Cómo describirías la percepción y definición de masculinidad en tu sociedad?
- Como persona queer, ¿te sientes bienvenida en tu sociedad?
- ¿Cuáles son los problemas y dificultades que experimentas por tu condición de queer en tu sociedad?
- ¿Cómo descubriste que eras queer? ¿Puedes contarme el proceso de descubrimiento, posibles modelos de conducta, inspiraciones, etc.?
- ¿Cómo describirías tus experiencias con el machismo en relación con tu orientación sexual e identidad de género?
- ¿Experimentaste aceptación o resistencia a las normas aceptadas por la sociedad sobre feminidad y masculinidad y cómo las presentas?
- ¿Dudaste de salir del closet/de ser abierto sobre tu orientación sexual y/o identidad de género? En caso afirmativo, ¿por qué?
- ¿Hubo situaciones en las que experimentaste vulnerabilidad por no ser hetero?
- ¿Crees que tu(s) visibilidad(es) homosexual(es) influye(n) en cómo te tratan?
- ¿Sientes que perteneces a la sociedad y al nacionalismo mexicano?

Outro

- ¿Hay cosas que te gustaría destacar de nuevo?

English Translation

First, I am asking you a question which you should answer. Answer as long as you want, every information and thought is valid and needed. As you know, I want to find out how culture shapes the process of finding one's sexuality, what influences there might be, how one's experiences with being queer are in the context where you live, and if there are grand differences due to things such as machismo, political structures, role models, etc.

Introduction

- What's your name, age? How do you identify? What are your pronouns?

SQUIN:

"Please tell me the story of how you experienced having a queer sexual/gender identity in Mexico (from the initial realization) up until now."

Structured Questions:

- How do you define machismo?
- Did you have any experiences with machismo? Situations, others?
- How would you describe the perception and definition of masculinity in your society?
- As a queer person, do you feel welcome in your society?
- What are the problems and difficulties you experience in your queerness in your society?

- How did you find out you were queer?
- Can you tell me the process of finding out you were queer, potential role models, inspirations, etc?
- How would you describe your experiences with machismo in connection to your sexual orientation and gender identity?
- Did you experience acceptance of or resistance to societal accepted norms about femininity and masculinity and how you are presenting them?
- Did you doubt coming out about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity? If so, why?
- Were there situations where you experienced vulnerability due to not being hetero?
- Do you feel that your queer visibility(s) influences how you are treated?
- Do you feel a sense of belonging in Mexican society and nationalism?

Outro

- Are there things that you would like to emphasize again?

Appendix D: Ethical Considerations

Participants were asked about their gender identity, including their experiences of coming out, discrimination, and acceptance. Queer people are a group with particular vulnerability. This is acknowledged by the researcher also since her personality is influenced by being a queer woman herself. Trust and sensitivity was therefore established since this is an overlapping connection between researcher and participants, and the relatability was enhanced from both sides. The study could have potentially reiterated psychological stress, discomfort and anxiety as the study is based on the experiences of participants within their society and themselves. In a country where queer individuals face discrimination and violence, participants may be hesitant to share their experiences and may experience additional stress if their participation in the study is disclosed. Researchers asked participants to share deeply personal and emotional experiences related to their sexual and gender identity. This may have placed an emotional burden on participants, who may feel compelled to share experiences that are difficult to talk about. Interviews were chosen in order to get a deeply personal experience of gender and sexual identity within the given culture. With this, both researcher and participant were able to touch upon the notion of how a culture influences the process of finding oneself without plainly making assumptions. The topics talked about were shaped by sensitivity, meaning that individuals might talk about negative experiences related to queerphobia, homophobia, machismo and misogyny. It was guaranteed that participants could stop the interview at any point without consequences. The researcher made sure that the interviews are a safe space and that any additional information and thought which comes up after and during the interview could be shared with the researcher. This helped dealing with feelings of overwhelmedness or reaction to potential triggers and helped the researcher and participant equally to manage the situation.

Next to this, it was the top priority of the researcher to ensure the participants safety, meaning that the context of the research and its considerations were explained thoroughly and space for need of clarification was given before participants gave their informed consent. The extracted and processed data was anonymised and handled with utmost care, safety and confidentiality. The gathered data is guarded in line with the regulations the university lays out for research. The following list shows the details on how the researcher aimed to ensure protections:

1. Confidentiality: Participants' privacy and confidentiality was respected throughout the research process and their participation in the research was kept confidential. I obtained informed consent from participants and ensured that their identities and personal information are kept confidential.
2. Anonymity: All data was anonymised. This anonymity assures that no one will be able to identify the individuals through their words or names.
3. Sensitivity and empathy: I approached the research with sensitivity and empathy, acknowledging the experiences and perspectives of queer individuals in Mexico. I took care not to retraumatize participants by asking overly intrusive or insensitive questions. As I, the researcher, is part of the queer community myself, my empathy and sensitivity is fueled by my own experiences and the knowledge of what it means to be part of the queer community.
4. Safety: I prioritized the safety and well-being of participants. This included providing resources and support for those who may need it, such as access to mental health services or legal assistance.

5. Collaborative research: To ensure that the research is conducted ethically and sensitively, I involved queer individuals in the research process. This can help to ensure that the research is respectful, relevant, and useful to the community. As already mentioned, I am queer myself, which will ensure the maximum comprehension.
6. Reflexivity: I continuously reflected critically on my own positions and biases and my potential impact on the research. I acknowledged and addressed any power dynamics that may exist between me and the participants, such as differences in social class, race, or gender. The aforementioned was be done by keeping a personal reflection journal throughout the data collection process, in order to ensure the intentionality of this continuous reflection.
7. The participants were fully informed about their participation in the study and will only be conducted once informed consent is given.
8. Participants were only asked to share what they want and what felt right, questions were asked in a manner that gave the opportunity to share only as much information as each individual was open to share and willing to open up, and before each interview the interviewer ticked a list of issues that would be touched upon and asked each participant to consent and if they are comfortable with those. If not, topics were left out of the interview.
9. To minimize potential harms, researchers approach the study with sensitivity and empathy and acknowledge the vulnerability of the population group since her personality is influenced by being a queer woman herself. The researcher obtained informed consent from participants, clearly outlining the study's objectives, the potential risks and benefits of participation, and how the confidentiality and privacy of participants will be protected.

10. Participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time, and the researcher provided resources and support such as counseling or advocacy organizations, in case participants experienced distress or required additional support.
11. It will be ensured that the research is conducted in a way that is respectful, relevant, and useful to the queer community.
12. The extracted and processed data was anonymised and handled with upmost care, safety and confidentiality. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms or code names were assigned to each participant and it was ensured that the data does not make them easily identifiable or reveal personal information.

The gathered data was guarded in line with the regulations the university lays out for research, meaning that data is stored in a secure location that is only accessible to authorised individuals, and encryption software was used to protect any digital data like audio recordings or transcripts.