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# Negotiating our membership : factors leading Latina lesbians to develop a political collective identity

Susana Rodriguez

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Susana Rodriguez  
Negotiating our membership: Factors  
leading Latina lesbians to develop a  
politicized collective identity

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the factors that lead Latina lesbians to develop a *politicized collective identity*. Simon and Klandermans (2001) define a *politicized collective identity* as an intentional group membership where members are mindful and conscious of the power difference that exists between in-group members, out-group members and the larger society, as well as engage in social and political power struggles to achieve justice and equality for their group. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the differences between a *social identity* and a *politicized collective identity* and the factors influencing the evolution from the former into the latter. Finally, the study explored the role *intersectionality* plays in the development of a *politicized collective identity* for this social group.

Eleven self-identified Latina lesbians, ages 19-42, volunteered for this study and answered questions pertaining to their ethnic, racial and sexual identities. Findings revealed that education, feelings of responsibility for their group, experiencing or witnessing racial discrimination, romantic relationships, familial allies and other LGBTQ relatives “come out” before, positively influenced participant’s development of a *politicized collective identity*. Additionally, findings revealed that conflation between ethnicity and sexual identity within family dynamics, concern for personal safety, and the difficulty navigating being a minority within a minority in the social world seemed to inhibit the development of a PCI. The study concluded that although most participants did not possess a systemic understanding of power and

oppression, they still engaged in “power struggles” and activism thus fitting Simon and Klandermans’ (2001) concept of a *politicized collective identity*.

**NEGOTIATING OUR MEMBERSHIP: FACTORS LEADING LATINA LESBIANS TO  
DEVELOP A POLITICIZED COLLECTIVE IDENTITY**

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2014

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

I identify as a Latina lesbian. That statement reflects the ways my intersecting racial and sexual identities have powerfully shaped my sense of self and inspired my engagement in activism. My experiences growing up in Cuba and being raised in South Florida, attending Smith College first as an undergraduate student and now as a graduate student in Social Work has supported my understanding that context matters. Our awareness of our identities and subsequent meaning making is shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors as well as structural and political processes (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2007).

I grew up in an ethnically/racially homogenous environment where most people looked like me. I was not aware of racial or ethnic “differences” and did not understand the significance of racism given that Latinos constituted the majority of those in my community. After transferring to Smith College as an undergraduate student, a predominantly White institution, my speech became defined by its “Miami accent,” I was marked as regionally, ethnically and racially different. In the midst of this experience, I also “discovered” that I was a lesbian and decided to come out to family. With this decision my conception of “belonging” drastically shifted as I became marginalized by my family as a result of my sexual identity and was exoticized by my Smith LGBTQ community for being a Latina. As I learned more about racism and heterosexism/homophobia through trainings and classes at Smith, I began to understand how my treatment in both the Latino and LGBTQ communities was impacted by dynamics of power



and oppression. I began to seek out opportunities at the local level to get involved and speak out against issues of racism and homophobia.

My clinical experience at the Smith School for Social Work has deepened my awareness of how these intersecting identities not only impacted me but other Latina lesbians. Working with mostly adolescents of color in a middle/high school setting during my first year placement and at a local LGBTQ organization with mostly youth of color for my community practice project, I was exposed to the difficulty many of these students faced when coming out to their families and being “out” in their schools. I also recognized the importance of addressing race within LGBTQ spaces as students wanted a space to talk about racism and homophobia. Additionally, working with mostly Latino/a adults during my second year placement, presented the challenge of how to address homophobic comments and behaviors from clients, while negotiating sharing a racial identity with them. As I continued to engage in efforts to interrupt racism and homophobia, and to further bridge my Latina and lesbian identities, I began to wonder what types of experiences led other Latina lesbians to engage in these same efforts? Given the marginalization from family members, that many of my Latina/o clients seemed to fear and the amount of stress it seemed to cause them, I became more intrigued about the types of life experiences that helped queer Latina/o individuals feel comfortable and empowered to challenge racism and homophobia at both the personal and societal level. My desire to further explore these questions and the life experiences of Latina lesbians led me to pursue this research topic.

### **Purpose and Significance of This Study**

This study will aim to explore the factors that lead Latina lesbians to develop a *politicized collective identity* which Simon and Klandermans (2001) define as a type intentional group

membership where members are mindful and conscious of the power difference that exists between in-group members, out group members and the larger society, and engage in social and political power struggles to achieve justice and equality for their group. In addition, this study will attempt to explore the differences between a *social identity* and a *politicized collective identity* and the potential factors involved in the development from the former into the latter. Finally, the study will examine the role *intersectionality* plays in the development of a *politicized collective identity* for members of this social group.

The NASW code of ethics (National Association of Social Workers, 2008) calls for the understanding and inclusion of issues of diversity and oppression as it pertains to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender presentation in social work practice. Given the limited research done around the topic of *politicized collective identity* and the lack of representation Latina lesbians receive in research pertaining to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer community, the field of social work would greatly benefit from gaining a deeper understanding of how the societal oppression of Latina lesbians contributes to their sense of self. Clinicians would benefit from having this knowledge which may influence or guide their approach and clinical interventions with clients who identify as Latina lesbians.

Additionally, community organizers alike could use the findings from this study to create and implement events that call for the integration of the LGBQ and Latino communities. In this way, LGBQ engagement in activism can be more inclusive of issues of race, while the Latino community can be more inclusive of LGBQ members and the specific issues they face.

### **Thesis Outline**

The following chapter will provide an analysis of relevant literature to ensure a solid understanding of the content of this study. The chapter will utilize theories from the fields of

psychology, social work and gender studies to address issues related to social and political identity development, race and sexual orientation as well as *intersectionality*. Additionally, the chapter will provide a framework along with examples of each theory in order to help readers understand how the theories relate to this research topic. Chapter three of this thesis will outline the research method, in addition to details about data collection and analysis. Finally, chapter four will discuss the study's themes and findings while chapter five will discuss the findings of this study and the implications for the field of social work.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that lead self-identified Latina lesbians to develop a *politicized collective identity* (PCI). Simon and Klandermans' (2001) politicized collective identity model describes *politicized collective identity* – as an intentional group membership where members are mindful and conscious of the power differences that exist between in-group members and out group members, understand how these differences play out in the larger society, and as a result, engage in social and political power struggles to achieve justice and equality on behalf of their group. In the context of this study identifying as a Latina lesbian and engaging in activism around ethnicity and/or sexual orientation, would constitute as having a *politicized collective identity* because it demonstrates that there is personal acknowledgement that as a lesbian and Latina female, experiences as an in-group member (i.e. an LGBTQ member or Latina group member) will differ from that of other in-group members (i.e. White lesbians, gay men, or straight Latinas) as a result of their intersecting and subordinate sexual, gender and racial identities. Additionally, their Latina lesbian identity creates a greater power difference from out-group members, (i.e. White heterosexual men), and therefore results in lesser opportunities, access to resources, and egalitarian treatment within the larger society.

The PCI model draws from social identity theory. While the terms *social identity* (SI) and *collective identity* (CI) are often used interchangeably, Simon and Klandermans (2001) argue that the term *collective identity* is more appropriate for the context of their model. Given this

distinction however, the terms *social/collective identity* differ from a *politicized collective identity* in that *social/collective identity* focuses on the personal fulfillment of psychological functions such as: belonging, distinctiveness, understanding, respect and agency. Simon and Klandermans (2001), define *social identity* as a type of *collective identity* that confirms that one belongs to a particular place in the world and that this group membership affords distinctiveness from other social places (or people) to which ones does not belong. At the same time this collective group membership establishes that one is like other people, although not like all other people and as a result can expect respect at least from those who are similar to us. Finally, the authors also state that *social/collective identity* provides a perspective of the social world through which it can be understood and indicates to group members that they are not alone but can count on the social support and solidarity of other in-group members.

A *politicized collective identity* uses the empowerment that these psychological functions provide to fuel the engagement in the political arena. In other words, a *politicized collective identity* is a kind of *social identity* that must include participation and engagement in larger social power struggles through activism (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

This study will explore the potential factors that lead Latina lesbians to politicize their identity. In addition it will attempt to distinguish the differences between a *politicized collective identity* and a *social identity* (as defined by social theorists), as well as examine the role *intersectionality* plays in the development of a *politicized collective identity*. There is very limited research on the theory and applicability of *politicized collective identity*. In addition, there is little research conducted around the intersections of ethnicity and sexual orientation, therefore the intent of this study is to gather descriptive data that will offer new insight into these unexplored identities. This chapter will draw from literature in the fields of psychology, social

psychology and social work on topics such as: social and political identity development theories, feminist theory, race, sexual orientation and *intersectionality*, in order to frame the findings of this study with the established findings in the existing literature.

The first section of this chapter will provide an introduction of the term *politicized collective identity* as defined by the politicized collective identity model (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). In addition, this section will introduce the distinctions the authors make between the terms, *social identity*, *collective identity* and a *politicized collective identity* to begin staging the premise for readers. The second section will focus on *social identity* as defined by *social identity* theorists. It will provide a brief historical description of the evolution of social identity theory, and will focus mainly on self-categorization theory (a branch of social identity theory) to illustrate these theoretical concepts. Additionally, this section will begin to introduce the concept of power and oppression as it outlined in self-categorization theory and begin to link these concepts to the distinctions made in the first section between a *social identity* and a *politicized collective identity*. The third and following section will utilize the introductory concepts of power and oppression to further establish a clear distinction between the terms SI and PCI. By exploring the term *politics*, this section will address the rooted difference that exists between both of these identity models. The fourth section of this chapter will introduce the theory of relative deprivation and explain how experiencing *relative deprivation* serves as a catalyst for *politicization*.

In the fifth section of this chapter, previously introduced concepts such as *social identity*, *collective identity*, politicization and *relative deprivation*, will be linked to illustrate their role in the development of a *politicized collective identity*. Throughout this chapter, examples will be provided to help the reader make sense of the complex theories and concepts presented, how they

apply to Latina lesbians, and how they show up in real life or manifest in reality. The final section of this chapter will focus on *intersectionality*. The reader will be introduced to the evolution of *intersectionality* through the writings of feminists of color and other influential voices in this arena. This section will examine the intersections that are at play for Latina. This section will attempt to address the complexity of developing a *politicized collective identity* for Latina lesbians, considering the many intersections at play for this particular social group.

### **Defining a Politicized Collective Identity**

To ensure a solid understanding regarding the content of this study, it will be helpful to provide a framework for each of the concepts and theories considered in this analysis in order to help readers make better sense of the question at hand as well as the study's findings.

The term *collective identity* refers to a person's identity as a group member (Klandermans, 2001). The term derives from, and is often used interchangeably with, *social identity*, given that early theorists focused on investigating the development of personal identity (the self) within a group membership. However, Simon and Klandermans (2001), use the term *collective* rather than *social* in order to prevent suggesting that any other form of identity, such as a personal identity, would be considered a-social in nature. Wordy...could you be more straightforward? Another important terminology distinction made between *social identity* and *collective identity* consists of *social identity* focusing on the *self* when referring to *identity*, implying that identity is, as a result, malleable and flexible (the idea of the "working self"), as opposed to *collective identity* defining *identity* as a fixed personal marker derived and developed from an enduring and stable membership to a social group (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Because the concept of a *politicized collective identity* calls for permanent membership to a social group, the malleability of the term *social identity* (working-self) does not fit with the

model's philosophy. As a result Simon and Klandermans (2001) prefer the term *collective identity* instead of *social identity*, establishing that the sole difference consists on the notion that the former implies flexibility and the latter implies stability. The authors also clarify that *collective identity*, as it is used in the model, refers to the identity of a person as a group member, and not the identity of a group as an entity, in the sense that the person shares the source of his/her identity with other people.

The model further suggests that the development of a *politicized collective identity* occurs in three sequences: 1. *Awareness of shared grievances*, 2. *Experiencing adversarial attributions* and, 3. *Involvement of society at large*. These three sequences require that group members develop and share collective feelings of grief and inequality, are able to blame an out-group for the group's feelings of grief and finally demand corrective action by involving all members of the larger social world (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Moreover, the authors conclude that a *politicized collective identity* should be equipped to fulfill these essential psychological functions (e.g. belonging, distinctiveness, understanding, respect and agency), provide group members with a meaningful way of understanding their social world, and offer them the tools necessary for being an effective social and political agent.

The following section will provide a brief history of social identity theory and examine its evolution. Self-categorization theory (a branch of social identity theory) will be used to depict in-group and out-group dynamics and their impact on the social "self" as outlined by social identity theory. The final part of the section will compare self-categorization theory to a politicized identity in order to further distinguish the differences between the two.



## **Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory emerged by borrowing from established psychological and sociological principles in order to create the field of social psychology, a realm that began to explore individuals' intra-psychic conflict and the influence of the social world in shaping a person's view of the self (Hogg & Williams, 2000).

Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) were the first to introduce the term *social identity* while studying inter-group dynamics, the emergence of stereotypes, and the perception of the self within the context of inter-group memberships (Trepte, 2006). Their perception of *social identity* was grounded on the notion that shared similarities and feelings associated with these personal characteristics brought people together, creating a sense of unity around these various parts of the self. Additionally, they posed that groups of people live in a society populated by other groups of people and it is, therefore, expected that perception of social status and power is determined and internalized through comparison to other social groups. Drawing upon self-categorization theory, social identity theory has accounted for in-group and out-group power dynamics and how these dynamics impacted the self. Furthermore, self-categorization theory addresses the in-group and out-group dynamics differently than the politicized collective identity model.

Self-categorization theory, states that social grouping and categorization shifts the way people perceive one another and, in turn, themselves. The theory states that self-conception (including individual attitudes, feeling and behaviors) is adjusted in order to assimilate to in-group norms and to establish distinction from out-group members (Hogg & Williams, 2000). Further, it poses that assimilation occurs when the individual becomes "de-personalized" and the concept of the self is substituted with the concept of the collective group membership. This can

be illustrated by thinking about Latina lesbians as members of an LGBQ group who assemble around group feelings of homophobia emerging from White heterosexual individuals in the greater society. In this case members of the LGBQ group are distinguishing themselves from heterosexual homophobic individuals by organizing. However, Latina lesbians are assimilating to the LGBQ group's desire to only address the homophobia, by overlooking that the oppressive statement also has a racial component, as it is coming from a White individual. This shows how a Latina lesbian's self-categorization could change based on her environment and the ways in which she views herself in comparison to others.

Assimilation, as defined by Rosaldo (1993), is a form of oppression and discrimination used by the social majority to exercise power over others that don't share their same interests or characteristics. In this case, the LGBQ group's reluctance to address race as well as sexuality, given that the oppressive statement came from a White homophobic individual, reflects how perhaps the group's racial privilege forced Latina lesbians to overlook the racial part of the identity that was shared by the group's majority. By the same token Johnson (2006) poses that when examining power, members of more privileged groups are socially and culturally authorized to interpret the experiences of others and impose their own views on reality while denying their own power and privilege in doing so.

Self-categorization theory also indicates that members deemed as more prototypical are perceived as more appealing to group members and are, as a result, more likely to become group leaders than less prototypical members. This aspect of self-categorization theory raises an interesting point around in-group power dynamics and their resemblance to larger societal re-enactments of oppression such that in-group members deemed more capable by other in-group members of embodying the established group norms (and therefore more capable of maintaining

the status quo) are the ones with more access to power, while least attractive members are marginalized. Revisiting the previous example of membership to an LGBTQ group and examining the concept of assimilation that is used to describe the process through which members adjust to group norms as well as the in-group favoritism that exists towards members who best fit this prototype, it can be argued that aside from the shared grievances around homophobia that group members share, group leadership is achieved by those who possess superordinate identities (White lesbians, gay men) rather than subordinate ones (Latina lesbians). For example, it is likely that given the group's racial composition as mostly male and White, Latina lesbians are less likely to be recognized for experiencing racism and sexism alike, because racially privileged group members might not recognize the significance of racial oppression for its minority members. As a result, Latina lesbians are called to form a collective identity that assimilates to a White gay men or White lesbians. This shows that that the more subordinate identities you possess, the less equal you are regarded by both in-group and out-group members. These dynamics could have an impact on Latina lesbians' ability to develop a *social or collective identity*, given that they represent the minority in both their Latino and LGBTQ in-groups, and as a result are required to assimilate to the ideals of each group and ultimately forced to overlook either their sexual or ethnic identity.

Overall the purpose of focusing on self-categorization theory is to demonstrate to the reader how the philosophies behind the development of a *social identity* and a *politicized collective identity* relate to each other. The main distinction lies in that a *social identity*, as intended by theorists, emphasized that the social *self* molds and changes through time depending on how the person understands themselves in relationship to others. However, this notion of the changing *self* only focused on one identity at a time, and so the complexity of the social self that

exists when one person identifies with several identities at once, is not deeply explored by social theorists. A *politicized collective identity* requires identity permanence. The philosophy of the model requires that comparison to others results in deeper understanding of the individual's own identity versus a desire to change or mold that identity, as it is implied in social identity theory. There is finally, one great distinction that emerges from comparing *politicized collective identity* and self-categorization theory, a *politicized collective identity* requires that, in-group and out-group experiences of oppression fuel the group's politicization or activism. Meanwhile, as it is depicted in self-categorization theory, experiencing in-group oppression by more powerful prototypes leads to in-group assimilation and the compromising of the social "self." This is not to disregard some critiques of social identity theory that emphasize the importance of "choosing" a group membership and suggest that social identity theory excluded this condition by simply assuming that individuals would naturally identify with given identities (Huddy, 2001). For example, it may not always be the case that every Latina lesbian identifies with her Latina roots. However, Simon and Klandermans (2001) would argue that choosing to identify as a Latina as well as a lesbian would be a sign of politicization because it would mean that the individual is choosing a subordinate in-group membership that does not assimilate to more powerful prototypes. It would be beneficial for readers to keep in mind the notion of in-group and out-group membership outlined by both self-categorization theory and *politicized collective identity* as it pertains to specifically to Latina lesbians. Given the in-group and out-group divisions that seem to exist between race and sexual orientation, calls into question how these dynamics are negotiated. In other words, re-enactments of homophobia in the Latino community and racist re-enactments in the LGBTQ community decrease the likelihood of Latina lesbians having access to all inclusive spaces where both identities can co-exist. As a result, Latina lesbians are required to

share in-group memberships with Latinos as well as LGBTQ members. Considering this dilemma, as it impacts Latina lesbians' abilities to develop either a *social identity* or a *politicized collective identity* is of relevance to this study.

As dynamics of power and oppression continue to be explained, the following section will use the material introduced in the two previous sections to solidify the understanding of what a *politicized collective identity* entails and how it differs from *social identity*. The section defining a *politicized collective identity* offered an introduction to the term as it is illustrated in Simon and Klandermans' identity model in addition to introducing the terms *social* and *collective identity* and offering the terminological distinction between the two. Finally, the section addressed the three sequences necessary for the development of a *politicized collective identity*. The section titled, social identity theory, offered an abbreviated history of and introduction to social identity theory and used self-categorization theory as the area of focus. Addressing the re-enactments of power and oppression that occur within in-group dynamics as outlined in self-categorization theory, this section began to establish the differences that exist between a *social identity* and a *politicized collective identity*. The following section will focus on making a more concrete distinction between a *social identity* and a *politicized collective identity* using the already presented material

### **Politicization**

What fixedly differentiates *social/collective identity* from a *politicized collective identity* lies in the very definition and understanding of the term "politics." Simon and Klandermans (2001) utilize Goodin and Klingemann's (1996) definition of politics as, "the constrained use of power by people over other people" (p. 323). Similarly, Oxford dictionary (N.D) defines politics as, "the principles relating to or inherent in a sphere or activity, especially when concerned with

power and status.” Therefore, a *politicized collective identity* requires that group members understand that their collective grievances stem from systemic power differences re-enacted by society at large.

Simons and Klandermans (2001) add that, while behaviors and actions around a *collective identity* may have political repercussions that impact the larger society, these effects might not be directly intended. For example, LGBQ students of color starting a Gay Straight Alliance for only students of color with the rationale that they simply “want to feel more comfortable”, might create awareness for White identified LGBQ students and perhaps lead to changes in school administration regarding the racial implications for LGBQ students of color. However, these changes were not intended in the first place by in-group members (LGBQ students of color). Further, *politicization* of an LGBQ of color identity would have required that these students organize separately and intentionally from White LGBQ students, not only because of their desire to “feel more comfortable,” but because of their understanding that their racial identity prevents them from having adequate representation, support, and access to resources that appear more readily available to their White counterparts. Furthermore, the group must understand that in order to accomplish these objectives changes to the institution need to be made.

Understanding the meaning of a *politicized collective identity* requires recognizing the shift that occurs from *social/collective identity* and into politicization. We have discussed that the term *social identity* refers to the flexible *self* that changes and assimilates to various group dynamics. We further established that the term *collective identity* calls for a fixed and non-malleable, group membership. However, we also established that politicization requires intent, and that a *collective identity* is not enough to lead to political action. In fact, salience of a

*collective identity* does not necessarily predict political relevance for one person or social group, although some studies show a connection between personal political salience and activism (Curtin, Stewart & Duncan, 2010). *Collective identities* must politicize in order to become the powerhouse of collective action and of larger societal change (Van Leeuwen, Van Stekelenburg, & Van Troost, 2013).

In other words, the shift that takes place between *social identity* (as defined by social identity theory), *collective*, and *politicized collective identity* involves a transformative process that starts with an exploration of the *self* within a social group (*social identity*), becomes a fixed marker develop through enduring and stable group membership (*collective identity*) and finally into the conscious acknowledgement that the group's shared grievances stem from societal power inequalities that require larger political and social engagement (*politicized collective identity*).

Simon and Klandermans (2001) introduce a claim that other researchers have continued to explore, that is: a *politicized collective identity* as a *dual identity*. This argument derives from the idea that a *politicized collective identity* involves identification with the aggrieved group (i.e. Latina lesbians) as well as with the more inclusive polity (i.e. a heteronormative, sexist and racist society) which provides the context for the development of shared grievances and the motivation for engagement in a power struggle (Simon & Grabow, 2010). Studies involving identity politicization of Russian and Turkish migrants in Germany further contributed to the argument that experiences of discrimination combined with a desire for citizenship and equal rights, lead Turkish and Russian immigrants to politicize (Simon & Grabow, 2010; Simon & Rubs, 2008). In other words, Latina lesbians must not only be able to closely identify with their in-group members, but must also have a strong desire to part-take and benefit from membership in the

larger society. This benefit can be as simple as fighting for equality in the work place, where Latina lesbians are often discriminated against as a result of their race, gender and sexual identity. However, their desire to be regarded as “normal,” to part-take in the larger society, and enjoy the benefits granted to members of other majority groups, is what drives them to politicize.

The concept of desiring that which others have serves as a good transition into the next section. While this section used the above presented material to show how the term “politics” is the marker of distinction between a social, a collective and a *politicized collective identity*, the following section will expand on this difference by discussing how desiring that which others have or experiencing *relative deprivation* can lead group members to want to politicize.

### **Experiencing Relative Deprivation as Catalyst for Politicization**

Examining the role power plays in the development of a *politicized collective identity* requires taking a close look at the dynamics behind social privilege and oppression that have been previously explained theoretically.

The theory of relative deprivation states that feelings of discontent arise when individuals measure the value of their own possession and levels of self- satisfaction based on comparisons to others or themselves in the past (Crosby, 1976). In other words, feelings of *relative deprivation* are marked by experiences of grief or resentment when realizing that we have been unjustly deprived of something others have (or we previously had) and in turn deserve. In the original theory of relative deprivation, Davies (1959) introduces the concept that feelings or experiences of *relative deprivation* are marked by dynamics of power and subordination. In the initial model, he poses that *relative deprivation* can be experienced among in-group as well as out-group members. In-group feelings of *relative deprivation* can be experienced when an in-group member compares him/herself to a non-deprived group member (i.e. a Latina lesbian



compares herself to a White lesbian). However, when a non-deprived person compares him/herself to a deprived person they experience what Davies (1959) refers to as *relative gratification*. Simon and Klandermans (2001) also bring attention to this trend by posing that minority groups are more likely to politicize as a result of their subordinate identities and collective experiences of oppression, while majority groups are more likely to part-take in activities that preserve the status quo, and uphold the group's societal power (Langner, 2006). This trend can be explained by thinking about the experiences of White identified lesbians versus that of Latina identified lesbians within the previously presented LGBTQ group example. Identification with two subordinate identities, might call for Latina lesbians to desire part-taking in collective LGBTQ activism around racial/ethnic identity issues within the LGBTQ community, however, White lesbians might not show interest in this particular activist engagement given that they experience racial/ethnic privilege. Although they share experiences of oppression with Latina lesbians around gender and sexual orientation, their racial privilege makes them, as we mentioned earlier, more appealing group prototypes and as a result more likely to address issues that affect the majority of group members, likely overlooking race and ethnicity. As a result, White identified lesbians not only possess in-group power as a result of their race, but dictate whether the status quo is preserved by other in-group members who share the gratification of being exempt from racial/ethnic oppression. Because White lesbians are more likely to resemble the group prototype Latina lesbians are more likely to become marginalized by people they share an in-group membership with. As Simon and Klandermans (2001) propose, by being denied the same opportunities as other in-group members, Latina lesbians would become more likely to politicize as a result of, being deprived this privilege and experiencing oppression.

In addition, the theory proposes a collective perspective stating that in-group comparison to out-group members creates a larger and more acute power dynamic. Davies (1959) poses that comparisons with out-group members will result in in-group members experiencing *relative subordination*, but when reversed, out-group members will experience *relative superiority*. Using our previous example and translating it into in-group and out-group dynamics would look as follows: White heterosexual men's (who hold societal power as a result of their racial, gender and sexual privilege), reluctance to recognize the racial, gender and sexual oppression experienced by Latina lesbians, leads them to preserve the larger societal status-quo where they assume a superior role (by having easier access to jobs, marriage, and other personal and political benefits), while Latina lesbians assume a subordinate role (by experiencing racism, sexism and homophobia, making it more difficult to obtain and hold a job, marry and enjoy spousal benefits).

The theory outlines that *relative deprivation* occurs when an individual lacks a desired good or opportunity, also known as *X* and begins to experience a sense of injustice in perceiving that others similar to him/herself possess *X*. Subsequently, the theory states that those perceiving that similar others possess *X* feel entitled to possess it as well. Therefore, *relative deprivation* is experienced when an individual lacking *X* a. perceives that a similar other has *X*, b. wants *X*, and c. feels entitled to have *X*. Returning to the example of Latina lesbians fighting for equality in the work place that was provided at the end of the previous section, would reflect the essence of *relative deprivation*. In this example Latina lesbians would begin by desiring the benefits, respect, prestige (among other qualities) that would come from having equal opportunities to men and White women in the workplace. However, because of their race, gender and queer identity they begin feeling a sense of injustice that men, White women and heterosexuals have a

better chance of obtaining these desired benefits. Seeing that their opportunities are determined based on factors other than skills, work-ethic, etc., Latina lesbians begin to feel entitled to enjoy the same benefits men, White women and heterosexuals enjoy.

More modern modifications of this theory (Crosby, 1976), added a fourth criteria consisting of: d. the individual must find it feasible to obtain *X*. This addition is connected to the rationale that individuals will experience anger about possessing *X* only if they deem it feasible to obtain *X*. Latina lesbians, as a result would perhaps experience anger because if they were offered the opportunity to have these desired benefits, rather than being automatically eliminated because of their multiple identities, these benefits would be feasible to obtain. Even while experiencing discrimination in the workplace, drawing attention to these dynamics could make this opportunity feasible for them.

In addition to this fourth determinant, *relative deprivation* was expanded to include collective group experiences and not simply individuals, a phenomenon referred to as *fraternal deprivation*. This theoretical distinction can serve to support the previously introduced argument stating that personal political salience does not necessarily predict political action, but rather is the collective feeling experienced within a group membership that serves as a catalyst for collective political action.

*Politicized collective identity* development is in essence a fight against injustice (feelings of *fraternal deprivation*) by a particular social group (Latina lesbians), that is endorsed by in-group members' social re-enactments of racism and homophobia (White lesbians, straight Latina women experiencing *relative gratification*) and maintained and implemented by the larger social context and out-group members (White heterosexual men and women experiencing *relative superiority*). Similar to relative deprivation theory, which states that feelings of *relative*

*deprivation* persist until *X* is obtained (Crosby, 1976), *politicized collective identity* is fulfilled when in-group members succeed in obtaining the desired source or opportunity (e.g. governmental support) or in other words, when they stop experiencing *relative deprivation*.

In summation, we have been exposed to the meaning of the term *collective identity* and its distinction from the term *social identity*. By addressing the dynamics of power and privilege that take place and are re-enacted within in-groups as well out-groups, we have established that it is the understanding of these dynamics that politicizes a *collective identity*. By examining social identity theory, relative deprivation theory and the model of a politicized collective identity we have established the differences as well as the similarities that exist between each model and how they collaboratively play into each other. The last major section of this chapter will address the complexity that surrounds the formation of a *politicized collective identity* for Latina lesbians, as the intersections of race, gender and sexuality are considered, explored, and supported by the literature on *intersectionality*.

### **The Role of Intersectionality in a Politicized Collective Identity**

According to Gopaldas (2013), *intersectionality* addresses the interference of various social identity structures (i.e. ethnicity, sexuality and gender) in fostering life experiences, particularly as it pertains to experiences of power and oppression. The concept of *intersectionality* was first introduced by black feminist writers who declared that their interests were not represented in either the black or women's movements (Gopaldas, 2013). This section will begin by offering a brief historical outline on the evolution of *intersectionality*, by referencing the writings of pioneering authors in this arena. It will continue by linking the ideas in the literature to the previously established concept of a *politicized collective identity*. This section will also address the importance of *intersectionality* in the research of Latina lesbians and

will conclude by summarizing how this concept could potentially influence the formation of a *politicized collective identity* for Latina lesbians.

### **Intersectionality, Feminism and a Politicized Collective Identity**

For many scholars, Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) is credited for coining the term *intersectionality* as she wrote about the interconnections of racism and sexism in the violence against women of color. However, the concept of *intersectionality* emerged throughout the twentieth century in the writings of black feminists who, although not calling it *intersectionality*, addressed the interlockings of race and gender within a White-led feminist movement that refused to represent the interests of all women alike (Gopaldas, 2013).

One of the first to write about *intersectionality* as *double jeopardy* was Frances Beal (F. Beal, personal communication, March 18, 2005) as she explored what it meant to be black and female in a 1970's capitalist society, where the intersections of race, gender and social class placed black women at the bottom of the societal hierarchy. Further, writings from lesbian identified black feminists explored the intersections of race, gender and sexuality in "A Black Feminist Statement", written by The Combahee River Collective (1977.) Many of these writings show how *intersectionality* dismantles the black and White perception of in-group and out-group membership that exists, by addressing the complexities of multiple identities. One of the Combahee River Collective writings discusses the conflation that exists between racism and sexism for black feminists:

Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that White women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which White women of course do not need to have with White men, unless it is their

negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism (p. 213).

The content of this quote illustrates various concepts that were brought up in the previous section around in-group and out-group membership. The first illustration is found in the reference around racial solidarity, where the author states that White solidarity between White women and men exists to oppress, while Black solidarity among Black men and women exists to dismantle racism. As it was previously explained, this statement resembles the idea that those in power can develop a *collective identity* but the identity is used to preserve the status quo (racism), while solidarity around race for Latinas, or in this case black women, serves as a way to share a collective grief that is rooted in oppression. The second example of previously presented concepts is illustrated in the conflicted solidarity that black feminists share with black men around race, gender and sexuality. Acknowledging the grey scale that *intersectionality* adds to the previously established perception of in-group and out-group membership is important. Just as for black feminists, in-group membership for Latina lesbians is shared between the Latino community and the LGBQ community. Arguably, Latina lesbians, like black feminists, stand in solidarity with Latinos as it pertains to race, but struggle against homophobic beliefs and attitudes that may exist in Latino communities, just as they stand in solidarity with the lesbian and gay community around sexuality but struggle with racist and sexist re-enactments.

Writings from *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), showcasing the voices of a range of women of color, spoke directly to these separate but unified experiences of oppression Latinas lesbians face. Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1981) passionately addressed the exclusion of women color, referring to them as “invisible” in the eyes of the White male dominated society as well as in the White feminist movement. She referred to the lesbian of color

as not just “invisible” but “non-existent” in the eyes of society. Moreover, she touched upon the racial dynamics that played out in the feminist movement that resemble the same dynamics being re-enacted with Latina lesbians and other lesbians of color in the LGBTQ movement today. She described White feminists as: “notorious for adopting women of color as ‘their cause’ (p.165)” but expecting them to adapt to the interests of White feminists, while paying no attention to the significance of race and its importance for women of color. Likewise, the argument is that Latina lesbians who struggle with acceptance within the racial in-group feel confined to adapt to issues impacting White lesbians and White gay men, in exchange for solidarity around their sexual identity.

The purpose of exploring the role of *intersectionality* as it impacts the development of a politicized identity is to begin to understand how this identity model, in actuality, applies to a group of people whose multitude of identities does not always allow them to establish a set in-group membership and as a result are unable to blame a specific out-group for their oppression. Instead, it seems like *adversarial attributions* have the potential to be directed towards complete out-group members (White heterosexual men) as well as towards partial in-group members (White lesbians, heterosexual Latinas etc.) It appears that regarding in-group members as partial oppressors can leave Latina lesbians questioning their sense of belonging, distinctiveness, respect, understanding and agency within each potential in-group, which could either compromise or simply shift the process of collective politicization for this group.

Although focusing on the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, as the core of Latina lesbians’ experiences, seems like the most relevant step when relating it to the development of a *politicized collective identity*, *intersectionality* is meant to include other factors such as: age, socioeconomic class, and religion etc.

Patricia Hills Collins (2000) introduced the concept of *multiple oppressions* in her writings about race, gender and class, as axes of the general oppression for Black women. However, she contributed the notion that *intersectionality* goes beyond these main axes but that it extends into other dimensions such as: age, and religion. She explored how multiple identities mark the specific experiences of an individual and how the interlocking of these experiences can lead a person into multiple levels of oppression or privilege. Collins (2000) focused on the individual experience of each human being under these main axes of oppression. As it pertains to Latina lesbians, this concept offers insight into how different the experiences of Latina lesbians can be when considering factors other race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality but also account for factors like socio-economic status, including access to education. Being mindful that these more specific experiences can also play significant roles in the way Latina lesbians perceive themselves in comparison to others in the larger social world, are all things to consider when thinking about *intersectionality* and its impact on the development of a *politicized collective identity* for this particular group.

### **The Importance of Intersectionality in Research with Latina Lesbians**

Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in the United States, expecting to surpass all other minority groups by the year 2050 (Garcia & De Greiff, 2000). Given the expected increase of Latinos and the impact their presence will have on American society, it is important to begin conducting research that addresses issues faced by this particular minority group, including issues that address sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. However, as it usually occurs for White LGBTQ community members, most the current research conducted on Latino sexual minorities is gathered from men, while Latina lesbians remain one of the least researched populations, especially in the social sciences (Calvo & Esquibel, 2010).



Further, much of our knowledge about women derives from studies done with primarily White women, which overlooks the impact of race, ethnicity and other intersecting factors that play a role in women's experiences. Attending to the effects of power and inequality when considering *intersectionality*, draws attention to how multiple category memberships places both individuals and groups in disproportion to one another (Cole, 2009).

Although the Latino community is not a homogeneous in nature, as its members vary by ethnicity, skin complexion, socioeconomic class, educational background and historical relationship to the United States, for Latina lesbians there exists a sense of collectivity around certain cultural values in addition to experiences of multilayered exclusion and discrimination in U.S society based on their identity as Latina, women and lesbians (Ruiz & Korrol, 2006).

Based on ethnic and racial identity alone and despite their growth, Latinos face much discrimination in the political arena, lacking political representation and access to rights and other resources granted to White counterparts. Adding gender identity and sexual orientation into this on-going political battle truly places Latina lesbians at a social, economic and political disadvantage. Furthermore, lack of exploration about the issues affecting this minority within a minority group makes it all the more difficult to find ways of empowering its members.

As it pertains to this study, awareness of *intersectionality* is crucial in understanding why a lesbian identity does not carry the same meaning for a White identified lesbian and a Latina identified lesbian. Understanding double jeopardy or multiple oppressions as it impacts Latina-identified lesbians (by having an identity that is influenced by the intersections of gender, ethnicity and sexuality among other axes such as age, socioeconomic status etc.) calls for the development of a collective group identity that is centered around these intersecting identities and not just a generalized homosexual identity that forces in-group members to assimilate to the

leadership of more powerful group members (i.e. gay men, White lesbians). In addition making generalized assumptions about all homosexual identities presents great limitations when considering the social, psychological and political resources available to Latina lesbians (Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004).

Some of the consequences that result from identifying as a Latina lesbian and the intersections of sexuality, ethnicity and gender may consist of Latina lesbians feeling like they are rejecting their “culture” by adopting what is perceived, by many Latino communities, as a westerner ideal (Harper, Jernewall, & Zea, 2004). Further, the *machista* values that steer Latino communities opposes deviation from gender norms including female sexuality as well as sexual identity. Anzaldúa (1981) writes in her letter:

Chicano patriarchal perspectives assigns the role of servitude to a woman, particularly as heterosexual relationships are conceived today and in the past... Obviously when the wife of or would- be-wife, the mother or would-be-mother questions out loud and in print the complex servitude/devotion/love: she will be quickly seen as false to her "obligation" and duty, hence a traitor (p.186).

It is in this way that it can be seen how coming out as a lesbian in Latino communities can lead to familial as well as cultural rejection or alienation, and as a result creates a disconnect from an individual’s own culturally situated identity. On the other hand, fear of exposing their sexual identity can lead Latina lesbians to hide their identity from friends and family members, including any expression of non-conforming gender identity. As we understand that Latina lesbians are more likely to experience discrimination based on the intersections of ethnicity, race and gender within the larger society, it is also important to acknowledge how discrimination can also occur within in-group membership, such as LGBTQ communities where

Latina lesbians can be objectified and “exoticized” by both White gay men and White lesbians (Harper et. al, 2004). As a result, it can be understood why many Latina identified lesbians would try and conceal aspects of their identity, or try and occupy less space in hopes of avoiding in-group discrimination. It is precisely this phenomenon that calls for the examination of how identity politicization and *intersectionality* transect.

It is however, necessary to clarify that despite focus on racial, gender and sexual identities in this study as intersecting characteristics linked to oppression, attention is also paid to other interlocking factors such as: education, socioeconomic status, nationality and age, which all have differently impacted the experiences of each individual participant in this study. It is important to also shine light upon a point introduced by Kumashiro (2001) in his writing of intersections of race and sexual identity and that is that, group identity is not the sum total of its’ individual members’ identity and that a queer youth’s expression of desire or culture cannot be explained by a shared experience of racism or homophobia. Therefore, it is important to highlight that although this study is attempting to gather the life experiences that have lead Latina lesbians to *politicize* their identity, these “life experiences” are heavily relying on the concept of *intersectionality* and how these various characteristics about themselves have impacted who they are.

With this thought in mind, the question remains: If it was previously established that members of subordinate groups are more likely to *politicize*, and that feelings of *relative deprivation* are connected to the desire of obtaining that which one deserves, what factors lead Latina lesbians to *politicize* given that they identify with three intersecting subordinate identities? Do intersecting feelings of oppression play a role in politicization? What role do more privileged identities or intersecting axes play in *politicization*?

Returning to Simon and Klandermans' (2001) concept of *politicized collective identity* as a *dual identity*, called for group members to identify with the shared grievances of in-group members as well as with the politics driving the larger society. It could be the case that Latina lesbians, possess 3 dual identities from which they can experience feelings of grievance and oppression. It is also arguable that inability to separate these three identities for participants could only call for the existence of 1 three-dimensional *dual identity*, requiring that Latina lesbians identify their merged grievances around racism, sexism and homophobia together. It raises the question of how does this multi-dimensional identification impact their identification with society?

Examining the factors that lead Latina lesbians to develop a *politicized collective identity* will potentially shine some light upon unexplored questions around *intersectionality* and *politicized collective action*. Using the establishing literature findings and the gathered data from this study, will hopefully contribute new insight into these inter-connected areas of study as they apply to, not only the group at hand, but also to other intersecting group memberships.

After introducing an abundance of literature that explains the concept of a *politicized collective identity* and addressing the level of complexity that *intersectionality* brings to this model, the next chapter will begin to outline the research process of this study. By describing the research methods, recruitment, and the data analysis process, the following chapter will begin bringing to life the purpose of this study that has, so far, only been theoretically introduced.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that lead to Latina lesbians to develop a *politicized collective identity*. Consequently, the study also aims to explore: 1. How a *social identity* resembles or differs from a *politicized collective identity*? 2. What factors influence the evolution from a *social identity* into a *politicized collective identity*? 3. What role does *intersectionality* play in the formation of a *politicized collective identity* for Latina lesbians?

Simon and Klandermans (2001), define a *politicized collective identity* as fixed and intentional social group membership, where members are conscious of the power differences that exist between, in-group members, out-group members and the larger society and as result engage in activism as a way to eradicate these differences and obtain equality on behalf of their group. In the case of Latina lesbians, group members must organize with the understanding that as a result of their intersecting ethnic, sexual and gender identities, they might experience oppression from other in-group members (White lesbians, gay men etc.), even greater subjugation from out-group members (White-heterosexual men and women) and experience the constant perpetuation of this oppression within the larger society. As a result Latina lesbians who have developed a *politicized collective identity* engage in activism around either or both of these identities as a way to challenge the oppression they face as members of this intersecting but refined social group.

## Research Approach and Rationale

This qualitative study employed a grounded theory approach to research. Grounded theory is type of qualitative approach that uses interviews, observations and documents to develop findings that are grounded in data (Urquhart, 2013). While existing literature was used to establish a foundation about the topic explored, face-to- face interviews conducted with eleven subjects aimed to examine the individual experiences of Latina lesbians and their engagement in activism around either or both, their sexual and ethnic identities. The study focused on identifying factors contributing to participants' formation of a *politicized collective identity*, a type of *social identity* that calls for engagement in political action (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

Qualitative methods were used for various reasons. Given that the purpose of this study was to explore the individual experiences of each participant around their ethnic and sexual identities and the intersection of these, it was crucial for participants to define their own experiences, rather than grouping or classifying them quantitatively. Giving autonomy and value to the voices and stories of Latina lesbian as a way to counteract the social and historical oppression they have, and still, endure (Ruiz & Korrol, 2006), was best achieved through qualitative methods.

Moreover, there is very little research that has been conducted around the model of politicized collective identity as well as around the intersections of sexual orientation and race and/or ethnicity. It was therefore important for the findings to reflect the complexity these identity intersections bring to the concept of a *politicized collective identity* in order to contribute novel insight into both of these unexplored research topics. Addressing these grey areas can only be done through the use of qualitative methods. The flexibility found in qualitative research is

best able to reflect the uniqueness of each participant's life experiences and as a result, make each participant the expert of their own identities.

Underlying my selection of research methods was my personal interest in the stories of others. Given that motivation to explore this topic is rooted in my own personal experience as a Latina lesbian as well as my identification with the term *politicized collective identity*, I found that my involvement in this research extended past the role of the researcher. Self-awareness played a very important role in the interview process as well as in the overall research process, given that I, as the researcher shared the same social ethnic and sexual identities as most of the participants. I practiced being aware of how my own voice and experiences resembled and/or differed from that of participants.. As a way to give myself a voice as a Latina lesbian sharing a *politicized collective identity* with participants and to further reflect on my own experiences, I decided to include myself as a subject, using auto-ethnographical interviewing. This type of interviewing allows for researchers to include themselves in the research in order to distinguish their voices from others in their group as well as to engage readers outside of their group (Pratt, 1999). In addition, auto-ethnographical research, like this study, holds a political relevance that according to Pratt (199) grants minority groups a voice within the larger more dominant publishing world. The act of including my voice in this research is a political act and a demonstration of my own *politicized collective identity*.

### **Sample**

The study involved a sample of 11 self-identified adult Latina Lesbians, between the ages of 18 and 60, who had engaged in social and/or political activism around either or both their sexual and/or ethnic identities. Information was gathered through 45 minute, face-to-face or video chat, interviews during which participants were asked demographic questions that

included, age, level of education, profession, race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, gender and sexuality, along with a series of open-ended questions regarding their ethnic and sexual identities and their activism around these identities.

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment for this study occurred by utilizing snowball sampling. Participants in this study were solicited through e-mail letters and flyers (Appendices C & D) to known or referred personal and/or professional contacts. Snowball sampling helped spread the distribution to other potential participants. In addition, given the geographical area where the study was conducted and the difficulty finding candidates that met the criteria, in-person recruitment was also conducted in order to tap more directly into communities or spaces that worked with or collaborated directly with the population at hand- Latina lesbians. In-person recruitment was done by visiting local youth LGBT organization as well as a local college's Latina organization.

Volunteers expressing a desire to participate in the study were pre-screened in order to ensure they met the eligibility criteria and demonstrated having a *politicized collective identity*, rather than simply assuming that participation interest sufficed as evidence of a PCI. All participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study and were required to read and sign the informed consent form prior to beginning their interview. Each participant was provided an additional copy of the informed consent form to keep for their records. Participants who did not reside locally were mailed informed consent forms that were mailed back to the researcher with a signature prior to engaging in the interview process.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection for this study began on February 2<sup>nd</sup> using in-person and video chat semi-structured interviews consisting of nine demographic questions and six open-ended questions,



including a series of sub-questions used for clarification in case subjects needed additional probing. Interviews began with demographical data questions that granted verification that subjects met the study's criteria. Additionally, demographics provided the researcher with a sense of each participant's academic, professional and other experience. Interview questions attended to each participant's experiences as in-group and out-group members in order to further explore their sense of identity politicization. Questions also attempted to gather specific examples of pivotal moments in each participant's life that contributed to their formation of a *politicized collective identity*. Additionally, participants were asked about their familiarity with the term and their felt relationship to it. Interviews were recorded with the permission of each participant in an audio-recorder. In these recordings the researcher did not mention the name of the participants and identified each interview by creating audio folders labeled with letters. Interviews were transcribed and saved onto a password-protected computer only used by the researcher. Each interview was transcribed, assigned a pseudo name, and stripped of all identifying information in order to protect the identity of each participant.

After transcription was finished, the study's over-arching question and sub-questions were separated and color-coded. Each interview was carefully read numerous times and a list of themes was generated indicating the amount of participants that had made exact or similar references. The researcher organized the themes based on how they answered both the overarching question and sub-questions to being generating the findings.

### **Limitations**

To compensate for researcher bias, interview questions were open ended. However, given the complexity of some of the question, the researcher on occasion, had to rephrase questions to adjust to each participant's understanding. As a result reliability, could have been compromised.

In addition, while snowball sampling served as a helpful recruitment method, referring subjects from similar social circles as initial participants could have impacted the perspectives and responses of some subjects, and as a result, the general findings of the study.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the type of research methods used in this study, the reasoning for its applicability, as well as the process through which data was collected and analyzed. The following chapter, the findings, will present the themes that emerged from participant's interviews.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

This qualitative study aimed to explore the factors leading Latina lesbians to develop a *politicized collective identity*. The research, in addition, attempted to explore the differences between the development of a *social identity* versus a *politicized collective identity* and the potential factors influencing the evolution from the former into the latter. Finally, given the intersecting ethnic, racial, sexual and gender identities at play for the population under study, the research further aimed to investigate the role *intersectionality* played in the development of a *politicized collective identity* for Latina lesbians.

This chapter will present the findings generated from interviews with eleven self-identified Latina lesbians who have engaged in activism around either or both their ethnic/racial and/or sexual identities in private contexts, (e.g. having conversations with friends and family about issues surrounding their ethnic and or sexual identities), public settings (e.g. participation in rallies, LGBT organizations etc.) or professional capacities (e.g. being out at work, facilitating discussions around issues impacting both their ethnic and/or sexual identities).

This chapter will begin with a description of the research participants followed by a general outline of the study's findings. The following section will discuss the themes that seemed to lead Latina lesbians to develop of a *politicized collective identity*, while the last section will discuss those that appeared to hinder its development.

## **Participants**

Eleven Latina lesbian identified women volunteered for this study. They completed interviews lasting 20-45 minutes between February 2<sup>nd</sup> and April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The youngest participant was 19 and the oldest was 42; six participants were between the ages of 21-24 and three were between the ages of 37-41. Subjects in this study were asked to describe themselves ethnically and racially. Two subjects racially identified themselves as Puerto Rican, while two others specified identifying as Brown Puerto Ricans. Three other subjects identified as Hispanic or Latina while one subject specified identifying as a Brown and Black Latina. Finally, one subject identified as Taino Indian and one as Mexican. Interestingly, although many subjects could “pass” as White, they did not identify as racially White. Some participants reported having difficulty distinguishing between racial and ethnic identity, expressing uncertainty about the differences between the two terms. As a result their personal definition of race and ethnicity did not differ. Other participants immediately highlighted the differences that existed for them between ethnicity and race and were quick to highlight how their identity reflected these differences.

Ethnically, four subjects identified as Puerto Rican and three identified as Hispanic/Latina. One identified as Mexican, one as mixed Nicaraguan and White, and one as Cuban. Nine subjects identified their nationality to be congruent with theirs or their family’s country of origin. Two subjects identified their nationality as American and one as Spanish. This data reflects the range and diversity of ethnic and racial identities chosen by each participant based on their personal experiences. Informally, this brings into question the meaning that an “American” identity holds for these Latina participants, as only two participants chose “American” as their nationality, despite the fact that the majority of participants had been born in the United States. “I just don’t think I can call myself American,” said Jackie. This inability to

identify with the term “American” seems to speak to the participants’ feelings of solidarity with their ethnic/racial identities in addition to hinting to the acknowledgement that identification with a racial minority group does not afford them privilege of identifying as “American ” in a White-dominant society that also claims this identity.

All subjects identified their sex and gender identity as female. While, eight participants self-identified as lesbian, one identified as lesbian/queer and another one as lesbian, bisexual and queer. Jackie discussed the “sexualized” meaning the word *lesbian* has for her. She discussed how her family played a role in the way in which she perceived this word, as she spoke about her mother seeing lesbian or gay couples and referring to their partners as “lovers,” which resulted in Jackie associating the word *lesbian* with a sexualized remark. Sonia also expressed how both culturally and linguistically, the word *lesbiana* also possessed a derogatory connotation, steering her away from using the term and only recently coming to terms with it.

However, other participants expressed disliking of, or inability to identify with the term queer. “ I don’t like that word,” said Michelle when the researcher brought up this potential identification. Sonia also expressed disliking the term queer because she felt that there is privilege associated with it, “that term doesn’t translate in Hispanic culture. I can’t talk to my family and say ‘queer’ because they won’t know what that is. As far as I know the cultural term that exists to define my sexual identity is *lesbiana* and I have to find a way to reclaim that.” Consequently, identification with the term queer, for both of the participants who identified under it, seemed to be linked to early exposure to social justice education (college undergraduate level or before) as opposed to other participants that were just becoming acquainted with social justice education, had not received much exposure to social justice education, or received exposure at a later time in life.

Four of the eleven participants went to graduate school, three obtained a Master’s Degree and one obtained a Ph.D. Four were full-time students and two completed a Bachelor’s degree. One subject completed Esthetics Trade school and one completed an Associate’s Degree. The participants in this study included 3 full-time students, a college lecturer, a college diversity officer, a hair-dresser, a human resources employee in the military, a deli worker, a non-profit organization employee and a college career advisor. Table 1 outlines the participants, their race and/or ethnicity, sexual orientation and profession.

**Table 1**

**Participant Profile**

PARTICIPANT	RACE	ETHNICITY	SEXUAL ORIENTATION	HIGHEST DEGREE	PROFESSION
<b>Jackie</b>	Taino Indian	Puerto Rican	Queer/lesbian	Ph.D	Lecturer
<b>Michelle</b>	Puerto Rican	Latina/Hispanic	Lesbian	College senior	Full-Time student/R.A
<b>Carmen</b>	Hispanic/Puerto Rican	Puerto Rican	Lesbian	Associates degree	Deli worker
<b>Flora</b>	Brown-Latina	Latina	Lesbian	Masters in Education	Coordinator of support program in a college
<b>Alina</b>	Hispanic/Latina	Puerto Rican	Lesbian	College sophomore	Human resources in the military

<b>Sandra</b>	Brown-Latina	Latina	Lesbian	Masters	Senior academic advisor in a college
<b>Carla</b>	Latina	Nicaraguan/White	Bisexual/Lesbian/Queer	B.A- Full-time Masters student	Non-profit work
<b>Erin</b>	Mexican	Mexican	Lesbian	College sophomore	Full-time engineering student
<b>Casey</b>	Puerto Rican	Hispanic	Lesbian	Esthetics trade school	Hair dresser
<b>Alex</b>	Latina-Brown and Black	Latina	Lesbian	Masters	Chief diversity officer in a college
<b>Sonia</b>	Latina	Cuban	Lesbian	Bachelors	Full-time grad student

## General Findings

The findings of this study highlight a few factors influencing participants to develop a *politicized collective identity*. Findings point to education, feelings of responsibility for their group, experiencing or witnessing racial discrimination, romantic relationships, having familial allies and LGBTQ relatives “come out” before, as factors playing an important role in the politicization of Latina lesbians’ identities. Further, the emerging results seem to indicate that the manifestation of a *politicized collective identity* does not occur in the linear manner in which is theoretically depicted by Simon and Klandermans (2001). Instead, the findings indicate that while many participants did not demonstrate a systemic understanding of power and oppression or actively participated in activism outside of the personal realm, they still engaged in day-to-day acts of activism such as: interrupting acts of racism or homophobia, choosing to be out in their workplace, and standing up to their families. Meanwhile, participants who engaged in larger forms of activism such as: protests and institutional reform seldom identified with the term *politicized collective identity* when provided an explanation and invited to respond.

Interestingly while the focus of this study was on factors that lead Latina lesbians to develop a *politicized collective identity*, participants also discussed what seemed to inhibit them from developing a *politicized collective identity*. These include but are not limited to, familial conflation between ethnicity and sexual identity, fear for personal safety when disclosing sexual and/or ethnic identity, and difficulty navigating being a minority within a minority. Further, while this study also aimed to explore the differences that exist between a *social identity* and a *politicized collective identity*, findings did not reveal consistent themes that addressed this question. While a few participants seemed to voice that they regarded sexuality as fluid and racial identity as fixed, which could indicate that sexual identity is experienced as a *social identity* rather than a *collective identity* or *politicized collective identity*, further research would



be required to further explore this notion. The themes below address in more detail the nature of the findings.

## **Factors Leading Latina Lesbians to Develop a Politicized Collective Identity**

### **Education**

According to the study's findings levels and areas of education seem to be factors contributing to the development of a *politicized collective identity*. Nine out of eleven participants were in the process of completing or had already completed degrees in higher education. Six of the eleven participants were pursuing or had already obtained a Masters Degree. Seven out of these eleven participants reported having been exposed to social justice education through their academic programs in higher education. Almost all of the college-educated participants were able to speak systemically about dynamics of power and oppression on various levels. Although, not an established finding in this study, this could suggest that exposure to social justice education and dynamics of power and oppression could have equipped participants with the knowledge and language necessary to speak about these power dynamics and address them in a systemic way (Westheimer & Suurtamm, 2009). While level of education did not determine activist engagement, all college-educated participants engaged in more systemic oriented activism, such as: coordinating support programs, volunteering with Latina youth, addressing institutional racism, and other non-profit community outreach. Flora described college as the place where she began to develop her "passion" for social justice issues and where she began to seek engagement in all aspects of social justice. Alex also discussed her "moments of protest against administrative action" as a result of "the disparities that were felt among students of color" while in college. Non-college educated participants, on the other hand, were able to recognize oppression and discrimination but they seemed to lack the language to speak about these issues in a systemic manner.

Remarkably, there seems to be a thematic divide between college-educated participants and non-college educated participants around the types of activism they engaged in. As it was previously stated, non-college educated participants engaged in more personal types of activism such as being “out” to their families and having conversations with family members around what it meant to be a lesbian in the Latino community. However, these conversations did not expand from the private realm into the systemic realm. Despite, lacking the language to speak about oppression in systemic manner, non-college educated participants still engaged in activism by interrupting racist and/or homophobic incidents in non-familial social situations, or by being out as Latina and lesbian in their workplaces. Casey spoke about her experience of interrupting homophobia when confronting her boss about a customer/friend, who after listening to an employee’s conversation regarding a gay-identified person with AIDS, proceeded to stress that it was “no wonder” a gay person would have AIDS.

I think that what I said kind of offended her because... have you seen the movie *Temptation* [she asks the interviewer]? Well that movie is not about gay people. It’s about a woman that is married to a man that doesn’t show her attention anymore and she cheats and she ends up getting AIDS so I was telling her [her boss]: “I’m going to tell her [the customer] to watch that movie.” And none of these people are gay and that can happen to straight people you know, it can happen to anyone, it’s not a specific group of people. I think she was upset that I said that. That’s a part of me, and that’s what she [the customer] was saying about myself, just because I’m a lesbian I’m going to get AIDS?

Overall, participants were not familiar with the model of a politicized collective identity. Out of the nine college educated participants, and the eight who engaged in more systemic types of activism, only two were acquainted with the term *politicized collective identity*. When the remaining seven were offered an explanation of the term and invited to respond, most of their reactions consisted of re-emphasizing their heart-felt responsibility to their group and their identification with their roles as educators to the larger society.

Both college and non-college educated participants, expressed a longing desire to engage in more systemic activism when asked about the importance of identifying as a Latina lesbian. Furthermore, when offered a definition of a *politicized collective identity*, participants suggested that possessing the language and/or education to address systemic oppression and participating in systemic activism could potentially have a positive connection with the development of a *politicized collective identity*.

As it was previously mentioned, a *politicized collective identity* requires the strategic re-formulation of an issue that invites the participation of allies. It appears that identification with the role of informal “educators” for college educated participants equipped them with the tools necessary to talk about oppression in a way that appealed to potential allies, found within their own family or racial in-group or within the larger societal realm. Jackie talked about the ways she uses her education when navigating familial interactions:

And so my family would initially say things like: “Oh you’re in college so I probably wouldn’t understand what you’re talking about,” or “You’re different now cause you’re in college.” And so education has created this rift that I’m trying now to patch those planks um... where because I had level to this different privilege can say: “Listen, I know how the game is played.” And bring that message back to the family and say: “Alright so when we get upset and start yelling this is how it looks on this end, but I know from the game that if you want to be heard these are the people you need to talk to.” So thinking of ways to reverse that broken bridge. So that’s one way in terms of race and ethnicity. And sexuality wise, I mentioned I have been talking to my mom about you know how to say partner versus lover...

While the sample size of this study is not large enough to conclude that education strongly influences the development of a *politicized collective identity*, thematic data does indicate that there is a potential and consistent connection between education and identity politicization, for the participants in this study.

## **Feelings of Responsibility For their Group**

Participants were asked about the reasons why it was important for them to identify as a Latina lesbian and most expressed a desire to educate, and support current or future Latina lesbians (in-group members). They also expressed the desire normalize what it means to be a Latina lesbian in White and Latino communities as well as within the larger heteronormative society. Simon and Klandermans (2001) write:

In the case of a politicized collective identity, however, group members should intentionally engage, as a mindful and self-conscious collective (or as representatives thereof), in such a power struggle knowing that it is the wider, more inclusive societal context in which this struggle takes place and needs to be orchestrated accordingly. To borrow from Marxian terminology, it is a politicized collective identity that turns the social group from a ‘group of itself’ into ‘a group of and for itself’ in the political arena (p. 323)

Most of the subjects in this study confirmed the above stated intention in their answers. Despite individual members’ private, public or professional level of activist engagement, mostly all members intentionally participated in this study and talked about their experiences with the intention of serving as “self-conscious representatives” of Latina lesbians for other Latina lesbians. This intention to speak openly about their group and for their group was true for subjects whose only activist experience had been around talking with family members about their sexual orientation. Most of these subjects did not entirely possess a systemic understanding of power and oppression as it played out in the larger society and most did not possess the language to speak systemically about power and oppression. Instead, they chose to speak based on their own experiences of moving about the world marked by the intersecting identities of Latina and lesbian.

Ten out of eleven participants reported feeling a sense of responsibility and need to be open and out about both identities with in-group and out-group members alike. They also reported their intention to serve as a role model for other Latina lesbians struggling with their identities as well as to challenge heteronormative ideals, especially within the Latino community, of what it meant to be a lesbian. Alina addressed her previous participation in similar research studies that addressed ethnicity and sexual orientation and expressed that her intentions in participating were to encourage other Latina lesbians to increase their social visibility and to speak about their experiences. In explaining her reasons she said: “If I stand up, than maybe more Hispanic/Latina lesbians will stand up as well.” Sonia also spoke about her determination to increase the “visibility” of Latina lesbians in both the Latino and LGBTQ community and her felt responsibility to constantly integrate both identities in her activism so that both groups are represented and seen.

According to Simon and Klandermans (2001), the intention behind the collective behavior is what determines a *politicized collective identity*. Collective group behavior might unintentionally have political repercussions, but the reasoning behind the behavior determines whether the political repercussions are in fact driven by a *politicized collective identity*. The activism or power struggles taken on by the subjects in this study, although not all performed at the social or political level, intentionally impacted that larger society. Subjects who engaged in personal activism, for example, by confronting and/or talking to their families about their sexual identity, did it with the intention and desire to educate members of the larger society (Latinos and Whites) about their experiences as Latina lesbians and that others like them. Ultimately, their decision to “come out” to their families was in itself a form of activism because the intention was to promote queer visibility and normalcy within a culture that did not grant lesbian Latinas equal treatment.

## **Experiencing or Witnessing Racial Discrimination**

When asked about specific life experiences they believed to have shaped the way they identified ethnically and/or racially, mostly all participants recalled having negative recollections of feeling or being different from the majority when it came to race and/or ethnicity. For several participants witnessing or experiencing discrimination and/or differential treatment based on ethnic identity or racial difference seems to have marked their awareness of in-group and out-group differences and how they manifested both personally and systemically. Experiencing stereotypes and/or discrimination against occurred in the context of growing up during significant historical events, immigrating from another country and identifying with the majority to identifying with the minority. Alex referred to growing up during the Central Park jogger case, and witnessing the discriminatory treatment towards brown and black kids, as a “turning point for me in terms of the disparities in the politics.” Additionally, Jackie addressed the revelation she experienced upon realizing what it meant to be Puerto Rican, as she played with her Italian friend who was not allowed to have Puerto Rican friends over, except for Jackie, because she was “different” from other Puerto Ricans. After that, Jackie recalls becoming more aware of the comments her mother would make that confirmed the ways in which Puerto Ricans were perceived by the larger society. Finally, Flora told her story about immigrating from Puerto Rico as teenager and realizing that she was no longer the majority: “Coming to this country I learned that there were so many differences.” She expressed how, through time and experience, she came to understand how she fit into these “differences” and solidified her own identity as a “Brown, Latina, Puerto Rican lesbian.” As it is exemplified above, these early experiences seem to have had a powerful impact on most participants allowing them to realize how the color of their skin or their cultural practices would impact the way they were seen, treated or permitted to part-take in activities within the larger social arena. Sonia added another dimension of this concept by

commenting on how feeling “shame” as a result of experiencing internalized racism or homophobia combined with awareness, sometimes gives her the “power to fight.” She described her thought process in the following manner: “like if I start becoming ashamed or if I start questioning, ‘oh my God, I’m so scared of coming out to this person,’ I tell myself ‘no, why am I scared? Is a heterosexual person scared?’ I really sort of fight against that for myself because I feel like its necessary.”

Experiencing stereotyping and discrimination seems to have propelled most subjects to develop *awareness of shared grievances* and *adversarial attributions*. Simon and Klandermans (2001) define the former as, “experiences of illegitimate inequality or threatened privileges” (p.324) and the latter as “blame of the out-group for the in-group’s predicament” (p. 325). They go on to state that these grievances result from social comparisons that “reveal that one’s in-group is worse off than relevant out-groups” (pp-324) According to the model, *awareness of shared grievances* and feelings of *adversarial attributions* mark the first steps towards politicization.

### **Romantic Relationships**

Findings also indicate that romantic relationships seem to have propelled the “coming out” process for many participants in addition to solidifying self-acceptance. As it was previously introduced, as it pertains to Latina lesbians, coming out to family members and risking rejection could be considered a form of activism. Because Latina lesbians struggle to fully explore, both their ethnic and sexual identities, due to the constant marginalization they experience within their Latino and LGBTQ in-groups, romantic relationships, according to the findings, seem to provide Latina lesbians with a safe space in which issues affecting both identities can be fully explored. Consequently, according to the PCI model, romantic relationships could serve as a vehicle for raising *awareness of shared grievances* but also

potentially developing *adversarial attributions*, the second step towards developing a *politicized collective identity* (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Carla discussed in detail how her romantic relationship impacted her identity:

In terms of queer identity, the first woman I dated was Mexican and I think that that was really important to me because um at that point I was still trying to figure out who I was and how I identified and well ethnically really embracing being a Latina and she had a lot of similar experiences to me. She is not out to her family even though she is grad school now and she you know comes from a very strict Catholic family, first generation, and she grew up in \_\_\_\_, where my family grew up originally. It was also nice to be queer with her because we had conversations about what it means to be in a Latino community and that is not quite that simple when you are dating someone from another culture, cause I mean everyone has struggles when they come out but in the Latino culture I think there is a very specific experience that is really hard to explain to people outside of the culture. I used to say that I came out for this woman but really came out for me, but I was really trying to tell myself that I came out for her so that we could be together but that belief in that time period made it easier to come out because it was a built-in support like that group that wasn't there with my family and looking back I am happy that it was really special to have that connection of both sexual orientation and race, in a way that I don't think that being with someone else would have equated.

It appears, based on the findings, that constant negotiation and in-group re-enactments of racism and/or homophobia found in both Latino and White LGBTQ environments, contributed to feelings of marginalization for most participants. Sonia's experience illustrates the kind of difficulty that Latina lesbians experience when being out and open in the Latino as well as in the LGBTQ community...

My culture rejects who I am sexually. I can't completely acknowledge my significant other or can't share my personal romantic life around those who share my ethnicity because it is very taboo and I will be rejected. I think that in order to be my sexual self I've had to put aside my culture in order to be gay, so if you bond with them [LGBTQ community] you bond with them mostly around the sexuality piece but race or ethnicity is not addressed.

It appears that relationships with women of color, romantic relationships in this case, reconciled the potential *adversarial attributions* that could have been developed by participants for, both, the heteronormative expectations of the Latino culture, as well as the racist ideals present in White LGBTQ spaces, providing participants with room to experience shared grievances about



their membership in the Latino culture as well as in the White LGBTQ community without needing to choose one identity or the other.

More specifically, romantic relationships seemed to have empowered participants to engage in power struggles with family members around acceptance and equal and fair treatment for themselves as well as for their significant others. Despite knowing that upsetting family norms by “coming out” would cause familial conflict and potential marginalization from their Latino in-group, participants understood that their families referring to their partners as *amigas* (friends) was oppressive in nature and most participants made the decision to fight it. Alina reflected on her “coming out” experience,

Yes definitely my first relationship. My first relationship was my first everything...then you know it got further than that into a serious relationship, having more feelings and than you know hiding it from my family and hurting that person because I was hiding them, or hiding myself. I would say that that relationship went on for about 8 years, so that was eight years of craziness you know. Either her coming around my family or me coming around her family and not being acknowledged the way she should or uh treated differently when she was around my family or friends or anything like that. So it was 8 years of craziness but obviously hurting and ending the relationship was what woke me up and was like: ‘Alright I need to cut it out and just come out and say it to my family’ regardless of what they thought. So I think my ethnicity and their beliefs and the way they thought you know, was what held me back from identifying myself as that and the once I let go of that I started thinking: ‘Screw what everybody thinks regardless of what my family or our religion beliefs and our ethnic beliefs and all that other crap, I’m just going to say it.’

### **Family Allies and Precedent LGBTQ Relatives**

So far, interviews with participants seem to indicate that romantic relationships, particularly with other Latina lesbians or women of color, is a leading factor in collective identity politicization.

In addition, the data also indicates that having an older or precedent family member come out as lesbian or gay, regardless of family approval, seems to have increased participants’ confidence in coming out to their families, also impacting the conviction with which they

address sexual identity dialogues within the Latino culture. Participants Casey and Michelle talked about their individual experiences:

They wouldn't talk about it in front of my grandma cause it would upset her. They wouldn't talk about it in front of my grandpa because he doesn't understand that stuff, so I think that seeing her [older cousin] be happy with who she was, was kind of like: "Well if they accept \_\_\_ like they're going to accept me too." And they accept my other cousins that are gay so whatever. Seeing that my aunt and uncles accepted them was kind of like: "Alright, I can do this too."

My grandmother, she was very mean and um...but I was okay with that because she's older and [in] the Hispanic culture that's not really...it's kind of frowned upon. But I wanted to get her comfortable with it cause she had other grandchildren that are also gay and uh I am a big family oriented person. We would always have family get-togethers it was never really about my friends, it was about my family. We were very tight and I didn't want my grandmother not to be part of that. She'll still ask me every now and then: "Do you have a boyfriend?" "No grandmother, I have a girlfriend."

In addition, to having family members come out before them, some participants reported that having ally family members' support helped ease the "coming out" process for them, as well as helped them navigate difficult conversations around sexual orientation and ethnicity. Michelle described how having her aunt's support helped her more confidently confront her mother's preoccupation about her sexual identity. Jackie also expressed how helpful it was to have her sister "fight fiercely" alongside her and support her before her family.

For Latina lesbians coming out to their families defines a *politicized collective identity*. The very act of disclosing their sexual identities to a culture that marginalizes those who identify as other than straight, with the intention to defend, educate and normalize homosexuality in the Latino community, is as much personal as it is political. Simon and Klandermans (2001) write:

Politicized collective identity thus implies a cognitive restructuring of the social environment that is no longer defined exclusively in terms of a bipolar in-group/out-group confrontation. Instead, the social environment is further differentiated into

opponents and (potential) allies, which involves strategic reformulation of the conflict issue such that it also appeals to potential allies (p.328).

Coming out to families, with the intent to normalize same sex relationships, is the strategic tactic that appears to be used by Latina lesbians in this study when navigating familial relationships. Gaining the alliance and support of family members around their sexual identity, helps them better negotiate their role within the Latino community and as result restructuring the perceptions and attitudes of fellow Latinos towards lesbian, gay or queer identified members of their in-group.

### **Factors Inhibiting Latina Lesbians from Developing a Politicized Collective Identity**

While it has been established that education, feelings of responsibility for their group, romantic relationships, familial allies and having precedent LGBTQ relatives “come out,” all seem to play a role in helping Latina lesbians develop a *politicized collective identity*, the following section will discuss the themes that seem to inhibit the development of a *politicized collective identity*. Findings point to conflation between ethnicity and sexual identity within family dynamics, as a major but complex inhibiting factor. In addition, fear for personal safety and struggles with navigating *double jeopardy* or identifying as a minority within a minority also play inhibiting roles in the development of a *politicized collective identity* for Latina lesbians.

#### **Familial Relationships: Conflation Between Ethnicity and Sexual Identity**

Interestingly when subjects were asked about the ways in which they identified racially, ethnically and sexually, all participants reported ethnicity as being an innate part of their identity as opposed to sexuality being something that was later discovered and/or explored. All subjects reported learning about their ethnicity through familial influence. Additionally, the early identification with a racial and/or ethnic group seems to have ignited a sense of pride about this

particular group membership that served as a source of strength when fighting White out-group members and the larger social world.

All subjects also reported feeling like both their ethnic and/or racial identities were inseparable from their sexual identity. However, when learning about their sexuality upon “coming out”, unlike their ethnic and/or racial identities, subjects were not able to find the same immediate collective support from family. As a result of experiencing disapproval from Latinos (in-group) as well as from Whites and heterosexuals (out-group), participants were in a position where they were fighting against members of their racial in-group as well as their out-group.

Interestingly it is the unison of ethnicity and sexuality that make enduring discrimination harder for most participants. In other words, while most participants’ experiences of racial discrimination lead to feelings of *adversarial attributions* against Whites, the same did not seem to occur with sexual identity. Negotiating sexual differences within their already established Latino/family in-group created a type of relational conflict that was doubly complex for participants. In other words, participants seemed to struggle to develop clear *adversarial attributions* towards one specific group because these feelings would suddenly need to be directed towards Latinos and family members (in-group) as well as Whites.

It could be inferred that cultural disapproval could potentially account for participants’ sexual repression or referencing sexual identity as ‘discovered’ rather than innate. For many participants, “coming out” and challenging their racial in-group/family norms would have meant compromising the sense of safety, protection, and established racial identity they received through membership within their Latino community and family unit, a concept too threatening to explore.

Difficulty navigating racial discrimination with Whites (out-group members), in addition to navigating homophobia within their Latino/family in-group, with whom they already shared

*awareness of shared grievances*, appeared to be quite inhibiting and challenging for participants in this study. The concept of marriage came up during several interviews. It appeared that defying cultural and familial expectations of marriage to a man seemed, like one of the most significant and difficult things to negotiate for participants and their families. Jackie and Michelle both talked about their mother's early expressed desire of seeing them in "white dresses" and being present at the church ceremonies. Jackie added how these comments served as an early indication to her that her sexual identity would not be accepted within her culture, due to the mere fact that she was unable to follow through with this expectation.

All participants verbalized, in various ways, the disconnect that exists between Latino culture and sexual identities other than straight, and how difficult it was for them to negotiate their lesbian/queer identities within family dynamics. Familial rejection arguably did also cause participants to experience *adversarial attributions* against Latinos, however it did not seem to manifest in the same way as racial antagonism against Whites, given that membership in the Latino community still provided support around the racial/ethnic identities of most participants. The conflation between ethnicity/race and sexuality did however seem to create distance between participants and families. The emergence of a norm-deviating sexual identity suddenly compromised participants' sense of belonging and general treatment within their racial in-group. Many participants admitted to viewing the White community as more accepting of an LGBTQ identity but often racially oppressive, while regarding their Latino community as racially safer but more homophobic. Both Erin and Jackie commented on this divide.

I really don't know cause I don't know about other cultures but I feel like the American culture is more accepting than where my parents come from. It just doesn't bring happy memories [coming out in the Latino culture], it's just not good experience. They're not really as accepting as other people can be. One of my aunts she has a daughter too, I guess she was messing around with a girl and when they found out they told her not to hang out with that girl anymore and she was punished for it (Erin).

But in terms of being Latina lesbian, I don't feel like there is a large community for me. I feel like the community I find myself in is kind of the White queer community most of the time. I feel like when I'm in Latino communities I'm not Puerto Rican enough and when I'm in White communities I'm sometimes not White enough and sometimes I'm not seen as Puerto Rican and I get that: 'Oh you don't even seem like a Puerto Rican.' And its like: 'What does that mean?' (Jackie).

When there is a specific out-group to blame for the group's feelings of inequality, *adversarial attributions* can be pointed towards the oppressor. As a result, blaming Whites for their racial oppression and finding comfort in Latino familial relationships can be helpful in developing a *politicized collective identity*. However, when a lesbian identity is introduced, it appears to be more difficult for subjects to blame a specific out-group for their oppression because their oppressors are now members of their racial in-group (Latinos) adding another level of complexity to their experience. Given that all subjects stated that their ethnic/racial and sexual identities are inseparable, navigating familial relationships under this joint identity of Latina and lesbian becomes more marginalizing as their personal construct of in-group safety no longer holds the same meaning, but re-enacts the larger existing societal oppression.

### **Fear for Personal Safety**

Data seems to indicate that fearing for their safety confined some participants from identifying as either or both Latina and/or lesbian. This theme emerged for both college educated and non-college educated participants regardless of engagement in any type of activism. Even participants who were publicly open about both of their identities and claimed an inability to separate them, seemed to become inhibited when placed in situations where they did not feel safe. Flora told the story of an incident that occurred during her partner's political campaign where the both of them, despite being out as Latina lesbians in their community, decided to not disclose their identities when meeting with an older White male constituent due to the strong sexual, gender and racial power differences that existed between both parties. Alina, who works in the

military, talked about her experience of being a Latina lesbian under the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy and how she was unable to freely disclose her sexual identity to colleagues. She also referenced the colorblindness approach that was implemented and how it impacted her ability to stand strongly behind her Latina identity.

Being a Hispanic female in the military before there were certain times and places where you [had] to pick: “Well, when I’m in the military I’m not considered a lesbian,” or “yes I’m Hispanic but everybody here is ‘equal.’”

Several other participants introduced the difficulty they experienced when negotiating feeling safe but being “outed” by their more masculine, or androgynous gender presentation. Sandra shared her experience of going to Puerto Rico with her wife and being the target of comments that labeled her as “the man” in the relationships as a result of her more masculine gender expression. Jackie also experienced being “out-staged” by her gender presentation and expressed her heightened awareness when in certain environments about keeping a distance from her wife to avoid being targeted. She also commented on her reluctance to reveal her racial identity when lecturing before students whom she suspected might have racial biases.

Flora and Sonia both commented on the “femme invisibility” concept that applies to lesbian or queer identified women who present as feminine, and as a result have to deal with the shock that occurs when they disclose their lesbian/queer identity to those who perceive them as straight. This type of passive confrontation seemed to also be challenging and somewhat fearful in nature often inhibiting the disclosure of a lesbian identity in the larger social realm. Sonia especially expressed her hesitation of outing her sexual identity in the presence of Latino-identified individuals, describing it as, “I have to feel it out to see if I am able to disclose to them.”

## **Double Jeopardy: Being a Minority Within a Minority**

While having discussed previously that homophobic re-enactments within familial (in-group) relationships seem to inhibit Latinas from “coming out,” and developing a *politicized collective identity* around both their sexual as well as ethnic identity, re-enactments of racism within the LGBQ community also seem to discourage and inhibit Latina lesbians from jointly politicizing their Latina lesbian identity. The challenges that come with belonging to two different in-groups that socially re-enact racism and homophobia, leaves Latina lesbians fighting against *double jeopardy*: feeling like a minority within a minority, with access to limited or no spaces in which both of their identities can co-exists jointly. Carla explained:

I have a very difficult time being queer and Latina because I think that, especially in LGBT culture, and the communities that I belong in for the most part they are predominantly White and they have very different expectations for power dynamics and gender dynamics within queer/lesbian relationships and I constantly struggle with that because I have mostly dated women of color and so those relationships seem to be a little bit more deep in terms of trying to navigate multiple identities while also respecting the equality of each other, while also figuring out how to understand each other within a minority within a minority.

She also talked about how her personal experiences within the LGBQ community manifest systemically.

I'm already trying to be conscious of racism and classism and blah blah blah in a larger sense but then when you bring that up in the queer community they are just being replicated. I have a lot of queer friends that think that it automatically makes you better than straight people because somehow you are more politically aware but I don't think that's a given, especially I would say in my White friendships because a lot of my White lesbian friends are very like a specific type of person and that identity, what being a White lesbian is, is very different than being a queer person of color like that's just night and day. I have a lot of friends at [omitted] who come from very privileged upper socio-economic backgrounds who are not people of color, who are gay or lesbian and the way that they move in the world I think its fundamentally different than the way people of color move in the world whatever gradation of color you might be and I think that can be a particularly challenging divide to be in any...but especially in friendships.

Both Alex and Sonia spoke about their frustrations with the LGBQ movement's inability to address race and non-White identified LGBQ persons. Alex specifically talked about her



disappointments with the Human Rights Campaign's lack of representation of LGBTQ individuals of color. Sonia on the other hand talked more in depth about what it felt like for her to be a lesbian in the Latino community. She compared her in-group experience with that of heterosexual Latinas by saying,

How nice would it be to be able to keep that family unit and acceptance with those people that you share that solidarity with in terms of race, ethnicity, language etc. how great would be to remain entirely in that circle by being able to fit in in that way. I wish, but I can't. They're included and I'm not.

Other participants spoke personally about the level of pressure they experience from society at large as a result of identifying as both a Latina and a lesbian and the exhausting work it requires to fight daily acts of oppression that originate from membership to either or both their racial or sexual minority groups. Jackie discussed how her drive and animation are stereotypically labeled as "passion," whereas the drive and animation of White women are labeled as "dedication." She expressed her feelings of exhaustion about being the target of daily micro-aggressions as a result of her intersecting identities, "I feel like there is so much armor I have to put on to get ready for the day." Sandra talked about the pressure she felt to "prove herself" as a result of the social stereotypes that exist about Latina lesbians. She described her experience by using sentences like, "I have to explain more who I am," "I have to make sure I am not perpetuating stereotypes," and "I had to fight stereotypes and prove that I was serious and professional."

Combating double the oppression as a result of belonging to two different social minority groups, according to participants' responses, seemed like a defeating battle. Based on the responses it seems that time and constant engagement in this power struggle has led some participants to transform the internalized defeat into feelings of responsibility for their group and although still inhibiting and oppressive, belonging to both the Latino and the LGBTQ community

apart, is the closest and most available reconciliation of identities Latina lesbians can manage to bargain when fighting out-group resistance and oppression in the larger social world.

## **Conclusion**

The above findings presented data addressing the overarching question of this study: What factors lead Latina lesbians to develop a *politicized collective identity*? In addition, findings in the data also pointed to potentially inhibiting factors in the development of a *politicized collective identity* for the 11 participants interviewed. The above themes suggest that education, feelings of responsibility for their group, romantic relationships, the support of familial allies as having other LGBQ family members “come out” before, play a role in leading participants to develop a *politicized collective identity*. Data also suggests that the conflicting familial relationships tainted by conflation between ethnicity and sexual identity, fear for personal safety, and navigating *double jeopardy*, could negatively impact the development of a *politicized collective identity*. The discussion chapter will explore more in depth the potential meaning of these themes and will further explore how they address the study’s sub-questions such as the potential differences between a *politicized collective identity* and *social identity* and the factors that could have played a role in potentially influencing the evolution from the former into the latter. Conclusively, the discussion will also discuss the role *intersectionality* plays the development of a *politicized collective identity*.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the factors leading Latina lesbians to develop a *politicized collective identity*. This identity model calls for intentional group membership where members are mindful and conscious of the power differences that exist between in-group members and out-group members. It additionally requires that members understand how these differences play out in the larger society, and as a result, engage in social and political power struggles to achieve justice and equality on behalf of their group (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Additionally, this study aimed to explore the differences between a *social identity* and a *politicized collective identity* and the potential factors that could influence the transition from a *social* to a *politicized collective identity*. Finally the study aimed to explore and address the role *intersectionality* played in the politicization of a Latina lesbian identity.

In the previous chapter, findings pointed to education, feelings of responsibility for their group, experiences of racial stereotyping/discrimination, romantic relationships, having familial allies and precedent LGBTQ relatives “come out” before, as factors appearing to have led Latina lesbians to develop a *politicized collective identity*. Although the purpose of the study was to explore “leading factors,” participants also addressed factors that seemed to inhibit their willingness to participate in activism. Findings pointed to familial connotations between ethnicity and sexual identity as a complex and powerfully inhibiting factor. Additionally, many participants also expressed that fearing for their personal safety and negotiating being a minority within a minority as difficult and challenging endeavors. Findings also seemed to indicate that a

*politicized collective identity* does not manifest in the same linear manner in which the model suggests, as several subjects who did not possess a systemic understanding of power and oppression still participated in acts that challenged and interrupted racism and homophobia. Furthermore, the findings revealed that there were no differences between a *social identity* and a *politicized collective identity*. Finally, the study uncovered that *intersectionality* plays a key role in understanding the *politicized collective identity* of Latina lesbians.

This chapter will discuss more in depth the findings of this study and how they relate to the information previously presented in the literature. Additionally, this chapter will also address the potential limitations of this study and finally summarize the implications of this study for the field of social work.

### **Re-defining the Concept of a Politicized Collective Identity**

The literature established that a *politicized collective identity* (PCI) consists of intentional group membership where members are mindful and conscious of the power differences that exist between in-group members and out-group members. It additionally requires that members understand how these differences play out in the larger society, and as a result, engage in social and political power struggles to achieve justice and equality on behalf of their group (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). In addition, the term PCI was separated from the term *social identity*, which referred to the changing *self* that assimilates to in-group power dynamics and the term *collective identity*, the fixed group membership that generates feelings of belonging, distinctiveness, understanding, respect and agency. It was concluded that the term “politics” and the understanding of power and oppression was essentially what converted a *collective identity* into a *politicized collective identity*. This conversion called for in-group members to develop feelings of *shared grievances* and *adversarial attributions* in addition to involving society at large (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

Simon and Klandermans (2001) call for the systemic (larger social) understanding of power and oppression as criteria for the development of a *politicized identity*. They use the terminology “power struggle” to define the concept of activism, however, the model does not establish a criteria that defines what actions would constitute as a “power struggles” in the context of a *politicized collective identity*. The question that arises in this juxtaposition is: How to account for “power struggles,” or acts of activism from participants that did not possess a systemic understanding of power and oppression and how these social dynamics impact their identities? Given that there were participants who engaged in more private acts of activism and some who even interrupted racist and homophobic situations, would they be regarded as having a *politicized collective identity*, and if so how do their experiences differ from the rest of the participants? The following sections in this chapter will aim to address potential answers to these questions while assessing their relevance to the literature.

### **Intersectionality and a Politicized Collective Identity**

The model of *politicized collective identity* was created by Bernd Simon, a professor of social and political psychology at the Institute of Psychology Christian-Albrechts- University of Kiel (University of Kiel, N.D), and Bert Klandermans a social psychology professor at the University of Amsterdam (University of Amsterdam, N.D). The work of both researchers has centered identity politics and in-group and out-group dynamics of power (University of Kiel & University of Amsterdam, N.D). However, much like the critiques on social identity theory presented in the literature, it appears that the model of politicized collective identity loses reliability in the face of *intersectionality*.

Referring to the theme “ Experiencing or Witnessing Racial Discrimination” as an example, illustrates how the politicization of race alone becomes clearer when there is only one out-group to blame and one group of people with whom to feel solidarity with. However, the

very affirmation by participants that a Latina identity does not exist separately from a lesbian identity, serves as evidence that these two identities cannot be called to politicized separately. Consequently when lesbian identity is introduced, the politicization of the racial identity is questioned and as result, the model of a politicized collective identity is not longer as clear, linear or seemingly applicable as it was when used with only one identity.

The intersections of race/ethnicity and sexual orientation in the formation of a *politicized collective identity* requires examining the meaning of “activism” in a cultural context. Whites participate in activism much more than Latinos and other minority groups (Campbell, 2003). Perhaps because acts of activism require that group members draw attention to themselves on a larger scale, Whites, who usually enjoy the privilege of being protected from negative social treatment as a result of their race (Wise, 2013) are more likely to participate in these “power struggles” than those risking further societal oppression. The kind of privilege and entitlement that comes from being White in the United States, is not a concept shared by Latinos and/or other racial minority groups, nor is it a concept that the model seems to take into consideration. The findings of this study, proposed that more personal acts of activism such as “coming out” to families and talking to families about sexual orientation could classify as a form of activism within the Latino community. While it is questionable that Simon and Klandermans (2001) would have labeled these acts as “activism,” it is important to recognize that the intentions behind these more personal acts of activism, resembled that of other participants who did engage in more systemic “power struggles.” Based on responses, participants who “came out” or challenged their families’ or communities’ norms, challenged the social status quo. The notion of activism is essentially led by a privileged conception, that those with social power and protection from social scrutiny are the ones more likely and willing to engage in social power struggles, while members of minority groups are not able to benefit from the same social protection and as

a result, suffer the risk of being further marginalized and are more discouraged to participate in activism.

Overall, the majority of participants exhibited a *politicized collective identity* that was congruent with Simon and Klandermans' (2001) model, however, those without access to education or possessing a systemic understanding of oppression, still engaged in intentional and significant forms of activism that could not be labeled as anything other than identity politicization. However, this deviation that was present in the non-college educated/non-systemic understanding participants is arguably reflective of how Latina lesbians, who move about the world marked by their identities and without access to higher education, actually politicize their identities. Those Latina lesbians whose *politicized collective identity* is congruent with the model, have enjoyed educational access that are for the most part granted to the racial majority, so it could be understood how having access to the language and knowledge necessary to address social discrimination could influence not only their desire but ability to part-take in more systemic activism.

Now that the role of *intersectionality* in the development of *politicized collective identity* has been examined, the following section will address how the remaining themes in the findings answer the study's sub-questions.

### **Differences Between Social, Collective Identity and a Politicized Collective Identity**

Although the argument has been made that non-college educated/ non-systemic understanding participants demonstrate having a *politicized collective identity*, the identity model created by Simon and Klandermans (2001) would suggest that those participants without a systemic understanding of oppression would actually possess more of a *collective identity*, rather than a *politicized collective identity*. Given that dynamics of power and oppression are at the core of the definition of "politics," the model suggests that lacking understanding of these, leaves

participants with just the fulfillment of the five psychological functions (i.e. belonging, distinctiveness, understanding, respect and agency) and without feelings of grievance or blame of an out-group for causing their grief. As it was introduced in the literature, if Latina lesbians do not experience feelings of *relative deprivation*, they will not feel unjustly deprived of a good or opportunity. They will not feel robbed of privileges or oppressed and as a result they will not politicize.

While the study's findings seem to indicate that personal/non-systemic understanding follows more private/non-systemic activism and systemic understanding is followed by systemic activism, Simon and Klandermans (2001) would as a result suggest that Latina lesbians with a non-systemic understanding would not possess a *politicized collective identity*. However, that is not to say that they would not experience *relative deprivation*. A counter argument to Simon and Klandermans (2001) perspective would suggest that "coming out" to families and other members in the Latino community would be done as a result of experiencing *relative deprivation* within their in-group. Consequently, if experiencing *relative deprivation* serves as a catalyst of politicization, as it was argued in the literature, then "coming out" would in fact constitute a form of activism for non-systemic understanding participants.

By the same token, Simon and Klandermans' (2001) model calls for the involvement of allies in the "power struggles" undertaken by in-group members. It can therefore be understood how, the theme of having familial allies and precedent LGBQ relatives "come out" before participants, would help Latina lesbians become closer to developing a *politicized collective identity*. As it has been established, Latina lesbians share in-group memberships with both the Latino and LGBQ communities. However, these shared in-group memberships that come with oppressive social re-enactments, demand that Latina lesbians use in-group allies as much as they use out-group allies when engaging in "power struggles." Therefore reliance on family allies can



help Latina lesbians strengthen their stand against in-group marginalization. Similarly, having other LGBQ identified relatives “come out” before, helps by buffering the familial conflict that often arises as a result of identifying as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer person in the Latino community.

Romantic relationships, especially with other Latina lesbians, seemed to serve a similar purpose by serving as the space in which Latina lesbians seemed to freely reconcile their two identities without facing in-group marginalization. As a result, this experience seemed to provide members of this social group with a safe space to develop feelings of *shared grievances* around both their racial and sexual identities as well as *adversarial attributions* as they were able to recognize how in-group treatment resembled out-group treatment. Additionally, the ability to engage in this exploration all the while being able to fulfill the psychological functions of a *collective identity* could explain why being in a romantic relationship with another Latina lesbian, would lead to the development of a *politicized collective identity*.

Overall, most participants seemed to possess a *politicized collective identity* that fit Simon and Klandermans (2001) identity model. Those who did not possess a systemic understanding did possess a *collective identity* (although it has been argued that their actions are reflective of a *politicized collective identity*). However, no subjects exhibited ideology or behavior that resembled a *social identity*. Mostly all participants felt a need to integrate their identities and not assimilate to in-group re-enactments of racism or homophobia. While some participants referenced their belief in sexual fluidity, which denotes the kind of self-exploration and malleability that both self-categorization theory and Simon and Klandermans (2001) address, most participants seemed fixed in their racial/ethnic group memberships. Perhaps, this suggests that sexual identity is regarded as more of a *social identity* for participants and less as a

*politicized collective identity*. However, the findings did not provide enough information to make this conclusion.

As far as addressing the inhibiting factors that emerged in the findings, more research would be required to better interpret how these affect the formation of a *politicized collective identity*. It has been discussed how navigating familial conflict (between ethnicity and sexual orientation) can leave participants feeling like they are members of two in-groups in which they are not entirely included, preventing them from solidifying their joint identities and identifying clear oppressors. Further, aside from needing to develop solidarity with in-group members who are also in the role of oppressor, Latina lesbians are faced with the same problem being a minority within a minority in the larger society. Being the target of oppression of homophobic members of the Latino community, racist or race neutral members of the LGBTQ community as well as White heterosexual women and White heterosexual men, exposes Latina lesbians to constant oppression and marginalization from various groups in society. As a result it can be acknowledged why fearing for personal safety, was also an inhibiting factor in the formation of a *politicized collective identity*.

Conclusively, findings indicate that the model of a politicized collective identity applied to most participants. However, the few non-systemic understanding participants who engaged in non-systemic types of activism seem to demonstrate that “power struggles” and interruptions of racism and homophobia do not always require the systemic understanding, the model suggests. Additionally findings also seem to indicate that the politicization of intersecting identities does not occur in a clear and step-by-step manner. While the politicization of a single identity can occur more clearly, identities do not all politicize individually.

Furthermore, the existence of *intersectionality* in the politicization process complicates the ways in which in-group and out-group dynamics play out, making it more difficult for

members to decide who should be involved in their “power struggles.” Although further research would be required to further examine the role *intersectionality* plays in the development of a *politicized collective identity*, the findings in this study suggest that Simon and Klandermans (2001) identity model would perhaps benefit from addressing this component. In setting the stage for analysis and criticism, this following section will examine the strengths and limitations of this study, including areas of improvement.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Recruitment for this study was difficult given the geographic area and the criteria necessary for participation. Applying snowball sampling was a helpful recruitment method allowing for participants to refer other potential candidates from their contacts. However, interviewing participants within proximal social circles could have potentially compromised the validity of the study’s findings, given the potential similarities shared between individuals. Recruitment methods also accounted for the gap in ages between participants, where a significant amount of participants were in their mid 20’s and another group between their late 30’s and early 40’s. Having been able to interview participants, who reflect a range of ages, could have increased the variance in the findings. Additionally, most participants identified as Puerto Rican, and only three identified with other ethnicities. While similarities can exist between ethnicities, being able to access a more ethnically diverse sample of participants would have perhaps pointed to inter-ethnic/racial differences influencing the formation of a *politicized collective identity*.

While findings in this study hint to potential factors involved in the development of a *politicized collective identity* for Latina lesbians, there were not enough subjects in this study to solidify these outcomes. It would be beneficial for future research to examine these findings more in depth in order to determine causality. Additionally, it would be beneficial for future research to build on the findings of this study, in order to, not only contribute knowledge to these

under-researched topics but to gather more information about Latina lesbians, as an under-studied population. The following section will expand on this argument and will address why this study, as well as future research, would benefit the social work profession and other areas of the social sciences.

### **Implications for Social Work**

Narrative theory accounts for the ways in which human beings come to an understanding of themselves based on their life experiences and the messages they have received from others (Freedman, 1996). As this study has reflected, people with subordinate identities are often marginalized by in-group and out-group members as well as larger society. In bridging the dichotomy that exists between clinical social work and our profession's commitment to social action and social justice, it is important to understand deeply how societal norms impact people's personal narratives and the ways in which our profession can work to interrupt this kind of oppression.

Learning about the concept of a *politicized collective identity*, what it entails, and the kind of empowerment it can bring to Latina lesbians, one of the least researched groups in the social sciences (Calvo & Esquibel, 2010), demonstrates a commitment to social justice and could be useful to consider when providing mental health services to members of this social group. Understanding how the socio-emotional experiences of individuals with memberships to subordinate social groups are impacted by socio-cultural factors, grants clinicians the ability to generate interventions that are mindful and take into account the nature of these experiences and the psychological impact they can have on those who are marked by them.

Additionally, it would be extremely remarkable, for both community organizers and policy makers to advocate for the inclusions of social justice education into school's curriculum and after school programs so that Whites and racial minorities alike can be exposed to dynamics

of power and oppression at a younger age. Furthermore, examining and understanding the experiences of Latina lesbians may influence social workers to work independently and collectively to address their needs. Whether providing clinical or community services to individuals in the LGBTQ or Latino communities, knowledge of the issues impacting the populations with whom we work and understanding the ways in which these contribute to social inequality and their impact on the well being of our clients, is at the core of the social work profession.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has examined the development of a *politicized collective identity* for Latina lesbians and explored how this identity model resembles and/or differs from social identity theory as defined by the literature, although the findings did not reveal themes that explicitly addressed these differences. Both the literature and the study's findings suggest that *intersectionality* adds a level of complexity to the politicization process. This complexity stems from an analysis of the interconnections of race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Furthermore, the study discussed the implication of the findings for the field of social work.

The purpose of writing about a *politicized collective identity*, and what Latina lesbians need in order to develop this type of identity, is in itself a political decision on my behalf. This thesis is an attempt to reach out to allies in the social work profession who are willing to promote the social and political visibility of this under-represented group. As a Latina lesbian, a prospective clinician, and a community organizer, I chose to undertake a project that would highlight my voice and those of others like me with the intention of making Latina lesbians more visible and recognized within the Latino and LGBTQ communities as well as in the field of research, where the experiences of White lesbians and gay men take precedence.

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## Appendix A

### Human Subject Committee Approval Letter



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**School for Social Work**  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

January 13, 2014

Susana Rodriguez

Dear Susana,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.  
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Rani Varghese, Research Advisor

**Appendix B**

**Informed Consent Form**



**SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL WORK**

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study  
Smith College SSW • Northampton, MA**

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**Title of Study: Factors leading to the formation of a Politicized Collective Identity for Latina Lesbians**

**Investigator(s): Susana Rodriguez**

(Susana Rodriguez, Smith School for Social Work, XXX-XXX-XXXX)

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**Introduction**

- You are being asked to be in a research study on the factors that contribute to the development of a politicized identity for self-identified Latina Lesbians.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you identify as Latina and as a Lesbian, are above the age of 18, and have participated in social and/or political activism around either or both of these identities.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

**Purpose of Study**

- The purpose of the study is to investigate the factors that lead Latina Lesbians to develop a politicized collective identity. This identity model states that collective politicized identity calls for intentional group membership where members are mindful and conscious of the power difference that exists between in-group members, out-group members and the larger society and engage in social or political power struggles in order to achieve justice and equality for their group. In addition, the study will explore what factors influence the **individual** evolution from social identity to collective politicized identity **for each participant** and the role intersecting identities (ethnicity and sexuality) play in this evolution. This study is being conducted as a thesis requirement for my master’s in social work degree.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

**Description of the Study Procedures**

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: **Complete a short screening questionnaire regarding your ethnic and sexual identification as well as your participation in any form of activism around either or both of your identities as a way to meet the criteria for a politicized collective identity.** In addition, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute interview conducted either face-to face in a private setting, or via video call (such as Skype). Interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. I will ask several questions **regarding your age, level of education, profession, race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, gender and sexuality** along with open-ended questions regarding your experiences as a Latina Lesbian.

#### **Risks/ Discomforts of Being in this Study**

- The study has the following risks: Participants may find it difficult to share experiences centered around their ethnic and sexual identities given that for some people this could be triggering of previously experienced trauma around the coming out process or other homophobic or racist encounters. **I will check in with you at the end of the interview to assess for level of discomfort and will offer a list of community resources you can access at your convenience if the discomfort persists or intensifies.**

#### **Benefits of Being in the Study**

- The benefits of participation include the opportunity to contribute novel insight, to various understudied topics such as: the process of developing an politicized collective identity, the role of intersectionality (intersecting subordinate identities) in the politicization process, and finally further research focusing on women, especially Lesbian identified women within the larger LGBTQ community.

#### **Confidentiality**

- The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Only my thesis advisor and I will have access to audiotapes. These recordings will only be used to ensure accurate transcriptions but will not be used for any other purposes. After use, audio recordings will be erased. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.
- The data will be kept for at least three years according to Federal regulations. They may be kept longer if still needed for research. After the three years, or whenever the data are no longer being used, all data will be destroyed.

#### **Payments**

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

#### **Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

- The decision to participate in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the study following 72 hrs of your interview (at which point transcription will begin) without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely at any point during the study. If you choose to withdraw, the researcher will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify the researcher of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by three days after your interview. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis, dissertation or final report.

**Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns**

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Susana Rodriguez at srodrigu@smith.edu or by telephone at XXX-XXX-XXXX. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

**Consent**

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study researcher.

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# Activists Wanted!

Do You Identify As a

**Latina** And a  
**Lesbian?**

**Looking for....**

*Lesbian* identified *Latinas* who have engaged in *activism* around their sexual and/or ethnic identities.

**To Contribute to....**

*Smith School for Social Work Masters Thesis Research On:*  
The Factors That Lead Latina Lesbians to Develop a  
Politicized Collective Identity.

If you are between the ages of 18-60 and would like to be among the first to contribute to this important area of study, I would love to hear from you!



**For More Information, Please Contact:**

**Susana Rodriguez**

## Appendix D

### Recruitment Letter

Date: December 9, 2013

Subject: Thesis Research Recruiting

Dear Participant,

My name is Susana Rodriguez and I am a graduate student at the Smith School for Social Work. As I prepare to fulfill my final requirements for my Masters in Social Work by completing my thesis, I am seeking to explore the factors that lead Latina Lesbians to develop a politicized collective identity. For Latina identified Lesbians, a politicized collective identity calls for intentional group membership, where members understand that as Latina identified Lesbians, there is a power difference that exists between them and other members of the queer community, (i.e. white identified lesbians) and the larger heterosexual community. Furthermore, there is an awareness that these power differentials lead to experiences of racism and homophobia by members of both of these groups that, impact not only group members themselves but also, influence the larger society. As a result engaging in social and political activism around ethnicity and/or sexuality would allow Latina identified Lesbians to gain similar access to resources provided to members of more powerful social groups.

If you identify as Latina and a Lesbian, are between 18 and 60 years of age and have participated in activist engagement around your ethnicity and/or sexuality I would greatly benefit from your participation in this study! Your contribution would help the field of social work understand how developing a politicized collective identity would contribute to an overall healthy sense of self for members of oppressed populations. As a participant you will be asked to part-take in a brief screening questionnaire regarding your ethnic and sexual identification as well as your participation in any form of activism around either or both of your identities in order to ensure that, as a participant in this study, you meet the criteria for a politicized collective identity. In addition, you will be asked to participate in a 45-minute interview, where I will be asking you to share your opinions about what factors have led you to develop a politicized collective identity and what personal meaning you have attached to this identity. I will additionally inquire about the personal meaning you hold for your intersecting ethnic and sexual identities.

If you are interested in participating in this study please reply to this message, or feel free to contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or through e-mail at srodrigu@smith.edu .

Respectfully,

Susana Rodriguez MSW Candidate  
Smith School for Social Work

## Appendix E

### Screening Questions

#### SCREENING QUESTIONS

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. Are you between the ages of 18 and 60? YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_\_ How old are you?\_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you identify as Latina YES\_\_\_\_NO\_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you identify as a Lesbian YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_\_
4. Have you ever participated in activism around either your ethnic or sexual identities in a public, private, or professional manner? YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY:**

\_\_\_\_ I have educated family, friends or someone close to you about issues pertaining to either your ethnic and/or sexual identity.

\_\_\_\_ I have participated in marches, protests and/or other public events around with or both of these identities.

\_\_\_\_ I have facilitated discussions or engaged in education around either or both of these identities in a professional setting.

## Appendix F

### Interview Questions

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

##### Demographical Information

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Level of Education \_\_\_\_\_

Profession \_\_\_\_\_

Race \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Nationality \_\_\_\_\_

Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Sexuality \_\_\_\_\_

##### Interview Questions

1. How do you identify racially, ethnically and sexually? How did you come to identify this way? (How do you identify to yourself and does it differ from how you identify yourself to others? Have there been specific life experiences that have shaped the way you identify?)
2. How does your ethnic and/or racial identity influence your sexuality? How does your sexuality influence your ethnic and/or racial identity? (Do you feel like it is difficult to be both in either circumstance? Why?)
3. How do you feel like your experience as a Latina and a Lesbian differ from the experience of differently identified members of the LGBTQ community? From heterosexual women? (How do you feel like you are perceived and/or treated by the larger society in comparison to other LGBTQ members or heterosexual women?)
4. Why is it important for you to identify as a Latina Lesbian? (What purpose does this identification serve for you)? Do you ever identify as one and not the other or feel like one identity exists separately from the other?)
5. Can you share with me your engagement in activism around either your race and/or ethnicity and/or your sexuality? What led you to participate in this activism and why did you feel it was important? (What did you hope to accomplish by engaging in this type of activism?)
6. Have you heard the term “collective politicized identity” before? What does it mean to you? (If participants are not acquainted with the term, I will provide an explanation and invite them to react about what it means for them to be able to name their actions and beliefs as “politicized collective identity.”)