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## These are my Communities and Spaces

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## **These are my Communities and Spaces**

By Jamie Lambaren

I build community in many spaces, online and in person. I would say family is a big part of my life. I spend more time and I am closer to my mother's side of the family. Her family is my family. When I say my family, I mean my mom's entire family here in California. My family is larger than the average American nuclear family. There are about 18 of us. There are my parents, my brother, grandmother, my 2 uncles, one of them whom has a wife (my auntie), and their kids, as well as my grandfather's sister and her husband. My family is Guatemalan, so we eat foods from there as well as other Latino foods. Friendship is also a community for me. I have a small friend group that includes four friends from elementary and middle school as well as my cousins. I have other friend groups that include people I've met in college, most of which I had classes with. Although I am much closer to my friends from home, I would say I have 2 best friends, 2 close friends, and my cousins who are also my friends. It's funny because my cousins are also friends with my friends, so we are all close and we all hang out together. Sometimes we all plan to meet at my house to hang out, watch movies, play board games, and other times we plan to go to L.A.

Another community I am a part of is the LGBTQIA+ community which I mostly engage in through social media and other online communities that coincide with the LGBTQIA+. My social media feed consists of those from the community that share their experiences, information, history, jokes, and other stories. One year I was able to go to Pride in LA. I started to learn more about the LGBTQIA+ community around the time I entered middle school. I started to engage in discourse with my best friend about the community. At that time, I had been confused about myself and who I was. By using social media, learning, as well as connecting with those that are part of the community, it helped me better understand myself.

During all the holidays and birthdays throughout the year, my family comes over to my grandma's house to celebrate. We all eat dinner together and hang out. My cousins, my brother, our mutual best friends, and I play board/card games at my house. My house is behind my grandma's house. In between the two houses there is a patio where we eat dinner together during the summer and spring. Since we are Latinos, we celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve. We all eat dinner together at my grandma's house, and at midnight, we all open presents. Every year the day before Christmas Eve, my mom and I help my grandma prepare the sauce, the masa, and wash the banana leaves for the tamales. On Christmas Eve morning, we finish putting together the tamales and cook them until dinner time when they are ready to eat. This is my favorite time of the year, it's just more special to me than any other time of the year. Hanging out in my grandma's or my house with family and friends are spaces that give me a sense of belonging that are quite literally my home. Hanging out with my friends and cousins also gives me a sense of belonging.

Online spaces, such as Twitter, is another place that gives me a sense of belonging because I am able to connect with many communities that I am a part of. Tumblr was a place where I learned more about the LGBTQIA+ community. That helped me figure out which label best suits me. Social media has helped me learn how to express myself and my identity. Expressing myself through fashion and clothing was very validating. As mentioned in "Finding Sequins in the Rubble," "For trans people, both standing out and blending in can be modes of self-craft... clothing can function as armor or as protection" (Alvarez, 624). I relate very much to this quote because what you wear can show off what community you are a part of; however, it can also help you "blend in" to the dominant culture. Sometimes I want to seem like any other cis person, and other times I want to look androgynous, and clothing helps me express that part of myself.

The LGBTQ community has faced many challenges because they do not fit in with the dominant culture, which is highly heter-

onormative and hetero-patriarchal. There are times where the spaces the community created for themselves are invaded by non-LGBTQ people. The police, i.e., stonewall riots, or laws are put in place to keep them from expressing themselves. Those who are POC may not only experience homophobia but also racism from non-POC within their own community and outside of it. LGBTQIA+ kids or adults may try to hide their identity or are put through conversion therapy. Coming out may also put a strain on their relationship with their family. They may even be kicked out of their house, become homeless at a young age. However, the community is making headway toward changing society to become more inclusive.

As mentioned before, social media is a place where a lot of LGBTQIA+ people share their critique on society, educate others on LGBTQIA+ history, share helpful resources or just engage in discourse. The community also participates in activism. They hold marches and parades similar to the party crew mentioned in "Back in the Days": "They taught themselves, and each other, skills... published their own magazines. They designed their own flyers, booked venues, and found creative ways to promote carefully planned events" (Fragoza 50). This can best be applied to the LGBTQIA+ community. Both communities taught themselves how to create things. The LGBTQIA+ community created their own safe spaces because "it was in the underground that youth like Rosales created a world of their own, away from the institutional establishments that had betrayed them" (Fragoza 48).

They've created magazines, have become published writers, and along with doing so much more to express themselves using "some of the strategies [such as] performance, writing, activism, spirituality, and everyday acts of survival and self-craft like fashion, relationships, dreaming, laughing, dancing, and kinship" (Alvarez 621). They talk about the systems in place that are used to continue prejudice against the LGBTQIA+ and what causes those against them to think that way. I also engage in discourse that relates to these topics with my best friend, and we educate each other about the community and other social justice issues.

Works Cited:

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