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Border Studies Archive Project  
ANTH 6306-01 - Spring 2024  
Dr. Milena Melo  
Eva L. Millan

## **Border Queer Narratives: Exploring LGBTQ+ Experiences on the US-Mexico Border**

*Transcript*

### **Introduction**

The Border Studies Archive stands as a beacon, preserving the diverse cultural tapestry and historical narratives woven along the US-Mexico border. In accordance with its commitment to inclusivity and the celebration of diverse voices. This project, conducted by myself, a Master's student in Interdisciplinary Studies - Anthropology, endeavors to illuminate the multifaceted experiences of queer and LGBTQ+ individuals within the borderlands.

### **Context and Objectives**

At its core, this project seeks to document and elevate the voices of queer and LGBTQ+ individuals who call the RGV home. In a region often marked by its complex cultural intersections, this endeavor aims to weave together a mosaic of narratives that are too often relegated to the margins.

### **Objectives**

1. Documenting Diverse Narratives: Through in-depth interviews, this project aims to capture the rich spectrum of experiences within the LGBTQ+ community in the RGV.
2. Exploring Vital Themes: From the formation of identity to the challenges faced and the resilience demonstrated, this project delves into the multifaceted layers that compose the lived experiences of queer individuals in the border region.
3. Intersectional Analysis: By examining the intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, this project seeks to unearth the nuanced realities that shape LGBTQ+ lives on the border.
4. Cultural Insight: By painting a picture of queer culture and community dynamics in the RGV, this project aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the diverse identities thriving within the borderlands.

## **Introduction to the Rio Grande Valley (RGV)**

Nestled along the southernmost tip of Texas, the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) emerges as a vibrant tapestry of cultures, where the waters of the Rio Grande weave together narratives of resilience and diversity. This region, with its rich history and complex intersections of identities, serves as the backdrop for the narratives that unfold within the LGBTQ+ community. From the sprawling citrus orchards to the bustling border crossings, the RGV is more than a geographical location; it is a mosaic of voices, each adding a unique hue to the canvas of borderland life.

*Without further ado:*

### **Voices from the Rio Grande Valley**

*Here are our participants:*

1. Can you give us your name and your pronouns?
  - Eva Ryan
  - Kaylee Hernandez
  - Alexandra “Mitchy” Gonzales
  - Nate Salazar
  - Logan Reed
  - Julia Reed

*I'm Mitchy, pronouns are, today they are, They/Them*

*Nathaniel Salazar, He/Him*

*This is Kaylee Hernandez, She/They*

As we delve into the rich tapestry of experiences within our community, it's important to recognize the diverse narratives that shape our collective identity. In this report, I aim to amplify some voices that often remain unheard, shedding light on the lived experiences of individuals who call *The Valley* home.

The journey of its participants is as varied as the colors of the sky at dawn. Some arrived here in their youth, carried by the dreams and hopes of their families. Others embarked on this path as adults, navigating through the complexities of relocation with determination etched into every step they took. And yet, amidst the bustling tapestry of life, there are those who have bid farewell to these familiar streets, their departures leaving behind whispers of memories and echoes of laughter. Each individual's arrival, whether in infancy or maturity, and departure, whether temporary or permanent, adds a unique hue to the collective canvas of this vibrant community.

In the heart of the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), the communal queer experience emerges as a narrative intricately woven with threads of resilience amidst adversity. Here, amidst a backdrop of deeply ingrained religious values and traditions, queer individuals often find themselves engaged in a struggle for recognition and acceptance. The conservative nature of the population casts shadows of discrimination and marginalization, compelling queer individuals to fight relentlessly for their voices to be heard and their identities to be respected. Within the familial realm, the spectrum of acceptance varies, with some parents embracing their children wholeheartedly, offering unwavering support and love, while others, entrenched in bigotry and prejudice, perpetuate hostility and rejection. Despite these challenges, the queer community in the RGV persists, forging bonds of solidarity and resilience, carving out spaces of acceptance and celebration amidst the prevailing currents of intolerance.

Over the past decade, palpable shifts in attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community have begun to emerge in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), marking a notable evolution in societal perceptions and values. What was once a landscape characterized by silence or outright hostility towards queer individuals has gradually transformed into one where acceptance and inclusivity are gaining ground. The seeds of change, sown through advocacy efforts, community education, and personal narratives, have blossomed into a cultural shift that is reshaping the fabric of the RGV. Increasingly, people are recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of LGBTQ+ individuals, challenging long-held prejudices, and fostering environments of understanding and respect. This transformation is not without its challenges, as pockets of resistance still linger, entrenched in traditional beliefs and social norms.

However, there is a palpable sense of optimism among many LGBTQ+ residents that the RGV is on a trajectory towards becoming more queer-friendly. As visibility and representation continue to grow, propelled by grassroots activism and allyship, the valley is slowly but surely embracing its LGBTQ+ community with open arms, paving the way for a more inclusive and vibrant future.

In the RGV, while strides towards LGBTQ+ acceptance have been made, significant disparities persist, particularly in accessing healthcare, a fundamental human right. For many queer individuals, the journey to affirm their gender identity or receive comprehensive care can be fraught with obstacles. In a region where resources are limited and conservative values often influence healthcare policies, accessing gender-affirming care can feel like navigating a labyrinth of barriers. Planned Parenthood stands as a beacon of hope amidst this landscape, offering vital services for gender-affirming care when few other options exist. However, the reliance on a single provider underscores the systemic shortcomings and gaps in healthcare accessibility within the RGV. Queer individuals may face long wait times, inadequate services, or outright discrimination when seeking care, exacerbating existing disparities in health outcomes. The lack of diverse healthcare options not only undermines the autonomy and dignity of LGBTQ+

individuals but also perpetuates a cycle of marginalization and erasure. As advocates continue to push for equitable access to healthcare services, it remains imperative to address these systemic issues and ensure that all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, receive the compassionate and affirming care they deserve.

In interviews conducted for this project, a prevailing sentiment emerged among participants in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) LGBTQ+ community: the paramount importance of the ongoing struggle for equal rights, particularly in the wake of recent developments such as the post-Roe v. Wade landscape. Many expressed deep concerns about the potential erosion of reproductive rights and the broader implications for LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly trans and non-binary individuals seeking vital medical care. The interviews underscored the critical need for continued advocacy and activism to safeguard and expand upon the hard-won gains in LGBTQ+ rights. Specifically, there was a resounding call for greater access to gender-affirming healthcare, recognizing it as a fundamental human right that remains elusive for many in the RGV. Participants highlighted the urgency of addressing systemic barriers and discriminatory practices within the healthcare system to ensure equitable access to care for all LGBTQ+ individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression.

The interviews conducted shed light on a lesser-discussed aspect of LGBTQ+ life in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV): the challenges of dating and finding romantic partners in an environment that is not particularly queer-friendly. Participants shared candidly about their experiences navigating the dating scene, describing it as a landscape fraught with obstacles and limitations. In a region where traditional norms and conservative values often prevail, many queer individuals expressed feelings of isolation and frustration in their search for companionship. The lack of visible queer spaces and social opportunities further compounds the difficulty of forming meaningful connections. Moreover, concerns about safety and acceptance can loom large, deterring some from fully engaging in the dating pool. As a result, the quest for love and companionship can feel like a solitary journey, with few avenues for meeting potential partners who share similar experiences and identities. Despite these challenges, the interviews also revealed a resilient spirit among participants, as they continue to seek out ways to connect with others and forge relationships that affirm their identities and desires.

Despite the challenges they face, the participants in these interviews overwhelmingly share a sense of hope for the future of the LGBTQ+ community in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV). Anchored by the bonds of their found families — networks of friends, allies, and fellow community members who provide support and understanding — they look ahead with optimism and determination. Their collective vision is one of a more diverse, inclusive, and safe future, where LGBTQ+ individuals can thrive authentically and without fear of discrimination. They envision a landscape where visibility and representation are celebrated, where queer voices are amplified, and where acceptance is the norm rather than the exception. While acknowledging the

work that lies ahead in addressing systemic inequalities and fostering greater understanding, the participants are buoyed by the resilience and strength of their community. Through advocacy, education, and collective action, they are committed to shaping a future where every member of the LGBTQ+ community in the RGV can live proudly and openly.

*Yeah, I mean. I feel like in the past couple of years it has gotten a lot easier to exist as a queer person in the valley, I don't feel a whole lot, I know if we lived in other parts of Texas that are a little bit more intolerant it would be a little bit more difficult, I wish that the state would stop trying to fuck everyone over but, I think the queer community is definitely growing and changing and it's nice to start being able to see how it grows and be able to meet new people in the queer community, like at work I will interact with students, they'll see my pride flag and go 'oh your also queer' and it's like 'yeah yeah' connect that way, it's so nice for them to be able to be open and not to have a second thought about 'i can't be open at school'*

*Oh man, I hope it blossoms, I hope it has like cool events, I hope it's a little bit more of an open community, I hope you know, it's more societal, like a little more, id like to see more events, I don't know that just what I like going to, the food, yeah, I don't like bars no, I know that the pride events are cool during pride but there could be other events that doesn't necessarily, yeah it could be like a queer-owned restaurant, I do not know, more queer people to do stuff like that,*

*Like I said earlier, I mean were here, we are always gonna be here, and I think that the support is only going to get stronger, and looking at the political climate and everything it's like, it's so hard to know what things are going to look like, what things are going to change and so it's like we have to lean on each other and we have to give our support when we can how we can, so you know we have each other, we are not going anywhere.*

In conclusion, these interviews offer a glimpse into the multifaceted LGBTQ+ experience in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), highlighting both the challenges and the resilience of this vibrant community. As we look ahead, I am eager to continue shedding light on the diverse stories and voices within the RGV LGBTQ+ community, recognizing that this project is just a small step in a much larger journey. By amplifying these narratives and fostering greater understanding, I hope to contribute to a more inclusive and affirming future for all LGBTQ+ individuals in the RGV and beyond. Together, let us expand upon this foundation, embracing the richness of our differences and striving towards a world where every person can live authentically and without fear.

NOTE:

Due to technical difficulties with corrupted audio, several of the interviews were unusable. I decided to change my approach to writing this project based on these difficulties.