

**SALSA DANCING: EXPLORING ETHNIC AND GENDER PERFORMANCES IN
HETERONORMATIVE AND QUEER SPACES**

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**A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree**

Master of Arts

In

Sexuality Studies

by

Jazmin Victoria Ibarra

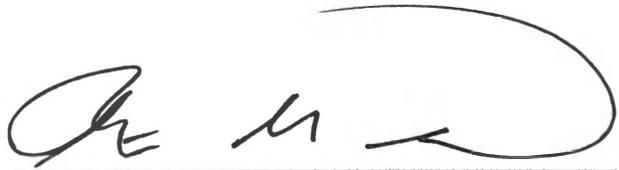
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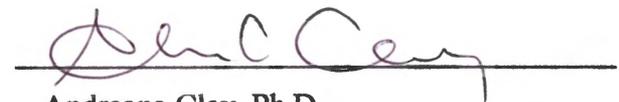
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rita Melendez', written over a horizontal line.

Rita Melendez, Ph.D.
~~Associate~~ Professor

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Andreana Clay', written over a horizontal line.

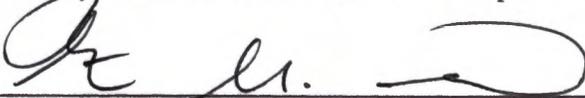
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SALSA DANCING: EXPLORING ETHNIC AND GENDER PERFORMANCES IN
HETERONORMATIVE AND QUEER SPACES

Jazmin Victoria Ibarra
San Francisco, California
2019

Salsa is one of the most popular forms of Latin Dance practiced among multiethnic communities across the United States since its introduction in the mid-20th century. Its development has resulted in conversations around dance, culture, embodiment and sexual expression. Dancers' behaviors and interactions demonstrate how cultural notions belonging to Latinx communities interrelate with constructs of gender and sexuality. Current literature predominantly interrogates more heteronormative spaces in Western society leaving a gap to further explore how interactions between dancers are motivated in queer spaces. Ethnographic research was conducted in heteronormative and non-heteronormative salsa communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. During the fall of 2018, data was collected from observational notes taken from several field visits at each of the salsa venues. Using an intersectional approach, was key to highlighting nuances observed between the various performances enacted by salsa dancers. Themes emerged from the data that expand upon Goffman's theories of performance. Analysis of the dancers' gender and ethnic performance draws conclusion on human sexual desire and motives that reinforce white heterosexist ideologies in queer and heteronormative salsa communities.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

5/21/19

Date

PREFACE AND/OR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family for all their love and support. I would not be the woman I am today without my parent's love, hard work and dedication. This journey was extremely difficult at times being away from you all, but each of you always had my back and continued to motivate me on a daily basis. I am extremely blessed to have great family support and I couldn't be prouder of where I come from.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2015, I began taking salsa lessons in a dance studio in Pasadena, California. As a Mixed Latina-American woman who grew up listening to salsa music at family parties, I thought I knew what salsa dancing was. The fast tempo and energy of salsa spoke to me and I couldn't help but move my body every time it started to play. However, my parents never taught me the “basics” that constructed the dance and I wanted to know more in hopes of connecting to my culture. I struggled in my first class and it felt odd, but I couldn't put into words why I felt that way. Soon, I realized that the dancing positions of leader and follower heavily relied on cultural notions of courtship between men and women where men were to assume the role as the leader and women were to be the followers. Although learning the position as a follower was uncomfortable for me at first, I quickly fell in love with crafting this performed identity.

As a young single woman, salsa offered me a sense of agency that I didn't realize I so desperately craved. Despite my position as a follower, I began to feel more comfortable with myself and my body. I began to feel sexy, and I embraced the way the dance made me feel. As a young girl growing up in a Latin family, I found it difficult being able to say the word, “no” to them and eventually others. However, salsa dancing revealed to me that I could say no and that I had a choice in my partnerships. I became comfortable interacting with other salsa dancers' bodies as I negotiated its meaning through the performance.

Entering the world of salsa dancing was an eye-opening experience for me and it gave me the opportunity to connect with various groups of individuals. California is known for its residents being from multiethnic communities. It is also made up of a large Latinx community, and while it did allow me the opportunity to meet many Latinxs, there were just as many who were not a part of the Latinx community that loved to salsa. I found this observation intriguing and began to wonder what it was about this dance in particular that had the power to attract such diverse groups of people.

My friend also took up salsa around the same time I did, and she would accompany me at times, but rarely danced. If she did, it was mostly with me because she had learned the leading position, and I knew the following position. Although I tried to encourage her to ask other followers or women to dance, I acknowledge that her experience of dancing with a partner of the same sex were different than mine. I asked her why she did not attempt to dance with others. She explained that she felt her visible queerness sometimes made others feel uncomfortable in this typically heteronormative space. I found this sentiment deeply troubling and wanted to make an examination of salsa dancing in a queer space as I wondered what similarities or differences existed between each space. Although this exploration was inspired for my attachment to this dance, my hope is to approach this project without personal bias in order to better understand how sexuality intersects with race, ethnicity, gender and other social constructs in each of these salsa communities.

Background

The history of salsa embodies one that describes a transnational phenomenon. Evidence supports its' music and dance are deeply embedded in African roots and cultivated throughout parts of the Caribbean and Latin America. Cuba is widely recognized for its influence where it combined both African musical instruments and rhythms with European lyrical sounds. After the revolution in Cuba, many musicians relocated to the United States. Since its introduction into America in the mid-twentieth century, salsa music and dance has evolved and looks differently across the nation.

Though salsa dancing is currently practiced amongst a multitude of individuals across the world, its development arises out of a history met with resistance and assimilation in response to colonialism in the Caribbean and Americas. The music and dance derived from religious practices amongst African nations was viewed as outlandish and deviant calling for its prohibition by their European oppressors. For example, In Cuba, the abolition had ended slavery near the end of the nineteenth century welcoming the tolerance for the black Dia de Los Reyes(Day of Kings) celebration exhibited in street dancing which admits can be regarded as an act of paternalistic generosity of the masters (Chateen 2004). These celebrations served as an opportunity for white society to spectate Africanism as they took to dancing in big circles accompanied by enormous drums in Havana. Detailed account by Swedish traveler explains that she witnessed how each nation has a variation of its own, but essentially the dances shared similarities- having a male and female dance in a manner of courtship where the man expressed his feelings.

However, this observation Chasteen argues demonstrates something diasporic where the mixing of African and European influences are rendered visible (2004).

As Latin culture dispersed across America, it traveled into new spaces through the bodies, minds and memories of its dancers (Pietrobruno 2006). Pietrobruno insists that salsa music and dance can become an expression of an individual's cultural heritage that cannot be forgotten regardless of an individual's geographic location. He also points out that when salsa is a part of one's heritage, it is typically learned without formal instruction and among families and communities. The the mixing of Latinx culture in American society becomes an important part of history that shapes salsa communities in San Francisco. How dancers form their union in salsa dancing may be influenced differently than in other geographic locations due to the varying identities of individuals such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, gender, sexuality.

Machismo and Marianismo

Discourse on the cultural notions of femininity and masculinity among Latinx communities have been described in terms of marianismo and machismo (Paludi, 2004). Machismo consists of an attitude associated with Latinx communities that supports male dominance over women as well as around other men. The machismo male is someone who receives messages from a young age that his masculinity is defined by his strength, respect by others, freedom to assert his sexuality and his exercise of power in all decision-making matters. According to Paludi, this idea of machismo is also made visible

in same-sex relationships where men who are passive and penetrable are likened to women (Paludi, 2004). Marianismo, coined in 1937 from the word marianism rooted in the Roman Catholic Church encompasses all that is in opposition to machismo and constructs a double standard for women. This viewpoint portrays Latina women as selfless and submissive partners predominantly for some Latin American countries.

Understanding these notions of Latin American culture produced in discourse have examined the gendered interactions in salsa dancing that may inadvertently reproduce traditional masculinity in its literature. Research that primarily focuses on Latin American culture in respect to these terms of machismo or marianismo is extremely narrowing as it frames social reality through the male hegemonic lens. Although the concept of machismo has been mass produced in literature, this outlining of masculinity exists across many cultures and should not be considered a predominant aspect of Latinx culture. As a reminder, the gendered interactions that one observes within the dance of salsa depends on the understanding of its evolution amongst its native people as a form of group dancing that transformed into a partnered dance between men and women that fell in conjunction with European ideals of courtship (Chasteen, 2004).

Use of term "Latinx"

Individuals of Latin American descent in the United States have used various labels to self-identify such as Latino, Hispanic, Chicano, Cuban- American, etc. Hispanic refers to a group of people who are from countries where the primary language is Spanish

such as Spain, Colombia, Argentina, etc. In contrast, Latino refers to people from the Caribbean, Mexico, Central and South America and other countries that are not Spanish-speaking such as Brazil or Belize. Latino has traditionally been used to describe male and female genders of Latin American descent according to the rules of Spanish language. The term Latinx is an inclusive and gender non-specific term created to replace Latino/a. It emerged in 2004 in the United States among the LGBTQIA community in an effort to promote inclusivity in language and to resist the gender binary. Since its introduction, findings indicate that there has been a significant trend of its usage in discourse such as popular culture and its emerging use within scholarly literature.

Therefore, I purposefully use the term Latinx to encompass all individuals of the Latinx community. As a mixed-Latina woman, I embrace the term Latinx as it combats the general and masculine-centric ethnic term “Latino” to describe people that feels more representative. However, my observations do entail the use of traditional gender assignments of Latino/a when referring to specific individuals and their interactions with their dancing partners to provide an analysis of gendered performances. Due to the limited verbal interaction with the participants observed in this ethnography, it should be noted that individuals did not use the term Latinx at any point during this research as a self-identifier.

Past Research on Salsa Dancing

Research conducted outside of the US, has informed us of individuals' positive relationship with salsa dancing in non-Latin countries. Ethnographic research conducted in Japan argues that salsa dancing creates opportunities of "parasexuality" for Japanese dancers. Parasexuality is defined as delimited yet intensified sensuality which is exhibited through sensual touching among partners (Gagné, 2014). Researchers found that limited public expression of affection or intimacy in Tokyo, heightened the sensual interactions experienced for men and women alike. This work reveals that salsa in Japan reflects particular gendered desires and techniques that are motivated by the sensual touch that takes place between partners.

Past research has emphasized how women and men find pleasure in the performance of sexualized dichotomous gender positions. It seems to be the intersection of Latin culture constructions and a desire for 'traditional' heteronormativity that, according to interviews with salsa dancers, renders the performance of submissive femininity and dominant masculinity as sexy (Schneider, 2013). Similarly, *Latin American Dance in Transnational Contexts* delves into the conflict of perspectives on ethnic identities and embodiment of stereotypes such as the "Hot Latina" (Borland, 2009). Past research shares that men lead in salsa, but salseras (women who dance salsa) experience their role as followers as empowering. Borland claims that for these women, embracing the "Hot Latina" stereotype allows them to rewrite that role, transforming it from a supporting character into a leading one and thereby creating a space in which they

can express themselves bodily, without fear of recrimination or the unwanted advances of men (Borland, 2009). This finding help shaped and transform the conversation around women's agency through the participation of their following position in salsa dancing.

Schneider observed a phenomenon of self-othering by non-Latin dancers to explain how this outsider perspective valued an "authentic Latin identity" to be exhibited by Latin dancers (2013). This illumination is particularly interesting as it makes implications that gender intersects in this context with a construction of "authentic" Latin identity. This work relates to the concept of "tropicalization" termed by Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman's. Tropicalization refers to the creation and circulation of dominant stereotypes about Latin America and Latin Americans, defining it as "to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values" that are then circulated via texts and mass media (Aparicio & Chávez-Silverman, 1997). Sometimes, the process is enacted by First World observers upon the Third World, and these, they argue, are just further "instances in a long history of Western representations of the exotic, primitive, other" - representations that often have an erotic component (Aparicio & Chávez-Silverman, 1997). This scholarly work calls us to reevaluate perspectives and consider the colonial gaze placed upon bodies of color that are fetishized and eroticized.

On the other hand, it has been revealed that this tendency to convey authenticity in salsa dancing creates potential division within the Latinx community. In ethnographic research conducted in nightclubs in Los Angeles, California explores the politics of

Latinidad within salsa communities (Garcia, 2005). Garcia's work demonstrates how acts of exclusion exist within the popularly diverse practices of salsa dancing. She argues that as Latinx dancers embody their differences and affiliations, they compete with each other to place themselves within the parameters of a Latinidad constructed within Los Angeles. Through bodily analyses of competing performances of Latinidad in salsa clubs, she assesses how the politics of citizenship, immigration, and globalization intertwine with local nightclub hierarchies of racialized, classed, and gendered dance practices (Garcia, 2005). This examination exposes some of the harmful realities that exists within the construction of salsa dancing and pose questions concerning its accessibility and inclusiveness across non-Latinx communities as well as amongst the Latinx community.

Discourse on Salsa dancing outside of Latin America have also analyzed participants' gender performativity. Through ethnographic research and qualitative interviews conducted in both Sydney, Australia and Frankfurt, Germany, it was found that there was often a desire to reconstruct traditional heteronormative gender roles in salsa dancing (Schneider, 2013). The article discusses queer performances as non-heteronormative performances that do not adhere to 'traditional' gender roles. It was noted that some of the dancers practiced the "wrong" roles or changed positions that Schneider claims more to a non-romantic pairing than romantic or due to a sexual attraction. She explicates in many cases a 'teacher-student' relationship between two female dancers is constructed where the more experienced dancer performs the male part in order to teach steps to the less experienced dancer. She also admits that male dancers hardly dance with

each other as bodily contact between two men is subject to a rather strong taboo (Schneider, 2013).

This non-heteronormative pairing then becomes describes as unusual and consequently constructed as either “un-normal” or “comical.” However, this dismissal of queer attraction or romanticism, calls for further investigation as it opens a whole array of new questions. My research seeks to further examine these gender and ethnic phenomena among salsa partners in both queer and heteronormative spaces in San Francisco, California. This research will assess dancers’ performances in salsa dancing by using an intersectional lens across gender, race, ethnicity and other social constructs.

Theoretical Framework

Sociologist, Erving Goffman is recognized for using theatre performance in order to illustrate the importance of social interactions between individuals. He claims that individuals are always performing for an audience. The performer may be fully taken in by their performance or obtain pleasure in the fact that they can convince their audience to take them seriously. In order for the act to take place, there must first be a setting that will foster the performance. There must be a coherence between the setting and the performer’s appearance and manner. This theory asserts that people are constantly engaged in the process of "impression management," where each person tries to present themselves and behave in a way that is socially acceptable. In order for this to happen,

each person must have the same understanding of the situation, know what to expect from others and then be able to act accordingly.

Understanding Goffman's theories of performance will help guide the analysis of this research. There is a performative aspect that is exhibited in social dance. Thus, salsa dancing provides a setting in which the dancers may perform for themselves and for others. We must then consider how the dancer's appearance, meaning legible characteristics such as race, age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status influences their behavior with one another. This will be expanded upon in the results section of this work.

Method

Ethnography can provide an analysis of people, places, and their communities and identities through descriptive field notes. As someone who frequented salsa clubs, I wanted to further investigate the interactions I witnessed between the dancers. I immersed myself in a gay-friendly bar and heteronormative nightclub setting that provided access to each of my participant's social lives in a way that other qualitative research might not be able to provide. The visual data captures the behavior of individuals in the context of social dance providing stories that help identify what people actually do versus what they may say they do when attending salsa events. This section outlines the setting of each venue, participants and the procedure carried out in this research. I attended each venue three times for a total of six different observations throughout the season of Fall 2018. Each time I attended the venues, I observed part of the salsa dance lesson offered before the social dancing commenced. In addition to observing, I participated in the dancing which allowed me an opportunity to have informal interactions with other salsa dancers which I later added to my notes that I took on my cell phone after attending for a few hours after each field stay.

Community Description of Red Room

The Red Room is a considerably large and popular heteronormative salsa nightclub in the Bayview area of San Francisco with 3 different Latin genre playing dance floors (Salsa, Bachata and Kizomba or Latin hits). It is located in an industrial area on the outskirts of the city, a bit of an odd placement, next to various warehouses that you

could almost mistake it for one as well. However, lights are strung outside of the building indicating that it is open for business that guests line up along the ropes outside of the venue. The twenty-dollar entrance fee is typical of San Francisco club, however this cost may influence its accessibility to interested salsa dancers. If tickets are purchased ahead of time, customers can pay as low as ten dollars. This may provide variance in the dancers who attend across different socioeconomic backgrounds. Plenty of street parking is available, which is not typical of the city of San Francisco. Nevertheless, a sign hanging on the walls of the entrance warns its customers to be sure to not leave any valuable items in cars, a reminder of the realities of city life and crimes of theft. A Mexican food truck is the only other form of business opened right outside for those guests who work up an appetite after a long night of dancing. Its exclusiveness attracts mostly locals and regular salsa dancers or those interested in learning salsa rather than a crowd interested in drinking or partying like most other nightclubs in the City.

Upon entry, you can see on your left hand-side a rather extensive bar; their drinks are priced on the higher end attracting a clientele of higher socioeconomic status or perhaps in hopes of deterring individuals from inebriation. They have two bartenders available who seem to manage the bar adequately considering that this crowd is more interested in the dancing than drinking. On the bar, they have a sign that advertise their drinks specials that begin at \$10 and up. However, this special doesn't attract the clientele as most of the male patrons nearby are holding beers and a few others have water or a cocktail. In the other rooms near the dance floors, folks refrain from drinking (alcoholic

or non-alcoholic beverages) as these rooms tend to get full discouraging its customers from increasing their chances of bumping into someone and spilling an overpriced drink.

Across from the bar, in the other room, is the first and largest dance floor that contains a stage and a few loveseats or small couches alongside the walls. Before the nightclub opens its doors to the public, a male and female instructor offer both salsa and bachata lessons in this room for its attendees between 8:00pm and 10:00pm. They instruct the men and women to line up on opposite sides facing inward towards one another. After they've taught some of the basic footwork, they urge the male dancers to ask the female dancers to partner up for a dance then instruct that they will be rotating to the next partner (similar fashion to speed dating). There is a roughly about 20 to 30 couples during each observation. A few couples opt out of the rotating system, hinting at the exclusiveness of their relationship and lack of interest dancing with anyone else. Most of the men approach the women and introduce themselves before asking for a dance, this form of asking seems to be one that will typically follow for the remainder of the night in this nightclub. Once the lesson is completed, a live salsa band performs on the stage for the remainder of the night. From the dance floor, dancers are able to see into the windows above towards the back of the room which showcases another dance floor containing strobe lights and a DJ. The main room also has an exit at the back, allowing guest to visit the second dance floor that plays bachata. This room is much smaller and dimly lit and is usually the hottest room filled with several bachateros (people who dance bachata). Stairs are located in the corner of this room so that dancers may have access to the upstairs

dance floor. Each dance floor exudes a different ambiance, allowing the guests to easily navigate each space according to their own free will.

Participants in Red Room

The participants observed in the club reflect the metropolitan nature of San Francisco that consisted of individuals from ethnically and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. The age range was from mid-20's to late 50's; the average consisting of individuals in their 30's. Each visit I observed the male instructor dressed in a business attire such as a suit or a nice button-up, slack, and dressy shoes. In contrast, the female instructor wore dresses or tightly fitted pants and a small crop top that fashioned off her waist along with her dancing heels (professional dancers typically wear these heels because they have a shorter stem making them more comfortable for dancing over a longer period of time).

Most of the men and women follow this manner of dress but there are also individuals who are dressed in relax attire such as men in sweatpants and women in yoga pants or workout attire. The heels for the female dancers' hint to their level of experience with salsa dancing; women who are looking to dance more seriously tend to wear the designated salsa heels or more comfortable shoes while some women may dress in higher heels and tighter clothing. Participants who attended the salsa lesson appeared to be White or people of color who were of non-Latin descent. However, after the lesson concluded, there was an increase of Latinx individuals who arrived throughout the night.

The crowd was also evenly made up of individuals who appeared as men and women danced typically in a male-female pairing.

Community Description of La Granada

The second venue is a gay-friendly bar in the Mission District which historically has been described as a neighborhood populated by Latinx in San Francisco. However, gentrification has impacted the Mission, resulting in fewer Latinx owned businesses, clients and residents. La Granada is located on Mission Street, situated near other bars and local services. On the outside, the rainbow flag is displayed above the entrance of this smaller establishment. There is also an entrance fee of ten dollars. Like the first venue, clients are welcomed by a stocked bar with drinks special starting at six dollars. Most of the crowd in this establishment, tend to be drinking more than at the other space.

Overall this venue, is more affordable than the nightclub which may speak to its location and the people who attend this bar. There is also a pool table, some stool chairs and a few guests mingling in this area. In comparison to the Red Room, this bar is much smaller however just as inviting, if not more, with a sign visible that reads, "All Sizes, all colors, all cultures, all genders, all beliefs, all types, all people, safe here." The back doors lead to the patio area. There is a deck filled with more bar stools facing the concrete area, which serves as the main dance floor and where most of the people can observe other dancers. There is a higher platform surrounded by trees and accented with more rainbow flags that serves as a stage for its musicians. There are a few tables with

chairs scattered on the ground level. In the back right-hand corner, there is a food stand that offers small bites for those hungry customers.

In a room located back up on the deck that is not connected to the bar's entrance is where two male instructors offer salsa classes to its' attendees from 3:00pm to 4:00pm. There is a much smaller group of attendees at this lesson than at the Red Room, around six to ten couples. Most of the guests who attend the workshop are White or non-Latin descent. There are more same-sex partnerships in this venue, however there are still male-female partnerships observed throughout the evening. During each of the field stays at La Granada, in the earlier hours, the space seemed to reflect one that was lacking persons of color or Latinx as well as queer folks. Once the lesson is completed, the salsa band would commence and people surrounding the dance floor would begin to dance. Once the salsa band started, there was an increase of queer and Latinx dancers. The environment is noticeably more relaxed than at the nightclub, more drinking, eating and mingling. The folks who dance here are much more free spirit that communicates freedom and acceptance amongst the community.

Participants at La Granada

As aforementioned, the gentrification of San Francisco's Mission District has shifted the visibility of Latinx culture in its neighborhood. Perhaps, this history may explain why the participants observed during the lesson at La Granada were mostly white or of non-Latin descent folks. However, after the lesson concluded, there was a more visible presence of Latinx and Spanish speaking individuals who entered later in the

evening. The two male instructors were dressed more casually; one wearing jeans and a button-up shirt, and the other wearing jogger pants. The attire of this crowd tended to be more relaxed, perhaps, due to the nature of the venue and the time of day. The men dressed more casual in their denim jeans and t-shirts. There were few women who attended in fitted dresses and heels (not professional dancing heels). However, there were more women who wore jean pants and sneaker like shoes or other clothing that would be identified as male clothing.

Unlike the Red Room, the instructors encouraged the new dancers to pair off whichever way they would like according to the position they were interested in learning, either leader or follower, and did not direct the men to ask the ladies to dance. The average age of dancers was a bit older than at the nightclub, falling in between late 30's and 40's. The ratio of male to female attendees was unevenly distributed reflecting roughly about sixty-five percent male and thirty-five percent female. Most of the partnered dancing I observed were men dancing with other men. The women who did dance with partners mostly danced with men, where I noticed there was a visible lack of women dancing with other women.

Procedure

Socializing and mingling with participants was a part of the study's procedure. I was interested in how couples would choose their partners and tried to look at how individuals connected among different or similar social categories such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class language etc. I engaged in informal interactions with other

salsa dancers during each field visit which contributed to the analysis of this work. I took notes of my observations and recorded the data on my cell phone. In order to avoid suspicion from guests or to avoid making anyone uncomfortable, being on my cell phone could be viewed as an appropriate behavior in this environment.

I typically tried to record data before dancing with any of the participants. For instance, I would sit on the couch when the lesson was going on in the first nightclub and would add a short note. Here is an example on one occasion:

An Asian woman appearing in her 20's dressed in a romper smiles and approaches the White man sitting on couch next to me and offers to teach him how to dance. He agrees and they laugh as she shows him the basic steps.

When I was asked to dance, I would put my phone away and join my partner on the dance floor. The interactions I had with individuals would be recorded later in the evening or when I returned to add further notes. I would revisit most of my notes the next day and add more detail to them while it was still fresh in my mind. After I had finished six different observations, I began to review the notes and noticed that some of the interactions between the participants shared similarities or patterns. These similarities found in the observations allowed me to create themes which will be discussed in further detail in the results section.

Results

The observations conducted in this study resulted in themes that examine performances among heteronormative and queer salsa dancing communities in San Francisco, California. The themes capture the idea of performance and will be separated into ethnic performance and gender performance. There is obvious overlap between the two themes and sexuality and when appropriate one will be highlighted in an area over the other. The performative aspect of salsa dancing invites an audience and dancers to assess the dancers' movement and interactions on and off the dance floor. Using Goffman's ideas of performance as a theoretical framework reveals how various dancer perform salsa in response to their sexual motives. The individuals exhibited in each venue are not only assessed on how well they perform the steps, but on their ability to perform as a desirable partner. The identities of the dancers lead to a performance that coincide and participate in heteronormativity in order to gain sexual gratification out of the dancing partnership

The mixing of Latinx culture in a dominantly Anglo society shaped the theme of ethnic performance. It evaluates what is being said about the dancers' and by who it is being said and why they are able to say that. Ethnic performance showcases the way Latinx culture is discursively practiced in the States among each of these salsa communities which becomes responsible for conceptualizing the role of a Latin lover. The Latin Lover analyzes the ways in which the dancer chooses to sexualize themselves or others as a way of performing characteristics associated with Latinx culture. Although

salsa is a part of some Latinx culture, its widespread has resulted in discrepancies of the dance itself that are interpreted differently across each dancer. This role demonstrates how constructs of sexuality, gender and ethnicity interrelate and are dependent on one another in order to perform this identity.

Gender performance considers the ways in which the dancers portray notions of masculinity and femininity in salsa. Subthemes were created to demonstrate the ways in which dancers performance relied on the constructs of gender. The subtheme of discourse evaluates the language used by individuals to describe the positions used in salsa dancing, more specifically the language used by the dance instructors. The second subtheme analyzes the attire worn by dancers to better understand expressions of maleness and femaleness displayed in salsa. Bodily movement is the third subtheme to arise which interrogates the ways dancers have access to their partners bodies that reify traditional gender roles.

Red Room: Ethnic Performance

Latin Lover and Ethnic Performance

Perceptions of the perfect salsa dancer are influenced by cultural notions belonging to Latinxs that render certain dancers as sexually desirable subjects. The dancers in this space comprise of multiethnic communities, some belonging to the Latinx community and many who did not. The interactions between Latinx and non-Latinx people resulted in an imagining of the perfect Latin Lover that served as a sexual motivation for some dancers. In the Red Room, i witnessed a group of dancers from a

local dance studio in San Francisco perform a dance for the audience. The attendees gather around to watch the dancers, some holding up their phones ready to record the performance. The four Latina women are dressed in dark blue dresses accented with rhinestones, high heels and a bright shade of red lipstick. Their male partners join them also fashioning a dark blue pant suit that is slightly unzipped exposing some of their chest. At the end of the performance, the audience cheers and a White woman nearby looks over to her friend and comments on their performance. “Wow, they all looked so sexy, so natural, could you imagine my white ass up there trying to dance like that?”

The differentiation made by the White woman between herself and the performers suggests that the performance has been evaluated as a representation of an ethnically other activity. The use of the word “natural” to describe the performer’s appearance and movements as sexy demonstrates how gender, ethnicity and race interrelate with one another shaping ideas of Latina woman. Implications of Latina/xs as “naturally” sexy, maintain values rooted in the White society casting marginalized folks as hypersexual individuals.

Similarly, nuances of ethnic performance are exhibited between by Latinxs and non-Latinxs that render some dancers unattractive or incapable of being a Latin lover. The overlap of gender, sexuality and ethnicity dictate the couples performance. The example below was taken from the smaller dance floor in the Red Room on a separate occasion:

A group of men stand near the couple dancing on the floor. The couple seem aware that they have an audience, and the non-Latinx male partner pulls in the petite White woman with blonde hair. He dips her and she extends her leg into the air. She flashes a smile as she returns to an upright position at the male gazers just a few inches away from her and raises her hands up to strike a pose. However, one Latino spectator comments, “They are trying too hard. Yeah, the gringa dances well, but it’s a bit much.”

The couple’s bodily movement and gendered performance would make claims that a sexual motive does exist between the couple. However, the male spectator’s comment problematizes cultural differences drawing a divide between certain salsa dancers. The word “gringa” is used among Spanish speakers to describe a light-skinned/ White person and or non-native Spanish speaker, and may sometimes be used as a negative connotation depending on the tone. His use of the word “gringa” in this context does negatively impact the couples performance. His evaluation of the dance leads us to believe that their ethnic performance falls short of sexual attraction due to their legible markers as non-Latinx persons.

Red Room: Gender Performance

Discourse and Gender Performance

The discursive language used in each of the salsa lessons by the instructors and the participants in the Red Room created a discourse that emphasized a direct correlation

between sexuality and gender. The assignation of leader and follower are presented by the instructors as fixed characteristics outlining the dancing partnership that would reflect gender hierarchies. The male dancers are assigned positions of the leader, while female dancers were allocated to the follower position. An example of this can be seen from the following field note taken from the Red Room:

The male and female instructor advise men and women to face opposite one another. Then, the male instructor tells the men that they will need to search for a partner since they are the leader. The female instructor jokingly tells the female dancers to wait and look pretty. She laughs lightly, and says, “the men will come to us ladies!”

This example demonstrates how the instructors’ choice of words outlined the positions of leader and follower as fixed positions for men and women. The instruction from the male dancer reifies societal values that suggests that men are the leaders. Consequently, the responsibility of leading pressures men into thinking that they must take the initiative if they not only wish to dance with women but sexually arouse their partner belonging to the opposite sex. Similarly, the female instructor propositions the ladies to take a more submissive role where they are expected to wait until a partner finds them suitable or attractive enough to dance with. The advisement for women to appear attractive for the consumption of their male partner implies that a sexual attraction is not only typical between male and female dancers, but necessary in order to gain a dancing partner.

Attire and Gender Performance

Most of the dancers in the Red Room portrayed their conceptions of masculinity and femininity by the articles of clothing they chose to fashion. Within this space, individuals perform their conceptions of gender identities in order to meet their goals of attracting a dancing companion. The fashion worn by most of the female dancers consisted of clothing associated with femininity such as dresses, skirts, cropped shirts, and heels. While their male counterparts dressed in more seemingly masculine apparel such as t-shirts, button-up, vests, slacks or jean pants. On one occasion, I witnessed a female dancer change her wardrobe. She arrived during the dance lesson wearing a long sweater and flat boots while carrying a small black bag with her. She sat on the couch and quickly pulled off her boots and removed short salsa heels from her bag. She removed her sweater revealing a small cropped red shirt that exposes her midriff and white jean shorts and then walked out to the dance floor.

The transformation above exemplifies the performance some women willingly participate in hopes of attracting a male suitor. She is aware of the gendered performance she must participate in as a female salsa dancer. The ways in which women display their conceptions of gender are accentuated by their feminine apparel. Notably, the women who did dress in more androgynous clothing still attracted dancing partners, but not as often as the women who played into the performance of their femaleness. This suggests that women and men are keen on reproducing societal norms that value heteronormativity and find it sexually satisfying.

Bodily Movement and Gender Performance

As salsa became highly popularized in the States, choreography and salsa lessons have shifted the ways in which dancers move on and across the dance floor. The dancers in the Red Room used similar techniques such as the fashioning of one's hands and feet that conveyed certain identities belonging to men and women. The evening I visited the Red Room, I witnessed a couple begin to dance very closely. The woman with the short black hair is facing the audience and raises both her hands above her head as if striking an inverted genie pose and the tall gentleman places his hand on her hips. She flashes a smirk at the male audience, as he pushes off of her hips turning her forcefully to face him. She stays embraced in his arms for a few moments. He steps away from her and places the palm of his hand on her midriff manipulating her belly into a body roll.

The couple's passionate bodily performance demonstrates how they both choose to behave in a way that typically permeates heteronormative relationships. The woman's body is manipulated and controlled by her male partner so that he expresses his male dominance over her. Although she appears to have no control over her own body, she smiles as if she enjoys being overpowered by him. Her smile to the male audience hints at her level of awareness as she plays into her gendered performance. Their performance beckons the attention of a male audience inviting them or enticing them to imitate and conform to hegemonic values in attempt to gaining sexual satisfaction. More specifically, the male gazers find the her more desirable as she enacts the gendered role of a

subservient woman. Ultimately, she and other female dancers who carry out this gender performance will receive more offers to dance serving the sexual goals of each partner.

La Granada: Ethnic Performance

Latin Lover and Ethnic Performance

Although salsa is a part of some Latinx culture, its widespread has resulted in a variation of the dance itself that are interpreted differently because of the identities marked legible on each of the dancers. Whether an individual is a part of the Latinx community or not is conceptualized differently across all individuals. The interactions or verbal expressions made among non-Latinx and Latinx dancers demonstrate how one's ethnic performance influences their sexualization. The following field note was taken one afternoon at La Granada:

Near the dance floor, an Afro-Latino man with curly hair wears a pair of white pants that are tightly fitted. His blouse is unbuttoned at the top exposing his gold chain around his neck. He looks to his partner as the music begins and starts to sing the lyrics to Hector Lavoe, "Mi Gente" and shimmies his shoulders. As the two men begin to dance, a white spectator near me comments to the woman beside him, "Look at this Papi, I can't stop staring at his ass."

The man described above shows how the dancer is quickly sexualized for his ethnic performance. The way he appears commands attention from onlookers that quickly sexualizes his body for his dress, skin tone, and participation in the dance. The spectators

comment reveals how the dancer's dress is responsible for his attraction, as he cannot stop looking at his bottom. Also, his use of the word "papi" demonstrates that the white male dancer is aware or somehow knows that he is a part of the Latinx community. Perhaps, the spectator is able to reach this conclusion from the dancer singing the Spanish lyrics of "Mi Gente." The distinction drawn between the Latinx and the non-Latinx dancer problematizes conceptions of cultural differences that explicitly render Latinxs dancers as desirable partners.

La Granada: Gender Performance

Discourse and Gender Performance

The promotion of non-heteronormativity at La Granada resulted in instructions and informal conversations by dancer that attempted to resist traditional gender roles. The positions of leader and follower were not associated with gender pronouns and were presented as viable options for all dance patrons. The instructors did not address the male audience as the leaders or the female dancers as the follower instead they direct the dancers to all line up facing them. Once they demonstrate the basic step to the class, they ask the leaders to line up to the left and the followers to line up on the right. They urge the students to pair off with someone who has chosen a different position than theirs. They encourage the uneven number of leaders and followers to be open to trying another position so that everyone has a chance to dance.

Asking participants to try out a different position contends with heteronormative teachings found in salsa and provides individuals with an opportunity to transgress binary constructs. The removal of gender may extinguish or heighten individuals motives that are linked to sexual satisfaction. Essentially, the dancer is exposed to both positions granting them more access to partners on the dance floor. Queering the salsa partnership frees dancers from enacting gender performances in juxtaposition to their sexual desires.

However, the transgressive act of deconstructing gendered discourse rarely extended beyond the dance lesson between dancers. Some dancers attempted to negotiate their positions but struggled with maintaining their selected role. The following note illustrates the obstacle of removing gendered positions between same-sex partners:

The male dancer wearing a vest approaches another male dancer wearing a bright yellow shirt and asks him to dance. Before they begin dancing, they negotiate positions and his partner indicates that he'll be the leader. He proceeds to offer the vested man a turn. A few moments later, the leading man stumbles with his partner and the vested man assumes the leading role. Both men laugh off this minor mistake, but once the dance is finished, they retreat to opposite ends of the dance floor and do not return to one another.

The struggle to maintain the dancer's position suggest that sexual desire dictate the salsa partnership. Although the dancers intended to resist traditional gender roles by negotiating and communicating what role each partner wanted, the dancers sexual motives did not coincide which was exhibited when the dancers switched roles within the

dance. Subsequently, the lack of interest to return to a previous partner demonstrates how sexual attraction conforms to heteronormativity. Same-sex partnerships successfully attain sexual satisfaction when each dancer performs their dichotomous gender roles.

Attire and Gender Performance

Interestingly, the apparel worn by most of the individuals at La Granada also reflected dancers' conceptions of masculinity and femininity that reinforced heteronormative roles. Manliness and womanliness were conveyed by dancers' clothing, accessories and hair style. Individuals who presented or dressed more "manly" than their counterparts, were observed in the leading position. The field note below was observed at La Granada:

The self-proclaimed lesbian woman, Nina, wears her hair short with jerry curls, a white button-up and plaid dress pants. She approaches the curvy woman wearing red lipstick and high heels standing nearby to ask her to dance. She takes her hand and pushes her body across the patio floor. A male gazer wearing a coral t-shirt approaches and comments on how well they dance together. The lesbian woman asks him to dance. She assumes a leading position and he follows without hesitation.

The woman in the example above performs as the leader with each of her partners without negotiating her role. Both of her partners displayed more feminine attributes allowing them to perform the salsa dance despite the discrepancy of sexual preferences

between the dancers. Contrary to the Red Room, women displayed their masculinity through means of dress or certain hairstyles at La Granada as a way of navigating their sexual motives and position as leader. Female dancers who appeared more masculine were typically partnered with women who appeared more feminine like the example above and not with other dancers who conveyed a more male appearance. Also, male dancers who appeared in tighter clothing, or certain colors associated with femininity resulted in their participation as the follower with their female partner. Thus, same-sex partnerships and opposite- sex partnerships on the dance floor conformed to heteronormativity.

Bodily Movement and Gender Performance

The movements that the dancers at La Granada enacted were similar to those found in Red Room. How dancers positioned their hands, swayed their hips, or played with their hair communicated expressions of maleness and femaleness. Nuanced behaviors off the dance floor also shaped gendered performances. For example, a man in a floral print button-up steps away from his partner in the blue blazer creating space between them on the dancefloor. He extends his pointer finger out to his partner and directs him to come to him in a teasing manner. They grin at one another and the man in the blazer looks intensely at his partner as his feet inch him forward. A couple of men stand nearby evaluating their performance and lean into one another as if they are sharing a secret about the couple.

The couple's flirtatious performance demonstrates how the movements of their bodies convey a sexual attraction due to their distinct oppositional roles. Pleasure arises out of the dancers' interaction for both partners. The male dancer wearing the blazer fulfills his duties as a "real" man by coming to conquer his submissive partner. The man in the floral top performs his femininity by happily waiting for his partner to touch his body. Their performance serves their sexual objectives by subscribing to heteronormativity through salsa dancing.

The male spectators are also drawn to the couple's gendered performance uncovering their sexual motives. The men who come into close proximity act out their maleness by seeking out a partner. They direct their gaze on the partner who is the follower. The dancer who is seen performing their femaleness continue to be asked to dance by these male spectators. The ways in which the dancers moved their bodies on and off the dance floor echo heteronormative attitudes situated in salsa spaces.

Discussion

The observations in heteronormative and non-heteronormative salsa communities in San Francisco served as a rich site to dissect the meaning behind the dancers' performances. The interrogation of dancers performed ethnic and gender identities draws conclusion on how these social constructs are interrelated with sexuality. The analysis of performance makes three things clearer about the dancers in each of these salsa communities. Dancers either want to be sexualized or inevitably are sexualize due to their ethnic and gender performances in salsa dancing. Dancers are drawn to this site because it provides them with an opportunity of carrying out their sexual attraction with others. Dancers meet their sexual goals through completed dance performances which adhere to heteronormativity in each of these salsa communities. However, the exploration and interpretations of the dancers' performances are limited to these salsa communities.

1. Sexualized Ethnic and Gender Performance and Salsa

The overlap of Latinx culture in a predominantly White society renders certain dancers as either desirable or undesirable partners. Social identifiers that are explicitly legible such as language spoken, race, or gendered behavior in ethnic performance shapes how dancers are sexualized. However, some of these dancers are unaware of this action as there was not an opportunity for them to hear the comments from other dancers. In both the heteronormative and queer spaces, I witnessed how individuals belonging to the

Latinx community were being sexualized by non-Latinx individuals. Dancers made explicit comments about the individual's body like calling someone a "papi" materialized the idea of the Latin lover. Latinx dancers are projected as the Latin lover which inadvertently sexualizes and marginalizes Latinx dancers because of its intersection in White culture. On the other end, we witnessed Latinx dancers assess the performance given by other non-Latinx dancers in which their comments about their race influence and intertwine with notions of ethnicity and eventually the sexualization of dancers.

On the other hand, dancers who play into gendered roles and are aware of their audience in salsa arguably want to be sexualized. Goffman's idea of performance and reality suggest that we are always aware of our identities that we perform for the audience. Part of the issue that becomes responsible for these gendered displays are due to the cultural and social discourse in the dance lessons themselves. The instructors become responsible for shaping ideas of leader and follower for those entering into the world of salsa dancing which make these behaviors explicitly known and accepted among their communities. The examples of dancers who smiled to the audience demonstrate their knowledge in this exchange. Cultural notions of salsa extrapolate from gender performance offering the dancers sexual gratification as their audience participates in their sexualization.

2. Sexuality Gender and Salsa

Salsa dancing is deeply impacted by sociocultural norms and attitudes that project it as a social opportunity to engage with potential romantic partners. Interestingly, each of

the spaces illustrate how dancers' sexual motives are the driving force behind the salsa partnerships. Couples who danced well with one another committed to roles that appeared to complement one another because they were in oppositional positions. The dancers being able to dance well with one another not only made the dance more enjoyable, but it also made it more enjoyable for the audience to watch. This is demonstrated by the onlookers who offer encouraging comments to the dancers or among themselves. The dancers who struggled to maintain their positions stipulates a lack of attraction when the partners refused to return to one another. Couples who were seen dancing together exclusively or returning to the same partner were also more likely to establish a more intimate relationship. Dancers were either seen exchanging numbers, hugging and/or kissing one another which may suggest that there is a strong desire for dancers to carry out their sexual goals.

3. Heteronormativity and Salsa

Regardless of the dancers' sexuality, most of the performances conformed to traditional gendered partnerships witnessed in non-heteronormative and heteronormative salsa communities. In La Granada, male dancers who displayed more masculine characteristics through physical appearance and bodily movement sought out partners of the same sex who presented more feminine. Regardless of transgressive acts exhibited in the removal of gendered discourse, dancers were still seen in this space conforming to heteronormativity with their partners. Similarly, female dancers who also performed more masculine assumed the gender role as leader when dancing with their partners who

played into their femininity. In the Red Room, men who assumed leading position sought out and approached women who appeared more feminine by waiting and playing the submissive role. The female or male dancers who play into their femininity do this in aims of attracting more masculine driven dancing partners. This can be assumed by the number of dances the dancer who performs their femininity receives from their partner and others after they are recognized for their gendered performance. We can infer that sociocultural attitudes are responsible for dictating how sexual motives are carried out in the performance of each salsa dancer that align with heterosexist ideologies in each of the spaces.

4. Unique Location

San Francisco offers an opportunity to explore issues of ethnicity, Latinx culture and sexual identities. As such, the two salsa clubs I observed are unique and offer insight into issues of sexuality, ethnicity and gender. My identity of a mixed Latina-American and participation in salsa dancing over the years made objectivity difficult at times. The history that outlines salsa as a site for sexual conduct was not the history that I was familiar with. I wanted to know what made salsa dancing a site for sexual motives to be carried out by individuals in each of the spaces. Participating in salsa dancing with other dancers provided a better understanding of dancers' motives in each of the spaces. The proximity and interaction with one another heightened sensitivity to data that contributed to its overall analysis.

In qualitative research, observational data collected is subjected to various determining factors that can fluctuate between each field visit. With that in mind, the analysis is limited to the behaviors of the dancer or verbal expressions by the audience in these spaces which lacks the cognitive perceptions held by the individual. Assessing individuals as either Latinx or non-Latinx presented its challenges as there are no accurate visual characteristics that may guarantee that an individual really is from the Latinx community or not. The spaces themselves had the potential to change depending on the day or hour and influx of participants which could result in other findings or meanings taken from the dancers' performances.

5. Conclusion

In closing, the analysis conducted in this research of San Francisco heteronormative and queer salsa communities served as a fertile site to uncover the cultural contingency of heteronormativity and also integrates the analysis of performance on gender and ethnicity with sexual desire and motive. Finally, it can be concluded that culture, ethnicity, living conditions, language, gender, class and sexuality become responsible for the performances that dancers submit themselves to which leaves it open to a whole array of new questions. What would these performances look like in rural areas of the States or in Latin America? How could gender performance be expanded upon to reflect salsa dancing among trans or non-gender conforming dancers? There are still many that remain unanswered even though they are central to the organization of social dance.

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