The career advancement experience of gay Mexican American men in corporate America

by

Andrés Franco

B.B.A., Northwood University, 2014
M.Ed., American InterContinental University, 2020

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2025

Abstract

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Haijun Kang

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Dedication

For Clara A. Carter — “Cookie.” Rest in Peace.

This is my commitment,

my modern manifesto —

for all of us

who never got the chance

to tell our story.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

In 2023, Latinos of any race made up nearly one-fifth of the U.S. population, making them the second largest group after non-Latino Whites (U.S Census Bureau, 2024). They also have the second highest labor force participation rate among all racial and ethnic groups (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Despite diversity and inclusion efforts, Latinos still face workplace hostility and discrimination, limiting their career mobility. The same can be said for members of the LGBTQ+ community.

While research highlights the positive impact of minority-supportive policies on workplace innovation (Hossain et al., 2020), including that of the LGBTQ+ and Latino populations, it fails to address the specific needs of individuals with intersecting marginalized identities, particularly that of gay Mexican American men. This niche and unique group seems well represented from the outside but lacks academic research to support this.

This chapter introduces the complex intersectionality of the Latino and LGBTQ+ populations, focusing specifically on the experiences of gay Mexican Americans in the United States and how their identities influence career advancement. It explains the rationale for selecting a qualitative narrative inquiry approach and outlines the research methodology.

Background

In the United States, Latinos of any race made up almost one-fifth (19.5%) of the population in 2023, making them the second largest group after the non-Latino White population. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). In addition, as of 2020, Latinos had the second highest percentage of labor participation among all other races and ethnicity groups, with a labor force participation of 65.6%, only .01% behind Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders, who had 66.7 % in 2020. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

Despite being the second largest group comprising the overall U.S. population and the second largest group with labor force participation, Latino individuals in the United States often face unique challenges in the workplace due to their ethnic identity. These challenges can include discrimination, stereotyping, and cultural barriers that impact their professional development and opportunities for advancement (Sanchez Cumming, 2022). Research has shown that Latino employees may experience lower rates of promotion and higher rates of job dissatisfaction compared to their non-Latino counterparts (Hoynes et al., 2012).

These issues can be compounded by a lack of representation in professional settings, like formal management, leadership positions, and mentorship opportunities, which are crucial for career growth. Crist Kolder Associates (2023) of America's Leading Companies examines the backgrounds and measures of the turnover of C-Suite Executives in a portfolio of companies from the Fortune 500 and S&P 500. The report looked at Fortune 500 and S&P 500 (674 Companies; 1,602 Executives); out of the 1,602 executives, only 44 (2.8%) of those C-Suite executives were Latino Crist Kolder Associates, 2023).

Organizations are increasingly recognizing the value of diversity and inclusion for improving workplace culture and business outcomes (Hossain et al., 2020). However, policies and practices often need to address the specific needs of individuals with intersecting identities. Research shows that marginalized groups face systemic barriers to career advancement. For instance, studies by Catalyst (2023) and the Human Rights Campaign (2021) reveal that LGBTQ+ individuals and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in leadership positions. By providing insights into the career advancement experiences of gay Mexican American men, this study can inform more comprehensive diversity initiatives that better support all employees—contributing to efforts to create equitable career progression opportunities.

Latino Culture in the U.S

Latino culture in the United States is diverse and deeply interwoven into the social, political, and economic fabric of the country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2024), Latino origin is defined not by race or language but by a person's heritage, nationality, or ancestry from Latin America. Therefore, the term "Latino" encompasses individuals from many different countries, including Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic, each with its own unique cultural practices that result in a complex and non-monolithic cultural landscape. Shared elements such as language remain a central unifying trait, with Spanish being predominant, though indigenous languages and Portuguese (among Brazilians) are also spoken (Lopez, 2013).

In addition, Latino families are generally collectivist, emphasizing interdependence through familial bonds and religious beliefs as well as multi-generational households and strong familial loyalty (Padilla, 1995). Yet, the broad term of "Latino" often homogenizes distinct identities and experiences. The tendency to group all Latinos under a singular banner can erase important cultural, social, and historical differences, particularly for Mexican Americans who despite making up the largest proportion of Latinos in the U.S. are frequently subject to negative stereotypes and underrepresentation in research (Valenzuela, 2016). Among the many communities encompassed by the term "Latino," Mexican Americans represent both the largest subgroup and one whose distinct cultural experiences, contributions, and challenges merit closer examination within the broader U.S. context. Therefore, a more accurate analysis of Mexican Americans requires a disaggregation of the broader Latino identity, allowing for deeper exploration of cultural influence and challenges.

Mexican American History in the U.S.

Mexican Americans represent approximately 62.3% of the U.S. Latino population, making them the largest Latino subgroup (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Their presence in the U.S. dates back centuries, and their cultural influence is particularly visible in the American Southwest, where Mexican customs have shaped regional cuisine, architecture, and community traditions (Muscato, 2017). However, this long-standing presence has not protected the community from marginalization.

While Mexican American culture is vibrant steeped in language, food, faith, and family, it is also deeply shaped by the experience of resistance and resilience. Cultural values such as familismo (family loyalty), respeto (respect), and personalismo (valuing personal relationships) contribute to a strong sense of identity and belonging. However, these same cultural values can also interact with systemic inequities in complex ways, especially in relation to education and employment.

As explored by Yosso (2006), Mexican American identity is historically entangled with exclusion from educational institutions, racialized labor markets, and narratives of deficiency. Yet, narratives in her work highlight resistance, resilience, and community-based knowledge, disrupting deficit frameworks. These narratives shed light on cultural wealth such as linguistic skill, familial knowledge, and aspirations that challenges the dominant views of success and intelligence in the U.S.

Mexican Americans in the Workplace

Mexican Americans, and particularly Mexican American men, experience complex barriers in workplace inclusion and advancement. Educational disparities are a key concern. De Brey et al. (2018) report that Mexican American men have lower rates of high school and college

graduation compared to their non-Latino White and even some other Latino peers. These disparities are linked to broader systemic issues such as under-resourced schools that funnel students into non-college pathways and cultural unease between home and school environments.

As a result, Mexican American men are overrepresented in low-wage, physically intensive jobs, including construction, agriculture, and service sectors (Kochhar, 2020). Wage gaps persist, with Mexican Americans earning less on average than their White counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Economic barriers such as lower household income and limited access to professional networks further reinforce these disparities (Lopez, 2020). Discrimination and racial profiling continue to hinder upward mobility.

Despite these obstacles, Mexican Americans contribute significantly to the U.S. economy and demonstrate resilience in navigating structural barriers. Entrepreneurial growth among Mexican Americans has increased, and representation in professional and managerial roles is gradually rising (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). As Yosso (2006) emphasizes, focusing solely on deficits obscures the cultural strengths and perseverance that drive many Mexican Americans to succeed despite systemic barriers.

Emerging research on community cultural wealth highlights how Mexican American men leverage bilingualism, bicultural negotiation skills, and extensive familiar networks as forms of social and navigational capital that create tangible value in multicultural workplaces (Gonzales & Gonzales, 2022). Long-run mobility studies further reveal that, when afforded comparable access to opportunity, Mexican American families achieve some of the fastest absolute income gains across generations, evidence that the potential for upward mobility exists even if mainstream scholarship seldom highlights these success trajectories (Chetty et al., 2018).

Cultural expectations around gender and identity, particularly the concept of machismo, also shape workplace behavior and self-perception. While traditional machismo values may emphasize stoicism and strength, more recent interpretations among younger generations include expressions of emotional intelligence and familial care (Arciniega et al., 2008). This evolving framework creates tensions but also opens space for new models of male leadership and vulnerability in both professional and personal areas.

Mexican American Identities in the U.S.

Mexican American identity is shaped by intersecting dynamics of race, language, gender, sexuality, class, generation, and region. Identity is not fixed but constructed through ongoing interactions with institutions, families, and broader cultural forces. As Torres et al. (2012) argue, Mexican Americans often negotiate between heritage, culture, and dominant U.S. norms, a tension that becomes more complex in spaces where cultural belonging and racialization intersect. Therefor identity formation can be a matter of assimilation or resistance, but both require fluid movement across multiple societal settings.

This complexity is particularly apparent in LGBTQ+ Mexican American communities, where intersecting forms of marginalization, homophobia, racism, and classism shape identity in unique ways. Hames-García and Martinez (2011) emphasize that queer Latino identities are not outside of Latino culture but deeply embedded within it. Gay Mexican American men often develop hybrid identities that draw from both cultural heritage and queer critique. These identities are often forms of resilience and affirmation, however they also involve emotional and social negotiation, especially when faced with exclusion from both mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces and traditional cultural contexts.

In addition, generational differences further expand how Mexican Americans identify. While some embrace the politically charged label Chicano, rooted in civil rights and cultural pride (Rosales, 1996), others prefer Mexican American to express a more bicultural experience. Second and third generation individuals may identify simply as American or Mexican, depending on their upbringing, community, and level of cultural or language connection. Additionally, the term "no sabo kid", often applied to youth who lack Spanish fluency, has emerged as both a critique and point of identity. As Callesano (2023) and Holguín Mendoza et al. (2023) note, this label circulates in digital spaces and classrooms, shaping how language loss is viewed and internalized within the community.

At the other end of the spectrum are Whitexicans, light-skinned, often middle- or upper-class Mexican Americans who may benefit from proximity to whiteness. García (2025) and Llamas-Rodriguez (2024) explore how Whitexican identity functions as a performance of selective cultural engagement, often reinforced by Eurocentric beauty standards, digital media aesthetics, and racial privilege. As Christiansen (2024) argues, these forms of identity can reproduce hierarchies within the Mexican American community, particularly around ideas of authenticity, racial legitimacy, and visibility.

These varying forms of identity like Chicano, Mexican American, no sabo, Whitexican, or simply American highlights the complexity of belonging and the many ways Mexican Americans make sense of identity in a racialized and hierarchical society. These identities reflect not only how individuals discover themselves culturally but also how they respond to shifting ideas of race, language, and community. These patterns of negotiation, exclusion, and creative self-definition are not unique to Mexican American communities. They also resonate with broader dynamics of identity formation across LGBTQ+ cultures in the U.S. where intersecting

forms of marginalization and resilience similarly shape how people live, express, and politicize who they are.

LGBTQ+ Population in the Workplace

In the United States, the LGBTQ+ population has been increasingly recognized in demographic studies and social research. As of 2023, approximately 7.1% of U.S. adults identified as LGBTQ+, reflecting a growing acceptance and visibility of sexual and gender minorities in American society (Gallup Inc., 2022). Despite this increased recognition, LGBTQ+ individuals often face significant challenges in the workplace related to their sexual orientation and gender identity.

LGBTQ+ individuals encounter various forms of discrimination and bias that can hinder their professional development. Research indicates that LGBTQ+ employees are more likely to experience harassment, exclusion, and unequal treatment in the workplace compared to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts (Human Rights Campaign, 2021). These adverse experiences can lead to lower job satisfaction, higher levels of stress, and decreased opportunities for career advancement (Badgett et al., 2020). Studies have shown that LGBTQ+ employees are less likely to be promoted and more likely to conceal their identities at work due to fear of discrimination (Badgett et al., 2020).

A significant barrier for LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace is the lack of representation in leadership roles. Data from the Human Rights Campaign (2021) and Catalyst (2023) reveal that LGBTQ+ individuals are underrepresented in senior management and executive positions. This underrepresentation can limit access to mentorship and networking opportunities, which are crucial for career progression. The absence of visible LGBTQ+ leaders

can also perpetuate a culture where non-heteronormative identities are marginalized or stigmatized.

Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the importance of diversity and inclusion in fostering a positive workplace culture and enhancing business outcomes. Organizations that implement inclusive policies and practices not only support the well-being of LGBTQ+ employees but also benefit from diverse perspectives and increased innovation (Hossain et al., 2020). Comprehensive diversity initiatives that address the specific needs of LGBTQ+ employees and other marginalized groups are essential for creating equitable career progression opportunities.

Understanding the unique experiences and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace can inform more effective diversity and inclusion strategies. By examining the career advancement experiences of LGBTQ+ employees, particularly those with intersecting identities such as gay Mexican American men, researchers can provide valuable insights for creating supportive and inclusive work environments.

Gay Men in the Workplace

Like the Latino population, the LGBTQ+ community is a melting pot of identities. In the United States, the gay male population constitutes a significant portion of the broader LGBTQ+ community. As of 2023, approximately 7.1% of U.S. adults identify as LGBTQ+, with a notable proportion identifying as gay men (Gallup Inc., 2022). The culture of gay men in the U.S. is diverse, encompassing a wide range of experiences, identities, and expressions. This cultural diversity is reflected in various social, artistic, and political contributions that have enriched American society. However, gay men often face unique challenges in the workplace that can impede their career advancement opportunities.

Studies have indicated that openly gay men frequently face biases that affect their job performance evaluations, opportunities for promotion, and overall career satisfaction (Badgett et al., 2020). Because of this, the pressure to conceal one's sexual orientation to avoid potential negative repercussions can hinder authentic self-expression and professional relationships. This concealment, often referred to as "passing" or "covering," can lead to heightened stress and a sense of isolation, negatively impacting job performance and overall well-being (Badgett et al., 2020).

In addition, systemic discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals, including gay men, remains pervasive in many social institutions, including the workplace. Research shows that openly gay men are often subject to stereotypes and prejudices that can adversely affect their professional trajectories. For instance, they may be perceived as less competent or less suitable for leadership roles, which can result in lower rates of promotion and higher instances of job dissatisfaction compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Human Rights Campaign, 2021). These biases not only limit career advancement but also contribute to a hostile work environment, which can discourage gay men from being open about their sexual orientation.

The influence of systemic racism further complicates the professional experiences of gay men, particularly those who are also members of racial or ethnic minorities. Existing literature highlights that systemic racism infects key social institutions and significantly influences dominant race-related attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors (Martin & Apugo, 2021). This intersectionality means that gay men of color may face compounded discrimination based on both their race and sexual orientation, exacerbating the challenges they encounter in achieving career advancement.

Despite advancement in legal rights and visibility, many gay social spaces and events remain predominantly white-centered. Scholars have documented how racism is embedded in gay nightlife, community leadership, and social programming, reinforcing the idea that "gay" is synonymous with "white" (Han, 2007). Han's (2007) study of cruising culture demonstrates that gay men of color are often excluded from bars, clubs, and community events through subtle and overt practices from social exclusion to the erasure of people-of-color narratives in LGBTQ+ historical commemorations. Similarly, Giwa and Greensmith (2012) found that queer service providers of color in Toronto perceived mainstream Pride events and professional networking mixers as segregated: people of color were either tokenized or entirely overlooked. This white-centric orientation not only perpetuates feelings of exclusion among LGBTQ+ people of color but also limits their access to the social capital and mentorship networks critical for career advancement. Such exclusion underscores the importance of centering the experiences of gay Mexican American men in this study.

Recent social justice movements have highlighted the negative impact of political agendas and policies on marginalized groups, including the LGBTQ+ community. Despite progress in some areas, many gay men continue to struggle for equality and recognition in both society and the workplace (Hill, 2006). The lack of comprehensive federal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity means that in many states, gay men can still face legal discrimination in employment, housing, and other areas of public life (Human Rights Campaign, 2021).

To address these challenges, organizations must implement inclusive policies and practices that specifically support LGBTQ+ employees. This includes providing diversity training that addresses unconscious biases, creating supportive networks and mentorship

programs, and ensuring that company policies explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Research has shown that workplaces that actively promote diversity and inclusion not only support the well-being of LGBTQ+ employees but also benefit from enhanced innovation and improved business outcomes (Hossain et al., 2020).

While societal attitudes towards gay men have improved over recent decades, significant challenges remain, particularly in the realm of career advancement. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to combat systemic discrimination and to create work environments that truly value diversity and inclusion. By fostering supportive and equitable workplaces, organizations can help ensure that gay men can thrive professionally.

Gay History in the U.S.

Understanding the historical context of gay men in the United States provides significant insight into the present-day challenges and identities they navigate today. One of the most pivotal moments in gay history was the Stonewall Riots of 1969 in New York City. The riots represented a significant turning point, symbolizing resistance against systemic oppression and marking the birth of modern LGBTQ+ activism (Carter, 2004). Prior to Stonewall, gay men frequently experienced police raids, arrests, and pervasive social stigmatization, with little visibility or organized advocacy.

Following Stonewall, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed increased political mobilization and visibility for gay men. However, these advancements faced a significant setback with the emergence of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the early 1980s. The epidemic disproportionately impacted gay communities, leading to widespread stigma and discrimination, fueled by misconceptions about HIV transmission and moral judgments (Shilts, 1987). During this period, activism

intensified, demanding governmental accountability and medical research, profoundly shaping the trajectory of gay rights movements (Gould, 2009).

In recent decades, gay history has seen significant progress, including the landmark legalization of same-sex marriage nationwide with the Supreme Court's Obergefell v. Hodges decision in 2015 (Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015). Despite these significant strides, gay men continue to navigate ongoing issues of acceptance, representation, and equality, influenced by the history of exclusion, activism, and resilience.

The Gay Men Identity in the U.S.

The identity of gay men in the United States is multifaceted and continuously evolving, shaped by personal, social, and historical implications. The intersectionality of identities further complicates the identity of gay men, particularly when considering the additional layers such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. Intersectionality underscores how overlapping identities can create compounded experiences of discrimination and privilege, significantly affecting one's personal and professional life (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, gay men of color often confront unique forms of discrimination that intersect both racial and sexual biases, influencing their identity development and social experiences (Bowleg, 2013).

Cultural expressions and community affiliations significantly influence gay male identity, providing individuals with opportunities for belonging, advocacy, and empowerment. Cultural phenomena, such as Pride celebrations, LGBTQ+ media representation, and community-specific spaces, contribute to a collective sense of identity and resilience among gay men (McCormack, 2012). However, internalized homophobia and societal stigma continue to impact identity formation, leading many gay men to navigate tensions between authenticity and societal expectations (Meyer, 2003).

By exploring these identities, we can address the nuances of gay men lived experiences, particularly as they intersect with other marginalized identities, in this case Mexican American men. To do this, intersectionality and social identity theory was used to highlight the importance of recognizing and addressing the layered complexities that shape the shared identities amongst gay Mexican American men in our society, today.

Theoretical Framework

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality to highlight how overlapping social identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation merge to shape distinct experiences of discrimination and privilege. Initially devised to address single-axis frameworks that failed to capture the compounded barriers Black women faced, intersectionality has since become a pivotal lens in social justice and academic circles. By challenging the notion that social identities operate in isolation, intersectionality underscores the complex interplay of identity categories that can amplify or mitigate marginalization.

In this study, intersectionality functions as the guiding theoretical framework, shedding light on how being gay, Mexican American, and male collectively influences career advancement opportunities and obstacles. Building on Crenshaw's foundational insights, this approach recognizes that individuals with multiple marginalized identities often encounter unique challenges not addressed by models that focus on single categories like race or sexual orientation alone (Cho et al., 2013). By centering on gay Mexican American men, the research examines how various facets of identity interact in the workplace.

Over the years, researchers have expanded intersectional theory to capture the multidimensional nature of marginalized experiences in professional settings. Bowleg (2008; 2020) reveals that individuals who simultaneously navigate identities such as being a person of

color and identifying as LGBTQ+ frequently face compounded forms of discrimination, leading to heightened workplace stress and diminished job satisfaction. Similarly, Jones et al. (2017) affirms that intersecting oppressions can create more severe outcomes than single-axis discrimination, thus reinforcing the need to study identities in tandem rather than in isolation.

Despite the growing body of intersectional research, scholars have noted persistent gaps when it comes to examining Latino cultural factors alongside sexual orientation (Gerena & Pilkay, 2024). This omission has led to an underrepresentation of gay Mexican American men in career advancement studies, limiting our understanding of how race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender intersect to produce distinctive workplace experiences. Padilla (E.d.) M. (1995) has offered one of the few explorations of gay Latino men, emphasizing that systemic racism and homophobia jointly impede their professional growth.

To complement intersectionality, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is incorporated to further illuminate how self-concept is influenced by membership in social groups—such as ethnic and sexual-orientation communities. Social Identity Theory posits that group affiliation not only informs personal identity but also shapes how individuals perceive, experience, and navigate inclusion, exclusion, advancement, and discrimination within organizational settings. Integrating this theory strengthens the analysis by focusing on the relational and psychosocial dimensions of identity formation, belonging, and career advancement.

A key strength of intersectionality and social identity theory lies in moving beyond additive models that simply tally marginalizations or privileges (Windsong, 2018). Instead, they emphasize that identity categories interact to form nuanced lived realities and that group affiliations further shape individuals' self-concepts (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This dual

framework is vital for understanding gay Mexican American men's workplace trajectories, which encompass a spectrum of challenges, successes, and coping strategies rather than a uniform narrative of struggle. By applying these complementary theories, organizations can develop truly inclusive diversity initiatives tailoring interventions to the full range of overlapping identities (Human Rights Campaign, 2021). Therefore, these theoretical lenses help to examine how intersecting race and sexual orientation influence career advancement, addressing a critical gap in the literature and grounding the forthcoming problem statement.

By applying intersectionality and social identity theory to the experiences of gay Mexican American men, organizations can develop truly inclusive diversity initiatives that recognize how overlapping social identities and group affiliations shape employees' career trajectories. Although substantial research has examined race or sexual orientation in isolation, few studies investigate how these identities converge in the context of career advancement. This omission overlooks the distinct forms of marginalization and resilience found at their intersection (Bowleg, 2008). By recognizing this gap, the study aims to broaden the understanding of workplace experiences for marginalized groups in corporate American and help inform organizations on interventions that holistically support employees, mitigate discrimination, as well as enhance well-being and productivity.

Problem Statement

Despite highly publicized investments in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, many marginalized communities continue to experience discrimination and workplace barriers that hinder their career mobility and professional growth (Clart, 2024). These challenges are often magnified for individuals whose identities intersect across race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. While DEI efforts are meant to foster inclusion, they have come under political

scrutiny in recent years, raising concerns about their long-term impact and sustainability (Clart, 2024). This is happening despite research suggesting that minority-supportive policies are positively correlated with workplace innovation and firm performance (Hossain et al., 2020).

In addition, a national survey of 338 Latinx LGBTQ employees found that 58 percent had experienced workplace discrimination or harassment, 46 percent had been denied a raise, hire, or promotion because of their LGBTQ status, and 26 percent had left a job for similar reasons (Williams Institute, 2024). However, research rarely centers the experiences of gay Mexican American men in corporate settings. Existing research on intersectionality has primarily focused on the experiences of Black women or, those of White or Native American individuals within LGBTQ studies, (Han, 2007; Giwa & Greensmith, 2012). Furthermore, most of the research found tends to group all Latino identities together despite individuals of Mexican descent comprising roughly 60 percent of the U.S. Latino population (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Research has examined the impact ethnicity or sexual orientation have on career advancement, but few studies explore how these identities intersect to shape the lived experiences of gay Mexican American men in the workplace. As a result, little is known about how this population navigates corporate structures and career advancement opportunities. This creates a gap that limits scholarly understanding and in turn, the practical implementation it can have on creating inclusive workplace strategies.

Therefore, addressing these gaps in literature are both important and timely as it examines how gay Mexican American men navigate career advancement within corporate America. By highlighting the voices of individuals who have bene excluded from existing research, this study aimed to provide valuable insights that can both add to intersectional frameworks and offer evidence-based insights that can inform more inclusive workplace

practices and policies. Through personal narratives, the study offers a deeper understanding of how intersecting marginalized identities shape career trajectories and how organizational systems either support or hinder advancement.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this narrative study is to explore how gay Mexican American men make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America through the lens of their lived experiences. By centering their voices, this study seeks to understand how the intersection of ethnicity and sexual orientation influences their professional paths, barriers, and resilience strategies. Through personal narratives, the study offers a deeper understanding of how intersecting marginalized identities shape career trajectories and how organizational structures either support or hinder their advancement.

Research Question

This study aimed to explore gay Mexican American men career advancement. The study answered the following research question:

1. How do gay Mexican American men make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America through narratives?

Overview of Research Design

Methodology

Narrative inquiry was used as the primary methodological framework, complemented by testimonio as a culturally grounded and decolonizing methodological tool. At the heart of narrative inquiry is a story or a collection of stories (Murray, 2009). Therefore, narrative inquiry worked for exploring the deeply personal and subjective nature of lived experiences, because at its core, narrative inquiry centers stories as a way of making meaning, both individually and

collectively. As Bruner (1991) and Polkinghorne (1988) suggest, individuals come to understand themselves, others, and the world around them through the stories they tell. These narratives are not only descriptive but serve as a tool for constructing identity, particularly within the complex interplay of cultural and social contexts. By focusing on the stories of gay Mexican American men, narrative inquiry enables a nuanced exploration of how participants make sense of their opportunities or lack thereof for career advancement in corporate America.

To further deepen this exploration, testimonio was incorporated as a complementary methodological practice. Rooted in Latinx and Chicanx epistemologies, testimonio offers a critical, political, and relational way of bearing witness to lived experiences particularly those shaped by systemic oppression (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Unlike traditional autobiographical approaches that center individualism, testimonio acknowledges the collective nature of struggle and the sociopolitical dimensions of identity. It provides a platform for participants not just to narrate life events, but to situate their experiences within broader histories of marginalization and resistance.

By integrating testimonio within a narrative inquiry framework, this study not only captures the individual trajectories of gay Mexican American men but also centers their voices in a way that challenges dominant narratives and reclaims agency. Through this dual approach, the research aims to produce a holistic, critical, and transformative understanding of identity, career progression, and social belonging in the context of corporate America and brings visibility to narratives that are often excluded from dominant discourse.

Participants

The participants in this study were gay Mexican American men with at least five years of professional work experience in corporate or professional sectors. To capture the complexity and

depth of identity as it relates to career advancement, participants had to meet five inclusion criteria: gender identity (male), sexual orientation (gay/homosexual), ethnic identity (Mexican American), age (25–50), and professional workplace experience (minimum of five years). These criteria were designed to ensure alignment with the purpose of the study and to allow for rich, in-depth narratives that reflect the intersectional experiences of the target population.

Participants were recruited using social media platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn, where a digital call for participants flyer was shared. The flyer included a brief description of the study, a QR code, and a hyperlink directing interested individuals to a secure eligibility questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of closed ended yes/no questions to confirm eligibility and asked for the participant's name and email to enable follow-up communication. Only individuals who met all five inclusion criteria were contacted for the next steps in the research process.

Given the narrative inquiry design of the study, a small, purposefully selected sample size was appropriate and intentional. Narrative inquiry emphasizes the depth and meaning of lived experience rather than breadth or generalizability. Therefore, the target sample size was set between five to nine or until saturation occurred - when no new information was being added to the coding categories or emerging theory (Bazeley 2021). The considerations such as the quality and richness of data, the scope of the research, the depth of interviews, and the use of narrative methodology were also used to inform decisions about when data collection was sufficient (Morse, 2000). This aligned with qualitative standards that emphasize flexibility and responsiveness in the research process.

The study excluded individuals who identify solely as bisexual, transgender, or any other sexual orientation or gender identity that does not align with the defined criteria. Additionally, participants who are newly entering the workforce or employed in roles with limited potential for upward mobility (certain blue-collar positions) were excluded to ensure that participants have had the opportunity to encounter career advancement opportunities and challenges in professional settings.

Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, with each participant taking part in two interviews. These interviews served as the primary method for capturing participants' counter-stories regarding their lived experiences as gay Mexican American men and how their intersecting identities, particularly ethnicity and sexual orientation influence their career advancement. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent, and observational notes were taken throughout the process.

Interview questions explored experiences of perceived bias, discrimination, or empowerment in the workplace as they relate to intersectionality and social identity. Since this study dealt with identities shaped by overlapping systems of marginalization, participants were encouraged to reflect on both personal and institutional influences of their career journeys.

Reflection along with the narrative inquiry approach, I was able to preserve each participant's unique story, while also identifying common themes across participants. Observations made during the interviews further helped in contextualizing the narratives, allowing for a more accurate, detailed, and authentic representation of each participant's experiences.

Data Analysis

The process of a narrative inquiry is rarely linear and often involves back and forth movement between different stages of data collection and interpretation. As a researcher, I am responsible of continuously refining my understanding by revisiting the data, reflecting on emerging patterns, and allowing themes and categories to happen organically. Hence, qualitative research's flexibility and iterative nature make it a powerful method for exploring complex phenomena like identity-based phenomena. To further ensure a thorough and authentic interpretation of the data, the analysis in this study followed four specific steps, aligned with the goals of narrative inquiry and corresponding methodologies.

The first step involved transcribing and organizing the audio recordings of the interviews into a text format. I used Sembly AI to transcribe interviews, summarize key points, and assist in organizing data by participant. This tool also supported secure storage of both audio and transcript files within a password-protected online account. Transcripts were reviewed alongside handwritten notes taken during interviews to ensure accuracy and gather any contextual details not reflected in the recordings.

Given the bilingual backgrounds of participants, it was expected that portions of the interviews were conducted in Spanish or may alternate between English and Spanish. Rather than translating these portions immediately, I preserved the original Spanish-language responses within the transcripts to maintain the authenticity of voice and cultural expression. During the coding process, these responses were tagged and analyzed in their original language, with contextual translations provided when necessary for interpretation. This approach respects the participants' linguistic choices and aligns with the values of both narrative inquiry and

testimonio, which emphasize voice, cultural nuance, and resistance to research assimilation norms.

The second step involved coding and thematic analysis, which was conducted using ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software. ATLAS.ti allowed for systematic organization, labeling, and categorization of large volumes of textual data such as interview transcripts. In this study, codes were applied both deductively (based on the research questions and theoretical frameworks) and inductively (emerging from participants' narratives). The software allowed for efficient tagging of key phrases, observations, and patterns across transcripts, including bilingual content.

ATLAS.ti also facilitated thematic analysis by helping visualize the relationships between codes, identifying recurring themes, and grouping related concepts into thematic clusters. Thematic analysis was focusd on participants' reflections about their sexual and cultural identity, career advancement, experiences of inclusion or exclusion, and the navigations of perceived or real bias in professional environments. To manage the dataset effectively, transcripts were then broken down into smaller analytical folders. Visual tools such as tables and diagrams supported the identification of patterns across narratives.

The third step included reflexive journaling. Throughout the interviews and data analysis process, I maintained a researcher journal to document analytic decisions, evolving insights, and any potential biases. As an insider researcher, this journal was a critical tool for maintaining reflexivity, acknowledging my positionality, and enhancing the transparency and trustworthiness of the findings.

The final step in the analysis process was participant validation (member-checking). Preliminary interpretations and themes were shared with participants to ensure their accuracy and

quality. Feedback received was incorporated into the final thematic findings, where appropriate, to strengthen the authenticity of the study and how participants' stories were represented.

In addition, for a narrative study, it was also important to be able to distinguish between similarity and contiguity. According to Bazeley (2020), similarity involves comparing codes or themes across participants, while contiguity involves recognizing the sequencing, relationships, or juxtaposition of ideas within a narrative. Coding alone cannot replace the contextual understanding gained through a close reading of the data. Therefore, coding was paired with connecting strategies to preserve the meaning and structure of each participant's narrative. The naming of codes was done carefully, acknowledging that the same word may hold different meanings depending on context and individual experience.

When coding narrative data, careful attention was given to things such as shifts in tone, pauses, repetitions, or emphasis that might indicate critical turning points in a participant's story. Following Bazeley's (2020) guidance, I used color-coding, annotations, memos, and narrative summaries (leveraging ATLAS ti.) to reflect on what the participant may have been conveying through their narrative stories, emotional cues, or language choices.

By following these four-steps as my analytical process, this study aimed to provide a strong, culturally sensitive, and deeply nuanced understanding of how gay Mexican American men make sense of career advancement through the lens of their intersecting identities.

Limitations and Delimitations of Research

This study includes both delimitations and limitations that acknowledge potential constraints on the findings. In qualitative research, particularly narrative inquiry, it is important to differentiate between delimitations which are the intentional boundaries established by the researcher and limitations, which are external factors that may affect the interpretation of the

results. That said, this study contains several delimitations the first one being the exclusive focus on individuals who identify as gay Mexican American men, which excludes those who identify solely as bisexual, transgender, or who identify as part of other racial, ethnic, or sexual identity groups.

Next, the study is limited to participants who are proficient in English, Spanish, or both, to ensure both the language and cultural integrity of their narratives. Third, participants must have a minimum of five years of professional experience in the workplace where career advancement is possible, thereby excluding individuals who are new to the workforce or employed in roles with limited upward mobility. Fourth, recruitment was conducted primarily through U.S.-based social media platforms (by me as the researcher – who's primary network is Texas based) this may limit geographic representation across the broader population.

Finally, the study employs a narrative inquiry approach using in-depth interviews as the sole data collection method, intentionally excluding other forms of data such as quantitative surveys or observational fieldwork to preserve the depth of participant storytelling. These delimitations were put in place to maintain a focused, culturally responsive, and identity-specific exploration of the lived experiences of the selected population, in alignment with the research questions.

Despite these boundaries, several limitations may influence the interpretation and scope of the findings. Recruiting participants who meet the strict inclusion criteria may prove challenging, which could lead to a sample that does not fully capture the diversity within the broader population of gay Mexican American professionals. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data has the potential for response bias, as participants may intentionally or unintentionally present themselves in a desirable manner or withhold sensitive information.

Participants' career experiences may also vary widely depending on the industries in which they work, and this study does not account for those sector-specific differences.

Finally, as an insider to the community being studied, my own positionality, background, and lived experience may influence how data is interpreted. While efforts such as reflexive journaling and member checking was used to moderate this influence, complete objectivity in qualitative research is inherently difficult to achieve. Acknowledging these limitations and delimitations is essential in the transparency of the study and provides important context for understanding its findings. By recognizing this, the study can more accurately contribute to the existing body of knowledge on identity, career advancement, and intersectionality within corporate spaces and offer practical recommendations while remaining grounded in the realities of the research process.

Researcher Background

My motivation for this study is deeply personal and rooted in my lived experience as a gay Mexican American man. Raised in a working-class household where my parents held multiple jobs to support our family, I developed a strong intrinsic drive to succeed. As a first-generation college student, my educational journey became my ticket to venture out into the world, one that shaped my identity, broadened my worldview, and opened doors to professional advancement. Today, as the Director of Learning and Development for a Fortune 500 company, I often reflect on the privileges, challenges, and turning points that have shaped my career. I am deeply aware that my experience is not universal, and it is this awareness that fuels my desire to explore the narratives of others who share similar identities but may have encountered different obstacles or opportunities. This study represents both a scholarly inquiry and a personal commitment to raising the voices of gay Mexican American men navigating corporate spaces.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 explores the intricate interplay between ethnicity and sexual orientation in shaping the career advancement of gay Mexican American men, grounded in Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework and informed by social identity theory. National statistics show that Latinos comprise nearly one-fifth of the U.S. population and rank second in labor-force participation, yet Latinos and LGBTQ+ employees remain utterly underrepresented in leadership. In addition, prior research confirms that single-axis approaches obscure the compounded discrimination faced by those with multiple marginalized identities (Bowleg, 2020; Jones et al., 2021). However, empirical work that centers gay Mexican American men is scarce (Gerena & Pilkay, 2024), and existing studies reveal that racism and homophobia jointly impede their professional mobility (Padilla, 1995). These gaps emphasize the need for nuanced,

intersectionality research that can inform more comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

To address this gap, the chapter uses narrative-inquiry methodology supplemented by testimonio, that explores the narratives of gay Mexican American men and how they make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America. I recruited 7 eligible participants and conducted two semi-structured interviews per participant. These interviews, after being conducted and transcribed – transcriptions were then coded in ATLAS.t. During coding, bilingual passages were analyzed in their original language to preserve cultural nuance and reflexive journaling, and member-checking helped reinforce integrity of the study.

Delimitations included the population focus, language proficiency, and reliance on narrative data, while limitations acknowledge self-reported bias, career and industry variations, recruitment difficulty, and researcher subjectivity. Chapter 1 lays a transparent, culturally responsive foundation for highlighting how intersecting identities shape career trajectories and for generating practical insights that advance organizational inclusion. As Gerena and Pilkay (2024) discuss, continued research on these overlapping dimensions is vital for truly understanding and mitigating the compounded challenges confronting gay Mexican American men in professional settings.

Definitions

Career Advancement - Career advancement refers to the upward progression in one's professional life, typically characterized by increased responsibility, higher status, and improved remuneration. This concept encompasses various activities such as promotions, skill development, networking, and obtaining additional education or certifications to enhance job performance and open new career opportunities (Noe-Bustamante, 2022).

Gay Men - Gay men are individuals who identify as male and are romantically, emotionally, and sexually attracted to other men. This identity is part of the broader spectrum of sexual orientations and is a key component of the LGBTQ+ community (Herek, 2000).

Race - Race is a social construct that categorizes people based on physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture. It has no basis in biology but significantly impacts individuals' social experiences, opportunities, and treatment within society (Omi & Winant, 2014).

Ethnicity - Ethnicity refers to shared cultural practices, perspectives, and distinctions that set apart one group of people from another. It is often based on common nationality, tribal affiliation, religion, language, or cultural heritage (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007).

Latino - Latino is a term used to describe individuals in the United States who trace their heritage to Latin American countries. This includes people from Central and South America, Mexico, and Spanish-speaking Caribbean nations, irrespective of race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024).

LGBTQ+ - LGBTQ+ is an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and others. It is used to represent a diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities beyond heterosexual and cisgender norms (Human Rights Campaign, 2021).

Mexican American - Mexican American refers to individuals of Mexican descent who are born in or reside in the United States. This identity encompasses a rich cultural heritage influenced by both Mexican and American traditions and experiences (Padilla (E.d.) M., 1995).

Sexual Orientation - Sexual orientation is an enduring pattern of romantic or sexual attraction to individuals of the same sex, the opposite sex, or both sexes. It encompasses a spectrum including heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and other orientations (Arciniega et al., 2008).

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The Latino population in the United States represents nearly one-fifth of the U.S population, with a labor force participation rate of 65.6%, the second highest of any racial or ethnic group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Despite this demographic and economic significance, Latino individuals continue to encounter systemic workplace discrimination and barriers to upward mobility compared with their non-Latino White counterparts (Hoynes et al., 2012; Sanchez Cumming, 2022). Diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives have expanded over the past decade in response to growing calls for equity. However, many still fail to acknowledge or address the compound challenges faced by individuals whose identities are both racialized and queer (Catalyst, 2023; Human Rights Campaign, 2021).

Gay Latino men in particular, navigate complex sociocultural dynamics that span multiple, and often conflicting, communities. Tajon (2009) described how they live within three distinct cultural "neighborhoods", mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces, the broader Latino community, and the predominantly heterosexual White mainstream. Each of these spheres imposes different expectations, norms, and pressures. These conflicting demands add to the already multifaceted reality of individuals with intersecting identities. For gay Mexican American men, a population situated within a prominent subgroup of the Latino community, this intersectionality introduces unique stressors, especially when navigating corporate environments where professional advancement often depends on conformity to dominant norms.

The layered pressures of racism, homophobia, cultural loyalty, and professional expectations frequently force gay Mexican American men into internal and external conflict as they attempt to succeed in workplace cultures that were not built with their identities in mind.

Career advancement pathways for this group are often opaque, exclusionary, or misaligned with their lived experiences and values.

This study examines how gay Mexican American men's narratives reflect the impact of their intersecting identities on career advancement. By exploring literature on Latino workforce representation, LGBTQ+ experiences, and the intersectionality of these identities, the review aims to uncover the cultural nuances, structural barriers, and potential opportunities that shape career trajectories for this understudied group. The chapter concludes with the integration of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as the guiding frameworks for understanding how these men construct and navigate their professional lives.

Latino Representation and Implications for Gay Mexican American Men

Latinos are one of the fastest growing and most diverse demographic groups in the United States. As of 2023, they comprised nearly one-fifth (19.5%) of the total population, making them the second-largest group after non-Latino Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). This population encompasses a rich mix of national origins including Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, and Dominican communities and reflects a wide spectrum of educational achievement, generational status, and language preferences. Within the labor force, Latinos are a powerful presence, with over 30 million individuals employed across industries such as construction, agriculture, healthcare, and professional services (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024).

Despite this economic influence, Latino representation diminishes dramatically at higher levels of organizational leadership. While Latino workers make up approximately 18% of the workforce, they account for only 12% of managerial positions and above, signaling a persistent

gap in upward mobility (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). According to Crist Kolder Associates (2023), Latinos represent just 2.8% of C-suite executives across Fortune 500 and S&P 500 companies, and only 44 out of more than 1,600 leaders identified as Latino. Although Latino men hold a slightly higher share of managerial and leadership titles than Latina women, both remain significantly underrepresented at the executive level. Key contributing factors include systemic barriers such as limited access to mentorship and support, exclusion from high-visibility projects, and implicit stereotypes questioning leadership capability (Catalyst, 2023).

Despite the focus being on Latino men, specifically Mexican American men, literature highlights that Latina women face even steeper obstacles. Despite being one of the fastest-growing entrepreneurial groups in the U.S., they hold fewer than 3% of executive roles in major corporations (Crist Kolder Associates, 2023). This is significant for this study as their underrepresentation speaks to the compounded effects of intersectional discrimination, where gender and ethnicity combine to limit access to advancement opportunities. These gaps prompt broader questions about how additional marginalized identities such as sexual orientation, further create gaps within the Latino workforce.

Chapter 1 introduced data highlighting that 58% of Latinx LGBTQ employees have experienced workplace discrimination or harassment, and nearly half (46%) report being denied promotion specifically due to their queer identity (Williams Institute, 2024). These realities reflect the persistence of the so-called lavender ceiling, which restricts upward mobility for queer employees of color and signals a critical gap in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts that fail to address the complexities of intersecting identities.

Given these widespread inequities, it is essential to explore the experiences of specific subgroups within the broader Latino population to understand how compounded forms of

marginalization operate in the workplace. Mexican Americans are the largest Latino subgroup and offer a particularly valuable lens for examining these disparities. Their demographic prominence, distinct cultural heritage, and unique socioeconomic positioning contribute to nuanced career advancement experiences that are not fully captured by generalized discussions of Latino identity. Furthermore, for gay Mexican American men, the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation introduces layered barriers that requires closer scholarly attention. Understanding their experiences can highlight the broader systemic changes necessary to create equitable pathways for all underrepresented professionals.

Challenges of Mexican American and Gay Mexican Americans in the Workforce

Mexican Americans represent approximately 60–62% of the overall U.S. Latino population and have maintained deep-rooted historical, cultural, and demographic ties to states such as Texas, California, and Arizona for generations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). As a bicultural group, Mexican Americans have long navigated the interplay between Mexican heritage and American sociocultural norms often in contrast to more recent Latino immigrant groups for whom assimilation and immigration status are more prominent concerns in workforce narratives.

Despite high labor force participation that routinely exceeds the national average, Mexican Americans remain underrepresented in professional and leadership roles (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). That is due to data showing that Mexican American men are particularly concentrated in industries such as construction, manufacturing, and service sectors which are fields that often provide economic stability but limited upward mobility (Lopez, 2020). Unfortunately, structural barriers such as lower educational attainment, lack of mentorship, and persistent stereotyping contribute to this disparity. Only about 20% of Mexican Americans aged

25 and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to one-third of all U.S. adults (de Brey et al., 2018). These educational gaps directly impact career trajectories and access to leadership opportunities.

Yosso's (2006) introduced what he called the Community Cultural Wealth model which challenges deficit-based narratives by highlighting the cultural, linguistic, and social assets that Mexican Americans bring to the workplace such as aspirational resilience and familial support systems (*familismo*). Research by Chetty et al. (2018) shows that when provided equitable access to opportunity, Mexican American families demonstrate some of the highest intergenerational mobility improvements. However, significant wage gaps and systemic biases persist. Kochhar (2020) reports continued income disparities between Mexican American and White male workers, while Arciniega et al. (2008) explore how evolving notions of machismo and blending emotional restraint with traditional provider roles, shape Mexican American men's workplace behavior and leadership potential.

It is also important to highlight that Mexican American women face even steeper challenges. Despite their high levels of entrepreneurship and increasing workforce participation, they remain severely underrepresented in executive leadership. Cultural expectations, caregiving responsibilities, and compounded intersectional discrimination contribute to their marginalization, with fewer than 3% occupying executive positions in corporate America (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021; Crist Kolder Associates, 2023).

This is important to note because the professional experiences of gay Mexican American men often mirror those of Mexican American women, as both groups navigate the compounded effects of intersectional marginalization. Like women in this subgroup, gay Mexican American men frequently encounter stereotypes, invisibility in leadership pipelines, and exclusion from

high visibility projects. Gerena and Pilkay (2024) note that cultural expectations around masculinity and family, especially within Latino communities can hurt the professional confidence and social capital of gay Latino men. These identity-based pressures can hinder access to mentorship, promotions, and belonging within corporate cultures.

While some gay Latino professionals may experience community support within LGBTQ+ spaces, Tajon (2009) points out that these men often jump through multiple sociocultural spheres, mainstream LGBTQ+ communities, Latino cultural spaces, and predominantly heterosexual white institutions each with distinct and often conflicting norms. This constant negotiation of identity intensifies professional stress and limits opportunities for authentic leadership development.

Unfortunately, disaggregated data on gay Mexican American men in the workforce remains limited. Daftary (2018) underscores the exclusionary effect of failing to capture granular identity data, which renders certain populations invisible within equity focused research and programming. As Hames-García and Martínez (2011) argue, meaningful inclusion demands analytical frameworks that consider the simultaneous impact of race, culture, and sexual orientation on workplace experiences.

It is also important to note that identity within the Mexican American community is not monolithic. In-group labels such as *Chicano* (reflecting political and cultural pride), *no sabo kid* (describing youth perceived as disconnected from Spanish fluency), and *Whitexican* (light-skinned, upwardly mobile individuals who benefit from colorism) reflect internal diversity and shifting social dynamics (Callesano, 2023; García, 2025; Llamas Rodríguez, 2024). While these distinctions are rarely acknowledged in corporate DEI programs, they influence how individuals experience belonging, mentorship, and advancement.

When gay Mexican American men navigate these layered identities, their career advancement is not only a matter of professional qualifications, it is also a negotiation of systemic inequities, cultural expectations, and organizational exclusion. Collins (2018) and Jones et al. (2017) stress the importance of dismantling such systemic barriers through targeted mentorship, culturally responsive leadership development, and proactive organizational inclusion efforts.

Finally, to fully understand the challenges faced by gay Mexican American men in the workplace, it is essential to situate their experiences within the broader literature on LGBTQ+ representation in professional spaces. Research shows that LGBTQ+ employees, especially those of color, face disproportionately high rates of discrimination, invisibility, and career stagnation (Williams Institute, 2024). These patterns, when viewed through the lens of intersectionality, reveal deep rooted organizational failures to foster truly inclusive and equitable environments.

Realities and Experience of LGBTQ+ Individuals in the Workforce

The LGBTQ+ population in the United States includes individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or other non-cisgender and non-heteronormative identities. Recent surveys indicate that approximately 7.1% of U.S. adults now identify as LGBTQ+, with visibility and self-identification particularly high among younger generations. Generation Z adults report significantly higher rates of non-heterosexual identity compared to older cohorts, signaling broader cultural shifts toward acceptance and recognition of identity fluidity (Gallup Inc., 2022). This growing visibility spans all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, reflecting the community's demographic diversity.

Despite increased visibility, systemic barriers remain prevalent. Legislative efforts aimed at restricting LGBTQ+ rights particularly those targeting transgender individuals and LGBTQ+

content in education has intensified in 2021 and 2022, contributing to heightened vulnerability and stress across both public and professional domains (Human Rights Campaign, 2021). LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly people of color and those from lower-income backgrounds, face compounded discrimination in housing, healthcare, and public services, along with increased exposure to violence and mental health challenges (Badgett et al., 2020).

Within the workplace, LGBTQ+ professionals navigate a complex landscape of inclusion and exclusion. Although many organizations have adopted diversity and inclusion (D&I) policies intended to support LGBTQ+ employees, implementation gaps persist. Studies show that LGBTQ+ individuals are underrepresented in managerial and executive roles, often due to discriminatory hiring practices, limited mentorship opportunities, and the prevalence of workplace microaggressions (Badgett et al., 2020). These factors contribute to what scholars have termed the lavender ceiling, a metaphor for the invisible barriers that hinder LGBTQ+ advancement in professional hierarchies.

Research further reveals that LGBTQ+ employees are more likely to conceal their identities at work, endure frequent microaggressions, and leave organizations that lack inclusive cultures (Badgett et al., 2020). These realities underscore the limitations of surface level D&I efforts that fail to account for the intersecting nature of identities. As Collins (2018) and Hossain et al. (2020) caution, diversity dashboards and training programs often collapse all queer experiences into a single narrative, overlooking how race, gender, and socioeconomic status shape workplace outcomes. For example, the workplace realities of a White gay man may differ significantly from those of a gay Mexican American man, whose experiences are shaped by additional layers of marginalization and cultural expectation.

Gay men face a particular set of challenges in career advancement. While some benefit from stereotypes that cast them as emotionally intelligent or creative, these assumptions can also restrict access to leadership by relegating them to niche roles in the arts or service industries (Hossain et al., 2020). Moreover, persistent biases around masculinity and leadership style contribute to their underrepresentation in executive pipelines. These dynamics reveal the need for targeted interventions that support diverse pathways to leadership for gay men and other LGBTQ+ professionals.

Despite these challenges, the benefit for organizations to adapt LGBTQ+ inclusion initiatives remains compelling. Organizations that adopt robust LGBTQ+ policies tend to experience higher employee engagement, greater innovation, and improved organizational performance (Hossain et al., 2020). However, simply creating these policies does not guarantee policy depth. Effective inclusion efforts must go beyond checklists and training modules to address structural inequities and intersectional gaps. Key strategies need to include culturally competent mentorship programs, the establishment of employee resource groups, and leadership accountability for diversity outcomes.

By recognizing the layered identities within the LGBTQ+ community particularly those of LGBTQ+ people of color, organizations can move toward more equitable and inclusive work environments. For gay Mexican American men, this means confronting the dual marginalization that stems from both racial and sexual identity, and developing workplace structures that affirm, rather than obscure, their complex realities.

Experience of Gay and Gay Mexican American Men in the Workforce

As mentioned earlier, gay men in the United States represent a distinct and significant subset of the broader LGBTQ+ spectrum, with increasing societal recognition contributing to

greater self-identification, particularly among younger generations (Gallup Inc., 2022). While the term “gay” is sometimes used broadly to encompass non-heterosexual identities, in most contexts it refers to men who are romantically or sexually attracted to other men. This group reflects wide-ranging racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity, yet they share common experiences shaped by gender norms, cultural expectations, and persistent stereotypes.

Within both research and corporate narratives, gay men occupy a contradictory space. On one hand, stereotypes portraying them as creative, emotionally intelligent, or fashion-forward have created visibility and opportunities in industries like fashion, hospitality, and the arts. On the other, these same stereotypes often pigeonhole gay men into non-leadership roles and away from high authority (Hossain et al., 2020). This phenomenon where queer individuals, particularly gay men, hit invisible barriers to executive advancement is commonly referred to as the lavender ceiling (Badgett et al., 2020).

The challenges faced by gay men in professional settings differ from those experienced by other LGBTQ+ subgroups, largely due to the intersection of gender expectations and traditional notions of leadership. Deep seated cultural ideals of masculinity and authoritative presence often exclude those who deviate from heteronormative expressions of male identity. As a result, many gay men report feeling pressure to conform or mask aspects of their identity in order to be perceived as leadership material.

These challenges are further compounded by race and ethnicity. Gay men of color, including gay Mexican American men, navigate multiple layers of marginalization that amplify exclusion from professional advancement pipelines. Martin and Apugo (2021) argue that systemic racism remains deeply embedded in even apparent inclusive or progressive institutions, placing additional burdens on queer professionals of color. National studies reveal that two-

thirds of queer professionals of color feel unwelcome in LGBTQ+ networking spaces, often dominated by white cultural norms (Han, 2007; Giwa & Greensmith, 2012). For gay Mexican American men, this means encountering barriers in both Latino and LGBTQ+ communities. Furthermore, homophobia and rigid gender roles within Latino circles can restrict mentorship and support, while racialization and colorism in LGBTQ+ spaces can obscure their visibility and limit support.

Research suggests that these intersecting identities like ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and cultural background do in fact create unique barriers to career advancement. While heterosexual Mexican American men already face challenges such as racial bias and limited access to leadership networks, they may still benefit from normative assumptions about their masculinity and sexual orientation in traditional corporate environments. On the other hand, gay Mexican American men often lack access to culturally competent mentorship and face stigma from both the majority and in-group population perspectives.

Addressing these disparities requires moving beyond a one size fits all diversity frameworks. Collins (2018) and others argue that inclusion efforts must account for the complexity of intersecting identities rather than treating LGBTQ+ professionals as a monolithic group. For gay Mexican American men, this means creating interventions that directly respond to their dual marginalization. Culturally responsive mentorship programs, inclusive support structures, and leadership development initiatives that challenge narrow definitions of masculinity are essential to dismantling the lavender ceiling and supporting equitable advancement.

Ultimately, recognizing and addressing the nuanced experiences of gay Mexican American men is critical to building truly inclusive professional environments. Their

underrepresentation of managerial and executive roles is not due to a lack of talent or ambition, but rather to systemic and cultural structures that have failed to accommodate their full identities causing limited opportunities for career advancement. Acknowledging this reality is a necessary step toward fostering workplace equity that works for all.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality and Social Identity Theory

This study is grounded in Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality, which suggests that categories such as race, gender, and sexuality interlock to produce unique modes of oppression and privilege. Originally developed to capture the compounded discrimination faced by Black women, intersectionality has since been applied to a variety of social identities, illustrating how overlapping categories cannot be understood in isolation (Cho et al., 2013; Bowleg, 2008, 2020; Windsong, 2018). Rather than adopting additive models like race and sexuality, intersectionality underscores how the merging of multiple identities results in distinct experiences.

For gay Mexican American men, intersectionality provides a powerful lens to examine how racism, homophobia, and cultural expectations, especially those surrounding masculinity intersect to shape professional and personal trajectories. These overlapping forces influence how this group navigates career advancement, organizational inclusion, and broader social belonging.

Neither a Latino only nor LGBTQ+ only framework is sufficient to fully understand these compounded challenges (Collins, 2018; Hames-García & Martínez, 2011).

To deepen this analysis, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is also integrated into the framework. While intersectionality explains structural power and systemic oppression, social identity theory offers insight into the psychosocial processes by which individuals derive self-esteem from group memberships and evaluate in-groups versus out-groups. In workplace

contexts, social cues like authoritative presence, code-switching, or participation in informal networks such as golf outings or affinity groups, often signal who belongs and who does not. When both ethnicity and sexuality mark someone as an outsider, stereotype threat and identity vigilance can drain cognitive and emotional resources, ultimately affecting performance and professional development (Jones et al., 2017; Bowleg, 2020).

This dual theoretical framework underscores how gay Mexican American men experience what has been termed the lavender ceiling noting invisible barriers to career advancement resulting from biases around sexuality and masculinity (Badgett et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2020). While stereotypes may cast gay men as emotionally intelligent or creative, these same perceptions often exclude them from roles demanding traditional authority or leadership presence. These dynamics are further intensified by racism and colorism, which can limit visibility within predominantly White LGBTQ+ spaces and create a sense of exclusion even in communities that claim inclusivity (Han, 2007; Giwa & Greensmith, 2012; Martin & Apugo, 2021).

In addition, Latino cultural adds layers of familismo, religious expectations, and traditional notions of machismo which can stigmatize non heteronormative identities, leading to marginalization within one's own ethnic community. As a result, Gay Mexican American men face dual marginalization. Within Latino contexts, they may be seen as disrespecting cultural gender norms and within LGBTQ+ spaces, they may face racialized assumptions or invisibility. These compounded pressures shape how they access mentorship, navigate career advancement, and develop professional networks (Collins, 2018; Padilla, 1995; Gerena & Pilkay, 2024).

Despite the growing recognition of intersectionality in both academic and corporate diversity efforts, gaps remain. Many organizational policies still treat diversity categories as

discrete checkboxes, neglecting the ways in which overlapping identities generate specific vulnerabilities and strengths (Daftary, 2018; Windsong, 2018). Gay Mexican American men are often rendered invisible in both Latino focused and LGBTQ+ focused initiatives, which limits the effectiveness of workplace interventions and inclusion strategies.

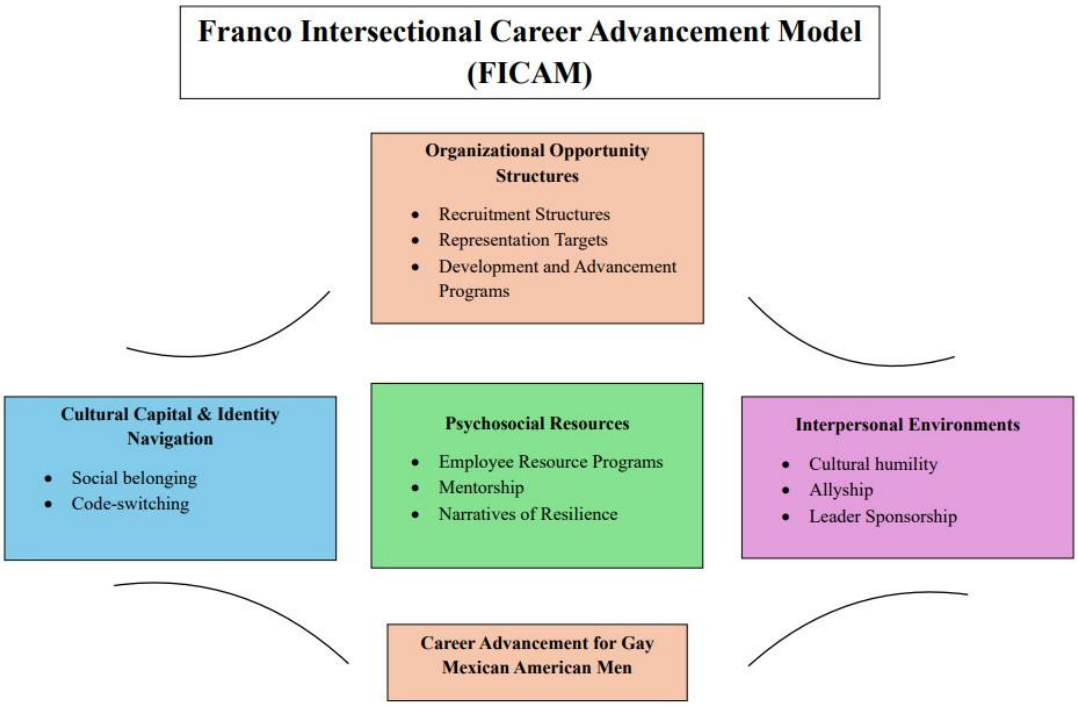
To address these gaps, scholars call for intersectional methodologies that examine how sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and cultural context interact in shaping workplace experiences (Bowleg, 2020; Jones et al., 2017). For example, mentorship programs and leadership development pipelines must be tailored not just for LGBTQ+ employees broadly, but with cultural specificity that acknowledges the lived realities of gay men of color. The Human Rights Campaign (2021) reports that holistic diversity initiatives that consider identity intersections significantly improve employee well-being, belonging, and productivity. While Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model provides an invaluable lens for recognizing the cultural assets and forms of capital within communities of color such as aspirational, navigational, social, and resistant capital, it does not explicitly account for the compounded influence of sexual orientation and gender identity on career advancement, nor does it address the organizational structures and climates that shape professional mobility for intersectional populations.

Therefore, to account for those compounded differences in the context of this study, which focuses on gay Mexican American men in corporate settings, an original framework was necessary. Community cultural wealth primarily centers educational contexts and broad Latino experiences, with less emphasis on the micro and macro level career dynamics within corporate hierarchies. My analysis of the literature revealed that, while cultural wealth is critical, it is only one piece of the puzzle. Career advancement is significantly shaped by formal institutional

policies, identity negotiation strategies, and psychosocial resources that operate within workplace environments.

As a result, in order to bridge this gap, I developed the Franco Intersectional Career Advancement Model (FICAM), an integrated conceptual model that uses and fuses insights from intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and Latino cultural research. FICAM consists of four interrelated domains 1.) Organizational opportunity structures which focus on formal systems and policies that either enable or restrict upward mobility (inclusive recruitment, transparent promotion criteria, leadership development programs). 2.) Cultural capital and identity navigation strategies which focus on the ability to leverage cultural competencies and navigate identity expressions in ways that facilitate belonging and reduce bias (code-switching, selective self-disclosure and relationship building). 3.) Psychosocial resources which focus on personal and interpersonal support that sustain resilience and motivation via mentorship of employee resource groups and support). 4.) Finally, we have Interpersonal environments which focuses more on cultural understanding from within the workplace, allyship and leader sponsorship which goes beyond mentoring.

Figure 0.1 Franco Intersectional Career Advancement Model



While intersectionality and social identity theory provide the theoretical frame for this study, the Franco Intersectional Career Advancement Model (FICAM) is an original model rather than a framework. Conceptual frameworks typically outline broad areas of influence or theoretical orientations, whereas models demonstrate how specific elements interact and influence one another within a system (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As such, FICAM is meant to go beyond the conceptual, doing so by mapping the relationships among four interrelated domains, organizational opportunity structures, cultural capital and identity navigation, psychosocial resources, and interpersonal environments.

These domains are processes that together explain how career advancement happens or fails to occurs for gay Mexican American men in corporate America. In addition, with FICAM

being a model, it can also be applied across different intersectional identities. FICAM can be used to explore other intersectional identities and workplace settings beyond gay Mexican American men. Therefore, as opposed to highlighting differences it can show similarity and open the doors for additional research in the future. It's a flexible tool for understanding and testing how intersecting identities operate within systems of organizational opportunity and constraint.

In addition, as it pertains to organizational structures as a domain in the FICAM model, participants, highlighted that their personal agency was restricted by organizational structures policies, leadership representation, mentorship access, and promotion systems that shaped the conditions for advancement. Therefore, inclusion of the organizational opportunity structures domain within FICAM acknowledges that career advancement is not determined simply by individual effort or resilience.

In essence, the organizational domain represents the contextual layer through which individual experiences gain or lose traction. Including this domain positions FICAM as a holistic model that captures the interplay between individual and structural factors. It also highlights that sustainable advancement for intersectional identities requires systemic change, not merely personal adaptation. Finally, by including the domain, FICAM creates space for future research to explore how other forms of intersectionality such as gender identity, disability, etc., may intersect with other organizational practices.

Unlike culture community wealth which focuses on assets within marginalized communities, FICAM provides a visual map that explicitly shows the interplay between individual agency and structural conditions in corporate spaces, therefore recognizing that even high cultural initiatives may not create advancement if organizations are exclusionary. This original model allows for a deeper analysis of how systemic barriers and personal strategies

intersect, offering a framework that both respects cultural differences and nuances and places it within the realities of corporate career advancement. This model positions career advancement, shaped not only by formal structures but also by interpersonal relationships, such as leader sponsorship, allyship, and cultural understanding from leadership.

Understanding these intersections is essential to designing policies that move beyond representation to achieve equity. Finally, as Daftary (2018) and Padilla (1995) argue, the failure to disaggregate LGBTQ+ and Latino data into specific subgroups contributes to the ongoing invisibility of gay Mexican American men in workforce research. Without targeted analysis, organizations risk perpetuating a status quo in which key populations are excluded from leadership roles and meaningful inclusion efforts. This study seeks to fill that gap by applying a critical, intersectional lens to the career experiences of gay Mexican American men, with the goal of evolving both theory and practice toward more inclusive, identity affirming organizational cultures.

Chapter Summary

Gay Mexican American men remain largely invisible in scholarship on career advancement in the United States. While studies have explored the experiences of Latinos in the workforce and examined LGBTQ+ inclusion in professional contexts, few address the intersection of ethnicity and sexual orientation creating a gap that leaves the experiences of this subgroup critically underrepresented in diversity and leadership research (Crenshaw, 1989; Hossain et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2017).

The existing literature reveals three converging insights. First, Latinos broadly encounter systemic barriers to career advancement opportunities, therefore intensifying when intersecting identities such as sexuality come into play. Second, Mexican American men carry distinct

historical, cultural, and social dynamics including machismo and bicultural identity navigation which further complicates their sense of truly belonging within dominant workplace expectations (Tajon, 2009). Third, LGBTQ+ research often neglects to disaggregate findings by race or ethnicity, creating a makeshift understanding of how the lavender ceiling operates for queer professionals of color (Badgett et al., 2020).

Without disaggregated data or targeted analysis, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts risk repeating the same exclusions they seek to address. Hames-García and Martínez (2011) further underscore the need for critical, culturally informed approaches to better understand how racism, homophobia, and cultural norms simultaneously shape the lived realities of gay Latino men. To address this gap, this study sought to apply an integrated theoretical lens that combines intersectionality theory with social identity theory. While intersectionality focuses on the structural and cultural forces that impede or restrict career advancement, social identity theory explains the psychosocial dynamics of group belonging, perceptions, and identity-based workplace stressors. Together, these frameworks can provide a holistic understanding of how gay Mexican American men experience and navigate career advancement within organizational structures.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

This narrative study examines how gay Mexican American men make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America. Guided by narrative inquiry and complemented by testimonio. Narrative inquiry provides a framework for exploring deeply personal, context rich accounts, while testimonio is rooted in Latinx and Chicanx epistemologies and situates these narratives within broader histories of marginalization and resilience (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012).

Together, these methods capture both, the unique professional trajectories of gay Mexican American men as well as challenges, reclaims agency, and highlights systemic and cultural factors influencing career progression. By centering participants' voices, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of these lived experiences and inform more inclusive workplace policies and practices that address the needs of individuals with multiple marginalized identities. This study aimed to answer the following research question:

1. How do gay Mexican American men make sense of their career opportunities for career advancement in corporate America through narratives?

Qualitative Inquiry and Standards of Quality

Qualitative research offers a robust and flexible approach to investigating complex social phenomena, particularly through methods that embrace subjectivity and participant narratives. This study's focus on the career advancement experiences of gay Mexican American men takes a qualitative approach that captures the richness and depth of personal stories. Narrative inquiry provides the framework to explore these stories, emphasizing how individuals construct their realities and navigate the intersections of cultural identity and sexual orientation within professional spaces.

This approach aligns with Bhattacharya's (2017) assertion that qualitative research is inherently nonlinear and iterative. The researcher frequently revisits data, uncovering layers of meaning as understanding deepens. This flexibility allows for the exploration of identities that exist at the intersection of marginalized categories, gay, Mexican American, and male as well as the unique pressures and opportunities they create in the workplace. Morales (1989) highlighted how gay Latino men live within overlapping communities such as the gay, Latino, and predominantly heterosexual white mainstream communities, each with distinct expectations. These dynamics create internal and external conflicts that demand nuanced analysis through qualitative inquiry.

This study also draws on testimonio as a methodological influence to honor participants' lived experiences and cultural voice. Rooted in Latin American and Chicana feminist traditions, testimonio emphasizes collective truth-telling and social justice by positioning the participant as a narrator of lived oppression and resilience (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). It disrupts hierarchical researcher–participant dynamics and validates the voices of those historically marginalized within institutional and academic settings. For this study, testimonio provides a culturally congruent way to center the narratives of gay Mexican American men whose stories have been largely absent from both Latino and LGBTQ+ scholarship. Their experiences of navigating identity, culture, and career advancement resonate deeply with testimonio's call to voice silenced realities and transform them into knowledge.

Given the study's multi-theoretical frameworks and the development of the Franco Intersectional Career Advancement Model (FICAM), a condensed version of testimonio was employed. This adaptation focuses specifically on the career advancement context rather than broader sociopolitical resistance narratives. The condensed approach allowed participants to

articulate experiences of marginalization, belonging, and resilience as they relate to organizational opportunity structures and identity navigation without expanding beyond the scope of workplace advancement. Using this approach also alignment with the study's methodological emphasis on narrative inquiry, ensuring coherence between participants' stories and the analytical goals of the research.

Testimonio was used as an interpretive lens that amplifies participants' voices within a structured narrative inquiry. This approach acknowledges the political and cultural power of storytelling while situating those testimonios within an academic framework that bridges individual narrative and systemic analysis. Therefore using a condensed testimonio provides the flexibility to integrate multiple theoretical perspectives while keeping aligned with the intent of keeping participants' voices in the forefront and staying true to cultural narratives within the parameters and purpose of this study.

In addition to intersectionality, this study is informed by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which emphasizes how individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups. In the context of this research, Social Identity Theory supports the methodological approach by highlighting how participants' identification with both Mexican American and gay communities influence the narratives they share. This perspective complements narrative inquiry by framing participants' career advancement stories not only as individual experiences but also as reflections of group belonging, perceived inclusion, and the negotiation of multiple, intersecting identities within workplace settings.

The quality and rigor of this study are grounded in Tracy's (2010) Eight Big-Tent Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research, which collectively ensure methodological integrity, trustworthiness, and resonance. The study embodies a worthy topic by examining the career

advancement experiences of gay Mexican American men, a group whose voices and narratives have been largely absent from both organizational and intersectional research. This topic holds relevance, addressing broader questions of equity, inclusion, and belonging in corporate America. The study demonstrates rich rigor through a robust design that employs narrative inquiry, multiple sources of data, and theoretical depth. The integration of intersectionality and social identity theory provides a strong analytic foundation, while the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and extended engagement with participants ensures depth and credibility of interpretation.

Sincerity is reflected in the researcher's reflexive engagement and transparency throughout the process. As an insider researcher, I maintained ongoing reflection about how my positionality as a gay Mexican American man shaped both the questions asked and the meanings interpreted. This self-awareness and openness strengthened authenticity and ethical responsibility. The study's credibility was reinforced through thick, detailed description and member reflection. Participants' words are presented in ways that allow readers to see and feel their experiences, and early interpretations were shared with participants to ensure accuracy and resonance with their perspectives.

The research also aims for resonance, inviting both emotional and intellectual engagement by presenting participants' stories with narrative depth and cultural context. In doing so, it encourages readers to reflect on the ways systemic and interpersonal dynamics shape career trajectories. The study offers a significant contribution to both scholarship and practice by introducing the Franco Intersectional Career Advancement Model (FICAM) as an original conceptual model that bridges theory and application. It advances understanding of how identity,

organizational opportunity structures, and psychosocial resources interact to shape advancement, while also offering practical implications for building inclusive professional pathways.

Ethics guided every stage of this research. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured prior to data collection, and participants' confidentiality was rigorously maintained through pseudonyms and secure data storage. Relational ethics also informed interview practices, emphasizing respect, reciprocity, and care in representing participants' narratives. Finally, the study demonstrates meaningful coherence through clear alignment among its theoretical frameworks, research questions, and methodological choices. Each stage from conceptualization to data interpretation reflects a consistent commitment to exploring intersectionality and social identity in a manner that is theoretically grounded, methodologically sound, and interpretively transparent.

By intentionally applying all eight of Tracy's criteria, worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence, this study establishes a high standard of qualitative excellence. These criteria collectively ensure that the research remains reflexive, rigorous, and resonant, capturing the authentic voices of gay Mexican American men while offering meaningful insights for advancing intersectional equity and inclusion in the workplace.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and document the lived experiences of individuals through their stories. As Murray (2009) suggests, at the heart of narrative inquiry is a collection of stories that reflect individuals' subjective realities. The foundation of narrative inquiry lies in the premise that humans understand and

make sense of their lives through narratives (Bruner, 1991). This approach is particularly suited to exploring how individuals construct meaning around identity, relationships, and experiences.

Narrative inquiry is well-suited for this research, which explores how intersecting identities specifically ethnicity and sexual orientation shape the career advancement experiences of gay Mexican American men. This methodological framework emphasizes the importance of stories in shaping self-concept and understanding social dynamics. Bruner (1991) and Polkinghorne (1988) argue that storytelling is central to identity construction, as it allows individuals to integrate past experiences, present realities, and future aspirations into coherent narratives. By sharing personal stories, participants provide rich, contextualized insights into how cultural identity influences their perceptions of themselves and others in the workplace.

The subjective and personal nature of the research topic necessitates a methodological framework that values individual perspectives and lived experiences. Narrative inquiry facilitates the exploration of deeply personal accounts, enabling participants to articulate their unique challenges, strategies, and successes in their own words (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach does not only capture the participants' voices but also highlight the sociocultural and systemic factors influencing their professional trajectories.

Given the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, narrative inquiry provides a lens to examine how these overlapping identities inform workplace experiences. This methodology allows for the deconstruction of dominant narratives and the amplification of marginalized voices, making it particularly relevant for this study (Crenshaw, 1989). Narrative inquiry supports the examination of the nuanced ways in which systemic inequities and cultural norms impact career advancement for gay Mexican American men, providing a holistic and nuanced understanding of their professional lives.

In addition to narrative inquiry, this study incorporates testimonio as a complementary and culturally grounded methodological practice. Rooted in Latinx and Chicanx epistemologies, testimonio offers a political and relational way of bearing witness to lived experiences shaped by systemic oppression (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Unlike traditional autobiographical narratives that center individualism, testimonio acknowledges the collective nature of struggle and situates personal stories within broader social and historical contexts. This integration enhances the narrative inquiry framework by positioning participants' stories as both deeply personal and inherently connected to the shared histories of gay Mexican American men, challenging dominant narratives while reclaiming agency.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria to ensure rich and meaningful data that captures the nuances of these intersecting identities:

- **Gender Identity:** Participants must identify as male.
- **Sexual Orientation**: Participants must identify as gay or homosexual men and be open about their sexual orientation.
- **Ethnic Identity**: Participants must self-identify as Mexican, Mexican American, or that of Mexican American heritage.
- **Age**: Participants must be adults aged 25–50 to capture a range of career stages. This age range considers both the historical and cultural contexts that may have influenced participants' identities and professional trajectories.
- **Professional Experience**: Participants must have at least five years of professional work experience in corporate or professional sectors where career advancement is possible. Employment can span various industries, sectors, or job roles.

Participant Recruitment - Briefing and Debriefing Process

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method that involves selecting individuals who are readily accessible and willing to participate (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). This approach aligns with the study's focus on gathering in-depth narratives from a specific and hard-to-reach population—gay Mexican American men with professional work experience.

Given the depth required by narrative inquiry, a smaller sample size is intentional, with a target range of five to nine participants, as a smaller sample size also aligns with the narrative inquiry methodology, which emphasizes depth and allows for detailed exploration of each participant's experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This range may be adjusted based on thematic saturation, which occurs when no new information is emerging from the data (Bazeley, 2021).

Recruitment began with outreach through personal, social, and professional networks, including LinkedIn and Instagram, as well as through LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations and diversity-oriented professional groups. A digital flyer provided a brief description of the study, a QR code, and a hyperlink to a secure eligibility questionnaire. This questionnaire was used to confirm inclusion criteria through closed ended yes/no questions and to collect participant contact information for follow-up. Eligible and willing participants were then sent a detailed participant information email outlining the study's purpose, participant responsibilities, time commitments, privacy safeguards, and ethical considerations. This email included a Calendly link for scheduling two in-depth interviews at mutually convenient times. Participants also received a consent form clearly outlining their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation.

During the first interview session, a thank you and study briefing statement (Appendix A) was read to each participant to reiterate the study's objectives, the interview format, and the estimated duration. Participants were also reminded that they may skip questions, pause, or withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. By building rapport and transparency at every stage of the recruitment and briefing process, I created a climate of respect, trust, and autonomy. This approach also reinforces the credibility of the study by confirming that participants fully understand the nature of their involvement and the protections in place for their privacy and well-being.

At the conclusion of the final interview, a debriefing statement (Appendix B) was provided to each participant. This statement included information on how to withdraw from the study should they later choose to do so, instructions for obtaining a summary of the study's results, and the contact details of both the Principal Investigator and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair for any questions or concerns. The debriefing also served as a final reminder of the confidentiality and privacy safeguards in place, reinforcing the measures taken to protect participant identities and data throughout and after the research process.

Challenge of Participant Recruitment

Given the niche intersection of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, finding individuals willing to participate may pose significant challenges. Cultural stigmas, familial expectations, and the personal nature of discussing one's sexual orientation in a research setting might deter potential participants. Additionally, the defined age range of 25–50, along with the requirement of at least five years of professional experience, limited the eligible pool to individuals who meet specific career and life-stage criteria. While these parameters are intentional to ensure alignment with the study's purpose, they may reduce the breadth of

representation. In addition, the exclusion of certain roles with limited upward mobility further narrows the pool. Potential participants may also question whether their experiences are relevant or significant enough to be included.

Trust and familiarity with the researcher can help mitigate some of these concerns. As an insider within the community, I leveraged existing social networks to identify and connect with potential participants. While this familiarity may aid in rapport-building, it can also carry the risk of introducing biases or assumptions into the research process. Being mindful of this insider–outsider dynamic, I regularly reflected on my positionality, documented potential biases, and actively addressed these considerations to maintain methodological integrity and ethical responsibility throughout participant recruitment.

Research Sites

When scheduling their interview sessions, using the scheduling software Calendly, I gave the participants the opportunity to choose the location for the one-on-one interviews requiring that at least one be scheduled in person, both if possible. Since these interviews and related data collection contain private, sensitive personal information, participants were asked to choose a space where they felt the most comfortable, ensuring both privacy and confidentiality. I did inform participants that if they could not identify a safe space, such as their own home, I could arrange an appropriate meeting location to maintain their sense of safety and protect their personal information.

Some participants opted to host the data collection sessions in their homes whether in person or via zoom. Others chose their place of work as it provided convenience but also the option of meeting spaces where they felt their privacy would be protected. By allowing the participants to choose, participants had an additional level of privacy and safety knowing that

their environment is safe and familiar. I had prepared a backup plan to have the meetings at a private meeting venue if participants had scheduling issues related to location, but no issues arose.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection for this study primarily involves in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to elicit participants' counter-stories about cultural identity, sexual orientation, and workplace experiences within a combined narrative inquiry and testimonio framework. This approach offers both structure and flexibility, ensuring specific topics are covered such as marginalization, empowerment, and intersectional identity while also allowing space for unanticipated themes to emerge (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Guided by testimonio, the interviews encouraged participants to situate their individual experiences within broader histories of marginalization and resilience, reflecting the collective dimensions of their narratives.

Each participant took part in two interviews, each lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. These interviews were structured around six major themes (Appendix C), allowing for a thorough exploration of participants' backgrounds, including cultural upbringing, coming-out process, experiences navigating marginalized identities, and sources of social support. By starting with general questions and progressively moving toward more personal topics, participants felt more comfortable opening up about sensitive or private experiences at their own pace and were more apt to sharing further details about their career experiences.

Given that participants all participants were bilingual, portions of the interviews were conducted in Spanish or alternated between English and Spanish. Original language responses were preserved in transcripts to maintain authenticity, with contextual translations provided when necessary for interpretation. In addition to interviews, I used audio recordings, journaling,

and observations of nonverbal cues to obtain comprehensive data. Observing participants' demeanor, body language, and emotional responses offered valuable context for interpreting their lived experiences and underlying truths of their perceived realities as it related to other ethic or monolithic identities. Reflexive journaling was then used throughout the process to document these observations, methodological decisions, personal reflections, and potential biases, ensuring transparency and credibility.

During each interview, I closely track participants' responses, probing for clarification and additional details when necessary. As Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) noted, semi-structured interviews strike a balance between guided inquiry and open-ended exploration. By combining carefully prepared questions with flexible conversation, I was able to capture the subtle complexities of each participant's account while maintaining enough structure to address the study's guiding research questions.

Researcher Subjectivity and Reflection

Paying attention to my own subjectivity was crucial in this study, particularly given my insider status as a gay Mexican American man. While this shared identity may have fostered trust and rapport, it also carries the potential to introduce bias. I tried to remain attentive to this insider/outsider dynamic by reflecting regularly on my relationship with participants and noting any personal judgments or assumptions that may arise due to shared cultural or community ties. By documenting these reflections in my research journal, I was able to maintain awareness of how my perspectives might shape the data collection process, ensuring that participant voices remain at the forefront.

Writing myself back into research does not mean positioning myself at the center of the study as the "master of truth and justice" whose self-appointed task is to uphold reason and

reveal truth to those who cannot see or speak it (Varga-Dobai, 2012). Rather, my role is to bear witness in line with the testimonio tradition, acknowledging collective histories of marginalization while preserving the individuality of each participant.

By adopting a narrative inquiry approach, I was able to create a balanced portrait of each story, recognizing the interplay between my own viewpoint and the participants' lived realities. This approach aligns with social identity theory in acknowledging how shared and differing aspects of identity influence interpretation. Ultimately, situating the findings within a rigorous ethical and methodological framework ensuring that the study remains both credible and respectful of the community at its center.

Data Analysis

In a narrative study, data analysis is inherently iterative and non-linear (Bazeley, 2021). To ensure quality and accuracy, I transcribed audio files in a timely manner using Sembly AI, which offers high accuracy and speaker differentiation. For interviews conducted partially in Spanish, the transcription preserved the original language to maintain authenticity, with contextual translations provided as necessary for analysis. All transcripts were reviewed manually alongside the audio recordings to verify accuracy before being imported into ATLAS.ti for coding and thematic analysis. I also noted any significant nonverbal cues during transcription and included them for contextual richness.

Following transcription, fourteen interview transcripts (seven participants × initial and follow-up) were imported into ATLAS.ti. To preserve voice and cultural nuance, bilingual content (English/Spanish) was retained and coded in the original language with contextual translations as needed. Data analysis began with a hybrid approach that combined both deductive (theoretical) and inductive (emergent) coding. Deductive coding reflected predetermined areas of

focus such as cultural identity, career advancement, and workplace experiences derived from the study's conceptual framework. Inductive coding allowed for unexpected insights to emerge organically from participants' narratives (Bazeley, 2021).

I then used ATLAS.ti's AI coding tool to support the initial inductive phase of coding. The AI was prompted with the study's research question to explore how the narratives of gay Mexican American men make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America. The resulting code set was refined through an iterative internal process that included (a) consolidation—merging overlapping codes and pruning generic labels; (b) organization—grouping code families and memoing analytic decisions; (c) second-cycle coding—moving from descriptive tags to interpretive patterns; and (d) trustworthiness and reflexivity—maintaining reflexive memos and conducting cross-interview consistency checks. This process generated nine broad clusters of potential themes that were ultimately synthesized into five overarching themes, four of which contained subthemes.

Throughout this analytical phase, I engaged in ongoing reflexivity and member checking to ensure credibility and alignment with participants' lived experiences. Member checking involved sharing summaries or preliminary interpretations with participants, inviting them to verify or correct any details they found inaccurate. A research journal was also maintained to capture methodological decisions, analytic reflections, and emerging insights. I frequently revisited transcripts, memos, and coded segments to refine my understanding of participants' stories and ensure that the evolving interpretations remained grounded in their words.

During coding, I remained attentive to the distinction between similarity and contiguity. Similarity arose when parallel ideas, behaviors, or experiences surfaced across different narratives, while contiguity reflected direct connections or influences among events or

statements within a single narrative (Bazeley, 2021). Recognizing both patterns helped capture the interplay between individual and collective experiences. Careful attention was also given to language, tone, and expression; pauses, shifts in content, and repeated phrases were annotated, and abrupt transitions were visually marked within ATLAS.ti to identify emotional or thematic significance.

Once themes began to solidify, ATLAS.ti's mapping capabilities were used to visualize relationships among categories and codes, revealing overlapping, contrasting, and hierarchical structures across participants' stories. The five final themes and subthemes were then cross-examined to ensure they aligned with the research question and reflected the participants' voices authentically. Each theme was also linked back to the study's theoretical lenses—intersectionality, social identity theory, and testimonio—to situate findings within broader conceptual and cultural frameworks.

This analytical process prioritized both the individuality of each participant's account and the collective patterns that emerged across narratives. By weaving together multiple voices, contexts, and meaning-making processes, the analysis offers a nuanced and authentic account of gay Mexican American men's workplace experiences and the factors shaping their career advancement in corporate America.

Data Representation

In this study, findings were represented by both narrative inquiry and testimonio approaches. Narrative inquiry guided the structuring of participant's lived experiences into coherent, story driven accounts, while testimonio ensured that these narratives were situated within broader sociocultural and historical contexts, highlighting collective struggles and resilience strategies rooted in Latino epistemologies.

I began by providing participant profiles to place each person's professional context and identity-relevant factors for the reader. Positioning these profiles up front provided the necessary frame for interpreting subsequent narratives, making clear how role, sector, geography, and educational background intersect with identity across narratives. I then examined each participant's identity-in-context of how ethnicity, language, sexuality, and organizational environment come together around their career histories so that the themes are read against a steady foundation rather than as purely abstract categories.

The thematic style of the chapter was derived through ATLAS.ti–assisted analysis. I imported bilingual transcripts and retained Spanish where it carried meaning, coding in the original language with clarifying translation as needed. I used ATLAS.ti's AI coding to seed a large, inductive code set which provided over 400 preliminary codes across interviews. The AI tool then moved through a four-step iterative process of consolidation (merging overlaps, pruning generic labels), organization (grouping code families and memoing decisions), second-cycle coding (moving from descriptive tags to patterns), and trustworthiness/reflexivity (maintaining reflexive memos, cross-interview checks). This internal process generated nine broad clusters of potential themes that I then synthesized into five final themes, four of which have subthemes.

Each theme was deliberately voice-led. I began with a selected participant quotation that sets the stage, then I presented three participant narrative excerpts that best illustrated the theme and represented common patterns found across all seven participant narratives. This process was repeated for each of the five themes to maintain consistency throughout the chapter. For each selected narrative, I provided analytic commentary to connect the participants' stories to the study's theoretical lenses. This structure allowed me to balance narrative integrity with analytic

clarity, giving space for the participants' lived experiences to remain central while also situating those experiences within broader theoretical and sociocultural contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In addition, language was treated as data, so I preserved the cadence and expression in the excerpts and retained Spanish terms or phrases when they carried cultural or conceptual weight, providing brief bracketed clarifications to sustain readability without flattening meaning. These representational choices reflected a participant-centered and culturally grounded approach to interpretation. By prioritizing participants' voices and shaping themes around their narratives, I intended to challenge dominant narratives present in existing literature while highlighting experiences often excluded from mainstream discourse.

Data Management

In a narrative study, the data management process ensures that collected information is accessible, securely preserved, and fully compliant with Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards, which exist to protect the rights of research participants. By having a structured plan in place, I can properly safeguard participant confidentiality and maintain high ethical standards. In alignment with IRB guidelines, all interviews were conducted using a dedicated, password-protected recording device; immediately after each session, this device was placed in a locked, password-protected safe box. Only I had access to both the device and the safe box, ensuring that raw data always remains confidential.

Once interviews conclude, the recorded files were transferred to a personal laptop that was secured with password protection and thumbprint identification. To maintain data integrity, I ensured that all data was saved in designated folders and that I log out of my laptop when data is not in use. Audio files, transcripts, and ATLAS.ti project files were stored in a password-protected environment. All interviews were transcribed using Sembly AI**,** which provided

verbatim transcriptions and maintained the original language of the interviews both in English or Spanish.

For Spanish-language portions, contextual translations were provided as needed for analysis. Once generated, each transcript was manually reviewed alongside the original audio recording to ensure accuracy before being uploaded into ATLAS.ti for coding and thematic analysis. ATLAS.ti facilitated data organization, thematic coding, and retrieval of excerpts, ensuring that each participant's information was clearly labeled and easily accessible. Any backup copies of the ATLAS.ti project were stored on an encrypted password protected OneDrive. Because confidentiality and security were vital, additional precautions include password protection for any approved cloud storage, and the storage of physical documentation in a safe. Any physical records no longer needed were securely shredded to ensure complete removal of sensitive information.

A researcher journal was also maintained to capture ongoing reflections, emerging themes, and methodological decisions; the journal was be stored either in the locked safe for physical notes or on the same password-protected laptop for digital notes. To preserve anonymity, all personal identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms in transcripts, field notes, presentations, and publications. In adherence to IRB guidelines, electronic data was retained for three years following the completion of the study, after which, all digital files were permanently deleted from the laptop and any cloud storage. Any physical media was securely destroyed to ensure a complete and irreversible removal of all sensitive information.

Researcher Positionality

Conducting qualitative research requires that I consider my positionality, particularly when studying the lived experiences of marginalized groups. As a gay Mexican American researcher,

my personal background naturally shapes both the inquiry process and the interpretation of findings. The evolving qualitative paradigm embraces subjectivity and pluralism, questioning the traditional positivist assumption that researchers can remain completely objective (Mullen, 1995). By explicitly acknowledging my positionality, I aim to highlight how knowledge is both produced and understood within the specific cultural and social contexts of this study.

Philosophical perspectives in social science research greatly influence conceptions of valid knowledge and the methodological choices that follow (Collective, 2023). In narrative inquiry, researchers acknowledge that individuals construct realities through the stories they tell, rendering lived experiences inherently subjective. This approach contrasts with positivist models by emphasizing that truths are context-bound and shaped by cultural norms, personal histories, and social interactions. Within this framework, being transparent about my own "knowledge claims" becomes essential, as it helps situate the study within a specific epistemological viewpoint.

My motivation for exploring this topic is rooted in my experiences navigating corporate spaces as a gay Mexican American man. Throughout my career, I have not encountered many Latinos, Mexican American, or gay individuals who climb the corporate ladder especially when it comes to leaders who share my racial or cultural background, and this visibility gap has profoundly shaped my sense of professional identity. Over time, I have become increasingly aware of the systemic barriers that Mexican American men encounter, often requiring greater effort to access the same opportunities afforded to their white colleagues. These personal observations inform the lens I bring to this research and underscore the urgency of investigating how cultural identity influences career trajectories.

In addition to my Mexican heritage, my identity as a gay man adds another layer of complexity. Early in my professional life, I often had to self-censor or strategically reveal aspects of my sexual orientation, acutely aware of fundamental workplace norms. While intersectionality initially heightened my sense of vulnerability, it also grew my resilience and adaptability. I have come to value how these intersecting identities sharpen my capacity for empathy and encourage me to challenge structures that marginalize others who, like me, do not fit dominant expectations.

This study takes on a deeply personal dimension, as it focuses on how other gay Mexican American men negotiate the dual forces of cultural heritage and sexual orientation in shaping their professional journeys. By centering the narratives of individuals who share similar backgrounds, I seek to highlight the interplay between culture, identity, and career advancement. Recognizing that qualitative research cannot claim absolute objectivity, I approach these narratives aware that my positionality confers both insight and potential biases, necessitating consistent self-reflection throughout data collection and analysis.

Despite corporate strides in championing for DEI, the challenges specific to gay Mexican American men often remain overlooked. Intersectional research is vital to address these nuanced issues, given that neither mainstream Latino studies nor broader LGBTQ+ discourse has sufficiently examined this subgroup (Daftary, 2018). Scholars such as Hames-García and Martínez (2011) argue for culturally competent interventions that account for racial, ethnic, and sexual identity dimensions. Moreover, Jones et al. (2017) emphasizes the importance of organizational cultures that dismantle systemic inequities. By investigating this intersection, the study contributes to a fuller understanding of the unique career barriers and opportunities experienced by gay Mexican American men.

As the exploration of this topic unfolds, I navigated an insider–outsider dynamic shaped by my membership in the gay community in Dallas. Leveraging personal connections via social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram facilitated participant recruitment, but insider status also ran the risk of unexamined assumptions. To relieve this, I maintained rigorous documentation of my reflections, biases, and interpretations at every stage including recruitment, data gathering, and analysis. By confronting the dual role of trusted community member and objective researcher, I aimed to uphold ethical standards and produce a nuanced understanding of how intersecting identities shape professional experiences.

Furthermore, my positionality was further informed by social identity theory, this framework allows me to situate participants' experiences within the broader social and organizational contexts that shape identity salience, belonging, and career progression. Additionally, my methodological decision to complement narrative inquiry with testimonio was grounded in my recognition of the need for culturally responsive approaches that honor participants' voices while situating their stories within histories of systemic marginalization and resilience. My shared cultural and sexual identity not only facilitated rapport but also deepened my commitment to amplifying these narratives with accuracy, respect, and cultural authenticity.

Ultimately, this study addresses a critical gap in diversity scholarship by foregrounding the voices of gay Mexican American men, whose narratives rarely surface in career advancement, leadership, career development literature. My insider point of view offers a unique perspective on the complex interplay of race, sexuality, and culture, while at the same time, required intentional reflexivity to prevent overgeneralization or bias. Through self-awareness, my aim was to present an accurate, respectful account of these lived realities while advocating for more inclusive organizational practices and policies.

Ethics

This study involves several ethical considerations for maintaining the participants' well-being, confidentiality, and autonomy. The study should indicate the ethical decisions that shaped how an inquiry was designed or undertaken and how texts and other data were organized, maintained, and analyzed in line with confidentiality guarantees and data protection plans AERA (2009). First, informed consent must be obtained from each participant before participating in the study, and the purpose of the research, procedures, potential risks, and benefits were communicated. Given the sensitive nature of the topics, participants should be aware of what sharing their experiences entails, and to ensure confidentiality, using pseudonyms for participants and securely storing data was done. A password-protected safe box and a personal laptop with additional security measures was also used to keep the participants' identities and details confidential during the research process and in any subsequent publications. To further ensure transparency and participant protection, a formal debriefing statement was read to each participant at the conclusion of the final interview.

This debriefing reiterated participants' rights, including the option to withdraw from the study after participation, it also provided contact information for both the Principal Investigator and the IRB Chair to address any questions or concerns or to request summary of the study's results. Audio recordings were transcribed using Sembly AI, a secure, password-protected transcription platform. Transcripts were reviewed line-by-line for accuracy, participant names were replaced with pseudonyms before being imported into ATLAS.ti for coding and analysis. This approach ensured that AI-assisted tools were used responsibly, with human oversight and adherence to IRB-approved confidentiality protocols. The study was submitted to the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. IRB review ensures that the study meets ethical standards and safeguards the rights and well-being of participants.

Acknowledging power dynamics were inherent in the researcher-participant relationship. Participants shared personal and sensitive experiences which were essential to recognize the potential impact of this dynamic. In addition, personal bias was taken into consideration as an important characteristic of humanities-oriented research in education. It directly takes on questions related to values, morals, and ideals based on the assumption that no research (and no researcher) is neutral regarding values. AERA (2009). Therefore, the study also touched on the potential conflicts of interest that could influence the analysis. For example, as a gay Mexican American man myself, I had to be mindful as to ensure that my subjectivities do not interfere with the results or conclusion of the study.

That in mind, being a gay Mexican American man, I was able to provide a certain level of empathy that allows me to understand some of the experiences that were shared. The process also provided space to address internalized stereotypes about my own community and other minority groups. This self-awareness was key to making sure I remained unbiased, true, and ethical towards my subjects and their narratives. This in hand reduced assumptions and allows the interviews to flow naturally without injecting too much of my views or narratives.

The ethical orientation of this study was also shaped by my ethical obligation to preserve the authenticity of each narrative while ensuring that participants' accounts were not distorted by dominant cultural interpretations. Narrative inquiry scholars emphasize the importance of respecting participants' agency, valuing their narratives, and acknowledging the ethical responsibilities of storytelling. That's because narrative inquiry is based on the premise that we understand or make sense of our lives through narrative. Increasingly, psychologists and theorists

are taking the view that not only do we make our existence whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story, but we achieve our identities and self-concept using narrative configuration (Murray, 2009).

Our life story is constantly changing as new events unfold. Our sense of self is, therefore, ever-changing. Creating a space where participants feel heard, respected, and appreciated for their contributions is essential. Ethical considerations in this study involved obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and data security, obtaining IRB approval, managing power dynamics, integrating reflexivity, and situating the research within the frameworks of social identity theory and testimonio. These considerations aligned with the principles of narrative inquiry, emphasized ethical engagement with participants in the research process.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the methodology used for my study of the career advancement experiences of gay Mexican American men, grounded in narrative inquiry and complemented by testimonio as a culturally responsive framework. In addition, social identity theory serves as a guiding lens for examining how group membership and intersecting identities, specifically ethnicity and sexual orientation inform career advancement. The chapter also details participant selection criteria, focusing on individuals who identify as gay Mexican American men and who possess sufficient professional experience to reflect on career advancement. This process ensures representation of diverse professional and personal journeys, which provides a more comprehensive understanding of workplace realities for this population.

Data collection methods involve in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to elicit stories and lived experiences related to cultural identity, sexual orientation, and professional growth. Sembly AI is used for secure transcription, followed by manual verification to ensure

accuracy and confidentiality. Data is coded and analyzed using ATLAS.ti, allowing for both deductive and inductive theme development. Ethical safeguards including informed consent, pseudonym use, secure data storage, and a debriefing at the conclusion of participation ensure methodological rigor and participant protection throughout the study.

By integrating narrative inquiry, testimonio, and social identity theory, this chapter positions the study to contribute new insights into the ways intersecting identities influence career advancement. The methodology is designed not only to highlight the challenges faced by gay Mexican American men in professional settings but also to highlight their resilience, strategies for success, and the implications for creating more inclusive workplace environments.

Chapter 4 – Findings

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to explore how gay Mexican American men make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America. Drawing on narrative inquiry complemented by testimonio, this study centers participants' counter-stories to illuminate how ethnicity and sexual orientation shape career trajectories, barriers, and resilience strategies. Seven participants completed two in-depth, semi-structured interviews each; their narratives provide thick, context-rich accounts that surface both shared patterns and singular turning points.

Guided by the following research question: how do gay Mexican American men make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America through narratives? The analysis integrates bilingual excerpts (English/Spanish) where appropriate to preserve voice and cultural nuance. Transcripts were prepared with Sembly AI and coded in ATLAS.ti using both deductive and inductive strategies; emerging themes were refined through code grouping and clustering.

Study Participants

This study involved in-depth interviews with seven gay Mexican American men (see Chapter 3 for methodology and inclusion criteria). Each participant completed two semi-structured interviews. The participant profiles shown in table 4.1 summarize the interview data and screening information to situate participants' professional contexts and identity-related factors relevant to career advancement. To maintain confidentiality, all names have pseudonyms, ages are presented in ranges, and organizational details are generalized by sector/industry.

Table 0.1 Participant Profiles

Participant	Age Range	Location	Industry	Role Level	Highest Education
Julian	40-45	Texas	Arts & Cultural Non-Profit	Director	Bachelor's
Eduardo	35–40	Texas	Emergency Medical Services	Paramedic – Individual Contributor	Associate's
Javier	35–40	Pennsylvania	Engineering	Systems Engineer	Master's
Emilio	30-35	Texas	Healthcare	Advanced Nursing - Nurse Practitioner	Doctorate
Diego	40-45	Texas	Healthcare	Assistant Director	Master’s
Damian	35-40	Texas	Real Estate	Agent – Individual Contributor	Bachelor’s
Armando	30-35	Texas	Healthcare	Chemistry Fellowship	Ph.D.

To complement the participant profiles, table 4.2 captures the degree of openness participants reported regarding their sexual orientation, the presence of supportive structures such as mentorship and employee resource group (ERG) involvement, and key supports or barriers influencing their career advancement. Including this information is essential to understanding how participants’ lived experiences of “outness” interact with organizational environments, representation, and professional networks. These factors directly shape access to advancement opportunities, perceptions of inclusion, and strategies for navigating intersecting marginalized identities, all central themes aligned with the study’s research question.

Table 0.2 Organizational & Identity Factors

Participant	Outness Level (1–5)	Promotions (Career Total)	Mentorship	ERG Involvement	Work Supports / Barriers
Julian	5 – Fully out in professional settings	3	Informal mentorship from senior leaders and formal colleagues	Limited/none	**Support**: leadership culture **Barrier**: subtle bias in leadership pipelines
Eduardo	4 – Mostly out, selective disclosure in conservative spaces	2	Formal mentorship through company program	Active member of LGBTQ+ ERG	**Support**: visibility through ERG **Barrier**: limited representation of Latinos in leadership
Javier	5 – Fully out	4	Both formal and informal mentorship from VP	Past involvement in ERG leadership	**Support**: strong sponsor advocacy **Barrier**: microaggressions in promotion processes
Emilio	3 – Out but selective with trusted colleagues only	2	Informal mentorship only	None	**Support**: peers **Barrier**: conservative company culture
Diego	3 – Out but selective with trusted colleagues only	5	Formal mentorship from executive leadership	None	**Support**: executive backing and ERG visibility **Barrier**: company culture
Damian	4 – Mostly out	3	Informal mentorship from Latino leaders in the community	Informal involvement ERG events	**Support**: cultural affinity groups as support **Barrier**: tokenism and lack of clear promotion pathways
Armando	2 – Mostly closeted, very selective disclosure	1	Formal mentorship from principal investigator	None	**Support**: Self-reliance **Barrier**: fear of discrimination and lack of visible role models

Emergent Themes and Narrative Analysis

The narratives shared by participants in this study offer rich insight into how gay Mexican American men make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America. Consistent with narrative inquiry and testimonio, these accounts highlight the relationships among personal history, cultural and linguistic resources, organizational context, and identity work overtime. Each theme was deliberately structured to begin with a participant quotation, ensuring that the participant's voice remained at the forefront of the analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). After setting the stage with this initial quotation, I selected three narrative excerpts that best illustrated the theme and represented common patterns found across all seven participant narratives. This process was repeated for each of the five themes to maintain consistency throughout the chapter.

Using ATLAS.ti, I identified five overarching themes, four of which included subthemes that provided additional depth and nuance. These themes and subthemes are shown in table 4.3 and respond directly to the research question by revealing both the conditions that shape opportunity, and the strategies participants employ to move forward - (a) Bicultural Capital, (b) Agency and Resilience, (c) Opportunity Structures, (d) Mentorship and Networks, and (e) Belonging and Psychosocial Safety. Definitions for themes were developed through a combination of my own extensive reading of the data, reflective memoing, and ongoing analytic notes captured throughout the coding process. As I engaged with participants' narratives, I wrote reflexive memos to document early impressions, potential patterns, and emerging connections between codes. These memos, along with my researcher journal, served as a foundation for articulating clear and precise definitions for each theme.

In addition, while all five themes and their associated subthemes were shared by the majority of participants, I chose to present three narrative excerpts for each theme to provide a clear and focused illustration of the findings. This decision was made to simplify the presentation of the data while still maintaining the richness and depth of participants' experiences. The three narratives selected for each theme were those that most explicitly and vividly captured the essence of the theme, making them strong narratives of the broader patterns presented across the dataset.

The inclusion of only three narratives per theme does not imply that these themes or subthemes were exclusive to those individuals. Rather, these excerpts served as representative cases to show experiences and perspectives that were reflected across all seven participants. By using this approach, I was able to balance the need for analytic clarity and narrative depth while ensuring that the findings remained grounded in the collective voices of participants. This strategy aligns with the narrative inquiry tradition of centering participant voice while also providing readers with accessible and coherent thematic representations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

Table 0.3 Emergent Themes – Intersectionality and Career Advancement

Theme	Subtheme	Description
Bicultural Capital	Cultural Identity and Bilingualism as a Professional Asset	How participants leverage Spanish/English bilingualism and bicultural identity as career assets, while balancing authenticity and professionalism in corporate contexts.
Agency and Resilience	Reframing Experiences for Growth and Self-Advocacy	How participants reinterpret challenges, develop resilience, and engage in self-advocacy to pursue career advancement opportunities.
Opportunity Structures	Transparency, Bias, and Exclusion in Career Advancement	How organizational policies, norms, and informal practices create or limit access to promotions, leadership roles, and professional visibility.
Mentorship and Networks		How mentoring and social ties open doors and shape career trajectories.
Belonging and Psychosocial Safety	Inclusion and Selective Disclosure in the Workplace	How identity disclosure, sociopolitical climate, and sense of psychosocial safety, influence comfort, authenticity, and opportunity-taking.

Theme 1: Bicultural Capital

"I consider myself bilingual… [it has] opened a lot of doors for me." – ***Javier***

In this study, bicultural capital refers to how participants' cultural identity and bilingual (Spanish/English) skills operate as practical resources and at times, constraints in career advancement. Participants describe Spanish as a trust-builder with clients, patients, and community stakeholders; a differentiator that expands reach across sectors and a day-to-day tool for problem-solving. At the same time, they navigate professionalism norms such as expectations around accent, tone, and when Spanish is "appropriate." This is coupled with things like policy

frictions such as “English-only” rules or interpreter policies that narrow when and how these skills are recognized. This theme matters to the research question because it shows how intersecting identities translate into concrete opportunity mechanisms. Bilingualism and cultural fluency can unlock projects, roles, and relationships, while organizational norms can also limit their visible value. Centering these testimonios highlights participants’ agency in leveraging culture and language and clarifies the organizational conditions under which bicultural capital becomes an asset for advancement rather than invisible or contested labor.

Cultural Identity and Bilingualism as a Professional Asset

In this subtheme, bilingualism and bicultural fluency function as career catalysts, building trust with clients and patients, expanding community reach, and positioning participants for high-visibility assignments. In these narratives, bilingualism is not simply a personal trait; it becomes a market-facing capability tied to outcomes, “being bilingual… opened a lot of doors for me.” Participants were often tapped to solve problems others cannot, which increases visibility with managers and can accelerate advancement. At the same time, they surface tensions; informal expectations to translate, limits imposed by interpreter or “English-only” policies, and the risk of being routed into language-bound tasks that do not translate into promotions.

Julian

Julian’s bicultural identity and bilingual skills translate into credibility and opportunity in community-facing roles. He connects his career growth to understanding how culture shapes connection and service, with Spanish fluency consistently opening doors. Leadership also recognizes his cultural fluency as an asset, positioning him as relatable and well-rounded in roles where community and trust matter. At the same time, his narrative reveals constraints in

predominantly white or traditional professional spaces. He describes moments of code-switching and identity alteration to be accepted, noting that aspects of his Mexican and gay identity often must be muted to fit in. This highlights the tension between authenticity and professionalism, where self-expression is carefully managed to meet workplace expectations.

"It's been a great learning curve for me, understanding those aspects…every single job that I've had it's because I speak Spanish so that has opened a lot of doors for me… I haven't had a job that my bilingual skills have not given me an extra opportunity." He goes on to say, "being part of the community makes me relatable as opposed to probably a straight person… it's familiar to an individual (person of color), but yeah, my boss fully supports it." However, Julian states, "…I don't feel like I can bring my full Mexican self to work even my gay self to work. So, the way I navigate it is, is by code-switching, I turn myself off to be able to fit into those spaces." Participant 1's narrative shows that bicultural/bilingual capital can be an asset when organizations value community connection and relational expertise.

Eduardo

In emergency medical services, Eduardo's bilingualism functions as a frontline capability that improves care and builds trust. He often served as the interpreter for worried families, helping them understand urgent medical situations more quickly and easing their anxiety. At the same time, his narrative highlights constraints. Being the only Spanish speaker meant additional uncompensated labor and exposure to bias, as racism in the EMT environment sometimes complicated interactions. His story also reflects skill-training gaps; while fluent, he never formally learned Spanish medical terminology, since his parents emphasized learning English in school and he picked up Spanish informally from his grandmother. "they [my parents] didn't want me speaking Spanish because they wanted me to learn English and be English speaking."

Therefore "…I never learned Spanish medical terminology… When as a child was, I going to use Spanish medical terminology?"

However, he quickly realized that being bilingual was more than just an asset for him stating, "there were a lot of parents that I got to speak Spanish to and that's actually what kept me going…The amount of times that family members thank me for being so kind to their family members, to the patient, and for just being there to interpret." He goes on to say, "…not everybody gets that [Spanish] and usually they have to wait for hours for the hospital to find somebody [translator] or wait for hours for them to find a niece or a nephew or a cousin or somebody who's willing to help." He goes on to say, "there's still some racism because we do live in Texas, but again, I work in medicine, so I have enjoyed showing up on a scene, seeing a family who is Spanish-speaking only, and being the only one that can speak to them." For Eduardo, Spanish is a clear career asset that opens doors and delivers impact, but its advancement value depends on organizational recognition like training, role design, and credit for interpretive work, rather than relying on personal goodwill alone. His statements underscore Spanish as a frontline capability that delivers impact and the need for organizational structures that recognize and resource it.

Damian

Participant 6 situates his bilingualism within an organizational context that both leverages and shapes Mexican American identity. He was often tapped for Latino outreach initiatives, which expanded opportunities but also risked flattening diversity into narrow images of what "authentic" Latinos should sound or look like. Yet he also acknowledged that over time, bilingualism felt less like an asset when its value was not tied to promotable credit. His experience reflects the broader tension of bilingual capital as both resource and constraint;

powerful in daily work, but only advancing careers when organizations recognize and reward its impact.

He starts by saying, “I’m very proud of being Mexican American, I speak Spanish fluently… I was a bilingual teacher for 11 years… it was an asset… at some point… I didn’t really feel like it was much of an asset.” He goes on to talk about his current role as a Real Estate agent, recalling, “… [At work] we had…call it the Hispanic initiative or something like that… where we were really reaching out to Latinos because it’s the fastest growing population group and so I was part of that.”

He goes on to reflect that, “When you think about Latinos… we’re so diverse… you get the ones that are like heavy accent… and then you have people like me.” For Participant 6 being bilingual has shifter as his career trajectory has changed, “It’s immeasurable… maybe somebody… can only communicate with four people, [but] I can communicate with ten… if there’s any kind of miscommunication, I’m always there to rectify it or clear it up… it’s an asset overall...” Participant’s 6 shift in carers and recent professional growth has been significant with how he sees himself, “I feel really at peace with how Mexican I am. I don’t feel like I have to perform for anyone…in front of white people, super Latino people, people fresh off the boat. Occasionally… I’m not warmed up to Spanish, that might be a little bit of a conflict… You never want to censor.”

Summary

It is important to note that the three narratives highlighted in this section are examples chosen for their clarity, but they are not unique. The chosen narratives helped demonstrate how bicultural capital functioned across diverse industries and roles while remaining grounded in the collective experiences of all seven participants. This approach ensured that the findings remain

focused on participants' voices and collective patterns, rather than favoring one story over another.

That said, across most accounts, participants described being bilingual as a career resource that opened doors, fostered trust, and positioned them as bridges between organizations and the communities they served. Spanish fluency was often described as essential for building relationships with clients, patients, and colleagues, and for resolving problems others could not, leading to increased visibility and credibility in their workplaces. Many participants traced these skills back to early family experiences, such as translating for parents or navigating bicultural spaces as children, which shaped their ability to adapt and connect across contexts.

These dynamics required participants to strategically balance authenticity and professionalism. Many discussed the need to manage aspects of their identity such as accent, tone, or cultural expression to fit within dominant workplace norms. This included code-switching or selectively revealing parts of their Mexican and gay identities to maintain safety and influence. While participants valued the connections their bicultural capital created, they also described the emotional and professional costs of having to constantly negotiate how much of themselves to bring forward in different settings.

Theme 2: Agency and Resilience

"… I think I always knew I just had to hustle for myself." ***- Damian***

In this theme, agency and resilience refer to participants' ability to persist, reframe, and push forward. Agency, for example, shows up in participant narratives when deciding which battles to fight, how to advocate for oneself and others, and when to pivot in public or social situations. Resilience manifests in how participants process setbacks, bias, and gatekeeping by drawing on family, community, faith, and by taking pride in making strides. These stories show

how gay Mexican American men use agency and resiliency to negotiate self-disclosure, set boundaries, and seek allies and mentors.

Growth and Self Advocacy

This subtheme examines how participants actively reinterpret moments of perceived bias, microaggressions, stalled promotions, or pigeonholing, through reframing and reflection. Participants showed to transform "setbacks" into things like setting boundaries, negotiating raises or role changes, seeking mentors, and pursuing credentials or roles that expand opportunity. Reframing the perceived negative experiences become engines of advancement, mechanisms by which these individuals' experiences turn into growth, advocacy, and momentum.

Julian

Julian transitioned from working in the arts as a solicitor for donations to public programs into a director role leading a team. This shift was unfamiliar to him, as he had little knowledge of the business and administrative side of the work. Moving from frontline to administrative responsibilities, he reframed the new expectations as an opportunity to build influence. He learned institutional norms largely on his own and began to use audience-aware communication as a strategy, adapting his style depending on who made decisions. Alongside this, he practiced self-advocacy despite discomfort with promoting himself, and he adjusted how he presented himself in different contexts to ensure others felt at ease. However, he also acknowledged the personal cost of these adjustments, at times feeling he had to turn parts of himself off in order to fit into certain spaces. He recalled, "…going into the administrative side… there were formalities… things of that nature that I had to learn on my own." He explained, "…I show what they need to see. And therefore, that is my code switching…" He reflected, "…speaking to

women [for example] … my voice fluctuates… I have to present myself in a fashion where they feel comfortable."

For Julian, agency and resilience emerge through the ability to reframe unfamiliar demands as opportunities for growth. He approached formalities, audience expectations, and even the discomfort of self-promotion as skills that could be learned and strategically applied. Code-switching, boundary-setting, and adjusting communication styles became deliberate tools to navigate bias, gain credibility, and reach decision-makers. At the same time, he acknowledged the personal cost of these adaptations, recognizing that fitting into certain spaces sometimes required silencing parts of his Mexican and gay identity. His testimony demonstrates how challenges are not simply endured but transformed into strategies that generate influence and forward momentum—exemplifying the subtheme of reframing experiences for growth within the broader theme of agency and resilience.

Eduardo

Eduardo described moving into roles where advancement often depended on navigating organizational politics and stereotypes. He recalled early progress as a "very progressive trajectory" but noted that his growth also came with challenges in perception and bias. Rather than internalize these setbacks, he reframed them as opportunities to refine how he positioned himself. Over time, he learned to choose his battles carefully, balancing when to step back and when to assert himself. This practice of selective engagement became a form of agency, ensuring he preserved energy while still advocating for his career path. This deliberate approach became a form of agency, allowing him to conserve energy while still advocating for his career trajectory. He also recognized the necessity of defining himself on his own terms, resisting stereotypes and

embracing authenticity within professional boundaries, “I’ve learned to pick and choose which battles are worth fighting.”

He reflected, “I probably wouldn’t go directly into confrontation, but I’d find a way to get my point across.” He added, “I actually hold back a lot… just when things get too much, I choose not to engage, because not every battle is worth fighting.” Finally, he emphasized, “I’ve been very fortunate to find supportive people along the way, but at the end of the day I still have to advocate for myself and not wait for others to do it.” For Eduardo, resilience emerges from treating bias and gatekeeping not as dead ends but as moments to strengthen his decision-making and advocacy skills. His narrative shows how reframing difficult experiences into intentional strategies allowed him to sustain momentum and pursue advancement without losing sight of his long-term goals.

Javier

Javier’s narrative highlights how early challenges became catalysts for resilience and growth. In middle and high school, he encountered doubt from peers and authority figures, which initially led to self-doubt but eventually fueled his determination to “prove them wrong.” He reframed discouragement as motivation, choosing persistence over withdrawal. In his academic and career path, he relied heavily on self-reliance, especially when navigating financial and institutional barriers. Rather than view these constraints as fixed limitations, he treated them as learning opportunities that sharpened his ability to adapt and self-advocate.

He explained, “Yeah, so in middle school… it was one of those schools where, you know, they didn’t expect much of us, so I just wanted to prove them wrong.” He added, “that but plus, yes, I didn’t get as much support as I should have. So I had to figure things out on my

own." Later, he emphasized, "I had to figure out financial aid by myself… nobody was there to guide me, so I had to learn the system."

Reflecting on responsibility, he stated, "I did when it came to responsibility… I had to grow up faster and make choices that other people didn't have to." Finally, he reframed the journey noting, "It was actually good because it forced me to be resourceful and to see that I could get through those obstacles." For Javier, agency and resilience emerge in his ability to reinterpret systemic inequities and lack of support as opportunities to cultivate independence and perseverance. His testimony demonstrates how reframing discouragement into determination and setbacks into skill-building reinforced his growth and solidified his capacity for self-advocacy.

Summary

Participants' narratives consistently demonstrated how agency and resilience shaped their ability to move forward despite bias, barriers, and limited support. Across interviews, participants described needing to "hustle for themselves," "figure things out on their own," and "choose which battles to fight." Agency appeared in the ways they decided when to speak up, how to navigate stereotypes, and how to advocate for themselves in environments where advancement was not guaranteed. Resilience was evident in how they processed challenges such as stalled promotions, microaggressions, and limited guidance by reframing these moments into opportunities for growth. Their words reflect a shared understanding that persistence and self-determination were essential to sustaining progress and momentum: "At the end of the day, I still have to advocate for myself and not wait for others to do it."

Participants repeatedly described reframing negative experiences as a way to transform setbacks into actionable strategies. Several recalled moments when discouragement or lack of resources motivated them to prove others wrong or push harder toward their goals. For instance,

when faced with limited guidance, one participant stated, “I had to figure things out on my own.” Others described learning to navigate organizational politics and stereotypes by focusing their energy where it mattered most, often “picking and choosing which battles are worth fighting.” This selective engagement helped them preserve energy, maintain authenticity, and continue to advance despite external barriers. Even in difficult situations, participants found ways to grow, to seek mentorship or new credentials, and to position themselves for future opportunities.

While three narratives were highlighted to illustrate this theme, these experiences and strategies were echoed by nearly all participants. Their voices reflect a collective process of turning bias, silence, and gatekeeping into catalysts for action. Through reframing, self-advocacy, and perseverance, participants showed that agency and resilience were not fixed traits but ongoing practices shaped by lived experiences. Together, their testimonios reveal a shared pattern of transforming adversity, building influence, sustaining hope, and continuing to move toward advancement even when systemic barriers present themselves.

Theme 3: Opportunity Structures

“Why am I not being promoted? Is it because I’m brown?” ***- Diego***

For this study, opportunity structures refer to the formal and informal systems that shape access to advancement. These can be things like clarity and consistency of promotion criteria, who gets development opportunities or assignments, how performance is evaluated, and how subtle exclusion or bias can narrow visibility. Participants’ narratives show that advancement is determined not only by individual effort, but by organizational rules and unwritten norms. Therefore, representation in leadership pipelines, transparency around requirements, equitable credit for high-impact work (including bilingual labor), and the everyday climate in which decisions are made become significant, especially for people of color.

Unfortunately, for moments of ambiguity, like being the "go-to" person for language needs without recognition, unclear pathways to the next title, or microaggressions that signal who is and who isn't seen as leadership material become chokepoints that shape trajectories. This theme reveals where the intersecting identities of gay Mexican American men meet organizational gatekeeping or openings. Their testimonios highlight factors that turn merit into growth and by centering these narratives, the theme clarifies that career advancement is not only a matter of resilience or skill, but of structures that can either translate contributions into promotions or render them invisible.

Transparency, Bias, and Exclusion in Career Advancement

This subtheme allows for further exploration on how organizational policies, norms, and informal practices create or limit access to promotions, leadership roles, and professional visibility. Participants' narratives make clear that advancement depends not only on merit, but on how criteria are communicated or hidden, who is seen and supported. Unclear career advancement opportunities, selective access to stretch assignments, and the routine of routing bilingual tasks without credit or compensation all function as structural filters that narrow opportunity. Accent and "professionalism" expectations, code-switching pressures, and microaggressions further signal who is deemed worthy of advancement opportunities. This subtheme matters because it shows the exact points where the intersecting identities of gay Mexican American men meet organizational gatekeeping or openings and whether their impact is translated into growth or rendered invisible.

Diego

Diego interprets career advancement through the lens of ambiguous criteria and inconsistent recognition. He describes doing assistant-director–level work without appropriate

title or pay and encountering unclear, inconsistently applied criteria for promotion. In his narrative, access to leadership roles depends as much on who advocates and how credit is assigned as on performance itself; support becomes the mechanism that converts visible contributions into actual mobility. "…I brought up my promotion or lack thereof, and I said to the head of HR, I said, why is it that these other people are being promoted? Is it because they are white? And why am I not being promoted? Is it because I'm brown? She's like, oh."

He adds, "I am basically doing the job of assistant director and you're not paying me for it, nor are you recognizing me for it. And they tried to play it off as, oh, we didn't know. Bullshit… So, yes, I thought, well, maybe it's because I'm a minority. The running joke in the organization, at least amongst the minorities, is that we're the wrong skin color." This powerful and raw statement clearly points to title–pay misalignment and under-recognition of higher-level work. The promotion process itself "…has to be advocated for and even then, they can choose not to."

Because of this, Diego feels that support and having, "someone finally in your corner who's going to basically fight for you like I fight for my staff." is significant and cannot go unsaid. That feeling he states, "has to do with just me being able to advocate for myself… to push for these promotions that they were not going to throw at me freely." Diego's narrative underscores a dual reality; when criteria are ambiguous and recognition is inconsistent, career advancement highly depends on organizational support and advocacy rather than a transparent processes. When organizations clarify advancement criteria, align recognition with responsibility, and reward positive impact, opportunity structures translate performance into promotion.

Eduardo

Eduardo discussed how an opportunity passed him through because of the gatekeeping he encountered at the hiring stage and the informal norms that signal who fits in and who doesn't. He describes a first-round interview with a scheduler that went well, only to learn she lacked decision power. The return visit with a supervisor unfolded in a very different way, he recalls, "I went back for that second interview with the supervisor and again, when I walked in, predominantly white, male… As I walked in, I was very aware that I did not look like the others. So when I approached the supervisor, he literally made a face at me, like, who the hell are you?" He adds, "I was dressed professional, I didn't gay it up… but he was very dry throughout the entire interview…I knew I did not have that job… And as I walked out, again, just white male passing me, white male passing me." This contrast between the screening interview and the interview with the hiring supervisor shows how informal gatekeeping and homogeneous norms can supersede positive assessments and narrow access to entry and advancement.

Beyond hiring, he describes being othered in practice settings in ways that shape visibility and safety. When asked about stereotyping he recalls instances in which he felt and perceived microaggressions he shares an instance in which he started an IV on somebody who had a swastika tattoo stating, "everything was fine and dandy when there was me, my white partner, and a bunch of white firefighters, but once everybody else left… dead silence… [Yet] I'm the one giving you the life-saving treatments… But he didn't want to speak a single word to me." For some, these moments are of minimal importance however, for gay Mexican Americans like Eduardo, these moments of perceived microaggressions reveal how everyday interactions can diminish personal credibility even the sense of belonging and acceptance regardless of how well you perform or in this instance regardless of whether you're giving someone lifesaving care.

Eduardo also talks about workplace policy and identity tension that regulates expression in the workplace, sharing that, “as a Hispanic person… I wanted to be in the protest [BLM Movement] but I remember getting in trouble at work because they told me, you’re representing this company, you cannot be seen pro this cause…” In addition to these workplace policies, which police expression outside of his work, there is also the navigation of his identity with colleagues stating that, “a colleague was hyper-religious and hated another guy who was outwardly gay. I was new." He hated him just for being gay… I eventually came out… because again, I have no issue with it. But I can present a little bit more masculine if I need to…” Despite Eduardo feeling comfortable in his identity, the trepidation of true expression is there, these workplace norms make career advancement dependent on managing identity to fit a narrow template. Taken together, his testimonio shows how opportunity structures are experienced on all levels, from the ground to who holds decision power. Homogeneous policies that shape public expression along with microaggressions and bias all come together to create or limit access to promotions, leadership roles, and professional visibility.

Javier

Javier interprets opportunity through a significant contrast between a small, family-owned firm and his current, larger organization. In the family business, power and policy were merged and the workplace environment normalized disrespect, making advancement feel unlikely. He explains, when I worked at the employer… that was a family-owned business we all knew each other, and I was considered the other because I was the only non-white American.” The day-to-day set the tone and he says, “I tolerated it for a year and a half… and it wasn’t just the gay jokes… the boss would actually say… if I messed up… ‘are you stupid?’… ‘I know they didn’t teach you that in college.’” In those settings, Javier managed risk by minimizing

confrontation and leaving, stating, “if I am in an environment where I’m the only one… I’m not really outspoken… I just… brush it off… and the way I move away from that is by finding other employment.” Together, his narratives reveal how central singular decision power and tolerant norms around microaggressions suppress voice and narrow pathways to career advancement.

However, in subsequent roles he saw how formal recognition of valued skills can widen access and visibility. “As a Mexican American… it hasn’t impacted me negatively. If anything, it’s benefited me if I speak Spanish.” Nevertheless, representation gaps and identity perceptions still shape opportunity, “I feel like I might be the only Latino in my department,” and a prior supervisor once implied, “you’re white-skinned pretty much, so you don’t really count.” These moments perfectly show both sides of opportunity structures how explicit, skill-based criteria and role design can translate contributions into mobility, and how informal judgments about who “counts” can still shape visibility.

Javier’s testimonio illustrates that advancement is dependent on the structures and norms surrounding the work. It highlights the importance of work environments, transparency, skill-linked criteria, and clear career pathways that signal development and career advancement opportunities. In workplace environments in which these things are absent, contributions are easier to overlook and therefore careers stall. However, in workplaces where these conditions are present, performance becomes career advancement.

Summary

Career advancement was described as deeply shaped by organizational policies, norms, and everyday practices that either opened doors or created barriers. Many participants shared feelings of uncertainty around promotion processes, often questioning why they were not being promoted despite their contributions. Others echoed this sentiment, describing how unclear

criteria, lack of transparency, and the absence of clear pathways created frustration and mistrust. Several participants talked about doing higher-level work without proper recognition or pay, while also feeling pressure to self-advocate in systems that were not designed to make opportunities visible or accessible to them. Across the narratives, advancement was not solely about individual effort, but also about whether the organization recognized and valued their contributions.

Participants repeatedly spoke about gatekeeping and bias that shaped who was seen as leadership material. Many described moments in hiring or promotion processes where outward appearance or perceived identity influenced how they were treated. Some recalled experiences of being the only person of color in the room or receiving dismissive reactions during interviews, while others pointed to microaggressions and stereotypes that made it clear who belonged and who did not. Policies and unwritten rules also played a role, such as expectations to suppress aspects of their identity or avoid visible support for social causes. These patterns revealed how power operated not only through formal policies but through subtle, everyday signals that determined who had access to growth opportunities.

While three participant narratives are highlighted in this section, the experiences they describe were shared by most participants. Collectively, their voices show that career advancement was shaped not only by performance and skill, but by the structures that determined whether their impact was seen, credited, and rewarded. These testimonios show that opportunity structures are not neutral but rather they either translate contributions into growth or render them invisible.

Theme 4: Mentorship & Networks

"They [my mentors] understood what my potential could be. Having that type of support and understanding, saying, you can do better, really meant a lot." ***- Julian***

In this study, mentorship and networks capture how guidance, support, and social ties open doors and shape career trajectories. Participants describe pivotal moments when a mentor's nudge, a manager's advocacy, or a well-timed introduction translated potential into opportunity, securing a second interview, getting placed on a visible project, or being considered for the next role. These accounts highlight both support (someone with influence who argues for you in rooms you're not in) and mentorship (coaching, feedback, and skill-building), alongside the everyday value of community and professional connections. For gay Mexican American men, these ties often bring hidden criteria to the surface forcing them to navigate organizational norms while also affirming their sense of identity and belonging. Centering these testimonios underscores that advancement is rarely a solo endeavor; it is socially mediated, and the presence or absence of mentors and networks powerfully conditions whose contributions become visible, credible, and promotable.

Julian

Julian shares how early role models and mentor nudges shaped aspiration and opened doors. Seeing LGBTQ+ leaders made advancement imaginable, "I was probably 21/22 at the time, and they were in their 30s and 40s, and these [were] leaders that I really looked up to… both straight and LGBT, [but particularly] a lesbian and gay director…" He shares that it was different from what he had before, "…being told by them [my mentors] that 'you can do better,' really meant a lot…"—and helped him recalibrate goals and steps toward them. These touchpoints highlight how mentorship can rewrite the unwritten rules, normalize ambition, and

provide concrete guidance for when navigating career paths as a gay Mexican American professional.

As his responsibilities grew, manager advocacy became pivotal for visibility and scope. He notes, “It was my current boss, who really helped me understand the direction I need to go, so putting those goals and efforts into place helped me a lot.” Supportive leadership didn’t just affirm his identity but it helped translate his contributions into credibility, positioning him for task that where community connection and cultural fluency mattered. In this way, mentorship and manager support functioned as support beam, signaling trust, amplifying strengths, and making his work matter to other decision-makers.

Where formal pathways were thin, he was proactive in finding his own network. Beyond the office, he leveraged community ties and intentionally cultivated a circle of allies stating that “from a personal aspect… I’m very intentional in who I speak to, who I keep close…” In addition, when asked who he owes his success to, he addresses his intersectionality by sharing that he owes his success to both his family ties and LGBT mentors, …” The discipline I learned from my father and the softness from my mother. Then… the guiding from my mentors on the LGBT side…” These accounts show how social ties both inside and outside the organization helped him access information, referrals, and personal affirmation. Julian’s narrative shows how mentorship and networks both formal or informal, familiar or not, are the social infrastructure that turns ability into opportunity.

Diego

When it comes to mentorship and networks, Diego talks about how role models and informal mentoring ignite confidence and direction. He recalls his only true mentor was a the husband of a female college professor, …” I looked at him like a father figure almost…

definitely a mentor... he and his wife were always encouraging me and pushing me and not letting me settle with just comfort." Looking back on those early years, he ties growth to people who noticed potential and intervened. "…they saw something in me, and so they decided to kind of take me…" These moments of recognition, offering guidance, or pulling him in functioned as on-ramps and offered a vision of potential and a clearer sense of professional identity.

As he got older having that sole mentor was pivotal both in his personal and professional life, he says, "I don't remember when it was, but at some point, I was like, wow, this is what it's like to have a someone who cares about you." He later underscores how having the additional fuel of his husband has also aided in how he pushes himself professionally, "I definitely feel supported by my husband, and I think pushing myself for the kids, too, it all plays a big part in it, in trying to keep going and growing." In his narrative, these ties show that workplace mentorships don't always have to come from a directive that outside mentorship can also provide encouragement, perspective, and bandwidth to continue seeking growth when organizational pathways feel slow or unclear.

At the same time, he is not oblivious as it pertains to the gaps in formal mentorship and is candid about how it is not always readily available or easy to find. Referring to his current job as director and talking about the lack of formal support, stating, I definitely feel it lacking and it's not necessarily something that is available at work." Diego sees the importance of formal mentorship and networks The result is a mixed landscape in which early mentors and personal support open doors and sustain confidence, yet limited structured access to sponsors and networks can slow career trajectories. Diego's narrative highlights the theme of mentorship and networks by showing how social ties inside and outside work spark opportunity and resilience, and how the absence of formalized networking and support can leave advancement solely

dependent on self-advocacy and chance rather than consistent organizational scaffolding and opportunities for gay Mexican American men.

Summary

Unlike other themes in this study, this theme does not include a subtheme because participants' stories were closely interconnected and consistently focused on the same core idea that the presence or absence of mentorship and networks directly shaped their career experiences. The narratives presented here represent patterns that were voiced by most participants, showing both the opportunities created through strong mentorship and the challenges that arise when those supports are missing. Together, their voices highlight the essential role of mentorship and networks as social infrastructure, demonstrating that career advancement is not a solo endeavor but one built through relationships that affirm identity, translate contributions into visibility, and create paths towards success.

For this theme, participants' consistently described mentorship and networks as critical to their career journeys, sharing how relationships with mentors, managers, peers, and community members opened doors that might otherwise have remained closed. Many recalled moments where a mentor's encouragement or a manager's advocacy helped them feel seen, supported, and prepared to take on new opportunities. Several spoke about how simply hearing someone say, "You can do better," or having a leader fight for them in rooms they were not in, gave them the confidence and direction to keep moving forward. Across their narratives, participants emphasized that mentorship and networks not only offered guidance and coaching but also provided visibility and access to resources and information they could not have reached on their own.

These experiences were shared widely among participants, even though they looked different depending on individual circumstances. Some participants, like those highlighted in this section, talked about finding mentors early in their careers whose belief in their potential fueled ambition and professional growth. Others described relying on partners, family members, or community connections for support when formal mentorship was absent or inconsistent. Many voiced a common concern about the lack of structured mentorship opportunities in their workplaces, pointing out that without formal support, advancement often depended on chance encounters or personal initiative. The narratives consistently revealed that when mentorship and networks were present, participants were more likely to feel connected, valued, and positioned for growth. When they were missing, participants felt isolated, left to navigate their careers without guidance, and forced to rely solely on their own resilience.

Theme 5: Belonging & Psychosocial Safety

"I don't feel like I can bring my full Mexican self to work even my gay self. I navigate it by code-switching; I turn parts of me off to fit those spaces." ***- Julian***

In this study, belonging and psychosocial safety refers to whether participants can show up as their full selves without consequence, and whether they can speak up, take interpersonal risks, and pursue visibility without fear of subtle or overt backlash. The theme examines everyday signals like leadership tone, how policies are enforced, professionalism policing, expectations to code-switch, and microaggressions mark who is seen as someone with potential for career advancement. For gay Mexican American men, these conditions are not minor workplace issues; they are career mechanisms. When people feel safe and recognized, bilingual and cultural fluency become capital that opens doors to client-facing roles, projects, and leadership tracks. When safety is not clear and when language is policed, identity must be

managed, or bias goes unchecked. Centering these testimonios clarifies how intersecting identities meet structures of inclusion or exclusion, directly shaping how contributions translate into career growth.

Inclusion and Selective Disclosure in the Workplace

This subtheme helps to further understand how participants calculate when, how, and whom they disclose facets of identity, but particularly their gay identity based on the surrounding sociopolitical climate and their perceived psychosocial safety. In the narratives, being out using Spanish, naming bias, or signaling solidarity on sociopolitical issues are not simple expressions of self; they are strategic choices shaped by power, norms, and risk. When organizations model inclusion with a purpose, policies are enforced fairly, and everyday interactions affirm dignity, participants report greater comfort and authenticity, speaking up in meetings, pursuing stretch roles, leveraging bilingual skills visibly, and seeking additional support.

When gay Mexican American men only feel safety through code-switching expectations, policing accent and annunciation, "English-only" signals, or retaliation cues, participants selectively disclose, mute or hide language or identity, and pass on opportunities that require visibility. Highlighting selective disclosure is crucial because it reveals the mechanism linking organizational environments to career advancement, meaning that the more psychosocially safe the context, the more participants can focus less on policing who they are and focus more on what they do.

Eduardo

Eduardo describes how organizational signals shape what feels safe to express and, in turn, which opportunities he will pursue. He recalls "I wore a Black Lives Matter mask and they told me to stop 'you're representing this company.'" Extending beyond the workplace, he was

warned against public affiliation: “As a Hispanic person… I wanted to be in the protest [BLM], but… they told me, you’re representing this company, you cannot be seen pro this cause.” These directives narrowed authenticity and visibility and made him weigh the risks of taking on more public-facing roles. In his words, the message was that belonging is conditionally safe so long as expressions of identity or conscience stay out of sight.

Certain work environments also required selective disclosure and careful identity management. He recounts how a hyper-religious coworker treated an openly gay colleague with hostility, which led Eduardo to calibrate when and how to be out: “…there was another guy who was outwardly gay… [the coworker] was very hateful… I eventually came out… because again, I have no issue with it. But I can present a little bit more masculine if I need to.” The need to manage presentation and dialing masculinity up or down depending on context shows how psychosocial safety governs everyday choices to speak up, seek stretch assignments, or step into leadership visibility. Where signals are supportive, disclosure becomes strength; where they are retaliatory or ambiguous, disclosure becomes risk to be managed.

Emilio

Emilio highlights belonging through the lens of language and cultural expression. He recalls being told not to use Spanish at work, only to be asked to interpret when convenient for others, “I remember being told I wasn’t allowed to speak Spanish to people or to patients… and Emilio ties belonging directly to how language and identity are policed in everyday practice. He recalls being told not to use Spanish, only to be summoned when it suited others: “I remember being told I wasn’t allowed to speak Spanish to people or to patients… and then it was like, ‘can you come translate?’ It really felt like a double standard.” He adds that outside of those sanctioned moments, he avoids Spanish because of how it’s perceived: “…in any other

[situation] I wouldn't speak Spanish… because other people would think that we would be talking about [them]." These statements capture how Emilio manages visibility; when to use Spanish, how much identity to show based on cues about safety, which in turn shapes whether his bilingual capital is recognized as promotable value or treated as ad hoc, uncredited work.

Social dynamics compounded the pressure to self-manage. Describing a previous unit, he notes, "And they were not friends with me. So I try to keep it professional…" and later, on being left out of informal circles, "…I have my pride… yeah, I'm not going to be begging." In these settings, exclusion narrowed access to the informal networks where opportunities circulate and where reputations are made. By contrast, a later move created relief and renewed engagement: "…it's been great, because it's always been my safe space." The contrast underscores how climate determines whether he speaks up, seeks visibility, and leverages identity as an asset—or withholds to protect himself.

When language is policed or identity cues are penalized, he limits Spanish use and narrows participation reducing the chances that leadership will see and reward his full contribution. When leaders and teams signal safety and respect, he brings more of himself forward, uses Spanish confidently, and participates in ways that build visibility conditions under which cultural and linguistic capital can translate into advancement rather than invisible, one-sided service.

Armando

Armando situates his experience of belonging and psychological safety within a journey from concealment to quiet confidence. Early in his career, he described how he kept his personal and professional worlds apart, saying, "I've actually never been out in my workplace… I've always kept my personal life separate from my professional life." He explained that while his

Mexican identity was visible and often accepted, his gay identity was easier to conceal, noting, "It's easier to just accept the stereotype of a Latino than accept the stereotype of a gay man." His story reflects the constant negotiation between authenticity and protection; being Mexican American was permitted, but being openly gay was something he had to measure carefully. These early experiences capture how limited psychological safety can narrow opportunities for self-expression and leadership visibility.

He starts by saying, "I tend to separate my worlds… but in order to be whole, I should try to merge my worlds… to be genuine and authentic." He goes on to explain that part of this process has been finding small, meaningful ways to bring his full self to work, sharing, "It's a way for me to show that I am gay without being explicit about it," when describing his decision to grow out his hair. For him, it became a subtle act of visibility that felt both safe and empowering. This served as a bridge between personal authenticity and professional presence, showing how belonging can begin with simple expressions of comfort and pride even in spaces that have not always felt fully inclusive.

He goes on to reflect that mentorship and inclusive leadership deepened that sense of belonging over time, recalling, "He sent me to collaborations in Germany, paid for conferences, and supported my ideas, he was an excellent mentor." Through these relationships, he experienced what it meant to be recognized without judgment, adding, "I feel connected, more seen and loved." For Armando, authenticity and opportunity began to align as his environment affirmed rather than policed difference. His shift from guardedness to openness underscores that when workplaces cultivate real psychological safety, gay Mexican American men can bring their full selves to work transforming identity from something to protect into something that propels growth and visibility.

Summary

All participants mentioned some form of belonging and psychosocial safety and whether they could bring their full selves to work and how that, in turn, affected their opportunities for growth and advancement. Participants shared the constant calculations they made about when to speak up, how much of their identity to reveal, and when to step back to protect themselves. Expressions such as "I turn parts of me off to fit those spaces" captured the ways participants managed language, behavior, and visibility depending on the signals they received from leaders, colleagues, and organizational policies. These findings also presented new interpretive insights were participants perceived that visibility operates differently for gay Mexican American men than for their gay White men counterparts in organizational discourse, pointing to the racialized dynamics that condition whether sexuality is experienced as an advantage or as a liability.

For many participants, lack of safety meant living in a constant state of vigilance. This suggests that the visibility of sexuality is conditional for gay Mexican American men permitted only when safety and organizational dynamics allow for it, while for gay White men, visibility may function as a competitive edge, afforded credibility through Whiteness. This is further revealed when participants described how fear of being misunderstood or judged based on their identity led them to hold back in meetings, avoid leadership visibility, or pass on stretch opportunities. The emotional toll of these choices was evident as participants talked about the energy spent protecting themselves rather than focusing fully on their work or growth.

While these experiences varied, most participants voiced some form of this tension, showing how the absence of belonging and safety limited both their confidence and their career trajectories especially when they perceive their differences as barriers. While three narratives are highlighted in this section, the collective voices showed that belonging and psychosocial safety

are not abstract ideals but daily realities that determine whether contributions are recognized and rewarded. When safety was present, participants spoke of feeling empowered to take on visible roles and let their cultural and linguistic strengths shine. When safety was missing, especially in White centered environments, they described silencing parts of themselves and watching their potential go unseen. Together, these testimonios reveal that belonging and psychosocial safety are essential for unlocking advancement, with participants making clear that their success depended not just on individual effort, but on the environments and relationships that allowed them to be fully seen.

Chapter Summary

The narratives shared by the seven gay Mexican American men in this study offer a deep and personal look at how identity, culture, and workplace dynamics come together to shape career advancement. From these narratives, five central themes emerged: bicultural capital, agency and resilience, opportunity structures, mentorship and networks, and belonging and psychosocial safety. Each theme reveals how complex and layered the journey to advancement can be. Participants showed how their bilingual skills and cultural identities often opened doors, but also how those same traits could be undervalued or used without recognition. Even when not formally compensated, being bilingual and bicultural was almost always seen as a professional asset, something that built trust with team members, clients, patients, etc. It strengthened relationships, and expanded reach in ways monolingual colleagues could not. At the same time, this aspect of identity was more visible and harder to hide. Skin tone, accent, and cultural expression often made participants' Mexican heritage readily apparent, leaving little room to mask this part of themselves, especially in majority-white spaces where they were often the only one.

By contrast, being gay was never described as an asset in the workplace. None of the participants felt their sexual orientation enhanced their opportunities or professional standing. In fact, it was usually something to be carefully managed, masked, or completely hidden until they felt psychosocially safe. This added another layer to code-switching that went beyond altering language or tone, participants described toning down the gay, whether by acting more masculine, avoiding certain conversations, or limiting social interactions with coworkers altogether. This dual navigation authentically showing up as Mexican while hiding or minimizing queerness required constant vigilance and emotional labor. It also highlighted how identity visibility works differently across areas. While race and ethnicity were visible and sometimes leveraged, sexuality was selectively disclosed only when participants felt the environment would not punish them for it.

These findings make it clear that career advancement is not just about working hard or having the right skills. It's about whether organizations create environments where diverse talents are seen, supported, and rewarded. Mentorship and networks, for example, were pivotal in transforming potential into opportunity. When participants had access to mentors and advocates, they were able to grow, gain visibility, and navigate unwritten rules. On the other hand, when those supports were missing, advancement often came down to self-advocacy and luck, which placed an extra burden on individuals already carrying the weight of navigating multiple marginalized identities. Similarly, belonging and psychosocial safety shaped whether participants could bring their full selves to work. In spaces where they felt safe, they could focus on thriving and contributing fully. In spaces without safety, they were forced to hide or mute parts of themselves, which slowed their growth and limited their opportunities.

Together, these themes call attention to what organizations must do to truly support diverse talent. Gay Mexican American men, like so many others with intersecting identities, bring unique strengths and perspectives that can enrich workplaces. But those contributions can only flourish when structures are transparent, opportunities are equitable, and inclusion is more than just performative. These findings lay the foundation for Chapter 5, where they will be connected to existing research and frameworks to explore how organizations can create lasting change ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to grow, lead, and succeed while showing up fully and authentically.

Chapter 5 – Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore how gay Mexican American men make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America. This study employed a qualitative approach narrative inquiry complemented by testimonio to center the counter-stories of participants whose intersecting identities of ethnicity and sexuality shape their professional trajectories. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the research sought to answer the following question:

How do gay Mexican American men make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America through narratives?

Chapter 4 presented the findings from narrative inquiries with seven gay Mexican American men, exploring how identity, culture, organizational structures, and personal strategies influence advancement. The analysis revealed five themes: bicultural capital, agency and resilience, opportunity structures, mentorship and networks, and belonging and psychosocial safety. Participants' stories showed how Spanish bilingualism and bicultural fluency often served as career assets, though these contributions were frequently undervalued in formal advancement.

Participants demonstrated how resilience and reframing challenges into growth strategies allowed them to persist despite bias and ambiguous pathways. Mentorship and support emerged as pivotal to career mobility, with networks helping to translate individual contributions into visibility and advancement. At the same time, the narratives revealed how limited representation, tokenism, and ambiguous promotion processes constrained growth. Finally, participants emphasized the significance of belonging and psychosocial safety, underscoring how conditions of inclusion or exclusion determined whether they could bring their full selves to work or felt compelled to code-switch and mute parts of their identities.

While ethnicity was often visible and at times leveraged as a strength, sexuality was selectively disclosed, requiring constant calibration in professional contexts; this was an underlying pattern that highlights how gay Mexican American men often hide or strategically manage their gayness especially in low-safety climates whereas their gay White counterparts were perceived as less constrained in this regard. This contrast adds nuance to the complex interplay among identity visibility, organizational dynamics, and career advancement. Although participants demonstrated resourcefulness, their advancement ultimately depended on organizational structures that either recognized or overlooked their contributions.

Results and Interpretations

This chapter used my Franco Intersectional Career Advancement Model (FICAM) as the interpretive frame for my findings. The model's four core components which both informed my interview protocols and guided the coding schema, align with the study's focus on the career advancement of gay Mexican American men with equal emphasis on structural and interpersonal dynamics. The model's core components will guide the three main sections of Chapter 5 - the first section is tied to organizational opportunity structures, in my model, this refers to any formal systems that enable or limits growth, things like recruitment, transparent promotion, leadership development. The second section is tied to cultural capital & identity-navigation strategies. This component focuses on how participants leverage bicultural and bilingual competencies as well as manage visibility, through code-switching, selective self-disclosure, perception, relationship-building. Finally, the last section is tied to psychosocial resources which can refer to things like mentorship and ERGs groups.

These findings extend current understanding by showing how bicultural capital, mentorship, and resilience function as critical resources, while limited representation, ambiguous opportunity

structures, and the need for selective disclosure of sexuality impose distinct barriers. The study also brings to forefront an underlying theme where some participants perceived that visibility operates differently for gay Mexican American men than it often does for gay White men, This theme was discussed further as a critical reflection as it points to the racialized dynamics that condition whether sexuality is experienced as an advantage or a liability and can potentially open conversations for future research. Finally, this chapter will conclude with additional sections on research implications, recommendations, delimitations and limitations, future research, and conclusion.

Organizational Opportunity Structures

I used organizational opportunity structures to name the formal and informal systems that convert contribution into growth. When processes were clear and equitable, participants described more pathways to advancement; where criteria were ambiguous or absent, growth stalled. These patterns echoed broader representation gaps for Latinos in management (≈12% of managerial roles vs. ≈18% workforce share) and a lavender ceiling linking LGBTQ+ underpromotion to bias, microaggressions, and thin access to mentorship and sponsorship (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021; Crist Kolder Associates, 2023; Badgett et al., 2020).

Participants' testimonios pointed to recurring chokepoints like ambiguous promotion rules, supervisor gatekeeping, title and pay misalignment, and English-only norms that offset strong performance and growth potential. Chapter 2 literature review showed how professionalism policing can suppress progression into senior roles even when gay men are perceived as creative or emotionally intelligent (Badgett et al., 2020). Together, these dynamics help explain why capable individuals experience a lack of career growth or slower growth.

A structural pattern involved the under recognition of bilingual and bicultural work. Many were positioned as the Spanish "go-to," routinely interpreting or bridging culture without that work being counted as promotable value. The literature notes how generic DEI initiatives often overlook intersecting identities, leaving culturally specific contributions invisible in performance evaluations and promotion packets (Catalyst, 2023; Human Rights Campaign, 2021). Work environments and professional networks further mediated access to high-visibility assignments that typically lead to promotion. Microaggressions, identity policing, and exclusion from formal networks constrained these opportunities, things that are amplified for employees of color within LGBTQ+ populations (Badgett et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2020). An underlying pattern also emerged in where some participants perceived that White gay men could leverage sexual orientation as neutral or advantageous visibility, while their own sexuality, intersecting with being Mexican American, was read as a liability.

Consistent with FICAM and the findings, organizations can convert bicultural practice into recognized career advancement by operationalizing equity. Things like clear career guides and promotion rubrics. Individual agency and resilience matter, but it is these internal structures and the culture around them that ultimately determine whether effort translates into advancement.

Cultural Capital and Identity Navigation

Cultural capital and identity navigation describe how participants leveraged bilingualism, bicultural fluency, and everyday identity work to create belonging, reduce bias, and keep access to opportunity open in predominantly White organizational contexts. These capabilities often built trust with clients and colleagues, yet the same assets were frequently undervalued or routed

into ad hoc interpreting and that did not translate into career advancement turning an asset into a burden when unrecognized.

Consistent with the intersectional lens outlined in Chapter 2, participants framed identity navigation as risk management rather than a resource they could fully lean into. The literature anticipated this layered bias, where Mexican American men negotiate overlapping expectations across mainstream corporate spaces, Latino communities, and LGBTQ+ settings, with conflicting norms of masculinity and professionalism (Bowleg, 2008, 2020; Hames-García & Martínez, 2011; Tajon, 2009). Generic DEI approaches often overlook the compounded realities of intersecting identities, rendering day-to-day navigation work invisible in formal systems (Catalyst, 2023; Human Rights Campaign, 2021).

Findings also showed that bicultural capital both opens doors and invites policing. Participants described strategic code-switching and selective disclosure to maintain credibility and safety at work while facing accent/presentation scrutiny and informal translation expectations. When organizations embedded multilingual and cultural mediation into job structures bicultural capital became a career advancement asset; when they did not, hidden time and emotional costs accumulated and slowed progress. These patterns underscore that identity navigation is a capability with measurable outcomes, not merely personal adaptation.

In addition, a comparative perception surfaced around visibility and liability where Mexican identity is often read on sight (skin tone, accent), whereas sexuality is more concealable and thus strategically managed. Participants reported that being gay was rarely treated as an asset at work and in some contexts, required toning down gay indicators to fit leadership architypes, burdens perceived as greater than those faced by gay White male peers. This aligns with Chapter 2's account of racialized privilege interacting with sexual orientation, helping explain why

similar markers can be neutral or advantageous for some but risky for gay Mexican American men (Crenshaw, 1989; Hames-García & Martínez, 2011).

Aligned with FICAM, organizations can convert navigation into recognized career growth. An approach that can be taken is to promote multilingual professionalism, formalizing bilingual protocols that credit skill, recognizing language and culture workload in evaluations, as well as training managers to accurately read code-switching without punishing it. These steps move beyond removal of culture and toward recognition, ensuring that the value created by gay Mexican American men is not obscured but translated into legitimate pathways for advancement (Badgett et al., 2020; Catalyst, 2023; Human Rights Campaign, 2021; Hossain et al., 2020).

Psychosocial Resources

Psychosocial resources refers to the interplay between psychological and social factors which for the FICAM model encompass mentorship, affinity groups (ERGs), and resilience narratives, all of which help individuals break through barriers that are unseen. For example, participants consistently described mentors formal or informal as career accelerators who helped them overcome unwritten rules and advocated them in rooms, they were not in. Another importance of having psychosocial resources is because when individuals do not feel psychological or social safety at work, that affects their ability or want to disclose, reducing visibility, and risk-taking, on the other hand when psychosocial resources are available, participants can confidently seek opportunities with less fear of using their voice and negatively impacting growth.

The findings align with Chapter 2's account of a lavender ceiling, where advancement is dampened by internal bias and thin access to mentorship, ERGs, or examples of people who look

like them (resilience narratives); by contrast, well-designed psychosocial resources strengthen belonging and innovation when tied to leadership accountability and pipeline practices.

In addition, participants felt that progress was fastest when psychosocial resources had organizational influence. Mentorship provided guidance and feedback, sponsorship converted credibility into opportunity by naming talent in calibration, placing participants with potential on high-visibility projects. ERGs were most impactful when they operated as bridge institutions, not just social groups, linking members to mentors and sponsors, surfacing talent to leaders, and creating skill-building and showcase opportunities.

Complementing both, you also have resilience narratives, where things like speaker series, mentoring circles, or even alumni spotlight functioned as vicarious evidence that advancement is attainable, offering practical examples for navigating bias and sustaining momentum By building psychosocial resources into organizational structures, organizations can provide a systematic counterbalance to career bottlenecks, ensuring contributions by gay Mexican American men translate into equitable career advancement opportunities.

Interpersonal Environments

In the FICAM model, I use interpersonal environments to refer to the day-to-day work environments and the relationship between managers, peers, and sponsors and how they interact; Interactions at work that either translate identity and performance into promotable visibility or render them invisible. Participants defined belonging as the ability to contribute authentically without fear that ethnicity or sexuality would be weaponized against them. In psychologically safe work environments, they voiced ideas, took interpersonal risks, and were read as candidates for development. On the other hand, in scrutinizing climates, energy shifted toward concealment and self-protection. Intersectionality helps explain why these climates matter disproportionately

for gay Mexican American men, who must manage overlapping systems of racism and homophobia at work (Bowleg, 2008, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989).

Leaders set the tone. Cultural humility from managers reduced pressure to code-switch and reframed bilingual and bicultural strengths as leadership assets rather than side tasks. Conversely, professionalism policing around accent, tone, or gender expression signaled risk and narrowed participation (Collins, 2018; Hames-García & Martínez, 2011). These dynamics align with broader evidence on microaggressions, and the emotional labor required to navigate them, particularly for LGBTQ+ people of color (Badgett et al., 2020; Windsong, 2018). When leaders normalized identity-affirming behaviors and recognized culture, participants reported greater willingness to speak up and pursue visible assignments.

In addition, sponsorship was repeatedly described as the interpersonal lever that converted credibility into opportunity. While coaching improved skills, sponsors advocated "in rooms they were not in," secured access to high-visibility work, and buffered biased readings of performance. Yet the lavender ceiling literature shows that LGBTQ+ professionals often face thin access to such advocacy, with compounded barriers for LGBTQ+ employees of color (Badgett et al., 2020). Participants' accounts echoed that progress accelerated when sponsors had organizational influence; when access depended on chance, advancement hinged on self-advocacy and luck (Hossain et al., 2020).

Finally, visibility itself is unevenly distributed across identities. Mexican identity is frequently read on sight through skin tone or accent, while sexuality is more concealable and thus strategically managed across mainstream corporate, Latino, and LGBTQ+ contexts with conflicting norms of masculinity and "professionalism" (Tajon, 2009; Hames-García & Martínez, 2011). Participants perceived that some gay White men could leverage sexual

orientation as neutral or advantageous visibility, whereas their own sexuality, intersecting with being Mexican American, was read as a liability. Taken together, the literature and findings indicate that interpersonal environments amplify but cannot replace sound organizational design. When leaders practice cultural humility, peers act as informed allies, and sponsors are empowered and accountable, relational climates become the instrument through which identity-inflected contributions are translated into legitimate, promotable evidence.

Critical Reflection Through The FICAM Model

This section interprets the study's results through the FICAM model to explain how visibility and identity management shape advancement for gay Mexican American men. Using my FICAM model - the data indicated that when organizational opportunity structures enforce narrow, White-centric norms, identity navigation becomes defensive (code-switching, selective disclosure), and in turn psychosocial resources are underutilized. When structures are transparent and work environments are deemed or perceived as safe, the same bicultural and gay competencies can be seen as an advantage or simply more than liabilities (Badgett et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2020). This clarifies why agency alone cannot offset exclusionary systems and why visibility strategy more than personal preference dictates who is considered for career advancement opportunities.

An additional insight that emerged was the visibility disproportion that organizations risk and reward. Mexican identity is often read on sight for example, skin tone, accent, cultural expression, whereas sexuality is more concealable and therefore strategically managed. Participants reported "toning down" gender expression or calibrating accent to maintain credibility, while simultaneously shouldering racialized scrutiny. This disproportion helped explain why comparable achievements can yield thinner returns relative to gay White men in

similar roles (Bowleg, 2008, 2020; Hames-García & Martínez, 2011; Tajon, 2009). Chapter 2 further documents how D&I efforts frequently ignore compounded identities, which renders daily navigation work invisible in performance systems and promotion packets (Catalyst, 2023; Human Rights Campaign, 2021). Read together, the literature and findings frame identity management as risk mitigation under structural constraint, not inconsistency.

This lens also clarifies how power operates through work environments and networks. Microaggressions, professionalism policing, and exclusion from informal networks redirect energy toward self-protection rather than create opportunities, dampening the visibility that sponsorship support requires to be effective (Jones et al., 2017; Windsong, 2018). On the other hand, when psychosocial resources are credible; resourced ERGs, active allyship, and sponsorship (not mentoring alone), they turn potential into realized opportunity, particularly when linked to transparent criteria and calibrated reviews (Badgett et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2020).

The comparative contrast to gay White men further sharpens the analysis. Participants perceived that Whiteness could buffer stigma and, at times, render gay identity to corporate discourse as progressive "distinctiveness," while Latinidad plus gayness more often triggered heightened scrutiny and narrower definitions of leadership "fit." Intersectionality explains the layered constraint; social identity theory explains anticipatory self-categorization and the pursuit of in-group sponsorship where possible (Crenshaw, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This contrast is not merely interpersonal; it is structural, embedded in who writes criteria, who calibrates performance, and which forms of cultural work are credited.

In summary, organizations need to disaggregate data and strategy for gay Mexican American men rather than subsuming them under broad "Latino" or "LGBTQ+" categories; the

literature noted that failure to do so sustains invisibility and weakens intervention design (Daftary, 2018; Gerena & Pilkay, 2024). In addition, organizations need to align their systems with intersectional realities and Finally, organizations need to create space of safety and belonging and treat them as preconditions for meritocracy. Taking the findings and processing them through the These steps operationalize FICAM model, organizations can turn identity-based competencies into recognized growth and career advancement for gay Mexican American men.

Research Implications

The implications of this study point show that advancement is not just about effort or talent, but it is also about how identities, structures, and relationships come together to turn contribution into actual opportunities. Read through the lens of my FICAM model, the findings show that what gets "seen" is filtered by opportunity structures (rules, norms, gatekeeping), identity navigation (how readable or concealable identities are), and the psychosocial resources people can access (mentors, sponsors, climate). For gay Mexican American men, the interplay of ethnicity, sexuality, and masculinity is not additive but rather interlocking. That is why single-axis diversity responses miss the mark as they do not see the full picture, and when we don't see the full picture, we risk reproducing the very gaps we say we want to close (Crenshaw, 1989; Bowleg, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

For individuals, the implications were practical. First, make identity-linked work understandable and translatable to stakeholders. Things like client wins tied to Spanish facilitation, examples of cultural mediation that defused conflict, written praises, and deliverables that connect that work to outcomes the organization values. Second is the importance of not only mentorship but supportive mentorship. Mentors advise but those who

support, advocate. Identifying leaders whose responsibility sits where you want to go and setting explicit career goals. Also taking care of psychosocial safety and finally, highlight bilingualism and bicultural fluency as market-facing skills that build trust, build revenue, and create career advancement opportunities.

For organizations, the implications are also very pointed. If the goal is equity, then being intentional about redesigning the internal system so credit is given to additional contribution: These changes can potentially respond to well-documented representation and advancement gaps affecting LGBTQ+ employees and Latino professionals, who remain underrepresented relative to workforce share and face compounded barriers when identities intersect (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2021; Badgett et al., 2020; Crist Kolder Associates, 2023).

Whether those fixes stick depends on organizational leadership. Psychosocial safety is not a "nice to have"; it is a prerequisite for any evaluation system that claims to reward merit. There should be leadership training on observable practices like anti-microaggression behaviors. In addition, ERGs should go beyond culture events, but they need to include a decent budget, access, and pathways into actual opportunities and networks. At the highest level, just as organizations examine intersectional metrics, paying attention to things like language-mediated work is can be a starting point. These are just some ways in which organizations can move from performative inclusion to structural change (Catalyst, 2023; HRC, 2021; BLS, 2021).

These implications also matter for how we study and measure advancement. Integrating intersectionality with social identity clarifies why visibility and safety are uneven because race/ethnicity is often readable; sexuality can be concealable yet still policed. Scholars and future research should avoid treating LGBTQ+ and Latino communities as monoliths, surface "visibility asymmetries," and count cultural work as inputs that affect results. Building

Finally, these implications should be read with the study's limits in view. This was a narrative inquiry with a small, purposive sample and self-reported testimonios, most of which live in a concentrated area. My positionality also shaped my interpretation. The findings are not meant to be a broad generalization, but they are applicable for practice and can open conversations and further discussion on intersecting groups, and minority subgroups. The point is to make authenticity an asset, not a liability, and to ensure career advancement opportunities are equitable in all spaces.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to organizations, policymakers, and scholars who aim to foster equitable career advancement opportunities for gay Mexican American men and others with intersecting marginalized identities. Given the narrative inquiry design and purposive sample, these recommendations are meant to be transferable across institutions but should be tested, piloted, measured, and iterated in context. Across settings, there is a clear need to move beyond one-size-fits-all diversity efforts toward strategies that explicitly acknowledge how ethnicity, sexuality, and masculinity intersect in daily work life. Standardized DEI programs often miss subgroup realities and can render gay Mexican American men invisible within both Latino and LGBTQ+ frameworks, which undermines equity goals from the outset (Crenshaw, 1989; Hames-García & Martínez, 2011).

First, organizations should implement culturally competent mentorship and, crucially, supportive sponsorship. Participants described mentorship as necessary for growth, but insufficient for movement at promotion checkpoints. Advancement depended on internal network support and direct advocacy in rooms where decisions were made. Culturally competent mentorship requires training leaders to notice and name intersectional barriers and to validate

bilingual and bicultural skills as benefits. Second, organizations should invest in leadership development that recognizes bicultural fluency as capital. Participants showed how navigating multiple cultural contexts and languages drives trust with clients, and improves team dynamics, yet these skills were often undervalued. Embedding bicultural and bilingual skills into things like assessments and training reframes this work as significant for career advancement opportunities.

Third, institutions must be in sync with their policy versus what the actual culture represents. Finally, scholars and practitioners should expand disaggregated research and measurement. Treating "Latino" or "LGBTQ+" as monolithic categories conceals important differences and sustains invisibility for groups like gay Mexican American men.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study includes both delimitations and limitations that acknowledge potential constraints on the findings. In qualitative research, particularly narrative inquiry, it is important to differentiate between delimitations, which are the intentional boundaries established by the researcher, and limitations, which are external factors that may affect the interpretation of the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The delimitations of this study reflect its intentional focus. First, the study centers exclusively on individuals who identify as gay Mexican American men, excluding those who identify solely as bisexual, transgender, or as part of other racial, ethnic, or sexual identity groups. This boundary was necessary to foreground the unique intersection of Mexican American and gay male identity in corporate America. Second, the study is limited to participants proficient in English, Spanish, or both, to ensure both language and cultural integrity in the telling of narratives. Third, participants were required to have at least five years of professional work experience in contexts where career advancement was possible, thereby

excluding individuals who were new to the workforce or employed in roles with limited upward mobility. Fourth, recruitment relied on U.S.-based social media platforms, primarily through the researcher's networks, which were largely centered in Texas. This approach may limit the geographic diversity of participants. Finally, the study employed narrative inquiry and testimonio as its sole methodological approach, intentionally excluding other forms of data such as surveys or observational fieldwork in order to preserve the richness and cultural responsiveness of storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These delimitations ensured a focused, identity-specific exploration aligned with the research question.

The limitations of this study highlight the external challenges that may shape interpretation. Recruiting participants who met strict inclusion criteria proved difficult, resulting in a small sample that may not fully represent the diversity of gay Mexican American professionals across industries or regions. Reliance on self-reported testimonios introduces the possibility of response bias, as participants may have consciously or unconsciously presented themselves in socially desirable ways or withheld sensitive information. Additionally, participants' career experiences varied by industry, yet this study did not systematically account for sector-specific differences, which may limit generalizability.

A further limitation relates to researcher positionality. As a gay Mexican American insider, I shared cultural and social experiences with participants that fostered trust and depth in interviews. However, this positionality may also have shaped interpretation. Reflexive journaling and member-checking were used to mitigate bias, but complete objectivity in qualitative research is neither possible nor desirable. Transparency in acknowledging positionality ensures rigor while situating findings within their proper interpretive context (Milner, 2007).

Taken together, these delimitations and limitations provide important context for understanding the contributions and boundaries of this study. They clarify how the research is intentionally scoped while also recognizing external constraints that affect generalization. By situating these parameters clearly, the study maintains methodological transparency and strengthens its contribution to the literature on intersectionality, leadership, and career advancement.

Bridging to future research, these limitations also point toward areas in need of expansion. Larger and more diverse samples, mixed methods approaches, and comparative studies across Latino subgroups and other LGBTQ+ populations could extend these findings. In particular, the interpretive contrast between gay Mexican American men and gay White men warrants testing in broader empirical studies. Hence, while this research offers a meaningful contribution, it also opens pathways for future scholarships to build on its insights and broaden their applicability.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored how gay Mexican American men make sense of their opportunities for career advancement in corporate America. Using narrative inquiry complemented by testimonio, and guided by my Franco Intersectional Career Advancement Model (FICAM), I highlighted how organizational opportunity structures, cultural capital and identity navigation, and psychosocial resources intersect in practice. While these findings clarify patterns that often go unseen, several areas remain to be examined that would deepen understanding and strengthen actions especially where formal systems, informal norms, and identity work run into each other.

Future research should take a thoughtful comparative lens. Participants perceived that sexual-orientation visibility carried different drawbacks and opportunities across racial lines;

carefully designed studies can test these perceived differences by comparing gay Mexican American men with gay White men and other Latino subgroups across industries, organizational work environments. It will also be important to consider for location, urban, suburban, and rural areas, as this, networks, and political context shape what is possible inside organizations and how opportunity is created.

Theoretically, future studies should test FICAM alongside adjacent frameworks to explain when and why progress accelerates or stalls. Different theories can offer complementary lenses that can specify pathways from policy action. Integrating these lenses can clarify, for example, how sponsorship converts cultural capital into promotable outcomes or how ambiguous criteria amplify bias even when performance is strong.

Different identity nuances should also be looked it in. Things like language, skin tone and colorism, location, generation, and masculinity perceptions all likely have benefits to access to networks, and exposure to gatekeeping. This could further validate my model. Finally, purposeful sampling which revolves around these differences rather than treating gay Mexican American men as a monolith.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to examine how gay Mexican American men understand and navigate opportunities for advancement in corporate America. Through narrative inquiry and testimonio, I focused around narratives that surface on how ethnicity and sexuality, together, not apart, shape the opportunity for career advancement. FICAM provided an organizing model where organizational opportunity structures, cultural capital and identity navigation, and psychosocial resources can create or maximize opportunities.

Across participants, five findings cohered: bicultural capital was real and valuable but often irrelevant in formal processes; agency and resilience helped turn setbacks into strategies, but could not overcome ambiguous rules, opportunity structures, especially promotion criteria, access to high-visibility work, and consistent policy enforcement, determined whether performance translated into advancement; mentorship mattered, but supportive sponsorship moved the needle; and belonging and psychosocial safety sort of dictated how much authenticity could be shown. Together, these findings describe a structure in which talent and effort must be matched by transparent structures support to create real advancement opportunities.

I do also acknowledge the boundaries of this study. A purposeful sample, a single qualitative design, and my positionality as an insider researcher limit generalization; the intended standard here is transferable to similar contexts. When organizational structures become transparent and cultural contributions are valued without removal, and when supportive sponsorship and a perceived sense of safety are real gay Mexican American men do not have to choose between authenticity and career advancement.

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Appendix A - Thank you and Study Debrief

Thank you for showing interest in participating in the study, The Career Advancement Experience of Gay Mexican American Men. As the second step in the research process, I am emailing you this short questionnaire to confirm you meet ALL inclusion criteria and to verify your willingness to take part in the study. Please read the criteria below carefully and answer YES or NO to each question. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. I am a Ph.D. student at Kansas State University researching 'The Career Advancement Experience of Gay Mexican American Men in Corporate America". This study will require an initial Interview and up to two additional interviews. In addition, depending on your responses, each interview can take anywhere from 60 – 90 minutes. The questions are meant to explore your personal experience as a gay Mexican American man and how that intersectionality has had an impact on your career experiences.

This interview will be recorded using a recording device. If at any point you would like to stop, please let me know, and we can stop the recording or revisit the question. My intent here is to get your true and honest experiences and do so by providing a safe space and keeping this information confidential. Confidentiality will be achieved by maintaining your full name out of the research and only sharing this data with myself and potentially my academic advisor for support with the analysis or interpretation of the responses if needed.

This material will be locked away in a safe box in my personal home to prevent this interview data from being misused. Do you have any questions?

If yes, answer questions and make a note of it.
If not, continue to interview questions.

Appendix B - Debriefing Statement

As we conclude our interviews, I want to express my sincere appreciation for your openness and willingness to share your experiences and insights. Your perspectives are invaluable in helping better understand the complex dynamics of cultural identity, sexual orientation, and career advancement in corporate America.

Your participation in this research not only contributes to the academic understanding but also has the potential to bring about positive change in workplaces by highlighting the challenges or opportunities for gay Mexican American men. Your voice matters, and your experiences are essential in shaping future diversity, inclusion, and equity discussions.

Please know that your privacy and confidentiality are extremely important. Any information you've shared during this interview will be confidential and anonymous to protect your identity, alias names (pseudonyms) will be used in the study to further protect your identity. If, at any time in the future, you wish to withdraw from the study and would no longer like your interview data to be used, please contact me as soon as possible via phone (469)475-1851 or via email at andresf@ksu.edu. You can also contact the principal investigator Dr. Kang (hjkang@ksu.edu) who will be supervising my research and the IRB chair Dr. Lisa Rubin (rubin@ksu.edu) for additional questions or concerns.

In addition, if you would like to receive updates on the results of the study, progress on your information used can be obtained by email at andresf@ksu.edu. If you have any further questions or wish to share additional insights after this interview, please feel free to contact me once again via phone at (469) 475-1851 or email at andresf@ksu.edu. Your feedback is valuable, and I want to ensure that your experience with this research is as positive as possible.

Once again, thank you for your time, your openness, and your contribution to further understanding this critical topic.

Appendix C - Interview Questions

Initial Interview

1. Introduction and Background

• Can you share your story with me—where you're from, how you identify culturally and sexually, and how those identities shape who you are today?

• How do you describe the intersection of your Mexican American identity and your sexual orientation in your personal and professional life?

• What does being a gay Mexican American man mean to you in the context of your professional identity?

2. Career Trajectory

• Can you walk me through your professional journey—where you started, major transitions, and where you are now?

• What have been some of the most significant challenges or opportunities in advancing your career?

• Have there been moments where your cultural or sexual identity played a role (either positive or negative) in your career trajectory?

Probing Questions:

• Can you recall a moment when you felt particularly proud of your career progress?

• Have you ever felt that your advancement was slowed or accelerated—because of who you are?

• How did you navigate moments where you were passed over for opportunities or felt unseen?

• Are there any specific people or events that served as turning points for you?

3. Workplace Experiences

• What has your experience been like navigating the workplace as a gay Mexican American man?

• Can you share any testimonios—moments or stories—where you felt either empowered or marginalized because of your identity?

• How do you navigate professional spaces where you may be the only or one of few who share your background?

Follow Up and Final Interview

4. Organizational Culture

• How would you describe the culture of your current or previous workplaces in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

• Have you noticed ways in which your company supports or overlooks the experiences of employees with intersecting identities like yours?

• Can you speak to how representation—if present or lacking—has influenced your sense of belonging or advancement?

5. Support Systems

• Who or what has supported you in your career advancement? This could include mentors, networks, family, community, or cultural values.

• Have you found spaces of solidarity with other LGBTQ+ or Latinx professionals? How have those relationships impacted your growth?

• In what ways have you drawn strength or motivation from your identity and community?

6. Future Career Goals

Primary Questions:

• As you think about your future, what are your professional goals and aspirations?

• How do your cultural and sexual identities inform what success looks like to you?

• What advice would you offer to younger gay Mexican American men entering corporate spaces?