

Gerry: Hi, my name is Geraldo Cadava, and this is Writing Latinos, a new podcast from Public Books.

Latino scholars, memoirists, novelists, journalists, and others have used the written word as their medium for making a statement about *latinidad*. We'll talk to some of them about how their writing illuminates the Latino experience. Some of our episodes will be nerdy and academic, while others will be playful and lighthearted. All will offer thoughtful reflections on Latino identity, and how writing conveys some of its meanings.

We'll publish a new episode every two weeks. If you like what you hear, like and subscribe to Writing Latinos wherever you get your podcasts.

Now, for the show...

Gerry: We are really delighted to have the chance to talk today with Edgar Gomez, who is a Florida born writer with roots in Nicaragua and Puerto Rico. A graduate of the University of California at Riverside's MFA program. They are a recipient of the 2019 Marsha Mccn Award for non-fiction. Their words have appeared in poets and writers narratively, catapult, lit Hub, and the rumpus and elsewhere online and in print.

Their memoir, *high Risk Homosexual*, was called *A Breath of Fresh Air* by the New York Times, recognized as a Stonewall Honor book and named a best book of 2022. By Publishers Weekly, buzzfeed, and Electric Literature. Okay. Tasha, I saw that you have the note about the Lambda Literary Award and editor.

They were also just named a finalist for a Lambda literary award in the gay memoir slash biography category. So congratulations on that, Edgar, and thank you so much for joining us.

Edgar: Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited. Um, nice to meet you Geraldo and Tasha.

Gerry: Also joining me today is the show's producer and editor, Tasha Sandoval.

Tasha: Hi Gerry, glad to be here

Gerry: Okay. Edgar, what pronouns do you prefer I use in this? I. I use all pronouns. So he, she, they, whatever rose off your tongue is fine. Okay. And what about the terms Latino, latina, Latinx? What do you use?

Edgar: Oh, that's a good one.

Um, I personally prefer Latinx. Um, if you want to use Latinx Latina, You know, whatever, whatever is good for you. I can also talk about Latina la and Latinx and you know, all that.

Gerry: Why don't you go ahead and do that? We're, we're here now, so tell us about that.

Edgar: Well, I, especially in this time that we're living in where there is so much trans discrimination, Um, so much discrimination against, um, queer and non-binary folks across the country, across the world.

Um, I think it's really important to, uh, be inclusive of queer and trans people in the language that we use. It's also just not very hard, you know, Latinx, Latine, whatever.

Gerry: We are here to talk about your, uh, Latinx coming of age memoir, high risk homosexual. So how did you decide that this story needed to be a book?

Edgar: It was a long journey. Um, I'll say that I've always been attracted to storytelling, whatever the medium. So when I was an undergrad, I first majored in TV production and like radio production. And, um, I also like interned at Telemundo for a little bit and the local PBS affiliate.

And so I was telling true stories, whether it be the news or like highlighting like local figures in central Florida. Um, but over time, I guess I always wanted to tell my story. And or, or not even just my story, but queer stories. And I realized while working in TV production that it's really expensive...that's why I ended up being more drawn to pros and making it a book.

Gerry: The whole time I was thinking, man, this guy is a good writer. He is a really, really good writer. And how did, how did the interest as a writer develop? And you don't really talk about that until the end, but now I think this makes more sense that you had worked at Telemundo. And it sounds to me like you feel like you were always kind of telling, uh, true stories, but not about yourself.

Edgar: Yeah. I mean, I think in general, I just feel like writers take up too much space in like storytelling. Like every movie I see, every TV show, every book. It's like the main character's a writer and it's kind of like, oh my God. Like, get another job. Um, and so as I was writing, I was like, let me not talk about writing cuz like, it's already too meta.

Like obviously I'm a writer, I'm writing this book. Um, so I was like, I'm only gonna talk about writing when it's like absolutely like essential.

Gerry: So one of the major themes that you develop in the book that we should spend some time on is machismo in Latino, Latine, Latinx society.

And how does that machismo itself manifest across the book in the, in the narrator's family, friends, and in your story itself.

Edgar: Yeah, I mean, in so many ways. Uh, the first thing I wanna say is that, you know, I think Latin Latinx people are often, especially Latinx men, are often like characterized as being like machista and like it's, the conversation is usually like revolves around machismo.

Machismo isn't like a uniquely Latin American thing. Machismo is just toxic masculinity with a Spanish accent. Um, so like, I just wanna like start with that because there's already a lot of like negative stereotypes, um, with Latinx people because of that. Um, but the way that it's manifested specifically in my life, I mean, it's in the fact that my uncles, you know, rang cock fighting rings in Nicaragua growing up.

And I would go there and they would be like, I mean, it would be like all men and the woman would be in positions of like, service, like, um, selling, like drinks and food and things like that. Otherwise, they were expected to be, you know, silent and off to the side. Um, it's in the expectations that were placed on me as somebody who was socialized to be a man, um, I had to be like, tough.

I have to be a provider. Um, and so yeah, I mean, it's in so many things and I've had to like gradually, um, unlearn a lot of the things that I was taught. Like, it's okay for me to express my emotions.

Um, it's okay for me to, you know, talk to friends about how I'm feeling and, um, to wear pink and things that are more traditionally feminine and you know, I mean, honestly, just be gay. Just that alone, um, is the thing that I've had to tell myself, oh, it's okay to be who you are.

Gerry: How did you do that unlearning? I mean, was it, did the lesson come from a particular relationship, a particular moment, a series of moments, one lesson at a time? How did that work?

Edgar: I think, yeah, all of the above. Uh, I wish I could say that there was like one easy answer.

Uh, but, realistically, like that's just not how life happens. There are very few like rare moments where you like have a major epiphany and you're like, oh, I have to change. Um, it was more like a gradual discovery. Um, basically just like experimenting with expressing my emotions and how like, good that felt to just like get it out.

Or more realistically actually like suffering the consequences of like bottling a lot up. Um, how that manifests in like substance abuse and in depression and in things like that. I mean, like pretty much all, maybe this is, I mean I know this is like an, a generalization, but pretty much like every Tío that I have is.

Suffering with something that has to do with machismo, which, which ha, which has, which has to do with like, if you just like talk to somebody about your problems, if you just didn't keep all that in, maybe you wouldn't feel like as bad. Um, and basically like just seeing all those models, seeing queer role models and how much like freer and happier, um, they seemed from the outside I was like, oh, let me try to like, see what this is like. Um, but really it's just like a, a gradual thing that every day I have to remind myself it's okay to be who you are. It's okay to, again, express your emotions, to wear pink, to, um, not be who you were taught to be. Um, and I think that makes it... I I, I have to try to be like generous with myself, um, and also remind myself that like, a lot of the reasons why I feel drawn sometimes to these like machista ways of thinking, um, come from a place of like wanting to be safe.

Gerry: Tasha, I'm gonna turn this, this over to you.

Tasha: Yeah. So hello again, Edgar. Thank you again so much. Um, and I, I wanted to take a moment to, to talk about, uh, your mom, if that's okay.

And this, this trope that you talk about toward the end of the book of, of the Latino parent and this idea of, um, an assumption that that parent might not be accepting or that that's more typical. You write about feeling frustrated when people make that assumption and about the frustration that it's, uh, a binary of extremes of either non-acceptance or full on acceptance.

I love you no matter what. And that for you is more a story of going from, um, one to the other. Right? And, and it took time. And I think that's actually probably the case for a lot of people, but maybe not really. The dominant narrative of, of coming out to parents and then specifically, um, immigrant and Latino parents.

So I'd love for you to speak to that a little bit and, and tell us, you know, what it was like to write through that and maybe, you know, how it's been received or if, if there've been more conversations around that?

Edgar: Yeah. I think to start, uh, I just wanna say that I'm like, I'm kind of like a. Um, I don't like to be told you know, what to do or who I am, and I think that comes from obviously being told who I am and what to do all my life.

And so whenever somebody tells me who I am, And on top of that, they're right. Like that's really frustrating to me cause I'm like, my instinct is to be like, you don't know me, you don't know what I've been through. Um, and that's the case with my mom, which is that, yeah, she wasn't super accepting at the beginning and over time she did learn to be, um, a little bit more supportive.

Until we've reached a place now where she's like overboard supportive and it's like, oh, send me pictures of your boyfriend, blah, blah, blah. Um, but I think it was really, really important for me to show that it was like a gradual, uh, like shift in that dynamic and to show the like concrete wave in the, which that dynamic shifted, um, which were that like I had to move out of the house and become independent and reach a place where even if my mom disapproves of me, I'm gonna be okay. Um, I had to do that. So then I can renegotiate the terms of our relationship so that if she like says something that, you know, is not cool with me, I can be like, well, I'm gonna go back to my place. And if you want to keep talking, like you're gonna have to change your attitude or it is what it is.

And often, like when I was watching like TV growing up or when I was watching movies, it was, there was that binary either like the parent. Like was really approve..., like approving from the beginning or, um, just like completely disowned the queer person. Um, and so I wanted to show other queer kids that like, yeah, it's not gonna be the easiest thing, but for me, um, by doing these concrete things over time I was able to reach a place where me and my mom are good now.

We're actually, we're great. Um, But don't be like, don't feel bad if it doesn't happen overnight.

Gerry: So far as you can tell, are there any downsides to the new over acceptance from your mom about like, send me pictures of your boyfriend? I mean has, has that created other problems?

Edgar: Well, I think there is like a, there's like a little passage towards the beginning of the book, I think like chapter three, where my mom is sort of starting that transition from being really, you know, from like unapproving, to starting to support me more. And it's like we're at a restaurant and there's this like older dude who's like three times my age and he's the server.

And as he walks away, my mom's like, oh, he would be like, good for you. And I think that was just like her subliminal way of signaling to me like, okay, we can like start talking about these things. It's like, it's all right. Um, but at that time we hadn't discussed any of the trauma. Um, her, we hadn't discussed her negative reactions, any of it, and in that way it was, um, I, I, I didn't love it because it felt like she was just sort of like glossing over all of like the harm and like erasing it and pretending that we were always okay and it felt kind of like gas lighty.

Um, and it made me feel like, wait, like. Am I, am I like being dramatic? Like, did that, like, was that not like an awful thing that happened like two months ago when I came out and like, she had this like major like, you know, like really bad reaction. Um, and it, it felt really like, kind of invalidating. Um, and so I would say there... it's good to be supportive, but you know, acknowledge that harm was done and you have to have those conversations.

Um, and I actually thank my book, uh, in a weird way because after my book came out, my mom called me and um, she read it and we had like this big conversation and she apologized and she like acknowledged everything that happened.

And like, I really needed that. Um, and I felt like, okay, uh, thank you for acknowledging it. Now we can start at a new place and have a fresh start. Um, but I, I just, I, I like it. It, it felt almost like somebody slapped me in the face and then pretended that they didn't, I was like, well, and then we're mad that I was like feeling like, like tiptoeing around them.

I was like, well, you need to like acknowledge that this thing happened and she finally did. And so now I feel a little bit. Until we had that like recent conversation, I always felt a little bit hesitant. About like sharing, uh, my life with her, because the last time I did that in a big way, she had that negative reaction.

And so now I'm like, okay, I can, I guess we're rebuilding that trust. Um, and yeah, it feel, it feels really good.

Gerry: I feel like maybe all children should write memoirs then that they give to their parents if it leads to that moment, uh, where you can actually have the conversation. Cuz as you were answering that, I was thinking about, you know, relationships between children and parents in general.

And I feel like we all get to some point where we feel like we're not actually gonna get the thing that we need from our parents, which is an acknowledgement of the harm. But we do arrive at a point where, We can at least have mutual acceptance.

Edgar: Mm-hmm.

Gerry: But it sounds like through the writing of your book, and maybe this was enough of a reason to write the book anyway, that you got that moment that you needed.

Edgar: Yeah. More than anything I really thank this book for, you know, getting me and my mom back together in like a very real place. Cuz where the book ends is still a little bit ambiguous. We're talking again and everything is like closer to being fine. Um, and I'm like reassuring her that being gay is okay. Um, while still acknowledging that there's still like a lot of like hard things about it. Um, but now I'm at a place where I'm like, oh, come visit me and my boyfriend. Um, which is something that like teenage me wouldn't have been able to even like imagine.

And I also feel like we are at this place where, like this cultural place where so many of us, um, in particular children of immigrants are really like breaking these cycles of generational trauma.

And we see it in movies like *Encanto* in movies, like *Everything Everywhere, All at Once*. And it's just like really exciting to be at this place where like, I mean, you know, you gotta appreciate your elders, but there's like, sometimes they take advantage of that. And you know, I'm glad to see the elders like acknowledging, you know, the shit that they've done.

[MUSIC - "City of Mirrors," Dos Santos]

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[MUSIC - "City of Mirrors," Dos Santos]

Tasha: I wanted to, um, take a minute and. Talk about the title of the book, uh, which you just alluded to a little bit, um, because it does revolve around this, um, experience with, with your primary care provider, with your doctor, and the way that you were labeled as a high-risk homosexual, um, and how HIV plays into that.

And I actually was reading the chapter to this book while in my own doctor's waiting room. Strangely enough and having lots of thoughts about what it means to be a queer person, going to see a doctor and what you share and what you don't share, and judgements that might occur. And, um, I can definitely relate to that in some ways.

And so I would love to hear more about, um, that journey of, of realizing that you were tagged in this way. Um, and, and then of course, what made you decide to go with this title?

Edgar: Yeah, I mean that's so funny you say that because I think you're the second person to bring up how weird, how like weirdly queer people are treated at the doctor's office and how like really invasive the questions can be.

And also I kind of wish, I mean maybe this is asking too much, but I kind of wish there were more queer doctors to have these conversations with. Um, I mean, some of the things that they ask you are like, how many times have you had sex this month? Um, where did you meet these people? Did you meet them online? Like it's this big scary thing. Did you use protection? Are you the bottom? Are you the top? Like it's, they ask like so many, like really, really personal questions and a lot of queer people have trauma discussing sexuality with straight people. And so it's like, at least when I. Like first starting my like, um, starting taking prep, which is why I was at the doctor's office.

Um, I was a little bit like uncomfortable. I was like, oy. Um, and I felt like this need to like perform like the ideal like queer person. Um, which I don't know if I would've felt that if I had been speaking to a queer doctor. Um, that said, I don't even know if that, if my doctor there was queer or not. Like she didn't say anything.

Um, [laughs] but yeah, it, it, it is like a totally like, surreal experience. Um, and not only like do I not like being told what to do or who I am, but this is also counter to like the idea that I wrote a memoir. But I don't always like, love to tell everybody, like everything about me. Um, and so yeah, it was, it was super awkward.

Um, long story short, I went to the doctor's to go on PREP. Uh, PREP is a one a day pill that you can take that reduces your risk of contracting HIV by basically 100%. So I went there, taking this preventative to, to get on this preventative drug. The least risky thing that I could be doing. In fact, I was being very safe by, by going there to do that and ended up being diagnosed a quote-on-quote high-risk homosexual, which is what it says on my prescription.

Um, and yeah, when I, when I saw that like diagnosis on my prescription. At first I was like really offended and I was like, what does this even mean? Like, why are you like, how, how am I a high risk homosexual? Um, and then I kind of like did what I do whenever I experience like trauma, which is I just started laughing and I was like, you know what?

Let me reclaim this. Uh, this is gonna be the new title of my memoir. Uh, so that's where the title came from.

Tasha: I wanna then switch gears and go back to, to your mention of Pulse, um, because it definitely was, uh, a thread that, you know, rather than be just one sole chapter, although there was a chapter that focused quite a bit on it, was kind of threaded throughout the book and seems like was a big part of, of several years of your life. What was it like to excavate these memories as you were writing the book and, and then, you know, now with a little bit of distance, you

know, what does Pulse mean to you as a young Latinx queer, and, um, is the dominant narrative something that you would agree with?

Edgar: Yeah. Um, it's strange because truly every chapter when I'm talking about that chapter, I'm like, oh, that was the hardest chapter to write. When I was talking about pulse. It was just like very immediately, um, you know, hard. Uh, this was a place that was like, you know, 30 minutes away from me. Um, I would go basically every Saturday night for Latin night. Um, you know, this is the place where at a time when I was grappling with a lot of shame and self loathing and internalized homophobia, you know, I would go to Pulse and see out queer, Latinx people who looked like me, who sounded like me, um, living their lives openly and like free of fear. And so to have a space like that turned back into a place of fear after the shooting was just like, I didn't, I really didn't know how to like, negotiate that in my mind because, and this goes back to machismo culture, I wasn't taught how to process my feelings. I was taught that, oh, if you are experiencing grief, you can't tell anybody about it. You have to like be a man and suck it up. And if you are having a hard time, the one thing you can do is drink and just like express your emotions that way. And that's why I see so many older, especially, um, Cis straight Latinx men have substance abuse issues because it's like the one time where they're allowed to like, you know, express their feelings and, um, that's how they get their emotions out.

Like the only times I've really seen many of, like the older men in my family, like crying is when they've been drunk. Right? Um, and so for me, after Pulse, I didn't, I didn't know what to do, um, and. That's, I think one of the moments where I really started unlearning, um, a lot of that machismo culture. Um, because I, like, I couldn't talk about it with, uh, my like straight relatives or many of my straight friends.

And so I, you know, sought queer people. Um, and I saw. Other queer people who were crying, who were emotional and who said, Hey, you can like lean on my shoulder. Here's a hug. I love you. That's another thing. I was like, not really taught by the men in my family. They could say I love you. Um, and so seeing them just like treat me with so much like kindness and warmth showed me like, oh, maybe this is something that I can do. This is something that is making me feel better right now. But yeah, it, it was, it was incredibly like painful, but it was also like I am the kind of person that when, because I am such an avoidant, um, I really appreciate writing, and writing has become sort of a safe space for me because it gives me the opportunity to like, Just like sit down, um, with whatever it is that's bothering me and think about it for hours at a time, often for months at a time.

And so it's like my way of like balancing like that avoidant behavior. Like, oh, you don't wanna think about it. Well now you're gonna write a story about it and you are gonna, I'm gonna like force myself to process this even if it's in real time. Um, and so, truly, like right after Pulse happened, I was already writing about it.

I was already trying to figure out like how I felt about it. Um, trying to find like weirdly like solutions for something like that to like never happen again. I was trying to find like the source of like, why, why would this man step into our space and do this. Like why? And like that ended up being one of the essays in the book.

Um, and yeah, it, it was really painful, but at the same time it was healing. Um, because if I didn't have writing, I don't know if I would have sat down with those feelings.

Gerry: I, I should probably know this, but I haven't followed the, the news about it has pulse reopened?

Edgar: Yeah. Now it is a, It's like a, I don't know what other, call it a museum or like a, his, it's like historical, you know, monument or something like that. Which I also find kind of weird too. Like, I don't know. It, it all feels really weird. Um, that was one of the reasons that I actually left Orlando, like right after the shooting. Like everybody had, you know, a shirt that said Orlando Strong. Everybody was getting Pulse tattoos. Literally the McDonald's sign right by my house said hashtag Orlando strong. Um, and then they like took it out when the, like the Mag McRib came back. It was just like, all felt really like gross, um, to me. Oh. I remember seeing like, there was like a poodle that had a hashtag bark for pulse, like one, and I was just like, I can't be here.

But I, I, I think they do do some good work. I, I know that they like give away scholarships and things like that, so I'm not like throwing shade at them. It's just like, not really for me. I actually still haven't even visited the site. Um, but it might be something that I, that I do now that sometime has passed, you know?

Gerry: One thing we both really enjoyed was how you used language in your book with just enough, uh, nuggets of Spanglish for bilingual readers.

And I was interested in the scenes of dialogue with your mom, where you sometimes choose to represent certain words in Spanish, but most of the dialogue is in English. So what went into those sorts of decisions and how does your bilingualism play a role in the way that you write about your own life for a larger anglophone audience?

Edgar: So first and foremost, I, it was really important to me that I don't italicize so Spanish. Um, and that came from a place, oh my god, I wish I could remember this writer's name, um, but there's this writer who also is bilingual, and he like came up with like a YouTube video. It's like 30 seconds long, and he was like, the reason I don't italicize in Spanish is because when I think in Spanish or when I speak in Spanish, um, it is just like a natural transition. I'm not like, you know, talking in English and then when I switch into Spanish, I don't like change my voice or like, you know, put on an accent or do anything like that.

It's just very natural to me. And italics, since italics sort of, um, implies that there is like a change. Um, and that's just like not true to life. Um, The second thing I was thinking about is that it is my audience, my intended audience, which is young, queer, Latinx kids. And I was like, oh, they speak Spanish.

So, uh, I guess I don't have to like overexplain everything because they're gonna know what these words mean. Um, maybe I'll give some context clues for non-Spanish speakers, but that isn't my prior. Um, and how I approach each individual use of Spanish really depended. Uh, so sometimes I would put a word or a phrase in Spanish because, you know, some words, some like translations in English just don't have like, that same like, feeling, that same like emotion.

Um, like I think hearing my mom, um, say something like “Ay diosito, aydame con este niño, blah blah blah, is a lot different than, “Oh God, help me with my son.” You know? It just feels different to me. Or like different like curse words. Like in Nicaragua we say “hijueputa” like a lot. And in English it's like, son of a, I don't know, son of a bitch doesn't just, I don't know. It just doesn't like, it doesn't roll off the tongue the same way. And so I was like, I'm gonna keep these, um, just because I'm gonna be losing something if I translate them. And why would I wanna lose something if my audience is queer Latinx readers?

Um, other times I put things into Spanish. Because I wanted to, because I, because this book is written in English, I did have to translate a lot of the conversations into English. Um, especially for my mom. Like 99% of the conversations I have with my mom are fully in Spanish, but I knew that I couldn't keep it entirely in Spanish just because, you know, a publisher was gonna come in and say, or an editor was gonna come in and say, oh, you have to translate this cuz you know, readers aren't gonna know what you're talking about.

Um, even though in my mind my reader was queer Latinx people, it's just like, it, it became like a commercial thing. Right? Um, and so it's like, all right, I'm gonna translate some of it, but I'm not gonna translate all of it, um, to signal to the readers that these conversations we're having are in Spanish.

Um, and there's some characters that I don't like outright explicitly label as Latinx, but I will put some Spanish words in their mouth to like, let the reader know, oh, this is a Latinx person. We are speaking in Spanish even though the version of this conversation you're reading is in English. Um, and it was like a little subtle way to do that.

Um, other times. For example, there's this flashback scene where I am watching, uh, the season finale of RuPaul's Drag Race at Pulse. Um, which is a thing that we would do like, I mean, a lot of gay bars show drag race. Um, and because I wrote so much about Pulse and about the queer Latinx people that were, um, lost at the shooting, it was really important to me in that flashback, to have Spanish speakers in the background, um, because they were there. Um, and you know, that is like one of the missions of my book to remind people we were here. Um, and so I didn't want to erase them. And so like every single use of Spanish, uh, I had like a different like, you know, intention, but I hope readers trust that it was intentional.

It wasn't just like, oh, I'm gonna sprinkle in a little Spanish for funsies, um, to like, give people like some flavor. No, it was like I had like a specific intention behind every use.

Tasha: And, and just kind of a quick follow up to that. You know, I think n this really intentional use of, of, of Spanglish peppered in Spanish, peppered in, in a way that prioritizes the bilingual reader over the monolingual reader. Are you aware of, of more of these kinds of works coming out and um, is it something that you hope to continue to do in your writing?

Edgar: Yeah, well, if it is a trend, I, you know, I hope that the trend is towards telling more authentic, truthful stories, um, that, you know, uh, give like realistic portrayals of what it is to be bilingual in the world. Um, I know this is like something that like is said all the time, uh, but

when, uh, white English speaking readers or whatever other, I guess, uh, European language speaking, uh, readers include like bits of French or German or even like, make up languages like the Lord of the Rings. Like, they just do it and they don't have to like explain it and readers just like figure it out or they like Google it. Um, it's only like writers of other like non-English or European languages that have to like do this work of like being more quote unquote universal and giving context clues for these like non-Spanish speaking in my example readers.

Um, And yeah, I, I hope that the trend is towards more like realistic storytelling. And, you know, because I am bilingual, I wrote a book that occasionally includes Spanish just because that is how I live my life.

Gerry: I have one last question. I'm wondering, you know, in what ways, when you were writing this, did you, or even as you set out to write it, did you self-consciously think, I am writing a Latinx memoir? Did you think that you were kind of making a statement about Latinidad and what it means to be Latino in the United States?

Edgar: So that's a really hard question because I have, I have kind of messy thoughts about Latinidad in general, I think it's like something that, you know, we sort of over rely on, um, as an identity marker. It's a very like US-centric thing. Um, and it does have a, I always say history, but it's like history makes it feel like it's in the past it has like a continued like anti-black and anti indigenous um, you know, it's a, it's a project that continues to harm people in like real life. Um, and so Latinidad is just like, you know, weird in and of of itself.

So when I was writing this book, I was like, I was already like a little bit hesitant. I even included a disclaimer in the beginning, like, I'm using this word, but in general I favor more like specific, um, ID-ing like Puerto Rican Nicaraguan. But even that is like complicated too, because that's just, then it becomes like nationalistic and that also has its problems.

So I'm still trying to figure it all out. Um, when I wrote the book though, uh, I was like, I'm just gonna, you know, tell my story. Um, I'm a Latinx person. I don't know how much more Latinx I can be. I grew up going to cock fighting rings in Nicaragua. Um, you know, I grew up watching Caso Cerrado, Sábado Gigante, you know, eating Hot Cheetos, blah, blah, blah, all those things.

Um, I don't know that I need to like acknowledge my Latinidad. Um, that feels like I am, in fact, centering whiteness by doing that. Like, why am I gonna stop to be like, oh, and by the way, this is the Latin thing. Like I would only do that for other, for non-Latinn people, right? Um, when I watch like Latinx movies or read Latinx books, and by that I mean, art that was created in like these Latin American countries, the characters don't stop every five seconds to be like, oh, and this is a Latinx space. They just like live their lives. Uh, and so that's what, you know, I did. I was like, I'm not gonna, like, I don't need to acknowledge it unless it is like very, very important that I, that I acknowledge it.

Um, for example, when I was writing about Pulse, it was really important for me to say I would go there on Latin night. Um, The victims were predominantly Latinx. Um, he went there on Latin Night on purpose. Um, so those were really important things for me to acknowledge. Um,

but other than that, it was just like, you know, what, what are people gonna say that I'm not Latinx enough?

Like whatever that, what does that even mean? You know?

Gerry: I love that answer so much, and I think messy thoughts about Latinidad is what we're all about.

Edgar: You know, I always say I'm not like trying to represent Latinx people. I'm not trying to represent queer people. Like I can barely represent myself. So, I'm just like telling what, like I've experienced. And if other people wanna say, oh wow, that's, so this, that's so that you, you do you.

Um, but I'm sort of trying to like, move away from, um, you know, I, I think because when I started I did feel a lot of pressure to like represent, you know, groups of people. There aren't a lot of like, uh, memoirists, for example. And when I did start writing, I was like, oh my God, I have to represent us. And I found that to be such a, like a paralyzing thing because I was like constantly like, oh my God, you are such a bad example.

Like you are so messy and like always doing like the worst thing. Like if the ever is gonna be a role model, like it should absolutely not be you. I'm gonna have to constantly remind myself like, oh no, you are not representing everybody. You are only representing yourself and your experiences. And so, yeah, this is the book that came from that.

Gerry: Thank you so much for being so generous with your time and, and just kind of open and thoughtful with all of your answers. We really appreciate it.

Edgar: Thank you for talking to me. These were such good questions and questions that I actually rarely get, like the use of Spanish or the doctor's office, like I always get like, ou know, what's, how are you and your mom?

Tasha: You got that too

Edgar: Um, so I really You got that too, the craft question. I mean, yes. But you gave me like some really good craft questions and I was like, oh, finally I'm getting, you know, people are acknowledging that I put a lot of effort into the prose.

Thank you for listening to this episode of Writing Latinos—

We'd love to hear your suggestions for new books that we should be reading and talking about. Drop us a line at geraldo@publicbooks.org

This episode is brought to you by Public Books. It was produced and edited by Tasha Sandoval. Our music is "City of Mirrors" by the Chicago-based band, Dos Santos.

I'm Geraldo Cadava. We'll see you again next time.