

Aunties, Aunts, and Tías:

The Forgotten Queer Figure Supporting & Housing LGBTQ Youth



LGBTQ youth disproportionately make up the population of youth experiencing housing instability, and studies and programs addressing this issue often overfocus on parental rejection as the cause of the LGBTQ youth's housing instability. By only focusing on parents, this previous work misses how non-parental relatives may provide support, housing stability, and safety for LGBTQ youth. Based on an ongoing mixed methods longitudinal study with 83 LGBTQ youth in South Texas and the Inland Empire of California, this talk intervenes by moving beyond the parent-child relationship to examining how aunts' supportive practices shape LGBTQ youth's experiences of housing stability and sense of safety. Notably, critical aunty studies has theorized the aunt as a queer figure that disrupts notions of the nuclear family. The findings in this study empirically demonstrate how LGBTQ-supportive aunting practices – such as educating other family members about LGBTQ people, using correct pronouns and names, and taking in and housing an LGBTQ sibling – actively challenge cisheteronormativity in the natal home. These supportive aunting practices can serve as a stopgap from LGBTQ youth ending up on the streets or in shelters. This study moves forward, then, sociological research on family processes and social support by not focusing on parent-child relationships or LGBTQ "families of choice" to instead examining how the roles and practices of aunts and aunting can support LGBTQ youth, disrupt cisheteronormativity in the family, and prevent LGBTQ youth from becoming unhoused.

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