



Undocuqueer Latinx: Counterstorytelling Narratives During and Post-High School

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Few scholars have explored the experiences of undocumented and queer Latinx students in K-12 and post high school. This qualitative case study uses a holistic analysis of the case themes, which helped to identify different issues within each theme (Crewell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2006). This study sought to analyze counterstorytelling narratives provided by a queer, undocumented student named Juan. His story during and post-high school graduation intersects multiple layers of oppression while he developed his own community cultural wealth.

FRAMEWORKS

Using critical race theory (CRT), Latina/Latino critical race (LatCrit), and Queer People of Color (QPOC) critique as part of this research, this study uses counterstorytelling narratives to echo the experiences of the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In education, CRT analyzes how issues of race, gender, and class intersect while shaping the experiences of students of color. It also challenges dominant ideologies such as “objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009 p. 133) while unpacking white privilege and dominant deficit-thinking models toward Communities of Color. LatCrit explores the racialized systems of oppression based on phenotype, accent, surname, immigration status, sexuality, culture, and language in Latina/Latino and Chicana/Chicano individuals within the United States and abroad (Yosso, 2006a). This study also uses QPOC epistemologies as part of its methodology, specifically, Jotería studies. “It uses the terms Jota and Joto both derogatory terms for lesbian and gay in Mexico, which have been reappropriated to reclaim an ‘identity/ consciousness of empowerment’” (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014, p. 174). Jotería studies how homophobia, heteronormativity, racism, patriarchy, xenophobia, gender discrimination,

classism, colonization, citizenism, and other forms of oppression shape the personal experiences of self-identified queer Latinx and/or Chicana individuals within the United States and abroad.

A QUEER OF COLOR

Family

Juan shared with me how he tried to kill himself. Juan tried to find acceptance from his mom and how he internalized homophobia by his own kind. Juan mentioned how his mom forgave his brother after he got deported for breaking the law in this country, however she could not accept his sexual orientation. Duran and Pérez (2017) argue that “queer Latino men are often marginalized within their own community because of machismo” (p. 1151). Other scholars refer to this type of discrimination as internalized homophobia.

High School

Espelage (2015) argues that “sexual minority youth have been found to be at greater risk for bullying, harassment, and peer victimization than their heterosexual counterparts” (p. 106). Juan shared that he was bullied because he was gay and it took a toll on him. He agreed that some students who happen to be bullied prefer to internalize being discriminated against due to being threatened by others or due to a lack of support from school administrators or teachers. Juan was usually very opinionated at school, especially when things were not fair. He learned how to advocate for himself.

Undocumented

Pérez (2012) argues, “Even though the community college is the most financially viable option for undocumented students, it still remains a significant challenge. Students not only have to pay full tuition, but they also are less likely to receive financial support from low-income parents” (p. 105). Despite being in this country for so long, following the rules, and pursuing higher education, Juan understood

how difficult it is for him to become a naturalized citizen due to the fact that he and his relatives crossed the border without legal documentation. Juan admitted, “I’m limited on stuff that I can and cannot do. It makes me feel belittled a little bit.”

FINDINGS: COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH

Yosso (2006b) defines community cultural wealth as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression” (p. 175). For the purpose of Juan’s counterstorytelling narratives, this study will focus on familial capital, navigational capital, aspirational capital, resistant capital, and a new form of cultural capital, reciprocal capital.

Familial Capital

Although this form of capital refers to cultural knowledges nurtured within the familia, its history, memory, and cultural intuition, it also expands the definition of family to include a broader definition. “Familial capital is nurtured by the ‘extended family,’ which may include immediate family (living or dead) as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends we might consider part of our familia” (Yosso, 2006b, p. 177). Once Juan was kicked out of his house, his friends became his new family. They supported Juan’s education, making sure he had everything he needed to succeed academically.

Navigational Capital

Yosso (2006b) defines navigational capital as “the skills of maneuvering through social institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind” (p. 178). While developing his own navigational capital, Juan also created his own agency within different institutions and social networks. After his move to California did not work out, he found employment at a restaurant. Soon, he realized he was not making enough money to pay for college.

Then he started working at a retail store where he developed a strong work ethic, allowing him to go from part-time employment to full-time in a short period of time. Juan also learned that even though he was undocumented, he could still pay in-state tuition at the community college. Finally, he found a nonprofit organization that supported part of his college expenses.

Aspirational Capital

Yosso (2006b) refers to aspirational capital as the “ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p. 176). Although Juan was kicked out of his house, he kept his aspirations to remain in school and to get good grades. He wanted to prove to himself and others that he could overcome life hurdles. The fact that he found people who motivated him and supported his education allowed him to keep his goals to remain in school and to graduate.

Resistant Capital

Resistant capital refers to how individuals challenge inequality through oppositional behavior (Yosso, 2006b). Juan came out as gay on social media, well aware that some people will always say negative remarks about LGBTQ communities. He not only had to cope with the fact that his parents kicked him out of the house for being gay, but he learned to create his own familial, navigational, and resistant capitals in order to survive discrimination from his biological family, Latinx peers, and mainstream systems of oppression.

Reciprocal Capital

Like Juan, most stories of hard work and success become exemplary discourses for others, especially minoritized communities. Juan is able to help others understand how he challenged social norms toward undocumented Latinx students and how his story can support others in the same situation (undocuqueer Latinx). Juan's reciprocity wealth is evident when he mentioned how he would like his story to inspire other individuals like him.

CONCLUSION

Juan's case represents a story of adversity, resilience, and personal success. It is important to understand that undocumented students that happen to self-identify as LGBTQ deal with more layers of marginalization than straight documented and undocumented Latinx students. Being an openly queer Latinx male was never easy for him, but in May 2018, Juan graduated from college.

Supporting undocuqueer Latinx students requires all of us, who believe in social justice in education, to create a strong and reliable networking system that supports and advocates for students like Juan. Teachers, counselors, and school administrators need to start seeing students of color community's cultural wealth as authentic assets in their education. Instead of perpetuating a deficit thinking model toward Communities of Color—with myths such as acculturation and assimilation—teachers, counselors, and school administrators need to understand and remind students of color that their best assets in their educational journey come from home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Ríos Vega was born and raised in Panama where he obtained a BA in English (1995) and Education (1998) at the University of Panama. He taught English as a foreign language in the public and private school systems in Panama before moving to North Carolina in 1999 to work as an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor in the public school system. He earned a Master's of Education in Curriculum and Teaching with an emphasis in ESL from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (2006); received National Board Certification in English as a New Language/Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood in 2009; received his doctorate in Philosophy in Educational Studies, Cultural Studies Concentration from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (2014), Women's and Gender Studies Certificate and North Carolina Principal License (2014). He received the 2013-2014 Graduate Research Scholar Award for his outstanding graduate research and scholarship (2014) and the Daniel Solórzano Mentorship Award (2014). His areas of interest include English Language Acquisition, Multicultural Education, Critical Race Theory, Latino/a Critical Theory, and Social Justice in Education. Dr. Ríos Vega has taught Latino/a Education in the U.S. at Davidson College, and ESL at the Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) in North Carolina. In 2015, he published his first book “Counterstorytelling Narratives of Latino Teenage Boys: From Vergüenza to Échale Ganas.” Currently, Dr. Ríos Vega is an Assistant Professor in the School of Teacher Education, Department of Education and Health at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois.

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