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Undocumented Queer Latinx
Students: Testimonio of
Survival

Biography

Maria is a first generation college student. She was born in Santa Inés, Michoacán México and then resided in Sonoma, California since she was five years old before attending San José State University. As the first college graduate in her family, Maria, strives to open new paths for her nieces and nephews as well as others to pursue degrees in higher education. Her degree is in Humanities with a concentration in American Studies and a minor in Mexican American Studies. Her research interests include, but are not limited to, ethnography, oral history, Latinx stereotypes in Hollywood, Queer Theory, immigration, borderlands, Latinx Literature, screenwriting and Latinx film. Maria plans to attend graduate school to obtain a Ph.D., continue her research of Latinx immigrants and to eventually teach younger generations about the diversity within the Queer and Latinx communities. Her ultimate goal is to create a non-profit Queer Latinx Community Center that caters to Queer Latinx individuals and their parents.

Undocumented Queer Latinx Students: Testimonio of Survival

Abstract

Recent U.S. political turmoil has deliberately embedded fear into many marginalized and underrepresented people living in the U.S. The fact that the United States was founded on the demanding work of diverse populations of immigrants is vitally important to how immigrants are being treated today. In 2016, the U.S. presidential electoral win for Donald Trump left many marginalized communities—including Undocumented Queer Latinx students—fearful of how his administration would affect their communities. This paper reviews literatures on Queer immigration history, the homophobic and transphobic psychological history behind legal immigration barriers, and the recent mobilization to include Undocumented Queer Latinx students in the Immigration Rights Movement as foundational elements for an ethnographic research case study of the Undocumented Queer Latinx student community. The historical and current adversities these students face will be the main point of this research due to the increased legal barriers, deportations, and uncertain future that extremely conservative politicians have set—or will set—in motion. The proposed project explores the intersectionality of the historical heterosexism of immigration law, current government debate over DACA, Queer Manifestos about immigration rights, and the gray politics that emphasize the importance of Undocumented Queer Latinx student voices. This research is a subject not many mainstream media sources investigate; however, it is vitally important due to the injustices faced by this community.

Introduction

Millions of people around the world continue to believe that the U.S. is an immigrant-friendly country; a place where the “American Dream” can happen. Yet legal admission into the United States is more difficult—sometimes even more unwelcoming—for Queer immigrants than heterosexual or cisgendered individuals due to homophobia and transphobia. Immigration has become one of the major players in U.S.

politics and historically was debated among politicians before the U.S. closed off its borders in the 1800s after the Mexican-American War. Immigrants from most countries south of the U.S./Mexico border have a hard time receiving a visa or resident status from the U.S. government as a result of the racial hypocrisy that exists within immigration law as well as politics (Martínez 99). Racist immigration policies make it difficult for immigrants, especially Latinx people, to have a pathway to citizenship and contribute to this country. At the same time the history of discrimination against the Queer immigrant community through policy and the need for ethnographic research suggests that not enough needs are being met for Undocumented Queer Latinx students in the U.S.

Within the Latinx immigrant community there exist marginalized groups that are sometimes overlooked by immigration politics. One of the most marginalized groups within Latinx immigration politics are Undocumented Queer Latinx college students (from ages 18 to 30) who consider themselves DREAMers (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act recipients) or now DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients (Walters). Undocumented Queer Latinx students are simultaneously multiply oppressed considering the various intersectionalities that exist in their identities regarding sexuality, gender, gender expression, nationality, skin color and/or age, among other identity factors. This specific group has been increasingly studied by scholars, including Katie L. Acosta, Eithne Luibhéid, Lionel Cantú Jr. and Karma R. Chávez, whose work has contributed to identifying the factors that cause the simultaneous oppressions the Undocumented Queer Latinx community face in the U.S.

Sexual orientation, gender, and racial prejudice contribute to the discrimination of Undocumented Queer Latinx students in immigration policy. Historically, sexual orientation has been part of the denial of Latinx immigrant experience as a result of the heterosexist ideologies in U.S. immigration law to ensure white purity of marriage and counter sexual deviancy. The international borders of the U.S. serve as a metaphor or “an extension of the protection of other kinds of borders between white and nonwhite, heterosexual and nonheterosexual.” (Chavez 11). Scholars Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr. point out in their anthology *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, that Queer

exclusion from immigration politics and law is “part of a broader federal immigration control regime that sought to ensure a ‘proper’ sexual and gender order, reproduction of white racial privilege, and exploitation of the poor” (xiv). The generalized idea that the U.S. is an immigrant nation due to U.S. history contributes to the historical erasure “of genocide, slavery, racialized heteropatriarchy and economic exploitation, and these representations in turn contribute to a national culture that expels racialized queer migrants, metaphorically and often literally” (Luibhéid xx). The targeted removal of Undocumented Queer Latinx people suggests the xenophobic biases from documented white heterosexual society to keep the U.S. population predominantly white; it also introduces an internalized homophobic fear within the Latinx community of sexual orientation deviation. On the other hand, transphobia—both in predominantly white heterosexual society and the Latinx community—implicates the rejection of transgender Latinx immigrants from being recognized and accepted. Further scholarship on Undocumented Transgender Latinx people—not just transgender asylum seekers investigated in the Luibhéid and Cantú anthology—can further address the need for a progressive immigration system that does not exclude people based on gender.

The predominant amount of scholarship, however, on Queer Latinx immigrants is based on Queer families and Queer Latinx male perspectives. For example, scholar Katie L. Acosta’s book, *Amigas y Amantes: Sexually Nonconforming Latinas Negotiate Family*, explores how nonconforming Queer Latinas understand the dynamics of what it means to be a family. Acosta points out how the discoveries in the “book are not only applicable to Latinas or other sexually nonconforming women of color” but to all “nonconforming women, regardless of race or ethnicity” (15). This suggests that different nonconforming Queer people can use these findings as a reference point for their own understanding of Queer family dynamics. Acosta uses ethnographic interviews in an epistemological point of view to allow the participants to express themselves freely regarding family.

Ethnographic research—like Acosta’s research—implies that further studies on Queer people in the Latinx community are needed—especially for students, women, or the transgender experience—there are

many unanswered questions regarding immigration identity.

Undocumented Queer Latinx student *testimonios* are important to study considering they can help disseminate the ignorance of Documented White Heteronormative ideology of the immigrant experience.

Testimonios, like those of UndocuQueer activist Julio Salgado, allow non-Latinx communities—as well as the Latinx community—a glimpse into the struggles Undocumented Queer Latinx students face in the U.S. The UndocuQueer movement was developed³⁶ by Salgado and others in the Bay Area as a form of resistance and to become visible to the Latinx community as well as the rest of the U.S. population (Seif), but this form of resistance is not the only way Heterosexual and Queer people are able to support the Undocumented Queer Latinx community. Queer people of color, especially organizations like Horizontal Alliance of Very Organized Queers (HAVOQ) and Queers for Economic Justice, have written Queer manifestos, which emphasize the importance of immigration rights and how these affects the Queer community. These manifestos are the basis of solidarity between documented and undocumented Queers.

The history of sexual orientation discrimination in immigrant law and current immigration politics, in combination with Undocumented Queer Latinx Student Voices and Queer manifestos about immigration rights, contribute to future research ideas about Undocumented Queer Latinx students. Most of the research on Queer Latinx immigrants has addressed various perspectives, but not those of Undocumented Queer Latinx students. Pierre Bourdieu's ethnographic research methods would allow for more humanistic scholarship on marginalized communities that mainstream society otherwise does not recognize. Ethnographic case studies on Undocumented Queer Latinx students can be beneficial, especially in the cases of more marginalized individuals—such as undocumented transgender individuals and Queer women—that scholarship has further overlooked. The importance of this potential ethnographic research is that it can help people—particularly those who do not identify as Undocumented Queer Latinx students—to better

³⁶ Salgado was not the sole founder of the UndocuQueer movement. It was more of a collective of Undocumented Queer Artists and Allies. He was just one of the first ones to use it in a very illustrative way and social media massively spread his artwork.

understand the misconceptions, needs, concerns, and survival of these individuals in the current U.S. political turmoil.

Background History of Queer Discrimination in Immigrant Law

Immigration exclusions of certain people are obvious since the beginning of U.S. immigration politics when the border was established. Immigration law in the United States, “has historically discriminated among potential immigrants based on sexuality, gender, race, class and other factors” (Luibhéid xii). Homosexuality has a vast history of legalized discrimination in the U.S., especially in connection with the American Psychiatric Association’s classification of it as a mental disorder in the 1968 DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) II. In a later revision of the DSM in 1974, the association decided to remove homosexuality as a mental disorder after an influential scholarly article urged the removal of homosexuality from the DSM (Spitzer). However, “gender dysphoria” is still part of the latest version of the DSM, which contributes to transphobia in the U.S. as well as around the world (Parry). In large part due to the DSM, historical discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity is transferred to the legislation of immigration law.

Since the U.S. was established as a nation immigration law has also fostered racist tendencies. As wars and conflicts began to arise, so did racially discriminatory immigration policy. After the Mexican-American War, Latinx people were targeted as “undesirable” immigrants. During the 1950s and 1960s, court cases indicate that immigration policy was used to ban homosexual immigrants or “psychopathic personalities” (Somerville 80). One of the most significant immigration acts that banned Queer immigrants is the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. This Act was described by opponents as “racist, Fascist, reactionary, bigoted, the creator of second-class citizens, xenophobia at its worst” (Bennett 132). The homophobic, transphobic, and racist attitudes toward Queer people help to perpetuate the anti-immigrant sentiment toward Queer Latinx people. Furthermore, these anti-Queer attitudes are the primary excuses to not allow Queer immigrants to legally enter the United States through immigration law or policy.

As time went on and attitudes changed in the United States regarding homosexuality, immigration law became more inclusive of Queer immigrants. Starting in the late nineteenth century, homosexuality “was no longer viewed as simply involving undesirable acts, but rather as a marker of individual identity” (Luibhéid xxiv). This change in ideology regarding Queer people helped rewrite immigration laws, especially asylum policies that banned Queer immigrants from seeking political refugee in the U.S. In the 1990s, the immigration ban against homosexual people was lifted; this led Attorney General Janet Reno in 1994 to declare that people could apply for asylum if they were being persecuted for their sexuality (Luibhéid x).

However, for Queer immigrants, proving this persecution has been difficult, even when same-sex relationships existed between documented and undocumented Queer immigrants. According to Karma R. Chávez in her book, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities*, the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act states that marriage cannot be used to gain legal immigration status “even for heterosexual married people who follow proper channels, and in most cases it provides essentially no recourse if the immigrant partner is currently undocumented” (50). Although Marriage Equality went to the Supreme Court and was ruled as a legal civil right, Queer immigrants who seek a pathway to citizenship still face this difficulty to some degree. Undocumented Queer immigrants that marry their documented partners can find difficulty in gaining citizenship because of the conservative debate over Marriage Equality and could be denied citizenship based on their Queer relationships. This leads many Queer Latinx individuals to remain undocumented or enter the U.S. without documentation.

For Queer immigrants, the evolution of immigration politics has drastically changed how people perceive Queer immigrants. The evolution of immigration politics also points out the biases in policies that contribute to racist laws. Chávez suggests that “speaking about queer migration activism only through the language of citizenship could also operate in an uneasy alliance with discourses of the elimination and replacement of native people” (13). Most of the predominantly White Heteronormative male politicians in the U.S. government are not particularly fond of

Undocumented immigrants nor of Queer activists considering they question the policies that are filled with stereotypical ideologies.

Current Immigration Politics

The 2016 U.S. Presidential race proved to be a political setback for immigrants to the United States. A few years before the 2016 U.S. Presidential race, immigration politics were more hopeful than they currently are for many immigrants. In 2010, the DREAM Act was introduced to the U.S. government, which granted Undocumented youth a pathway to permanent residency (Walters). After the government failed to pass the act, DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) was introduced by President Obama in 2012 (Walters). These two acts emphasize the importance of legalizing undocumented students for the reason that they are seen as beneficial members of American society by immigration advocates. However, this idea changed when the Trump administration announced that DACA would be ended (Walters). Acts of Congress—like DACA or the DREAM Act—can help develop a more progressive immigration system in the United States that allows undocumented immigrants to receive legal documentation that would permit them to seek benefits and eventually contribute to the growth of the nation.

Undocumented Queer Latinx students use DACA to help them pay their way through community college or universities. According to DACA, recipients must have at least a GED or be currently enrolled in school, cannot be convicted of a federal offense or severe misdemeanor, be present in the United States since June 2007 and be under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Consideration”). The recipients of DACA are investigated thoroughly so they are non-threatening immigrants that contribute to the well-being of the U.S. communities. Many of the DACA recipients want to be part of this nation as they have grown up embedded in American culture. The DACA students who benefit from this program can legally work in the U.S. and be eligible for financial aid if they are attending a post-secondary school (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Consideration”). DACA helps undocumented students who want to pursue higher education or be part of the military.

However, the Trump administration has become a threat to these students by cause of the current bipartisan plan to compromise on DACA. The new bipartisan plan “would prevent parents from being sponsored for citizenship by their children if the children received citizenship through the pathway created by the bill or if the parents brought them to the US illegally” (Koplan). At first glance this proposition might seem like a good option, but it demonstrates how DACA recipients are being held hostage due to the indecisiveness of both the Trump administration and U.S. politicians on the future of the DACA program.

The anti-immigrant sentiment behind immigration policies emphasizes the racist White-Supremacist Heteronormative doctrine that undocumented immigrants do not contribute to the welfare of the nation. Immigrant advocates suggest that immigration policies are used as a legal tool “to accomplish what cannot be accomplished through the criminal justice system” (Solomon 17). The white doctrine—that contributes to the “preservation of white purity”—displaces millions of Undocumented students who are not potential threats to prosperity of the U.S. The ineptitude of the U.S. government in detecting actual potential threats to people living in the U.S. has caused political turmoil since the September 11th terrorist attacks occurred (10-11). Although immigration advocates want immigration reform, the shortcomings of the U.S. government to better screen actual potential threats during immigration proceedings causes some opponents to strongly view Undocumented students as threats. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security consistently claims that “it must maintain custody of such individuals while their cases proceed to protect society from those it deems dangerous and to contain ‘flight risks’” (5). Not all Undocumented students are “flight risks” on the grounds that most of them were brought over by parents who believe in the American Dream of prosperity.

The generalized assumption that most Undocumented immigrants are from Mexico emphasizes the asymmetrical relationship of codependency between the U.S. and Mexico. According to a 2012 report from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the four main birth nations of Undocumented immigrants are Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Baker). The anti-Latinx sentiment in immigration policy counteracts immigrant advocacy for Undocumented

students because it clearly shows the racist tendencies of U.S. politicians to discourage Latinx immigration. This idea is further perpetuated by homophobic and transphobic ideologies that also discourage Undocumented Queer Latinx individuals from documented immigration, claiming asylum, or sometimes even seeking medical attention for fear of being deported. A 2013 report revealed that there are approximately 267,000 Queer identified Undocumented immigrants, of those 267,000 they are more likely to be cis-gendered young males and 71% of those Undocumented Queer immigrants are Latinx (Gates 1). While the 2013 report on Queer immigrants reveals surprising information about Undocumented Queer Latinx people, these results can be considered outdated and may also be skewed due to the community's vulnerability. The report also points out how Undocumented immigrants are not all uniformly a certain way but individuals; transgender people and Queer women exist in the community but are overlooked by this report.

Since Undocumented Queer Latinx immigrants face different types of oppressions, there is an internalized reluctance to identify themselves as Queer or undocumented due to the homophobia and transphobia in both mainstream society as well as the Latinx community. Scholarship points out that recently arrived Undocumented Queer Latinx immigrants are hesitant to reveal their queerness to their respective immigrant communities due to homophobia as well as the idea that they “may not necessarily find advocacy and support networks in the gay and lesbian community that might lead them to find out about the asylum process as a means of seeking refuge from persecution” (Randazzo 40). Furthermore, if those Undocumented Queer Latinx immigrants happen to be students as well, support might not be so openly offered by their universities. This can create a culture of fear or resistance.

However, the potential fear that can exist in the Undocumented Queer Latinx student community does not limit most individuals from participating in activism as a form of resistance to the oppressive governmental systems. Undocumented students or DREAMers utilize activism to campaign against unfair immigration policies by allowing the visibility of the marginalized community through activism. If the Undocumented students are Queer, they use “the coming out strategy, including the development of ‘undocuqueer’ activism and counter-

DREAM activism, both of which turn toward coalition beyond the initial appropriation” (Chávez 19). Undocumented students—regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation—used the “coming-out” strategy of Queer individuals as a form of activism to demonstrate their visibility to the general public. The initial appropriation of “coming out” has become a way of showing pride in being an undocumented person and unafraid of the political repercussions for publicly announcing being undocumented. This in turn causes Undocumented Queer students to have double “coming out” experiences—both as Queer and Undocumented—which causes a backbone of inclusivity in the Immigration Rights Movement. UndocuQueer is “a term attributed to San Francisco–based artist and self-identified queer, undocumented DREAM activist Julio Salgado, emerged from within DREAM activism in order to call attention to the unique situation of queers in the migrant rights movement and to emphasize queer leadership” (Chávez 81). Salgado’s display of queer visibility in the immigrant rights movement points out the need for Undocumented Queer Latinx student voices to be heard since there are marginalizations in both immigrant communities and the Queer community. The visibility of this population is important to comprehend considering that it can potentially help understand the multiple oppressions Undocumented Queer Latinx students face and how they survive them.

Importance of Undocumented Queer Latinx Student Voices

Since the DREAM Act was introduced, there have been several Undocumented Queer Latinx activists that have helped immigration politics become more visibly diverse. Chávez proposes that “DREAMer testimonies feature stories of the hardships that undocumented youth have confronted and the profound successes they have achieved even in the face of such tremendous obstacles” (107). Salgado has utilized artwork to help build a platform for Undocumented Queer Latinx students to have agency among immigration rights organizations. Salgado’s artwork “depicts the daily struggles and complexities of the lives of 1.5 generation youth, and pushes Latino and LGBTQ organizations and communities to deal with the intersecting identities and issues of undocumented youth” (Seif). There are several ideas that his “I am UndocuQueer” artworks communicate to the general U.S. audience, but predominantly, Salgado’s art features

Undocumented Queer Latinx immigrants in public spaces as a form of resistance to the xenophobic immigrant legislation; Salgado emphasizes with his art that “the migrant can also be queer” (Ochoa). Salgado’s artworks do not display a single “type” of queer person but diversity within the UndocuQueer community.

The diversity within the Undocumented Queer Latinx community is one pillar of the resistance to conform to mainstream heterosexual white society. The intellectual philosophy of Queer Women of Color Feminism introduces a more academic stance—this becomes important since it gives a more diverse point of view than the typical white heterosexual male perspective in academia—towards the importance of immigration reform to the Undocumented Queer Latinx students. Queer Women of Color Feminism is another significant ideological pillar which helps to develop Undocumented Queer Latinx voices in the Immigration Rights Movement. The concept of *nepantilism*, which Gloria Anzaldúa suggests in her book, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: the New Mestiza*, is a foundation for the arguments behind current Undocumented Queer Latinx voices, especially young Queer students. *Nepantilism* comes from the Aztec culture, which means “torn between ways” and Anzaldúa points out that queer people as well as mestizas are products “of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another” (100). The idea of *nepantilism* implies that Undocumented Queer Latinx voices are important to expressing the oppressions and triumphs they encounter as well as how they survive in political turmoil. A goal of Queer Women of Color Feminism is to move “toward the process of discerning the multilayered and intersecting sites of identity and struggle—distinct and shared” (Moraga xvi). These multilayered and intersecting parts of identity suggest the complexities of Undocumented Queer Latinx voices, especially being that the movement does not only deal with sexuality but with gender identity as well. Through the comprehension of *nepantilism*, Undocumented Queer Latinx people can help organize the Immigration Rights Movement in a very unique way that is inclusive of the Latinx immigrant community as a whole. Cherrie Moraga emphasizes that Undocumented Queer Latinx youth are a foundational part of the Women of Color Feminism and “that the queer daughters and sons of domestic workers, farmworkers, and day-laborers can fight for their familias’ rights,

without compromise to the whole of their own identities” (xxi). In order to build complete solidarity in the Latinx immigrant community between heteronormative and queer individuals, there needs to be acceptance. There also needs to be acceptance between documented and undocumented Queer people since immigration rights are just as important as Queer Rights.

Queer Manifestos About Immigration Rights

Solidarity in the Queer community in the U.S. is important, regardless of immigration status. There are multiple Queer manifestos that display a solidarity with Undocumented Queers and urge for immigration rights. Scholars claim that “by pooling their knowledge and resources, gay, lesbian, and immigrant rights advocates not only can ensure the rights of gay, lesbian, and transgender asylum seekers who lie at the intersection of these groups’ agendas, but can also simultaneously strengthen their own bases of support through mutual cooperation and coalition building” (Randazzo 56). Unlike the scholarship of immigrant rights based on sexual orientation, the scholarship on transgender immigrant rights is not so vast. This has the potential to cause a break in solidarity with Undocumented Queer Latinx people since transphobia can exist in both the queer and immigrant communities. Solidarity among marginalized individuals and privileged people can only exist if phobias and prejudice are addressed, in the hope of avoiding them. Additionally, solidarity between two marginalized groups cannot move forward without also addressing the common goals among them.

Manifestos are a form serving to address common ideology or political goals, usually written by activists or community organizations. Chávez’s manifestos based on immigration are considered “gray politics” and can “shift away from rights based on citizenship and toward human rights and justice, regardless of citizenship” (37). The reason that manifestos are considered “gray politics” are because the demands in them are not yet fact and can change at any given time. The purpose of queer manifestos is to “achieve a differential political orientation by centering on the most vulnerable, shifting imaginaries, achieving legislative objectives, and constructing a ‘gray politics’” (29). It becomes important to highlight immigration politics from a different standpoint and have marginalized

groups—within racial minorities— become visible, like Undocumented Queer Latinx students. This creates a culture of solidarity and advocates for the most vulnerable among marginalized communities. The authors of Queer manifestos “uphold and advocate positions that are well outside the predominant public discourse surrounding the issues of LGBT immigration politics” (24). For example, one immigration requirement is to have a medical screening, which exposes Undocumented Latinx transgender people to transphobia by way of the medical examiners.

The 2011 manifesto “Undoing Borders: A Queer Manifesto,” written by HAVOQ, emphasizes multiple demands towards immigration politics. One demand is “an end to all medical screenings as a prerequisite for immigration, which are developed and enforced in sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and racist ways” (15). Medical screenings can hinder the entrance of queer immigrants, especially if the medical personnel are racist, homophobic, or transphobic in any way. This prerequisite causes queer immigrants to become vulnerable and may lead them to seek immigration in other ways, which increases the number of Undocumented Queer individuals. HAVOQ claims that they will “organize together against the racist, sexist, classist and otherwise oppressive impacts of borders and immigration policies” to form solidarity as well as “recognize the needs and voices not prioritized in mainstream movements” (9).

Many Queer organizations might not consider immigration to be an issue in their community; however, if they do not recognize and prioritize marginalized individuals within their community they essentially are not supporting one another for equal rights. HAVOQ further suggests that they “believe in the right to access documentation” that is more inclusive of “self-identified genders or does not list our genders at all” (15). The importance of more inclusive language in immigration paperwork suggests the potential redefinition of what immigration policy points out as identity. HAVOQ writes, “we seek to build a world where government does not hold the power to legitimize our identities through access to documentation such as IDs and that government control over access to these documents no longer impacts our abilities to lead the lives we want to live” (15). Immigration policies are intentionally non-inclusive in order to discourage racial and social minorities from immigrating to the United States. However, millions of minorities continue to immigrate to

the U.S. to achieve their dreams, economic mobility, or to avoid persecution by other people in their countries of origin.

Immigration reform would disallow bigoted immigration policies to exist and would enable millions of immigrants, regardless of sexuality, gender or other identities, to immigrate to the United States. A 2008 Queer manifesto written by Queers for Economic Justice (QEJ) titled, “Queers and Immigration: A Vision Statement,” conveys their positions and demands for immigration reform. QEJ writes, “with this statement, we call for genuinely progressive immigration reform that helps LGBTQ immigrants” (1). Advocates for immigration rights demand immigration reform, seeing that it would benefit the United States in many ways; the economy could potentially grow by creating more legal businesses, leaders in the community, lawyers, teachers, entrepreneurs etc. In the 1980s, when President Reagan signed immigration reform into law, millions of undocumented immigrants were given residency even though the enforcement of U.S. borders increased as well as “sanctions for employers who knowingly hire[d] undocumented workers” (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Immigration”). Opponents of immigration reform might argue that a reform would lead to the U.S. population becoming vulnerable to terrorist attacks, like 9/11. Yet, as previously stated, the incompetence of the U.S. Homeland Security led them to incorrectly screen actual terrorist threats (Solomon 5).

The current immigration system fails to keep people in the U.S. safe due to the incompetence of the U.S. Homeland Security and it also denies non-threatening immigrants the chance to immigrate with proper documents. There needs to be a better immigration system that allows non-threatening undocumented immigrants a pathway to citizenship. QEJ further advocates that “a truly fair immigration system should recognize all families in our LGBTQ and immigrant communities, including non-immediate relatives and non-traditional families of our choice” (Queers for Economic Justice). As previously stated, there is no singular queer identity; instead, there are multiple queer identities, which extend into multiple types of non-traditional families. The *testimonios* behind Undocumented Latinx Queer immigrants are important considering they help humanize immigration policy and migration research to be more inclusive.

Ethnographic Research Potential: Theories and Methods

Ethnography can permit research to be more inclusive being that its methodology may lead to the studies of people and cultures that tend to be marginalized by other types of research. Generally, queer migration research “focused largely on male migrants on the assumption that mostly men traveled across international borders looking for work or fleeing political persecution” (Chávez 10). The importance of inclusivity in research can potentially benefit future laws or policies. It also humanizes a complicated subject like immigration being that it gives the readers glimpses into the multiple struggles that Undocumented Queer Latinx students experience. Furthermore, ethnomethodological knowledge “sets out to make explicit the truth of primary experience of the social world” (Bourdieu 3). The experiences of Undocumented Queer Latinx students simultaneously capture their struggle with being undocumented, queer, Latinx, and students. Ethnography uses oral history as well as *testimonios* to produce observational results that can serve as credible sources for policies or to rewrite laws. Pierre Bourdieu points out in his book, *Outline Of A Theory Of Practice*: “‘Phenomenological’ analysis and objectivist analysis bring to light two antagonistic principles of gift exchange: the gift as experienced, or, at least, meant to be experienced, and the gift as seen from outside” (5). Bourdieu implies that knowledge—the gift—can serve both the person who lived an experience and the person who learns about the lived experience of another. This knowledge of other people’s struggles can also serve a general audience if the research becomes available to the public. Additionally, ethnomethodological analysis puts “aside the question of the relationship between so-called objective truth, i.e. that of the observer, and the truth that can scarcely be called subjective” (5). In order to represent Undocumented Queer Latinx students well, the observer must recognize that the students are subjects and not objects. People—who are part of the Undocumented Queer Latinx community—are not objects but humans with real problems, dreams and a need to survive the oppressions of their multiple identities.

A study on Undocumented Queer Latinx students can use previous frameworks from scholars, such as Acosta’s research on nonconforming Latinas and their families. Acosta’s book is based on “forty-two in-depth

interviews with sexually nonconforming Latinas and fourteen months of participant observation” (7). Acosta uses observation and interview techniques to emphasize the importance of Queer Latinx families’ inclusivity in sociological research. The importance of Acosta’s research techniques and the inclusivity of Queer Latinx families help contribute to recorded evidence of the need to study groups within the Queer Latinx community. Jan Vansina points out in his book, *Oral Tradition as History*, “when sources are intangible, such as oral tradition, ethnography or linguistic sources, they must be reproduced from the time of their first appearance until they are recorded” (195). Oral history and ethnography are often not considered tangible sources that are factual research evidence. However, ethnographers—like Vansina—argue that these research methodologies need to be reproduced and recorded to allow credibility by producing commonalities between people interviewed or observed.

The non-profit organization, *Define American*, researches stories behind undocumented immigrants in the United States. They use ethnography to “transcend politics and shift the conversation about immigrants, identity, and citizenship in a changing America” (*Define American*). These *testimonios* allow many people—including U.S. politicians—from different communities across the U.S. to visually see the struggles, triumphs, and dreams of undocumented immigrants. These type of ethnographic reports can influence the way undocumented immigrants are perceived in media representation. This organization presents a positive perspective on the situation of immigration and contributes to the advocacy of immigrant rights. *Define American* also points out issues based on gender rights and Queer rights, among other things; they depict the image of undocumented immigrants from various perspectives, identities, and backgrounds. The intersectionality of the undocumented immigrant that is presented by the organization allows the disintegration of the image of the singular undocumented immigrant projected by mass media outlets.

The lived experiences of Undocumented Queer Latinx students help to unravel the complexity of an individual’s identity and the struggles behind them. Ethnography contributes to the past, present, and future history of a person. Scholar Alejandro Murguía suggests the idea that, “the

past is like a *trensa*, a braid of many different strands twined together, and each historian picks one strand to follow, reject, recover, or rewrite” (x). Murguía’s idea can also be applied to the experiences of Undocumented Queer Latinx students because each identity they have is its own strand of history based on struggles and triumphs throughout time. It is important to research Undocumented Queer Latinx students with ethnography to allow the visibility of diversity within this community to exist to the public. This type of research can push future lawmakers, politicians, and voters to question immigration policies that do not allow Undocumented Queer Latinx students a pathway to citizenship.

It is also vital that we as Latinxs “destroy the belief that we don’t belong here, that we just arrived and therefore haven’t contributed to this society, or that our language is foreign to this landscape” (Murguía xii). In order for the Immigration Rights Movement to prosper, Latinx people must unite and acknowledge that we belong to the United States, no matter what immigration opponents believe. There are a multitude of different types of people in the United States and “everyone wants to belong, to feel a part of something.” (Murguía 198). Everyone in the U.S. is part of this nation, no matter the ethnicity, creed, sexual orientation, gender, or immigration status. We all contribute one way or another to what makes the U.S. the nation it is. However, the rest of the world might perceive the U.S. as an anti-immigrant nation if we all continue to ignore the current immigrant politics and racist policies being passed in the government. We have to acknowledge that without immigrants, this nation would not be able to continue to grow.

Conclusion

Historically, immigration policies have barred Queer immigrants from entering the United States legally, in particular through the prerequisite of immigration: medical examinations. Scholars also demonstrate how homophobia and transphobia produces wrongful policies that prohibit the expression of civil freedom—i.e. Marriage Equality. Some people in the United States can be prudish at times by cause of the outdated ideology of immigration exclusion that haunts this nation. However, we have evolved in time to recognize when policies or ideas needed to be changed, like the removal of homosexuality from the DSM.

The potential for change is present in our communities if positive representations of identities exist that allow us to accept each other. If we come from racial minorities—like the Latinx community—we need to advocate for equal representation and protect the rights of groups within our communities that are even more marginalized, like the Undocumented Queer Latinx students. We—both mainstream society and the Latinx community—must not be afraid to be exposed to those marginalized communities and ask questions that can help everyone involved learn from each other. Ethnographic research permits readers and scholars to have an open dialogue about difficult subjects—like immigration—and could potentially serve as an important pillar in future policies.

Advocates of immigration reform have many political challenges currently thanks to the unknown future of DACA and immigration overall. Undocumented Queer Latinx students have even more of a difficult challenge since there is little to no access to scholarships or financial aid. They are simultaneously Undocumented, Queer, Latinx and students, which carry challenges within each layer of identity. There is scholarship on Undocumented Queer Latinx immigrants, but there exists a huge gap on researching the perspective of students who are part of this demographic. Ethnographic research on Undocumented Queer Latinx students can help revolutionize future immigration policies—as well as contemporary programs such as DACA—and allows the general U.S. population to disassociate Undocumented Latinx immigrants with hackneyed stereotypes portrayed in the media.

Large numbers of Undocumented Queer Latinx students are behind the public demonstrations of the Immigration Rights Movement and need to be recognized for their work in the Latinx community. To avoid the recognition of these Undocumented Queer Latinx students by the media, implies the historical homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia that have erased the history of many Queer people of color—in particular Latinx individuals—that have helped civil rights movements in the U.S. It is important to publicize—even if it is anonymous—the struggles, achievements and daily survival of Undocumented Queer Latinx students to humanize the turmoil, so some opponents can accept that the U.S. immigration system needs to be fixed.

As a Queer Latinx student—who is a documented immigrant—I believe that my fellow Undocumented Queer Latinx peers are vital assets to the U.S. population and should be researched—which I plan to do in graduate school. The U.S. immigration system is broken, there is a history of discrimination towards Latinx immigrants, even though they want to be part of this country but are denied based their nationality. Opponents of immigration reform need to be exposed to more individual stories of Undocumented Queer Latinx students to help keep programs—like DACA—or create a better immigration system. These students are not a threat to the prosperity of this nation and need to be viewed as assets that can one day be the next leaders, innovators, politicians etc. of the U.S. Their stories need to be heard and more scholarship on this community can help aid them for future financial aid in college or eligible for employment. They should not be held hostage by political turmoil because that only reifies the traumatic U.S. history of discrimination. We—as a nation of immigrants—need to show the rest of the world—most importantly ourselves—that we can treat each other better and advocate for a progressive immigration reform from U.S. politicians. This is a nation built by a diversity of immigrants, not a nation that excludes many immigrants.

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