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Latino Gay Men and Their Relationship to the Gay Movement, Latino Communi- ties and Higher Education

Victor A. Sánchez

Research has been made on the experiences of gay men and the experiences of Latino men. This paper offers a review of the literature about Latino gay men in relation to gay communities and Latino communities. Suggestions will be made for student affairs practitioners to reconsider the support provided for Latino gay men and to foster a safer environment for them.

Introduction

Latino gay men must learn to navigate the racism they encounter in the gay community and the heterosexism they face in Latino communities. The limited literature on Latino gay men indicates that Latino gay men and their experiences are undermined by both, United States' gay movement and Latino communities. This paper reviews literature about Latino gay men, explores their relationship with the gay and Latino communities, as well as analyzes their role in higher education. Gay is used in this paper to refer to men attracted to other men. Queer is generally used as an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities, but this paper focuses on gay men. Latino will be used to refer to people of Latin American descent, and Chicano will be used to refer to people of Mexican-American descent; the terms will not be used interchangeably but both will be used throughout this paper.

As a result of their multiple subordinate identities, Latino gay men are charged with creating communities and cultures that embrace them (Kumashiro, 2001). This task raises questions about Latino gay men and their experiences, which will be explored in this paper: Why are Latino men excluded from the gay movement? Why are Latino gay men silenced in Latino communities? What effect does their silence have on the experiences of Latino gay men in higher education and what implications does that have for student affairs practitioners?

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Latino gay men and the Gay Community

A question that must be posed about the gay movement and community is: who do these groups represent? Kumashiro (2001) explained that terms like gay and queer ignore the oppression and discrimination that was historically associated with those words when they began to be used to describe non-heterosexual people. Hames-García and Martínez (2011) summarized Sedgwick's argument that the terms gay and queer are advantageous because they refer to a wide variety of people. The problem with umbrella terms is that they fail to represent the diverse perspectives of men that comprise this group. Often times the term "gay" is associated with those that lead and define U.S. gay culture: middle-class, white gay men (Anzaldúa, 2009).

The term "gay" is commonly used to refer to men who are attracted to other men yet it neglects Latino gay men and other gay men of color. The word "gay" becomes problematic when it is used as an umbrella term. In addition, "gay" and "queer" ignore the individual experiences of gay men of color that are vastly different from gay White men (Anzaldúa, 2009). Anzaldúa (2009) asserted that the queer movement is another way of recolonizing communities of color and disregarding their stories. Single-issue movements risk ignoring and reinforcing other oppressions (Kumashiro, 2001). As a result, the U.S. gay movement tends to focus on the single issue of oppressed gay men as if all gay men are oppressed through the same means. Grouping all gay men together limits the way we understand gay men (Anzaldúa, 2009) and by doing so, we can perpetuate the oppression of people who do not fit the mold.

Furthermore, Anzaldúa (2009) argued that words such as lesbian, queer, gay, and homosexual exclude the "other" as well as erase the history and experiences of Chicanos, in particular, those who do not identify as heterosexuals. As a result, Anzaldúa (2009) reclaimed her identity as a "*jota, marimacha*" to avoid being defined by labels that refer to White middle-class women. Anzaldúa reclaimed "*jota*" and "*marimacha*" because they are used by her people to speak about her love for women. Anzaldúa's words call for non-heterosexual Latinos to reclaim the words that are used by their people to speak of their sexuality.

Latino gay men do not define the gay movement and they are expected to assimilate to White gay culture. Peña (2004) suggested Latino gay men "do not assimilate into a static U.S. gay culture and adopt its language, symbols, and sexual systems. Rather, U.S. gay culture is itself changed by extensive contact with immigrant, non-English-speaking homosexual men and women" (p. 236). In other words, Peña claimed gay men of color have an impact on White gay culture. However, Anzaldúa (2009) stated the following about Queer Theory and White queers:

It follows the tradition in which white middle-class lesbians and gay men frame the terms of the debate. It is they who have produced Queer theory and for the most part their theories make abstractions of us colored gays. They control the production of Queer knowledge in the academy and in the activist community. (p. 165)

The gay movement has historically catered to the needs of White middle-class individuals (Anzaldúa, 2009). Drawing from history, the movement has ignored the intersections of race and sexuality for Latinos. As a result, Latino gay men struggle to find support within gay communities and compromise their identities to seek support. For example, if Latino gay men pursue support from White gay men it directly conflicts with their cultural identity and must sacrifice traditions and customs (Lukes & Land, 1990; Garcia, 1991). Boehmer (2002) found that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) issues were addressed in 3,777 articles dedicated to public health; of these, 85% omitted information on race/ethnicity of participants. It is critical to explore what it means for Latino gay men to compromise their gayness or their Latino identity.

Jotos and the Latino Culture(s)

Like “gay,” the term “Latino” is another term used to cluster a diverse group of people under one umbrella. Garcia (1998) offered the following analysis of Latino culture(s):

There is a set of shared values across nationalities and socioeconomic groups, such as the strong influence of the Catholic Church and the lifelong, intense involvement of parents, siblings, and relatives in the lives and decisions of individual family members. The shared Spanish language and the Latino culture(s) also offer important sources of commonality through sayings, songs, and shared meanings that, to a large extent, shape a common worldview and a set of values. (p. 5)

The differences and similarities within the Latino culture(s) must be recognized in efforts to better serve this growing population. For the purposes of this paper, Latino gay men in the U.S. will be referred to as one group.

Wieringa and Blackwood (1999), like Anzaldúa (2009), state that the term “gay” is not inclusive of all non-heterosexual people. Some of the very important factors the term undermines are class differences, race differences, gender hierarchies, and women’s oppression. The mainstream gay movement is focused on issues deemed important by White middle-class gay men such as marriage equality (Kumashiro, 2001). Communities of color perceive the gay movement as a “White thing” and gayness is seen as a “white disease” (Anzaldúa, 2009; Kumashiro, 2001). Subsequently, Latinos who embrace their gay identity are perceived as “race traitors” (Allman as cited in Kumashiro, 2001, p. 6). As a result, the White gay narrative

marginalizes Latino gay men and as such they are perceived by other Latinos as abandoning their Latino root(s) and conforming to whiteness.

To further complicate the intersection of being Latino and gay, Latino gay men are perceived as traitors to family values and the Catholic Church's rules. (Carballo-Diequez, 1989; Garcia, 1991). Garcia (1998) cited Morales' identity formation model for ethnic minority gay men, which included a phase where there is a direct conflict between ethnic identity development and gay identity development. By embracing their homosexuality, Latino gay men reject the expectations that their families and society have of them. This places a direct conflict between the value they place on themselves and the value they perceive others to place on them.

Gay movements within Latino communities have historically excluded the voices of men. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa (2012) theorized about "mestiza consciousness" and also briefly discussed Chicano gay men. She discussed the exclusion of the Chicano gay men based on lesbian separatist politics. Although there are historical points that justify the exclusion of Chicano gay men due to machismo, Anzaldúa (2012) stated that the liberation of *jotos* and *marimachas* could not be completed until both were included in the movement.

Kumashiro (2001) summarized Moraga's claim that gay Chicano literature offered little to the understanding of how to navigate different spaces with different identities. In other words, Moraga argued that gay Chicano writing did not offer insight into a "mestizo consciousness," therefore, offering nothing to the cause. Viego (1999) argued that Moraga's claim was problematic because it is based on the assumption that gay Chicano men and their literature weaken Chicana political effectiveness. Almaguer (as quoted by Kumashiro, 2001) summarized Moraga's statement:

Male homosexuality has always been a "tolerated" aspect of Mexican/Chicano society, as long as it remains "fringe"...But lesbianism, in any form, and male homosexuality which openly avows both the sexual and the emotional elements of the bond, challenge the very foundation of *la familia*. (p. 9)

Moraga's claim tied *machismo* with the sex between two men. According to Garcia (1998), Latino men who participate in sexual encounters with other men retain their masculinity as long as they "insert their penis in other men" and the ones "receiving" are degraded (p. 18). The labeling of gay Chicanos as weak can be linked to the gender roles that are imposed. While lesbian Chicanas are perceived as rejecting weakness and femininity, gay Chicanos are perceived as choosing to adopt those characteristics willingly.

Jotos in Higher Education

In addition to the settings and circumstances described above, Latino gay men face racism and heterosexism in post-secondary education institutions. Yosso (2005) stated that issues concerning the creation and dissemination of knowledge in the U.S. are closely tied to racism and the knowledge that is valued. Such practices also involve the heterosexist environments that gay people encounter in higher education institutions. Misawa (2010) cites Dille, who stated that universities reproduce heterosexist norms in their learning environments in various ways. These include heterosexist practices in lectures and the creation of unwelcoming environments towards gay men. Through the universalization of knowledge, the minority perspectives are silenced (Misawa, 2010).

Konik and Stewart (2004) found that involvement in college positively affects gay identity development. However, Konik and Stewart (2004) did not explore the effect that this may have on gay Latinos since a positive development of gay identity may be in direct conflict with their Latino identity development (Morales as cited in Garcia, 1998). Valades and Elsbree (2005) studied “Queer coyotes,” which referred to the unique positionality of gay Latinos in higher education and the distinctive perspective they bring to the conversations. However, much of the literature about gay students of color in higher education explores race and sexuality completely separate.

Universities are spaces where harmful interactions and inactions are a part of the experiences of queer students of color. Kumashiro (2001) explored anti-oppressive education as a means to improve the experience of queer students of color. Kumashiro found that there are three main components to anti-oppressive education: education for the other, education about the other and education that is critical of privileging and othering. All of the components come with warnings such as not tokenizing the students or being mindful not to present a “dominant” narrative “that could be read by students as ‘the’ Queer-of-color experience” (Kumashiro, 2001). Kumashiro states that if inclusive learning environments are to be created, both racism and heterosexism must be dismantled in classrooms.

Implications for Student Affairs Practitioners

Practitioners must explore the ways that Latino gay students are supported in post-secondary education institutions. Furthermore, professionals must “re-think” and explore ways of “re”-membering the *jotos* that are on college campuses. Latino gay men face dichotomies imposed by Latino and American cultures, as well as by gay communities and educational institutions. The *jotos* are being pulled in many directions while being pushed away by the same forces. Student affairs practitioners must acknowledge the unique challenges that Latino gay men face,

especially their exclusion from many different spaces that are created to “support” them, such as LGBT centers and multicultural centers.

Misawa’s Queer Race Pedagogy (QRP) for inclusive learning environments presented activities that educators and student affairs practitioners must practice in order to create such learning environments (2010). Drawing from critical race theory and queer theory, Misawa (2010) proposed, “building a community with counter-narratives and examining stereotypes in terms of positionality” (p. 32). Misawa explained that “counter storytelling” allowed “sexual minorities of color to explore their life stories with a narrative approach that invites students to share their own stories with peers who may have similar experiences” (p. 32).

Such approach can empower Latino gay men to reflect and think critically about their stories while creating connections in the classroom. The second component of QRP is to examine “stereotypes by developing and using critical thinking skills” (Misawa, 2010, p. 33). Examining stereotypes requires critical thinking in order to deconstruct the hierarchical structure associated with stereotypes. QRP is one of the strategies that student affairs professionals can incorporate into their practices to support Latino gay men and other students with underrepresented identities.

Student affairs practitioners must also consider the intersection of these identities and what that means for the students in higher education institutions. Practitioners must consider what being gay and Latino means for a student that may enter into an LGBT center or a multicultural student center. Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni and Walters (2010) summarized Ward’s findings and argued that even racially diverse LGBT organizations can be perceived to be predominantly serving the White LGBT population among local LGBT people of color. Practitioners must question the safety and inclusivity of Latino gay men and other queer students of color in those spaces.

Conclusion

Research allows student affairs practitioners to explore the experiences of Latino people and the experiences of gay men. Latino gay men are excluded from the gay movement and Latino communities for many reasons such as the gay movement catering to White gays (Anzaldúa, 2009) and being perceived as “race traitors” by Latino communities (García, 1998). There is a need to further explore the experiences of Latino gay men in order to further support them in higher education and create safe and inclusive spaces for them. Misawa’s Queer Race Pedagogy and the reevaluation of the inclusivity of LGBT and multicultural centers are ways student affairs practitioners can explore different means to support Latino gay men.

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