

Augustana College

Augustana Digital Commons

Audre Lorde Writing Prize

Prizewinners

Spring 5-2022

Coming Out as a Queer Latinx

Giselle Barajas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/wollstonecraftaward>



Part of the [Chicana/o Studies Commons](#), [Latina/o Studies Commons](#), [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Barajas, Giselle. "Coming Out as a Queer Latinx" (2022). *Audre Lorde Writing Prize*.
<https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/wollstonecraftaward/48>

This Student Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Prizewinners at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Audre Lorde Writing Prize by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

Coming Out as a Queer Latinx

Short analytical

Giselle Barajas

WGSS-330

Dr. Simonsen

Spring 2021

In dominant queer discourse, the latinx community is typically overshadowed. Dominant media that centers the lives of the LGBTQ+ community usually center the coming out journey of the lives of white cis males and females. Some current popular depictions include the film *Love Simon*, and *Call Me By Your Name*. Both of these popular films center the lives of teenage white cis males. While these films bring to light some of the difficulties with the coming out process in our heteronormative society, the lack of film and media centering the stories of latinx individuals add an extra hurdle to the lives of queer latinx individuals. Queer latinx individuals have to also struggle with unique cultural and systemic structures when trying to understand their own queerness, and eventually, coming out to the people in their lives. When applying the feminist theories of post-colonialism and gender theory, one can better grasp the complexities of the coming out process for the queer latinx community.

To begin, Anzaldúa's (2001) and Piepzna-Samarasinha's (2002) feminist theorizing on post-colonialism critiques the ways in which colonial values instilled in latinx individuals have created a cycle of intergenerational trauma in the community. Particularly, colonial values centered around gender and queerness have complicated the process of coming out for the latinx community. In the latinx community, family is highly valued, this phenomenon is known as *familismo*. Consequently, the reinforcement of colonial values through family plays a role in a latinx individuals coming out journey. First off, catholic religious values such as *marianismo* and *machismo* have passed down through the generations, making some queer latinx individuals feel at odds with their queerness and familial religious values (Cauce and Rodriguez 2002, Guarnero 2007). To clarify, *marianismo* is based on the catholic ideal of the Virgin Mary, emphasizing the woman's role as a caretaker in the family structure. On the other hand, *machismo* emphasizes the man's role as head of household to “ensure the continuation of mexican family pride and respect”

(Cauce and Rodriguez 2002). Coupled together, these religious colonial values reinforce the patriarchal structure. Depending on how each latinx family interprets these religious familial roles, some queer members may feel as though coming out deviates from these roles in ways that their family may or may not accept. For example, a lesbian woman deviates from the marianismo and machismo norm by marrying a woman, and essentially, not marrying a man who can fulfill his “head of household” role. A gay man may be seen as more “effeminate” by liking other men, which is seen as antithetical to the machismo role of a man.

That being said, religion's influence into the latinx family structure is not to be ignored, however, there are other colonial values other than religion that influence the family structure as well. Heteronormativity and homophobia also have roots in colonialism. In fact, Guarnero (2007) conceptualizes that some homophobic ideals stem from a false equivalence of queerness and breaking from family ties, like what happened when the spanish (forcebaly) mixed with the aztecs. For example, a homosexual man or woman may be seen as “not contributing to the reproduction of the family and community” through their non-reproductive sexual acts (Guarnero 2007). In other words, some latinx individuals are still confronting their traumas from the enforcement of whiteness into their communities as well as the erasing of their culture. So any rejection of the norm may be seen as being sympathetic to the white colonizers; obviously that is not the case though, but the fear of further colonization is understandable.

Lastly, homophobia and heteronormativity has also been enforced through the language of the colonizers. In Anzaldua’s (1987) post-colonial borderland theory, she stresses the importance of language in the coming out process. Acosta (2018) builds on these theories, claiming that we must “queer our family relationship,” especially with language. Acosta (2018) attests that many of our nuanced understandings of queerness and heteronormativity are

emerging in “the eurocentric academy.” Briefly put, the spanish language lacks inclusivity for many complex queer concepts and identities, because much of the language behind theorizing has taken place in eurocentric spaces. The colonial wiping of indigenous languages, and the violent conversion into the spanish language for much of the latinx community, makes it difficult for queer latinxs to explain their identity to their families. When Aguilar (2018) came out to her spanish speaking father as queer, she had to use the spanish slur for gay, since that was the only word she knew for gay. Gonzalez (2017) also struggled with explaining LGBTQ+ friendly terminology to her family after coming out. A woman with the name of “Julie” in an interview mentioned how language postponed her coming out. She felt that “safety in silence” was easier than having to find the words to describe her own queerness to her family. The spanish language made it difficult for her to explain (Acosta 2018). Indeed, heteronormative and patriarchal ideals have been passed down through the generations (Anzaldua 2002). Anzaldua (2002) states, “It is difficult for me to break free of the Chicano cultural bias into which I was born and raised, and the cultural bias of the Anglo culture that I was brainwashed into adopting.” In brief, Anzaldua also struggled with her queerness and breaking from the heteronormative and patriarchal norms instilled and inherited through her family. She goes on further to explain how because of colonialism, women of color and women outside of the western world are not oppressors but instead accomplices to our own oppression if we do not learn to decolonize ourselves.

Equally important in grasping the complexities of coming out for latinxs is gender theory. More specifically, the coming out experience is better understood when applying feminist gender theories on performance, masculinity, and objectification. Gender performativity posits that gender is a social construct (Wilson 2015, Parahoo 2020). However, gender can be performed through various acts or even aesthetically and artistically through clothing and hairstyles (Wilson

2015 2015, Parahoo 2020). When analyzing queer performativity, much of pop culture centers around white queerness as opposed to latinx queerness or other people of color (Parahoo 2020). This lack of representation can lead latinx queer individuals to feel further “othered” and isolated from the queer community (Rosario 2004). In fact, latinxs were found to be less likely to partake in “queer activities” (Rosario 2004). Meaning that, latinxs don’t have access to the same accepting LGBTQ+ community as white individuals do due to the harmful racism within the LGBTQ+ community. So even if a latinx individual feels comfortable coming out to their family, they may have an extra hurdle to encounter when coming out to people outside of their family. Racism and lack of representation may even make it difficult for queer latinxs to understand how to even “act queer.” Therefore, the lack of queer latinx role models in pop culture makes the coming out process confusing to navigate. Additionally, machismo and gender theory also complicate coming out for latinxs. As mentioned previously, because machismo values are still prevalent in some latinx spaces, being a homosexual man is seen as more feminine (Cauce and Rodriguez 2002). Thus, gay men and other queer latinxs open themselves to possible violence, oppression, or rejection if they deviate from machismo and perform their gender in “queer ways” (Cauce and Rodriguez 2002, Wilson 2015). Furthermore, performing gender in ways that conflict with what is typically “accepted” in a heteronormative society, such as “appearing” queer in any form, can position queer folks in danger. For example, a trans woman may be susceptible to violence for performing her gender in a “feminine” way as opposed to as the gender she was assigned at birth. In a patriarchal structure, those who perform “masculinity” are placed at the top of the patriarchal hierarchy (Wilson 2015, Connell 2005).

Like mentioned earlier, gender theory on masculinity also provides a nuanced insight into feminist theory on latinxs coming out process. In the patriarchal hierarchy, white cis-straight men

“reign,” while other types of men fall “below” them (Connell 2005). Of course then, white homosexual men fall below white straight men, but then latinx gay men and trans men fall even lower on the hierarchy. This means that latinx men who come out as queer have to grapple with their more complicated oppressions and lose privileges. However, latinx men may internalize homophobia and subscribe to the patriarchy since queer men still benefit from the patriarchal dividend (Connell 2005). In other words, they still benefit from “the overall subordination of women over men” (Connell 2005). As Wilson put it, “masculine performances get the financial rewards, and social recognition as valuable, and can depend on feminine performances of care and self-sacrifice,” whereas women do not reap any “benefits” from the patriarchy. Thus dismantling the patriarchy for latinxs means losing their male privileges over latinx non-men. The systemic issues at hand here hence place queer men in more instances of violence and harm. Obviously, this patriarchal issue adds yet another obstacle for queer latinxs, making them more fearful for their life once coming out and publicly performing their queerness.

Significant to queer latinx discourse as well is the theory of gender objectivity. Objectification happens to genders that are viewed to have “less social power” than other genders (Wilson 2015). There’s both benign and negative types of objectification. Benign objectification views someone as an “object” but in a way that does not reject their humanity (Wilson 2015). Whereas, negative objectification simultaneously objectifies and denies someone’s humanity. Non cis-straight white males are viewed as more submissive and thus subject to objectification and denial of their humanity (Wilson 2015, Connell 2005). For instance, in Taylor Swift’s music video “You Need To Calm Down,” Parahoo (2020) argues that Swift objectifies queer people. Essentially, queerness is flamboyantly and extravagantly showcased by Swift but then also silenced as well. Similarly, Katy Perry’s music video “I Kissed

a Girl,” objectifies queerness by presenting queerness as “experimentation” and “fun” (Parahoo 2020). These depictions of queerness both lack in recognizing the complexities of the queer experience. They imply that queer people don’t chose their identity while also ignoring the violence and oppressions faced by queer folks. Consequently, queer identities are objectified. To connect objectification theory back to queer latinx people, many queer latinx individuals face further objectification due to the fact they’re also people of color as well. They’re already seen as less human because of their race, let alone for their queer identities as well (Anzaldua 2002, Piepzna-Samarasinha 2002, Wilson 2015). Specifically, queer latinxs are also fetishized and hypersexualized in the dominant cultures objectification of them (Acosta 2018). For instance, many latinx gay men end up experiencing being whistled at and made fun of for their outward performance of queerness in public (Acosta 2018). To reiterate, queer latinx bodies are objectified to an even greater extent than white people.

All things considered, both the feminist theories of post-colonialism and gender give an insight into the depressing reality of coming out for queer latinxs. Luckily, there are possible solutions to some of the oppressions queer latinxs face when coming out. First off, while some latinx individuals have had a rough time coming out due to colonial ideals instilled in their families, latinxs whose families have stronger ties to familial love and acceptance as opposed to the idea of respect, had an easier time coming out than their white queer peers (Rosario 2004). Therefore, I propose that we can reimagine familismo to emphasize love and acceptance over colonial ideas of machismo and marianismo. Another solution that Acosta (2018) proposes herself is the idea of disidentification. Disidentification begs for decolonization in feminist theory. However, I propose we go beyond decolonizing just theory to also decolonizing our livelihoods. Some examples of decolonization include deconstructing harmful internalized ideas

of gender and sexuality. Once we deconstruct harmful colonial ideas, we can start to learn how LGBTQ+ individuals fit into the familial structure. Queerness and Familismo are not at odds with each other (Acosta 2018, Cauce and Rodriguez 2002). Truly, queer latinxs have their own communal role/s in the family.

Another necessary component of decolonization involves the inclusion of queer friendly language in the spanish language. Anzaldua prefers to call herself “una de las otras” which translates to “one of the others” (Acosta 2018). She does this to include her own queer identity in the spanish language, while also distancing herself from heteronormativity, “marking herself in the borderlands” (Acosta 2018). Creating spanish phrases such as “una de las otras” works for some latinxs like Anzaldua, but for others, the feeling of “otherness” makes them uncomfortable, so creating other spanish friendly words or borrowing from the english language or their ancestors indigenous language may also help. Finally, increasing representation of latinxs in queer spaces will also ease some of the stress of coming out for latinxs. The lack of queer latinx role models in queer performances and dominant queer circles creates a more intimidating experience for latinxs (Rosario 2004, Parahoo 2020). There are a few ways we can combat this issue. First, we can create more queer latinx safe spaces (Anzaldua 2002, Piepzna-Samarasinha 2002). However, we can also perform anti-racism within current dominant white queer spaces, in which white people become accomplices to queer people of color (Kendall 2020). That way latinxs have the opportunity to choose which safe space is best for themselves and their happiness.

Ultimately, current queer discourse lacks an understanding of the queer latinx experience. The coming out journey for queer latinxs also involves battling colonial and gender structures that contributes to their oppression. Once we better understand the nuanced perspectives of queer

latinxs, we can target the solutions. Specifically, decolonization and representation/inclusion of queer latinxs in LGBTQ+ spaces will help ease some of the systemic structures that latinxs face when coming out to their communities.

References

- Acosta, K. L. (2018). Queering family scholarship: Theorizing from the borderlands. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 10(2), 406-418.
- Aguilar, C. (2018, August 14). In 'Room to Grow' Doc, a Latinx Teen Struggles After Coming Out to Religious Parents. *Remezcla*.
- Anzaldúa, G., Castillo, A., & Alarcón, N. (2001). La prieta. *Debate feminista*, 24, 129-141.
- Connell, R. (2020). The social organization of masculinity (pp. 192-200). Routledge.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza*.
- Cauce, A. M., & Domenech-Rodriguez, M. (2002). Latino families: Myths and realities. *Latino children and families in the United States: Current research and future directions*, 3-25.
- Gonzalez, B. (2017, October 7). How I came out to my traditional latino father.
- Guarnero, P. A. (2007). Family and community influences on the social and sexual lives of Latino gay men. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 18(1), 12-18.
- Piepzna-Samarasinha (2002). *Browngirlworld: queer girl of color organizing, sistahood, heartbreak*. In Hernández, D., & Rehman, B. (Eds.). *Colonize this!: Young women of color on today's feminism*. Seal Press.

Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., & Hunter, J. (2004). Ethnic/racial differences in the coming-out process of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths: A comparison of sexual identity development over time. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 10*(3), 215.

Wilson, L. A. (2015). *Gender Performativity and Objectification*.