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## Post-Colonial Heteronormative Consequences In The Life Of A Queer Chicax

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# Post-Colonial Heteronormative Consequences In the Life of a Queer Chicax

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Armando Alejandro-Huerta

“**Q**uítate esa putada y tirala a la basura.” My mom was watching a novela lay across the couch. It was summer, but school was about to start. There was a silicone rainbow bracelet with the words “pride and joy” on my wrist. Her eyes only saw the colors, and her ears only heard ‘lo que la gente va decir.’

“Pero sólo significa orgullo y alegría.” I was ready to walk out the door, ready to leave no sé a donde, but I couldn’t walk out the door without her permission. It was the summer of my freshman year. She wasn’t working yet, so she was always home.

“Ay, tú no te ocupas de esas cosas,” I heard this in the tone of her voice, so nonchalant, and I saw it in her eyes. The force with which she ripped that silicone bracelet from my wrist and threw it in the trash was full of hate! Honestly, that’s not what hurt the most. What hurt most was having to accept her bendición, with tears in my eyes, before I left. I was mad. I felt defeated. She saw them, but perdóname is a word she does not recognize. The argument in its entirety is one I will never forget, and yet it’s just one of those moments in my life that my mind constantly avoids.

I come from a world where we hide our rainbow bracelets. It is a place where I was only valued for being who I am not. It is a place that valued my image more than my reality, a place where labels could not describe me but only confined me. I come from a place that did not, and does not, value my story, my true story. Thus, my world has taught me that my story is one not worth reading.

I do not possess the power to control the negative and violent experiences in my life. As a queer Chicana growing up in East Oakland, I did not possess that power. Power is something I am afraid of because I've seen the destruction caused by the cisgender-heterosexual men with guns who have it. I have seen women in my life beaten unconscious and I was not able to do anything but wait until they woke up. I have seen lives taken and all I could do was avoid a stray bullet. I have escaped the violence when homophobia has been more than simply verbal degradation. Homophobia acted on by people within "my own community," the ones with the power to decide whether someone can take their next breath. A dim lit street and a gun can do that.

Oppression and injustice are not something I am new to. Living in a toxic environment, however, I was conditioned to accept them. I was forced to submit to and ignore my experiences of violence because, as a queer person of color, heteronormativity silenced my voice. I could not challenge the narrative in my own life because I did not possess the pen to rewrite it; that too, was taken from me.

Growing up, being identified and perceived as a Mexican male in East Oakland is difficult. I lived in an environment where systemic racism and institutionalized oppression railed against me. *La raza y familia* claim to be a source of support, one that empowers and motivates you to do better for yourself and improve your community if, and only if, your gender and sexual identity conform to their expectations. Growing up as a non-binary, male-identified, queer Chicana in East Oakland exposed me to the same oppressive institutions, but there was no *raza*, no *familia* for me. Instead, I was, and am, devalued for not fitting the community's standard of normalcy. I was forced to suppress my identity to fit in with the community that openly despised my queer "otherness."

My parents did all they could to keep my siblings and I safe in Oakland. Safe from the risk of becoming another bloody body on the streets, but importantly, safe from other people's judgments. ¿Qué va decir la gente? They created a reputation, an image of me that they value more than the real me. My parents came to the United States to provide their children with opportunities that

would not have been accessible to us in Mexico. They are incredibly supportive of the effort my siblings and I make in obtaining a higher education. We fulfill their American Dream. The one image of me they do uphold is one that solely depicts my academic “success.” However, the one aspect of me that they do not support, that they hardly acknowledge, is a critical aspect that makes me who I am – my queer identity. The comfort, care, and support that other people of color experience within their families are ones I am not familiar with. Not having a home within my own immediate family, I was forced to create a home away from home, among people who are not my family, yet they accept and embrace my multiple identities.

I have a unique perspective of “comunidad” and “familía” than the one experienced by other people of my raza. As a result of the violent invisibility and ostracism from “mi gente,” I do not fully embrace Chincanx as a core identity. I can more easily identify with people who have been marginalized by their own racial communities for their queer “otherness.” If I had not created a sense of community among people who share my gendered experiences, beyond my appearance, I could have easily become another statistic. Another name turned into a number; a life lost among a list of lives that could have mattered. Another life, another smile, stolen and consumed by hatred. I am not a number because, subconsciously, I knew that one day I would be able to escape the smog of Oakland, and finally freely breathe.