Dissertation Prospectus

Although queer students have become more visible in contemporary media, their lived experiences continue to be reduced to narrow and seemingly individualized encounters with homophobia. In addition, their identities are still overwhelmingly represented as White, middle class and cisgender (Driver, 2008; Kumashiro, 2001; Paceley & Flynn, 2012). With such narrow conceptions of queer student identities the complex realities of all queer students’ lived experiences and needs are often obscured. The extant literature exploring the formal school experiences of queer students has documented the many ways in they are particularly vulnerable to poor academic performance, absenteeism and drop-out, as a result of the discrimination they confront in formal school settings (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Grov et al., 2006; Hackford-Peer, 2010; Holmes & Cahill, 2003). Isolation and anti-queer discrimination that queer students experience in school can significantly contribute to a decline in academic participation (Campos, 2005). In particular, queer students of color experience these kinds of discriminating and marginalizing obstacles but their experiences are under-researched (Ryan, 2002) and under-theorized. Queer students are a diverse population, and have just as diverse needs. Russell and Truong (2001) note that while it is difficult to conclude that queer students of color are at a greater risk for victimization at school, their experiences are qualitatively different from their White peers (p.117). To this point, this proposed project seeks to examine and make sense of the lived experiences of queer young adults of color who claim multiple salient and overlapping identities. By exploring their student narratives, this project intends to offer insight on the strategies and savvy queer young adults of color employ when navigating marginalization.

In this study the PI seeks to collect and analyze narrative stories from queer young adults of color reflecting on their youth and lived experiences of navigating formal school settings, and their personal conceptions of the purpose of education. The PI will analyze each narrative story individually and generate analytic findings, and intends for the analytic findings to contribute to the extant literature about the lived experiences of queer students of color in schools. Additionally, the PI intends for this project to be a queer of color critique (Ferguson, 2004; 2005; Hong & Ferguson, 2011) in that it seeks to put queer of color identity at the center of exploration in an attempt to identify the strategies and tools that queer young adults of color use to negotiate multiple intersecting identities and navigate formal school settings.

In conclusion, the rationale for this project rests on the claim that queer students of color are often rendered invisible because their lived experiences and identities do not fit nicely within the mainstream gay discourse (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013; Driver, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Kumashiro, 2001; Manalansan IV, 1996; Marquez & Brockenbrough, 2013; Sausa, 2005). This research project plans to offer a more nuanced look into the lived experiences of queer students of color and illuminate the complicated ways they are marginalized, and the strategies they employ to navigate and negotiate school.

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