

## **Personal narratives as a form of communication in Chicano/a Studies**

### **Introduction**

Any academic community revolving cultural studies allows its students to better understand the community's ideals and struggles; however, for a member of the community, it allows for them to grow a better understanding of their own. This idea is true for Chicano/a studies as they cover topics that are important to the community such as racism, the border, immigration, and social justice. One of the ways that the community is able to express their ideas on these topics to those who are not members of the community, is through the telling of personal narratives from community members. Thus, this essay I researched the different ways that these personal narratives express the ideals of the Chicano/a discipline.

In the story of Judith Flores Camora we see the way in which community youth organizations have helped alleviate some of the struggles that impact undocumented youth. However we delve into greater issues regarding racism, crime, marginalization as we learn about the life of Persona #1. Finally, we see the way in which the community struggles toward upward mobility, the validation of their parents sacrifice for them, and citizenship itself.

### **Methods**

In order to gauge the different ways that the discipline communicates through personal narratives, I first turned to the UC Davis library database and searched for articles filtered under "Peer Reviewed articles". I was originally inspired to write on this style of discourse after coming across the article "Amherst to Veracruz: Undocumented Student to Postdoctoral Fellow" and resonated with the story told by Judith Flora Carmona. I then came across similar articles with the same narrative style. That then lead me to wonder how prevalent this style of writing is

seen within the discipline. I then encountered the Chicano/a Studies “manifesto”, El Plan de Santa Barbara, and was able to analyze how they complimented each other.

### **Genre and Study Analysis**

El Plan de Santa Barbara was written as the manifesto that laid out the foundation and the first steps in implementing Chicano/a curriculum. Yet, the context of El Plan De Santa Barbara isn't just the fundamental document of Chicano/a Studies, but also is important in fighting the battles of the Chicano/a movement, which dedicates itself to creating equity among people who have been historically marginalized. El Plan de Santa Barbara notes specifically that our society is based around a “racist structure”, this racist structure refers to the idea that one ethnic group is socioeconomically underprivileged because of arbitrary characteristics. When it comes to the Chicano/a community, El Plan outlines that this racist structure has left the community “exploited, impoverished, and marginal” (El Plan de Santa Barbara,17). Due to these occurrences, El Plan de Santa Barbara also outlines that Chicano/a curriculum offers an opportunity for its students to better serve and understand the community, with the expectation that it then spreads the community's ideals of social justice, political action, and overall awareness of the struggles that members of the community face. As a way to create an environment of support for members of the community, El Plan de Santa Barbara also calls for communities to create programs for underprivileged youth to thrive academically, as it notes that education of one of the greatest ways to push the community towards upward social mobility. After reading into different scholarly and peer-reviewed articles, it seems as though one of the most popular and effective ways of doing so are through the use of the personal narrative or anecdote of a member of this community.

## **Judith Flores Carmona**

In her article “Amherst to Veracruz: From Undocumented Student to Postdoctoral Fellow” Judith Flores Carmona tells her own story of her struggles as an undocumented student in the United States. With vulnerability, she speaks to her familial problems that surfaced because of her family’s undocumented immigration to the United States. She explains that it was difficult for her to form bonds with her family of 10 because they “had abandoned me to live in the United States”, since she was the last of her siblings to cross the border. She then goes into how a mentoring program called the Fulfillment Fund, a mentorship program that paired wealthy people with underprivileged students who had college potential, changed her life. Because of this program and the help of her mentor, Carmona was able to obtain information about applying to college as an undocumented student and gained admittance as an international student to several CSU universities even after her application had been lost (Carmona,35).But with her acceptances, Carmona notes the difficulties that came with gaining admittance as an international student. As an “international student” Carmona was now faced with the struggle of paying international tuition, which is sometimes more than double of in-state tuition. Fortunately for Carmona, she received funding for her undergraduate career by her Fulfillment Fund mentor and generous donations from their friends. However, Carmona states that she understand that she stood in a place of privilege since she had a group of people willing to support and sponsor her education(Carmona,37). Given this, Carmona’s story helps emphasize the importance of community organizations that El Plan de Santa Barbara calls for to help the community prosper.

## **Persona #1**

While the Chicano/a Studies academic community is an advocate of using personal narratives to communicate their ideals, the community realizes the legal dangers that come with people openly talking about their legal status and immigration story. Thus, in “Learning and Mentoring the Undocumented” the author Shane T. Moreman tells the story of one of their grad students using the anonymous name Persona, which means “person” in Spanish. Similar to the ideals about the stereotyping of the Chicano/a community, Persona describes that “Brown conjures up the ideas of dirt, dirty, and even scatological” as she points out that her brown mother and father not only represent the dirt of society, but the ones who clean up the dirt of society. Persona reminisces about the “bedazzled mansions and clean cut lawns” of the neighborhoods that her mother would work at as she “sacrificed her hands and knees to lean over glassy porcelain bowls” and her father “slaved away under the sun, shoveling horse duns” (Moreman, 312). But what is more important than the socioeconomic status that her family was subjected to because of the country’s racial structure, were the rights that she lost because of her legal status. While giving her professor a tour of her home town, Persona recalls a time where she was walking down the streets of her hometown and a man in his car pulled up closely beside her on the sidewalk, stuck out his hand, and “slapped her on the ass”. Shane Moreman asks her in an almost joking manner if she had called the cops, but it is after he concludes his sentence that he realizes that she is revoked from that right since contacting the police would require documentation from all parties involved. Persona notes that Shane and she “share different spaces, even as they walk together side by side”(Moreman, 316). Through this story, it is evident

as to how the Chicano/a, especially the Undocumented population, community is subject to the “racial structure” that exists in the United States and how the academic community uses the publication of these narratives to bring awareness of the community's struggle.

### **Ana, Lalo, and Santi**

In her article “California Dreaming: Latino/a Undocumented Student College Choices”, Maria Luisa Woodruff conducts research to further understand the struggles that face the undocumented student community and she does this through interviewing members of the community and proves her points through the use of personal narrative. Woodruff begins her research by asking students “Who or what informed or inspired your college decisions?”(Woodruff, 105). When interviewing Ana, a student at a University of California, Woodruff noted that these students speak commonly about their parents’ efforts to provide them opportunities in the US and because of this they feel the need for their academic success to “validate their parents struggles and dreams they had for them when they immigrated.” Woodruff notes “a validation of their struggles” as a primary reason (Woodruff, 107).

Lalo, a student at a California State University, further amplifies this statement by explaining to Woodruff that while his parents never received a formal education, they understood the value it has and how it leads to an overall increase in upward mobility. Lalo quotes his parents “No quiero que trabajes como nosotros”, which translates into English as “We dont want you to work like we do” (Woodruff, 108).

However a much more sobering reason for their motivation to pursue a higher education appears when Woodruff interviews Santi, a student at a California private university. Santi states

“You are buying time until everything gets figured out. Hard work will give you the benefits of the future so you think like if I study hard I’ll get into college, if I do well in college and if I’m a good person, if I’m a really good student, a company will sponsor me. This country will want me” (Woodruff , 109). This reasoning expands far beyond feeling the need to validate their parents struggle, but instead highlights the want for a country, in which they are already cultural citizens, to feel like they are a part of it too.

### **The United States Department of Homeland Security vs. the Chicano Studies Discourse**

As seen, the publication of personal narratives is popularly used by the Chicano Studies academic community as a form of discourse to help translate their ideals of social justice, racism, immigration, and more to outside communities. However, some of these published personal narratives have gained enough traction in mainstream media and are being spread on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. This has led to an outpour of support, from members within and outside the community, for those who have been brave enough to share their stories. Many community members are bravely sharing personal details about their immigration to the United States and their experiences; however, this has become increasingly dangerous after US President Donald Trump has ordered the Department of Homeland Security to begin collecting online data (social media handles and search history) on both documented and undocumented immigrants in the United States starting October 17th, 2017. While incredibly recent, this has caused an uproar in the Chicano/a Studies academic community now that one of their primary forms of discourse is currently under fire, given that many of the members that share their story

are afraid to speak out. Yet, it is unsure as to how this may affect the way in which the community communicates and the willingness of its members to share.

## **Conclusion**

There are various themes that are prevalent throughout the Chicano/a discipline: immigration, racism, social injustice, and others. After further analyzation of several personal narratives, it became clear as to how the discipline uses them to transcend their ideals onto others that aren't members of the community. By telling the stories of Judith Flores Carmona, Persona #1, and personal insight from college students Ana, Lalo and Santi, the struggles that are commonly faced throughout the community become present to members outside of the community and overall allow for them to emotionally connect to a community they are not a part of.

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