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Book review -The struggles of identity, education, and agency in the lives of undocumented students: The burden of hyperdocumentation

Arli Mohamed
Loyola University Chicago

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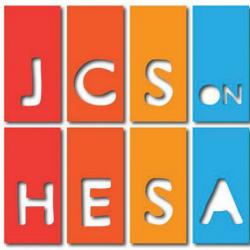
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Book Review

**The Struggles of Identity, Education,
and Agency in the Lives of
Undocumented Students**
The Burden of Hyperdocumentation

Arli Mohamed, Loyola University Chicago

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Chang, A. (2018). *The struggles of identity, education, and culture in the lives of undocumented students: The burden of hyperdocumentation*. Palgrave Macmillan.

In *The Struggles of Identity, Education, and Agency in the Lives of Undocumented Students: The Burden of Hyperdocumentation*, Chang examines the unique experiences of undocumented students as they struggle with identity formation and the perception of educational accomplishments as a pathway to achieve worthiness in the United States. Throughout the text, Chang explains that undocumented students constantly battle to disrupt the common narrative of their undocumented status through hyperdocumentation, which Chang defines as “a person’s excessive production of documents, texts, and papers in an effort to compensate for a feeling of unworthiness” (2018, p. 3). The book broadly focuses on undocumented students but centers literature on Latinx undocumented students.

Although it may be risky for scholars to publish “a less than moving self-revelation” (Chang, 2018, p. 2), the author believes that it is beneficial for scholars from marginalized backgrounds to write themselves into academia because nothing speaks to official knowledge more than official experience. The book is seven chapters in which Chang provides meaningful studies examining the lives of the Latinx undocumented students. To provide a better scope of understanding of the experiences of Latinx undocumented students, Chang draws from various theoretical frameworks, including Tara Yosso’s (2005) theory of community cultural wealth, to examine being undocumented as a form of capital instead of as a deficit. Through emerging themes such as identity formation, agency, a borderland love ethic, and strength, Chang provides a foundation for agentic practices and recommendations for educators and practitioners working with undocumented Latinx students to help them navigate their identity formation in higher education.

In Chapter One, Chang asserts, “my personal life

and my academic life are not separate; they never have been” (2018, p. 1) to highlight society’s arbitrary rule that academics should separate themselves from their scholarship, claiming personal experience as less rigorous or an unofficial source of knowledge. However, Chang positions herself as a scholar of a marginalized background, sharing her experiences as a once undocumented immigrant from Guatemala to now a faculty at a prestigious predominantly white institution.

Chang explores the transition of once being undocumented to hyperdocumented in the second chapter. Drawing from Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso’s (2002) notion of counter-storytelling, Chang explains her experiences of being undocumented—a person who entered the United States without government authorization—to “hyperdocumented: a person who produces exceeding amounts of documents, texts, and papers” (2018, p. 12). To interrupt the common narrative about undocumented immigrants, Chang also draws on Michael Apple’s (1993) ideology of American common sense, which refers to undocumented persons as “illegal,” “illegitimate,” and “inhuman” (Chang, 2018, p. 12). Solórzano and Yosso’s (2002) notion of counter-storytelling, as described by Chang, is a method of “telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (2018, p. 13). Chang constructively analyzes these frameworks to further explain that counter-stories are also a tool for “exposing, analyzing, and challenging the master narrative of racial privilege” (2018, p. 13). While emphasizing the stories of her students, Chang also interweaves her own personal stories to offer as a source of strength in unwelcoming spaces.

In Chapter Three, Chang experiments with the strains of what it means to be a “deserving” (2018, p. 28) native researcher. Drawing from Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) borderland love ethic framework focused on “nurturing strength to love in spaces of contention, tolerance of ambiguity as a revolutionary virtue, and humbly beginning anew again and again” (Chang, 2018, p. 28), Chang attempts to decode the experiences of undocumented Latinx students. Chang

examines her positionality to her students' recent immigration status to understand their perspectives with immigration legislation such as the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Act. In this analysis, Chang uses her previous immigration status and the current status of her students as the central focus to battle her privilege of now being a native scholar studying undocumented people. Chang offers a borderland love ethic as a conceptual framework to "embrace ambiguity and reject binary positions" (2018, p. 28). Borderland love ethic is valuable because of its ability to embrace difference while providing an opportunity for scholars to engage with research participants in intentional and meaningful ways.

In the fourth chapter, Chang draws on the experiences of undocumented students with the DREAM and DACA Acts to continue her exploration of the impact these legislative policies on undocumented Latinx students. Chang relies on Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth to understand how undocumented Latinx students navigate educational spaces to figure out strategies of meaning-making in their worlds and uncovering their identity in the educational system while using their cultural capital as a source of critical hope and resilience. Chang uses Holland et al.'s (1998) social practice theory of self and identity to further explain the experiences of undocumented Latinx students and their perceptions of feeling objectified in a social world they seek to achieve the ambiguous American Dream.

Chang presents a quick overview of the existing literature of Latinx undocumented students in Chapter Five to situate a qualitative study of 18 undocumented Latinx students. Using results from this study, Chang examines these students' perceptions of, and the significant impact of, their interactions with educators. Chang draws on Angela Valenzuela's (1999) notions of education and authentic caring to examine how students interpret their daily interactions with educators. Chang focuses on participants' words in

this chapter to make a strong argument that educators have the power to "do good" or "do damage" (2018, p. 84) in the lives of undocumented students. Through her astute analysis of Valenzuela's (1999) framework, Chang evaluates the experiences of undocumented Latinx students, highlighting the importance of authentic care within relationships in Latinx culture. Through the acknowledgment of Latinx culture, educators can gain a deeper understanding of the significance of authenticity and provide a space of care and agency for undocumented Latinx students, so they feel supported.

Chapter Six draws on an in-depth youth participatory action research (YPAR) that Chang conducted over two years with an intimate group of four undocumented Latinx students. Chang describes YPAR as research that allows both students and partners to be researchers because YPAR positions students as the "experts of their community cultural wealth, their experiences, and their schooling process" (2018, p. 110). Based on the information provided by these four undocumented Latinx students, Chang offers three suggestions to educators: "(1) You don't need to know a lot to help me; (2) Don't tell me everything will be fine; (3) Walk the path alongside me" (p. 110). These practical suggestions provide educators with a relational method that allows them to get to know their undocumented Latinx students through daily relationship building.

In the final chapter, Chang provides her thoughts on academic agency in the lives of undocumented Latinx students and the burden of hyperdocumentation. Chang concludes the book by returning to her personal experiences of once being an undocumented immigrant from Guatemala to now being a hyperdocumented scholar. Drawing on Anzaldúa's (1987) borderland love ethic framework, Chang reconnects with her personal experiences and those of her participants. Chang poses questions to challenge her audience and encourage scholars from marginalized backgrounds to enact their agency by writing themselves into academia.

Strengths

I recommend educators, scholars, practitioners, administrators, staff, and others who may work with undocumented Latinx students to read this book because it provides a foundation for understanding the educational experiences of undocumented Latinx students. Chang provides constructive tools to engage with these students in teaching and learning in a way that embraces difference. The practical approaches provided in the text are a means to support undocumented Latinx students. For example, educators can apply relationship building as a strategy to include students in curriculum decision making process and enhance their learning experiences. Practicing inclusion enables higher education institutions to adapt their curriculum and programming to meet these students' needs in a culturally inclusive and authentic way.

Improvements

While this book is a valuable resource, some areas could benefit from additional conceptual frameworks. The author's inclusion of her experience and the experiences of her students provide an effective method of storytelling as various individuals from marginalized backgrounds may readily relate to this approach. However, within the scope of storytelling, the author could have benefited from incorporating critical race theories to further theorize the experiences of undocumented Latinx students, providing readers with multiple lenses to decipher and appreciate those experiences. Particularly, Chapter four could have benefited from an application of W.E.B Du Bois' idea of double consciousness as discussed by Levinson et al.'s (2011). Similarly, Delgado and Stefancic's (2017) notion of multiple consciousness would help to further explore the ways undocumented Latinx students view themselves through the eyes of others, and how they navigate that reality as they continue to strive for perfection through hyperdocumentation. Du Bois's idea of double consciousness, as described

by Levinson et al. (2011), "is [the] sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 204). Due to our multifaceted identities, Delgado and Stefancic's (2017) notion of multiple consciousness "holds that most of us experience the world in different ways on different occasions" (p. 63). Therefore, it is worth noting that people's perspectives change, not only in the way they view and interpret themselves with respect to their identity development, but also in the way they understand the world at different times. These frameworks could further provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of undocumented Latinx students in terms of the ways they understand their identities amidst a changing social world.

Conclusion

This book uses the experiences of undocumented Latinx students to provide educators a foundational understanding of their struggles. Along with personal narratives, the author draws on many critical social theories to analyze and comprehend the experiences of undocumented Latinx students and provides recommendations for agentic practices based on existing literature. Chang's experience and the participants in her studies throughout this book do not by any means encompass the experiences of all undocumented Latinx individuals. However, their testimonials provide readers a framework to understand these students' struggles with identity and agency in education as they strive to make meaning of their lives and use hyperdocumentation as a method to achieve worthiness and the American Dream. For educators and scholars working with undocumented Latinx students and other individuals from marginalized backgrounds, this book serves as a guide in supporting these students in establishing agency in their education and in their lives as they strive to achieve success in the United States. While the author's use of storytelling through the inclusion of her personal experience and her students' experiences in the studies serves as a

meaningful strategy to connect with readers, the text could have benefited from including a critical race theory framework. The inclusion of critical race theory concepts would have allowed for further theorization of the experiences of undocumented Latinx students. This additional analytic lens would, therefore, have provided readers with multiple lenses to stimulate their process of understanding and appreciating those experiences, particularly the ways in which undocumented Latinx students decode their identities in a dynamic social world.

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