



PRAYE(RED)

Les Delgado
Southern Illinois University
les.delgado@siu.edu

Les Delgado is an undergraduate student at Southern Illinois University's Communication Studies Department focusing on Performance Studies. Much of their research involves the intersections of queer identity and Latinx identity- focusing on Mexican-American culture. Les identifies as genderqueer and this identity is one of their main foci. They also have an interest in poetic inquiry, autoethnography, and queer studies.

Abstract: This performance uses a poem autoethnographically to engage the poet-researcher's lived experiences in order to examine the relationship of their identity intersections (queer, Latinx, gender non-comforming) to their culture(s) through the current events that inform their experiences and identities. Identifying as gender non-comforming, the poet uses terms like "Latinx" and the pronoun "they" to simply state and relate to a line of Sylvia Plath's the *Bell Jar* that "*I am, I am, I am.*" The usage of literature helps the poet become aware of what they are feeling. Using poetic autoethnography, these pieces strive to amplify the emotions—sadness, anger, anxiety, and fear—that stem from their positionality in relation to events like the tragedy in Orlando. Further, using poetry to engage in embodied and often hidden epistemic realities, the poet looks to the relationship of identity, culture, and the gender/queer, Latinx body that carries this cumulative knowledge from lived experience to lived experience to express those feelings. Using these poetic connections, the poet strives to question their existence in the current world, and make sense of their authenticity.

Keywords: Latinx, genderqueer, queer identity

In this paper I report on an autoethnographic poetry and performance that explored the intersection of queer, genderqueer, and Mexican identity. This is significant because after this year's (2016) American election results the author, I, used my voice to find a place with my identities to not feel silenced. This poem, written in a epistle style, directly pulls the reader into the poet's personal life.

Using personal experience in this poem, I use my identities to make my way through life, trying to find my place in the world, but especially in the American Flag. I see myself in the Mexican flag and genderqueer flag, but being considered "American" does not feel right when my additional identities are not valid. Using the color red – which might translate to the love and hate that spills on the floor of Orlando, to the love I give to others – but rather, having these marginalized identities makes me red, as in angry. In this piece I find my voice to keep fighting, and ask America what they have done after this election, this election that has made me feel less of a person. Using Sylvia Plath's (1963/2014) quote from the *Bell Jar*, I realize that "*I am, I am, I am*" these identities minus one. This poetic exploration is an example of social justice in that it strives to make people who identify as either queer, or Mexican, or gender non-conforming valid as persons. My goal in this poem is to make a statement, in a way to make my voice heard, and to say that right now, we might be going through tough times, but we need to realize that we can do this together, to have our voice heard, and, however we identify, know that we are valid.

"I see myself in the Mexican flag and genderqueer flag, but being considered "American" does not feel right when my additional identities are not valid."

Praye(red)

Dear America,

Look at me.

No actually look at me

Not what I am wearing or the way I act

Look into my eyes, look at my face.

As I will say this once and only once,

as it seems like you do not give a shit about me.

I will say this loud and clear

And proud

I am a queer, genderqueer and Latinx

Still looking at me?

Good.

I am queer.

I am the red in the Pride flag, the red that shines brightly,
since the day I knocked down that closet door.

I am that red but brighter when I think about the girl I love
and how I don't want to be any other color of that flag.

I am the red bowtie she wraps her presents,
her presence.

Her favorite color is not red but it is the color
that flows thru my veins that pumps blood to my heart to keep it alive,
that screams "*I am, I am, I.....am*"

It's the love I give her.

But that turns into hate,

that caused blood to be splattered on the floor of Pulse,
where I lost brothers and sisters,

I was tainted maroon you wanted voted for a man that told me
"a man shall not lie with a man"

and his running mate telling me you can shock the gay out of me
America.

You cannot shock the red out of me

Because I am also the red in the Mexican flag.

It's only one third of the flag but I am 100% puro mexicano,

I speak both Spanish and English at the same time telling you,

No.

I cannot cut your grass or clean your home.
That same red flows through my veins that dances
to the pace of uno, dos, tres to Norteno music, mami, ven para aqui,
I can't dance, so I sing Cielito Lindo, red face drunk
but I don't sing but cry about the way you treat mi raza, America.
You see, I am the red in the blood, sweat and tears of my mother's accent
when she came into the country so her children could have a life she never had.
So I am going to turn a real fucking red when people tell her
"You need speak English, you're in America."
I am the red in my late father's bloodshot eyes
-yes he drank a lot-
but he wasn't a rapist or drug dealer.
He was a man who loved his family, helped others in need.
Who worked so hard that his hands were covered in motor oil.
But if he were alive today,
his hands would have been on top of his head
because he didn't have a green card,
but a red flag over his head labeled "criminal."
I am the red of the blood I am willing to lose,
fighting, to carry on his legacy in the States.
They crossed the border so I could cross the stage.
Madre America,
Even though I was born in your soil,
Am I your child or enemy?

Now there is no red in the genderqueer flag
There is lavender, green and white
But look I have red boxers.
I don't have to pull my pants down to prove it,
Yes I am genderqueer
I am not this or that
It's they and them
My name is Les cause I cut the lies out of my name,
That means I wear boxers, bowties, and cologne
'Cause yes honey, I slay,
But I also wear sport bras,
And I think we all know what those are for
But that doesn't mean you can be grabbing me by the pussy
Because there is a thing called consent and respect.
It's the red, the love that I give to people only
Have them say,

“you know, I just don’t understand *that*”
and it happens every time I meet someone
it’s that same red that
I remember that Tuesday night vividly, America
As the results came in,
I was a pint of beer drunk
Three cigarettes in, I don’t smoke,
As I asked La Virgen for help,
Because I was red- angry
the red that didn’t turn maroon
but rather a clear color,
I don’t pray, but that day you elected that man, America
I turned wine into water, tears-
where I questioned if my fucking existence was valid.

Madre America,
I spent 23 years of my life accepting myself.
Giving myself the love,
Being red
But now I’m trying to be
Trying to find
The red in the American flag

REFERENCES

Faulkner, S. L. (2009). *Poetry as method: Reporting research through verse*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Plath, S. (1963/2014). *The bell jar*. London, UK: Arcturus.