

INTERSECTIONS OF QUEER AND IMMIGRANT IDENTITIES IN NBC'S
SUPERSTORE

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Communication Studies
May 2021

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DEDICATION

To Parker. Thank you for being my best friend. You were there for the multiple emotional breakdowns and unrealistically confident tirades. People are boring, but you're something else completely.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis wouldn't have been possible without the work and labor of so many people I value in my life. In addition to my spouse, Parker, I would like to thank my sister, Natalie who was our roommate for a period of about a year. Natalie, you were cooped up in the apartment with me for the majority of this bonkers idea turned thesis so you get a space here in the acknowledgements. I also would like to thank my parents, Jim and Dena, for instilling in me a life-long love of education and learning. My advisor and mentor, Dr. Elizabeth K. Eger, is my academic shero. Thank you Dr. Eger for your constant support and advocacy for me. I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Jasmine T. Austin and Dr. Josh Miller. Dr. Austin, I'm so thankful that I chose to take your Diversity Training course. That class bonded us as students and sparked some rad activism, none of which would have been possible without you. Dr. Josh, you have been so important in my journey as an activist-scholar. If I could take a course with you twice a year for the rest of my life, I would.

Lastly, I would like to thank my cat Mittens. She is my world.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This poem is titled *Bursting of photographs after trying to squeeze out old memories* by queer migrant activist and poet, Sonia Guiñansaca.

They don't tell you this when you migrate:

Old Polaroids are never enough
You are left tracing the silhouette of your grandparents
Or what ever is left

Of them

How many years has it been,
5,10, or 20?
It's been 20

20

In those 20 years you have been asked

To hide your accent

Sow your tongue

So that no more Rrrr's roll out

Straighten up
So that white Jesus accepts you

So that the lawyer helps you

Dig out the roots

Of your home

From underneath your nails
Cut your trenza

Pledge allegiance to the flag
And when you cannot,
Each thread will cut through

Every inch of you
To teach you, your kind was not meant

For this country

Dad told you that they will measure your success based on how smart you could be
So, you tried to be smart

Books after books you chased vocabulary for value
Legislation to give you meaning

Yes, sir. I am a skilled worker

Yes, sir. I can contribute

No, sir. I haven't committed any crimes

Pinned. Against One. Another

You remember that your mother almost didn't make it through the Border
Or any legislation, this time around

She won't make it into health care packages
She won't be remembered during press conferences

She will be dissected, research
How much she doesn't belong will be published

They don't tell you this when you migrate (Segal, 2015)

In the fight for immigration reform, DREAMers, “immigrant youths who qualify for the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act,” have been given center stage in the media (Blum, 2017; Hildreth, 2020). A subset of “undocuqueer” immigrants (at times separate from the DREAMers) have been instrumental to agitating for immigrant rights (Blum, 2017). Some undocuqueers take issue with the media’s focus on the “deserving” and “merit” of DREAMers (Blum, 2017). This narrative of exceptionalism leaves those lacking “respectability,” those who reject cisnormativity and heteronormativity, by the side of the road. Undocuqueer immigrants face unique sets of challenges in the U.S. due to their multiple marginalized identities (non-white, queer, and undocumented). They also face challenges within their communities, confronting whiteness in the LGBTQIAP+ community and heterosexism in the undocumented

community (Campbell, 2017). It is because of these intersecting challenges that I begin my first chapter with a poem by undocuqueer poet and activist Sonia Guiñansaca. She articulates the intersecting forms of oppression she faces targeted at her queer and undocumented identities. I examine these unique challenges within the context of work in my master's thesis.

Work is where those living in the United States spend a large percentage of their time, nearly a third of their life (Gettysburg College, 2020). Studies of work(ers) rarely focus on immigrants and even further neglect the challenges of undocumented workers. Additionally, studies of organizational diversity largely focus only on white-collar workspaces, which according to organizational communication scholar Karen Ashcraft, “makes little sense to attempt social change primarily in work/places associated with privileged bodies” (2011, p. 17). Communication studies research on diversity at work has critiqued white-collar normativity (Ashcraft, 2011; Cowan & Bochantin, 2011) and the sometimes shallow usages of diversity as a term. Instead, scholars have embraced the term “difference” from Brenda J. Allen’s theorizing. Difference for Allen brings our attention to the fact that similarity and difference are on a spectrum (2011, p. 4) and emphasizes that social identities are not fixed but subject to change (2011, p. 13). My master’s thesis specifically contributes to literature pertaining to organizational difference and illuminates the working experiences of queer immigrants. The contribution will be accomplished through an examination of a media characterization of a working-class, Filipino, undocuqueer narrative.

The rhetorical text for my master’s thesis is seasons one through five of NBC’s workplace sitcom *Superstore*, and my analysis specifically focuses on the status narrative

(how someone discovers they are undocumented and how that status impacts their life) of one of its characters. The show centers on floor workers at a fictional big-box retailer called Cloud 9 and the unique challenges they face as a result of the nature of their work and social class. One specific character whose identities and lived experiences stand out from other *Superstore* characters is Mateo Liwanag. Mateo is an undocumented, gay, cisgender, Filipino man who works as a floor employee at Cloud 9. Mateo does not find out his undocumented status until season two of the show, and the plot of how his status impacts his life carries through to the sixth season. Two examples of how Mateo's status effects his life is that he is unable to transfer stores to be closer to his boyfriend because he does not have a social security number, and when attempting to request asylum to avoid deportation, he resorts to asking one of his co-workers to physically assault him so he can claim to be a victim of a hate crime.

My analysis of Mateo's narrative will advance conversations already happening within communication studies literature. Critical, rhetorical, intercultural, and organizational scholarship in communication studies offer important theorizing about intersections of queer and immigrant lives, bodies, and rhetoric (see for example, Asante, 2015; Chávez, 2013a, 2017; Eguchi, 2020). Each of these areas is essential to my master's thesis; I seek to examine intersecting identities (critical) of a Filipino immigrant (intercultural) within the context of work (organizational) with narrative criticism. This contribution will be highly important to the field of communication studies as these four fields rarely interact with each other all at once. I enter this conversation in my thesis through a rhetorical narrative criticism of Mateo's status narrative and characterizations of the intersections of immigrant queers because intersecting modes of oppression are

often ignored by academia and the public. Television narratives of intersecting identities, especially queer and immigrant identities, further visualize that immigrants are not one-dimensional and cannot be contained within a single story.

Past rhetoric and critical cultural scholarship have examined queer media representation (Dow, 2001; Eguchi et al., 2018) and immigrant narratives (Kinefuchi & Cruz, 2015). Most literature on queer media has been about non-work related relationships, and family such as in *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word* (Reed, 2009; Spencer, 2020). This thesis will contribute to literature in communication studies pertaining to intersectionality, that is multiple marginalized identities that lead to interlocking forms of oppression, within the context of work. This contribution is greatly needed as interlocking forms of oppression of multiple identities are often enacted through communication.

This chapter proceeds as follows. I will explain the importance of conducting narrative criticism of immigrant queers at work. Next, I will examine the literature I seek to contribute to with my master's thesis including theorizing about intersectionality from queer of color, immigrant queer, and Asian Pacific Islander (API) perspectives. I will then explicate my addition to this specific area of intersectional theorizing from an API, queer, undocumented immigrant, working-class perspective. The literature will also include a brief section on how I will engage difference in the organizational communication discipline. Then I will detail my research question.

Justification and Significance

Lived violence is often correlated with media representation of those oppressed groups experiencing the violence. Thus, study of these media representations, specifically

television characterizations of marginalized groups, is necessary in light of rising statistics of hate crimes and speech against these groups (Hassan, 2019; Lang, 2021). Media representations of marginalized groups impact how those groups are treated by the dominant society and have the potential to expand the worldviews of audiences (Lünenborg & Fürsich, 2014; Reed, 2009). Specifically, scholars have argued that irresponsible and transphobic representations of trans people in the media directly contribute to a culture that tolerates, and even encourages, violence against and murders of trans people (GLAAD, n.d.; Reitz, 2017).

Importantly, it is often through television characterizations that marginalized groups see themselves as depicted in culture. As stories of deportation (Jordan, 2020), family separation (Alvarez, 2020), forced hysterectomies (Treisman, 2020), and children in cages (BBC, 2018) dominate our 24-hour news cycle, the television industry is attempting to address our current political climate and country. It is now more important than ever that characterizations of marginalized groups, especially immigrants and undocumented workers, are layered and responsible (Hassan, 2019). Studying intersecting identities is also important in rhetoric and communication studies as my specific area of study of intersectionality within rhetoric *and* in the context of work is not a prevalent focus. Rhetorical criticism has a tendency to focus on the rhetoric of the most privileged (Chávez, 2015; Flores, 2018) ignoring the discourse of those considered to be “non-normative.” To clarify, those who are considered “non-normative” are people with identities that are outside of hegemonic standards, e.g., white, cisgender, heterosexual (cishet), middle-class, men. The use of rhetoric to analyze intersecting marginalized identities will make strides to correct this tendency, with some adjustments to normative

modes of rhetorical criticism, of course.

In my master's thesis, I specifically examine the characterization of Mateo in the first five seasons of *Superstore* following how his work-life is affected by his legal status intersecting with other identities. I am focusing on Mateo's character because it is important to examine characterizations of marginalized groups. *Superstore* showcases a cast of characters with multiple intersecting identities, I have chosen to examine Mateo because his undocumented status creates significantly more challenges for him at Cloud 9 as compared to his co-workers. In Mateo's case, his gay, Filipino, undocumented immigrant, and working-class identities contribute to wider conversations about intersectional identities. Mateo's intersecting identities necessitate analysis because of his uniqueness within television portrayals of queers and immigrants at work. Mateo is *allowed* to have a story outside of his legal status, an allowance that is rare for media characterizations of undocumented workers.

Not only is Mateo a unique characterization of a queer immigrant at work, but he is also a Filipino, queer, undocumented immigrant within the working class. Analyzing Mateo offers an addition to scholarship on intersections of queer, Asian, undocumented immigrant, working-class bodies outside of white-collar work. This analysis of Mateo's undocumented storyline seeks to add to literature of intersectionality within the field of rhetoric and within the context of work. The ultimate goal of this project is to theorize Mateo's thick intersectionalities (Yep, 2010) and interlocking oppressions and to manifest a deeper understanding of structured oppression.

Intersectionality and Communication Studies Literature Review

As Mateo inhabits multiple intersecting identities, this project will employ multiple perspectives of intersectionality as they correspond with particular facets of Mateo's identities. First, I will situate my thesis as an intercategorical approach to intersectionality theorizing. Second, I will examine the theorizing of intersectionality from queer of color and immigrant perspectives. Lastly, I situate myself in API queer theorizing and place my specific contribution to this area of intersectionality through the context of work and rhetoric.

Intersectionality, as a term, was coined by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in reference to the interlocking forms of legal oppression Black women face based simultaneously for their gender and race (1989). She examines the normativity of white women and Black men's experiences arguing, "race and sex, moreover, become significant only when they operate to explicitly *disadvantage* the victims; because the *privileging* of whiteness or maleness is implicit, it is generally not perceived at all" [emphasis in original] (p. 151). It is important to note here the emphasis on interlocking forms of *oppression*. Crenshaw asserts the Black women experience oppression in ways that are similar to, and different from white women and Black men; she theorizes "the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex" (1989, p. 149). After she finishes describing this "double discrimination" faced by Black women, she advocates for a new world where the rights of the most disadvantaged are elevated and brought to the forefront, "if their efforts instead began with addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged and with restructuring and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are singularly disadvantaged would

also benefit” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 167).

From Crenshaw’s (1989) perspective, if U.S. culture were to acknowledge and address the issues faced by those most oppressed (i.e., the unhoused, trans people, undocumented people) then those who face singular disadvantages (white cis women, Black cis men) would gain. Here I would also like to address Crenshaw’s (1989) use of “double discrimination.” This phrase and its use by intersectionality theorists has sometimes been criticized for insinuating that intersecting identities are additive (Bowleg, 2008); in the case of Mateo, an additive perspective would be that he is encompassed by his Filipino + queer + undocumented immigrant + working-class identities. However, an additive perspective cannot coexist with a framework that understands multiple marginalized identities to be interacting *simultaneously*. It is difficult to approach studying intersectionality without falling into the conceptual trap of an additive perspective. However, as articulated by Bowleg (2008), “intersectionality researchers are charged with the responsibility of making the intersections between ethnicity, sex/gender, sexual orientation (to name just a few) and the social inequality related to these identities, explicit” (p. 322).

Though initially a term utilized in the legal field, intersectionality became popular theorizing in other disciplines. Due to intersectionality’s popularity as a theory, scholars’ applications and perspectives of the theory are diverse. These differences in application and perspective create a unique form of complexity within intersectionality theorizing. Social scientist Leslie McCall (2005) popularly categorized diverse methodological approaches to intersectionality by proposing three potential types: anti-categorical, intercategorical, and intracategorical. Anticategorical approaches to intersectionality

“deconstructs analytical categories,” intercategorical approaches “requires that scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories,” and the intracategorical approach asks “authors working in this vein... to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection... in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups” (McCall, 2005, p. 1773-1774). In organizational communication, James McDonald (2015) argues for an anticategorical approach to intersectionality as “an anticategorical approach to difference and intersectionality research can thus help expose between-group and within-group differences and similarities for which intercategorical and intracategorical studies of difference cannot account” (p. 317). However, Parker et al. (2017) counter that, “usage of the anticategorical approach may ignore the everyday material realities of some lived experiences, especially those of vulnerable communities such as low-income people of color” (p. 18).

I situate my master’s thesis within the *intercategorical approach* to intersectionality. Mateo’s multiple intersecting identities require me to address them through categories, but by doing so, I aim to reveal the complex and unstable nature of those identities. According to McCall (2005) the intercategorical approach “begins with the observation that there are relationships of inequality among already constituted social groups, as imperfect and ever changing as they are” (p. 1784-1785). The intercategorical approach recognizes the problematic nature of identity categories, but views those categories as the best starting point, or “anchor point” to analyze inequities (McCall, 2005, p. 1785). Unlike the intracategorical approach which examines differences *within* social groups, intercategorical “focuses on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories” (McCall, 2005, p. 1786). I

will diverge from McCall's (2005) theory in that I will not rely heavily on comparing Mateo's experiences to those of his heterosexual, white, citizen, co-workers. I will focus on Mateo's status narrative and center *his* intersectional marginalized identities. Thus, through employing the intercategory approach in my analysis of Mateo's undocumented narrative, I examine his intersecting identities at his categorical intersections (race, sexual orientation, class, and legal status). Though his identities will be analyzed through categories, I will not adhere to the additive understanding of intersectionality that views Mateo's identities as separate. Each of his identities interacts with one another, and he experiences them simultaneously.

Though intersectionality has become a popular form of theorizing in multiple disciplines, with that popularity has come criticism. Some scholars argue that intersectionality, as a theory and its implementation by theorists from varying disciplines, has "presupposed the primacy of the (oppressed) subject and its investment or self-understanding in identitarian politics, taking as static entities... what are actually ... always already emerging, becoming, and transforming" (Carastathis, 2016, p. 126). I do agree with this assessment of the intersectionality literature I read for my thesis. Often, I came across articles that utilized intersectionality as a theory to account for multiple identities, paying no mind to the intersecting forms of oppression faced as a result of those intersecting identities. As Crenshaw tells us, intersectionality informs our understanding of intersecting *oppressed* identities and the interlocking forms of *oppression* that occur as a result (1989). Intersectionality can be used as a multicultural, identity check-list, feel-good kind of theory when identities are treated as static. However, to discount the potential of intersectionality as a result of poor implementation

is unwise and premature.

Several communication scholars have implemented intersectionality through routes that acknowledge the complexity of identities (Aiello et al., 2013; Chávez, 2012, 2013b, 2017; Eguchi, 2020; Parker et al., 2017; Yep, 2010). In her theorizing, Karma R. Chávez (2012, 2013b, 2017) examines this complexity through the intersections of queer and immigrant identities, asserting that immigration is a queer issue pointing to the advocacy of undocuqueer activists. Shinsuke Eguchi (2020) actively decenters whiteness through taking a queer perspective to intra-racial desire, destabilizing static identity categories. Aiello et al. (2013) engage in dialogue about intersectionality, lamenting its status as a punching bag for queer scholars, as Chávez points out that intersectionality as a theory “has been very queer” (p. 104). Parker et al. (2017) also recognize the utilization of queer theory in conjuncture with intersectionality as a destabilizing force for perceptions of identities as static, stating that queer theorists who utilize intersectionality actively question identity categories and the systems that uphold them.

In our late-stage capitalist reality of precarity, it would be foolish to treat identities as frozen and never changing. In fact, treating identities in this way only functions to further white supremacy. Nakayama (1994) argues:

perhaps we need to move away from the trap of binary thinking by not allowing “race” to be defined in black/white terms, gender in femininity/masculinity categories, sexuality as gay/heterosexual... without fluidity in identity, however, white heterosexual masculinity is again privileged. (p. 176)

So, treating identities as static is antithetical to the ideology of intersectionality. Identities should not be analyzed through intersectionality if the routes used to analyze them

continue to center cishet, white, masculine hegemony.

To effectively utilize intersectionality and not succumb to the pitfalls of an additive perspective, the fluidity and instability of identities must be recognized. A prolific intercultural communication scholar, Gust A. Yep, examines identity in his scholarship while actively working to decenter whiteness. Specifically as an intercultural scholar, Yep (2010) ruminates on the role of race in communication studies and how people become “marked” through communication about race. Additionally, Yep (2010) acknowledges the instability of identities and calls for scholars to employ “thick intersectionalities.” He defines the call for thick intersectionalities as “an exploration of the complex particularities of individuals’ lives and identities associated with their race, class, gender, and sexuality by understanding their history and personhood in concrete time and space” (Yep, 2010, p. 173). Destabilizing identities allows communication scholars to examine the messiness intersecting identities present. Thick intersectionalities can manifest “more nuanced, richer, and more intricate research that captures the embodiments and lived experiences of individuals and groups inhabiting multiple identities, of which race is one key component” (Yep, 2010, p. 173). Yep’s (2010) theorizing empowers scholars to circumvent a purely categorical, additive approach to identities as it examines multiple intersections in addition to “the interplay between individual subjectivity, personal agency, systemic arrangements, and structural forces” (p. 173). Thick intersectionalities aptly avoids playing into fantasies of multiracial diversity checklists. Thick intersectionalities acknowledges people’s complex personhoods and specifically concentrates on how multiple oppressed identities result in interlocking forms of oppression as a result of systems of oppression.

Yep's (2010) thick intersectionalities have been adopted by communication scholars and extended by the original author himself (Asante, 2015; Eguchi, 2020; McCann et al., 2020; Yep, 2013; Yep & Lescure, 2019). Seeking to illuminate the experiences of queer African migrants, Asante (2015) employs thick intersectionalities as a tool in qualitative autoethnographic research. Eguchi (2020) turns to thick intersectionalities to challenge homonormativity that centers white, cis, middle-class bodies and challenge linear growth expectations for immigrants. Similarly focused on bodies and embodiment, Yep (2013) extends thick intersectionalities to "understand culture from the perspective of the 'other,' that is, a translation that resembles, honors, and respects such a viewpoint" through uniting queer and trans studies with the subfield of intercultural communication (p. 119). Another extension of thick intersectionalities applies the theory to microaggressions, as Yep and Lescure (2019) argue "by examining microaggressions intersectionally we can more fully understand the complexities—and combat their insidiousness—of such verbal, nonverbal, and environmental indignities and insults directed at oppressed groups without reducing them to only one part of their identity" (p. 113). Lastly, McCann et al. (2020) draws upon thick intersectionalities to harangue communication studies as a discipline, calling attention to its reification of white supremacy. People with multiple intersecting oppressed identities are complex, and their experiences rich and nuanced. They deserve to be studied through a theory that acknowledges those complexities, which my thesis accomplishes.

The following sections will examine intersectional theorizing from a variety of perspectives that also align with Mateo's intersecting identities: (1) queer of color x queer immigrant and (2) API queer x API queer, undocumented immigrant, working-class.

These subsections are separated for the sake of clarity and placing these perspectives in overlapping conversations together. Additionally, this literature overlaps the sub disciplines of intercultural and rhetorical scholarship, two sub disciplines that powerfully inform my research and to which I seek to contribute to in my master's thesis.

Queer of color x queer immigrant perspectives. Intersectionality theorizing from queer of color perspectives is integral as it challenges heteronormativity and whiteness (Chávez, 2013b). Not only was intersectionality born from women of color feminists, “the work of attending to the multiple vectors of power that create privilege and oppression remains of utmost concern for queer theorists” (Chávez, 2013b, p. 90). Chávez (2013b) continues, arguing queer of color perspectives on intersectionality also acknowledge the fluidity of identity and the importance of analyzing interlocking forms of oppression

the logics of race, class, gender, sexuality, coloniality, and culture, among others including language, ability, education, and nation congeal to produce certain identities, modes of relating, ways of living, and manners of social organization not only as normal, but as normative. The normative is violent. (pp. 85-86)

Forms of normativity (heteronormativity, whiteness, citizenship, cisnormativity, patriarchy) serve to other marginalized groups. Thus, when people have multiple marginalized identities, they are othered by multiple forms of normativity, impacting their material situation and inflicting violence against them. In an issue of the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, Karma R. Chávez (2013b) introduces the essays centering on queer and trans theorizing. Within this issue was a dialogue among queer of color theorists (Aiello et al., 2013) surrounding multiple topics, including

intersectionality, Lisa Kahaleole Hall pondered if intersectionality “[had] become a term like ‘queer’ – originating from the margins, taken up by many as an intervention and then becoming a catch all term that connects and obscures” (Aiello et al., 2013, p. 99). Chávez responded that the recent intense criticism of intersectionality was confusing for her, stating, “I have always been very troubled by this, and I wonder why intersectionality or interlocking oppressions... are positioned as only connected to a certain kind of rudimentary identity politics” (Aiello et al., 2013, p. 104). Sirma Bilge responded with, “it’s really astonishing – intersectionality (rather a caricatured understanding of it) as the favorite shooting board of some queer scholars” (Aiello et al., 2013, p. 104). The theorists continue to express the merit of intersectionality when treated as interlocking forms of oppression as a result of complex identities, Giorgia Aiello stating, “I wonder if it also offers more of an opening to intercultural and intersectional understandings of ‘queer,’ insofar as bodies are always inseparable from race and ethnicity” (Aiello et al., 2013, p. 107). These theorists utilize queer theory to destabilize conceptions of normative identities and transfer this action to their discussion of intersectionality. Though they acknowledge the potential for intersectionality to be utilized improperly (leaving norms intact and centering whiteness), these queer of color theorists view intersectionality as a queer perspective; they also recognize the disrupting potential of pairing queer theory with intersectionality.

Immigrant queer theorizing of intersectionality is especially necessary as it challenges heteronormativity, homonormativity, and the violence of citizenship (Chávez, 2012, 2013a, 2017). Chávez’s research critiques the modern LGBTQ rights movement aiming for legal citizenship (2017), and connects immigration issues to queer issues

stating, “the struggle for immigration justice has been most visibly led by ‘undocuqueer’ leaders, illuminating the fact that immigration is a queer issue” (p. 132). Chávez builds the foundation for this argument in her book *Queer Migration Politics*, asserting that “the subject of queer migration politics, the queer migrant, is an inherently coalitional subject, one whose identities and relationships to power mandate managing multiplicity” (2013a, p. 9). She also refuses to frame resistance of queer migrants as acts of citizenship, “to talk about resistant acts, even within a particular nation-state, as acts of citizenship unnecessarily reproduces it as a problematic double discourse” (Chávez, 2013a, p. 13). The double discourse Chávez (2013a) is referring to is that of reifying the norm of citizenship at the cost of queer migrant activists. When queer migrant activists are engaged in acts of resistance, they are often literally dissenting against the violence of citizenship (deportations, ICE raids, family separation, inaccessible paths to citizenship). Therefore, to frame their activism as a form of citizenship would be simultaneously propping up citizenship and endorsing the rhetoric of undocuqueer activists; the two cannot co-exist.

Furthermore, Chávez advocated for an intersectional approach within her work to gain rights for Wisconsin immigrant workers, as it “provides analytical resources to investigate and reveal the many dimensions of power and identity that need to be salient as... activist-scholars work toward social change” (2012, p. 29). Queer of color (and immigrant) perspectives on intersectionality are necessary theoretical lens for my thesis analysis of Mateo’s status narrative. Mateo is not a citizen, nor heterosexual, and is Filipino, so utilizing a perspective on intersectionality that upheld the violence of citizenship, heteronormativity, homonormativity, and whiteness would be detrimental to

my analysis. The perspectives that follow center on additional intersections of Mateo's identities and my specific contribution to intersectionality theorizing.

API queer x API queer, undocumented immigrant, working-class perspectives. Shinsuke Eguchi (2020) and Thomas K. Nakayama (1994) are two API communication studies scholars who examine the intersections of API and queer identities in their research. In 1994, Nakayama weaved together three critical agendas (racial, feminist, and gay politics) to analyze a movie entitled *Showdown in Little Tokyo*. Through his analysis of the film, Nakayama ascertains that a coalitional framework is needed to challenge white, cishet, masculinity as otherness is “neither simplistic or monolithic” (1994, p. 166). Queer theory, as utilized by Nakayama (1994), connects to intersectionality to critique oppressions. Queer theory for Nakayama (1994) critiques normativities (heteronormativity, homonormativity). He recognizes that normativity and constructions of the “other” are multifaceted. Therefore, a coalitional framework, a joining of several politics from different identity groups, is needed to disrupt oppressive normativities. These intersecting forms of politics allow Nakayama to acknowledge identities as shifting, “not only is sexual identity unstable, but gender, ‘race,’ nationality as well are much more fluid than they might seem” (1994, p. 176).

Eguchi (2020) mirrors Nakayama's (1994) treatment of identities as fluid in their analysis of two films, *Yellow Fever* and *Front Cover*, that contain “sticky rice” themes, which “refers to an Asian man who is primarily interested in developing sexual and romantic relationships with other Asian men” (p. 67). They examine intersectionality from queer of color theorists and reference Yep's (2010) thick intersectionalities stating “thick intersectionalities require queer-of-color theorists to analyze multiple, fluid, and

unstable particularities of queerness that alter, shape, and/or reinforce hierarchal relations of power” (Eguchi, 2020, p. 71). In justifying their use of intersectionality, Eguchi (2020) asserts that “queerness can never be ontologically and epistemologically isolated from interwoven forces of power” (p. 71). Queerness, as an embodied state and a theory, is thus inherently disruptive to norms and interacts with the power that upholds them. Queerness flips ideologies and heteronormative knowledge on their heads and turns the tables on those accustomed to normativity, therefore altering normative ways of knowing. There is not a route in which queerness untangles from power.

This is where I locate my contribution to the queer of color theorizing about intersectionality. I contribute to current literature on intersectionality including queer immigrant and API queer identities. I also am in conversation with simultaneous multiple intersecting identities (undocumented immigrant x working-class) that result in interlocking forms of oppression for Mateo in the context of his workplace. Multiple intersecting marginalized identities result in interlocking forms of oppression. As Mateo’s intersecting identities interact (Filipino, gay, undocumented immigrant, and working-class), there are compounding forms of oppression that he faces in the context of his workplace. Studies of characterizations of non-normative workers are necessary because through analysis we may further understand interlocking forms of oppression and their mechanizations. Through understanding these systems, we are closer to dismantling them. The following section briefly introduces literature on work and media representations of work that inform my analysis.

Literature on Work and Media Representations of Work

As previewed earlier, the study of difference in organizational communication has heightened recently in the discipline. I seek to build specifically on studies of “work” from critical organizational communication scholarship to examine difference at work in my rhetorical text. Ashcraft (2011) states difference “revolves in large part around key cultural formations of difference-sameness, such as gender, race, and class” (p. 14) and that the focus of organizational communication on white-collar work “reflects scholars’... reproduction of cultural notions about what work is more valuable and worthwhile” (p. 16). She questions “why have we stressed ‘desirable’ work/places... rather than also engaging difference in the less enviable work/places where other bodies are historically concentrated” in organizational communication’s studies of difference at work (Ashcraft, 2011, p. 16). Surmising emphasis on difference at work within white-collar settings is counterproductive, Ashcraft (2011) bluntly argues, “emphasizing how diversity can be enhanced in professional settings, in the absence of common questions about other labor sites and forms, ironically perpetuates sexist and racist evaluations of work/place” (p. 16).

Similarly, Allen’s (2011) theorizing around difference adheres to the importance of viewing identities as ever-changing, “this perspective on identity also helps us avoid the tendency to separate things into *either/or* categories” [emphasis in original] (p. 4). She also emphasizes the importance of media representations in understandings of others’ identities. In describing an interaction with a white, male student named Jason, Allen (2011) explained that Jason had pre-conceived stereotypes about what “kind” of people were professors; in Jason’s mind, Black women were not professors. Examining what

Jason's preconceptions could have been, Allen (2011) ponders, "he might have unconsciously gotten these notions from a variety of sources (including the media, his family, peers, and teachers) that depict black women in stereotypical ways" (p. 2). Here Allen (2011) brings attention to the role media plays in influencing people's understandings of marginalized groups. This perspective is essential as it contributes to my argument that there are real-world impacts of television characterizations of marginalized groups.

Parker et al. (2017) also argue for studying difference from "communication perspectives [that] enable researchers to examine how difference is produced, sustained, and transformed through symbolic means" (p. 1). Finally, McDonald (2015) laments the stagnation of approaches to studying difference, emphasizing that approaches have primarily been rooted in feminism and no other approaches, while Eger (2018) contributes to difference theorizing through extending the metaphor of "the closet" to ways transgender people communicate when looking for work. This research is significant for my master's thesis as I study difference in television narratives of queer immigrants in the context of work.

Similar to organizational communication studies on difference at work, research on workplace situation comedies (sitcoms) have also focused primarily on presenting white-collar work. For example, one of the most popular workplace sitcoms, *The Office*, centers on predominantly white, cishet, able-bodied workers in the paper sales industry. The U.S. version of *The Office*'s success set off a wave of mainstream network television shows centering workplaces and workers (e.g., *Parks and Recreation*, *Brooklyn 99*, *30 Rock*, *2 Broke Girls*). Past communication studies researchers have analyzed both the

U.K. and U.S. versions of *The Office* examining the audience's role as a character in the show, as the series has a mockumentary-like format where the cast of characters frequently speak directly into the camera in their confessional interviews (Bore, 2009; Jongste, 2017). Analyses of *30 Rock* and *Parks and Recreation* similarly center on audience understanding of female-led comedies (Swink, 2017).

In addition to representing work experiences, workplace sitcoms are useful in character portrayals of personal identities that are not typically centered. Literature on the workplace sitcom typically focuses on how the genre of situational comedy influences audiences. In research analyses of *The Office*, audiences are impacted by the “authenticity” of the mockumentary style (Bore, 2009; Jongste, 2017), and audience's perceptions of female-led comedies *30 Rock* and *Parks and Recreation* were conflicting in their connection of the shows to real-world understandings of feminism (Swink, 2017). In these prior studies, there is a gap in the communication studies literature pertaining to intersecting identities of characters within workplace sitcoms (see Miller & Eger, 2019, for a contribution in this area). My thesis is not focused on a genre analysis but instead on theorizing work challenges through lived, intersecting identities. I will argue that examining fictional challenges of work outside of white-collar representations in relationship to intersecting identities will assist scholars with comprehending workers' realities and can add to past research on fictional portrayals of work.

This literature needs further inquiry on queer and immigrant television characterizations within the context of work. Not only am I proposing an analysis of a queer immigrant television character, but specifically a Filipino, gay, working-class, undocumented immigrant within the context of work through rhetorical narrative

criticism. I want to examine how these intersectional identities are constructed at work and in relationship to working-class identities. With all this in mind, I propose the following research question:

How is Mateo's *Superstore* undocumented status narrative constructed in relationship to his intersectional gay, Filipino, undocumented immigrant, and working-class identities?

Preview of Chapters

Through a narrative criticism that includes examining the events, characters, theme, and setting of Mateo's status narrative, my thesis reveals his thick intersectionalities to allow for a better understanding of the interlocking forms of oppression he faces across five chapters. Following my review of relevant literature for intersectionality in this chapter, chapter two will explicate my chosen method: a rhetorical narrative criticism. This chosen method allows a nuanced analysis of my research question and exposes Mateo's thick intersectionalities. My use of the rhetorical narrative criticism will engage with Mateo's status narrative on terms that are respectful of his intersecting marginalized identities, and correct problematic aspects of rhetorical criticism. I also detail my analysis processes and justify *Superstore* as a rhetorical text.

Next will be my analysis chapters in chapters three and four. Each chapter will center on my argument pertaining to the two themes, themes which were discovered through my analysis of the fifty-three episodes centered on Mateo's status narrative. Each chapter will begin with a primary narrative example from *Superstore* that supports the theme. While there were numerous narrative examples from the text that could be included, due to the limitations of a master's thesis, I focused my energy on several

especially salient narrative examples. In chapter three, the first theme is that Mateo reifies stereotypes of two identities, gay men and API immigrants, while also complicating those characterizations through his status narrative. This theme is manifested primarily through the character and events of Mateo's status narrative. Mateo's character engages in catty, petty behavior, but as stated previously, is complicated by events that detail his status narrative. This development occurs in the setting of Cloud 9 store 1217 where Mateo works. Chapter three will emphasize Mateo as an individual and attempt to answer what the implications are for his characterization.

Following, chapter four will shift to a systemic perspective, revealing how an organization can have a stance in the lived experiences of its workers. The second theme is that Mateo's working-class and undocumented immigrant identities place him in a unique position to experience organizational violence from Cloud 9. This theme comes to be through equal parts setting, events, and character. The majority of the time, the setting for *Superstore* is the Cloud 9 store 1217 as Mateo encounters obstacles to his well-being through the events of his status narrative. These events are especially impactful to Mateo because of his intersecting marginalized identities that are encompassed in his character. Finally, my concluding chapter will ascertain my contribution to intersectionality theorizing, narrative criticism as a method, and the implications of my analysis for *Superstore* audiences and perceptions of undocumented immigrants.

II. METHODS

I think as undocuqueers now, that's why most of us push back on the narrative of "good DREAMer" versus "bad DREAMer," or "good immigrant" versus "bad immigrant." Because if you are to analyze it and write it down, all undocuqueers fall either one way or another as a "bad immigrant," however you want to write it. The fact that you love the same sex you are bad. – Joe, a thirty year old DACA recipient

In order to answer my research question, my intersectional analysis of Mateo's status narrative utilizes a rhetorical narrative criticism. Rhetorical methods offer an opportunity to investigate my research question, and my specific approach to this method de-centers whiteness and the violence of citizenship. A form of rhetorical methods, narrative criticism allows an analysis of what composes Mateo's status narrative: the events, characters, themes, and settings that construct his intersecting identities and, in turn, the interlocking forms of oppression he faces in his workplace. This chapter elaborates on my chosen method for analysis and describes the reasoning behind my choice.

Rhetorical Methods

To best understand the significance of Mateo's narrative as a queer undocumented worker, my rhetorical thesis is a necessary addition to ongoing research. Media, especially television, is never neutral (White, 1994). Rhetorical criticism reveals what common rhetorics are being perpetuated and/or challenged by the specific text. Rhetorical criticism differs from social sciences as it is not testing a hypothesis, "unlike the mysteries of quantitative method, the methods of theory-related rhetorical criticism involve no more esoteric an action than reading a newspaper or journal, or watching television" (Brummett, 1984, p. 99). The accessible nature of rhetorical criticism is necessary to analyze a show being broadcast to the masses so that the finished product of

criticism can be helpful for the world. Indeed, the purpose of rhetorical criticism is pedagogical “to teach people how to experience their rhetorical environments more richly” (Brummett, 1984, p. 103). More rhetorical analysis of work and difference outside of white-collar work enlivens ongoing scholarship. Outside of the normative approach to the method, Flores (2018) approaches rhetorical criticism from an intersectional standpoint and advocates for the decentering of whiteness in the discipline of rhetoric. Rejecting traditional calls for objectivity Flores (2018) asserts:

Theory happens, as women of color have long argued, in our insights and reflections and with our willingness to center ourselves, not in the all-knowing voice of white masculinity or the fragile tears of white femininity but in the intersections of insistent – critical – vulnerability. These manifestations of critical vulnerability point to the second key insistence, obstinate intersectionality. (p. 354)

Obstinate intersectionality, according to Flores (2018), is a response to the call for objectivity in communication studies; it is a refusal to center white masculinity. Chávez (2015) further challenges normative methods of rhetorical criticism and calls for a reexamining of rhetoric’s historical narrative which centers citizenship as an ideological tenet. According to Chávez (2015), centering all political actions as enacted by various forms of citizens “preclude[s] the lives, experiences, and practices of numerous collective and individuals who have always engaged in practices that are justifiably called rhetorical and political, but that don’t conform to this norm” (p. 165). As Mateo is undocumented, the concept of citizenship and the violence it inflicts must be confronted through rhetorical criticism.

Adding to the non-normative approach of rhetorical criticism, Foss (2006) asserts that rhetorical criticism endows scholars with agency, “the process of analyzing an artifact is a reminder to me that a major part of agency involves interpretation of the structural conditions to which I attend” (p. 377). Studying rhetoric is a form of enacting agency. Scholars have choices about what to study and how to study it; “it functions as synecdoche for agency that reminds me that I always have choices and am always choosing as I move through my day” (Foss, 2006, p. 378). Synecdoche deals specifically with representation and is defined as “the process by which a part stands for the whole” (Foss & Domenici, 2001, p. 242). For example, Foss (2006) is arguing that choices rhetorical critics make when choosing a text to study (a part) represents a larger concept of agency (the whole). These non-normative approaches to rhetorical criticism inform my approach to Mateo’s status narrative. In answering my research question, it is important that I enact agency in my choices of what perspectives to include in my analysis. Implementing a normative approach to rhetorical criticism (centering citizenship and whiteness) would do a disservice to my analysis, conclusions, and Mateo’s identities.

Narrative Criticism

Narrative criticism as articulated by Foss (1989) serves as my primary method for analysis in this thesis. According to Foss (1989), contributions to narrative theorizing originated as far back as ancient Rome and Greece; modern applications of narrative include Burke’s pentad and Fisher’s (1984) narrative paradigm (which will be elaborated on in the following section). Fisher’s (1984) paramount work on the narrative paradigm, is necessary to engage with when enacting narrative criticism. According to Fisher, “the narrative paradigm does not deny reason and rationality; it reconstitutes them, making

them emendable to all forms of human communication” (1984, p. 2). There are some interesting modern ways that Fisher’s (1984) theorizing is being utilized (see Clair et al., 2014 and Young, 2005). However, Fisher’s narrative paradigm is not the right fit for the nuanced description needed of Mateo’s intersecting identities and interlocking forms of oppression. As stated previously, to prevent an additive perspective of intersectionality, identities must be portrayed and analyzed through methods that acknowledge their complexity. Understanding Mateo’s thick intersectionalities and how they interact with one another requires detailed, multilayered analysis of multiple facets of his status narrative. Fisher’s perspectives are important to current understandings of the power of narrative, however this dominant view of the functions of narratives will not suffice for my intersectionality theorizing. Therefore, Fisher’s (1984) narrative paradigm will not fulfill my research question. Foss (1989) allows for these intersections to become “thick intersectionalities” (Yep, 2010) and manifest further understanding of the proposed research questions.

Narrative criticism as a method has been successfully employed by rhetoricians to study media texts as a form of rhetorical criticism, which is my focus in this thesis. Olson (2013), Selby (2001), Greene and Meyer (2014), Spencer (2014), and Eguchi et al. (2018) utilize narrative criticism in new and interesting ways that inspire this thesis. For example, Olson (2013) employs narrative criticism to ascertain damaging ideologies about domestic violence contained in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, while meticulously analyzing dialogue within the film to ascertain its rhetorical significance and epideictic nature. Selby (2001) examines the Exodus narrative used by Martin Luther King Jr. in multiple speeches and how that narrative created purpose within the movement. Green

and Meyer (2014) conduct a feminist narrative criticism of *The Walking Dead* and its sexist portrayal of its female characters. Spencer (2014) conducts a trans narrative criticism of both the short story of the *Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Anderson and Disney's *The Little Mermaid* to contribute to literature about gender identity. Lastly, Eguchi et al. (2018) utilize the queer studies concept of disidentification to analyze the constructed narrative of a queer Black man, Miles Brock, on the second season of VH1's *Love and Hip Hop*. These previously mentioned articles utilize narrative criticism, intersecting with rhetorical criticism and queer thought. As such, this is the methodological scholarship I seek to add to with my master's thesis, contributing the context of work to successful and interesting narrative criticisms of media texts.

Foss's (1989) perspective on narrative in detail. Narrative criticism is not limited to traditional texts that contain narratives (television shows, movies, short stories) but can also be applied to "conversations with friends, comic strips, painting, songs, or dance" (Foss, 1989, p. 229). Foss (1989) articulates that there are three routes through which narrative criticism uncovers the meaning of narratives. First, "narratives help us identify the central action of an experience; they help us decide what a particular experience 'is about'" (p. 229). Second, once an understanding of the overall message of the narrative is achieved, narrative criticism then, "establishes connections between the central action and the various elements in our experience or the story" (p. 230). Third and finally, narrative criticism "judge[s] the narratives about reality... and find them either adequate or lacking" (p. 230). Foss (1989) acknowledges that while other methods could be employed to study narratives, narrative criticism "deal[s] specifically with features of narratives" and traffic in two specific areas of the narrative "the story itself... and the

expression or telling of the story” (p. 30). Foss (1989) clarifies that “the story is the *what* that is depicted in a narrative, and the expression is the *how*” [emphasis in original] (p. 30).

Following Foss (1989), the four aspects that I focus on in my narrative criticism are events, character, theme, and setting. These aspects can be analyzed through three steps, “(1) analysis of the substance of the narrative; (2) analysis of the form of the narrative; and (3) evaluation of the narrative” (Foss, 1989, p. 230). The first asks the critic “to describe and analyze the content or substantive dimensions” (Foss, 1989, p. 231). The second pushes to a deeper level of “the means by which those elements are communicated” (Foss, 1989, p. 233). Finally, the last provides a “basis for an evaluation of the narrative in some way,” whether that be morally, ethically, or logically (Foss, 1989, pp. 235-236). Each level of analysis will lead to a nuanced description of Mateo’s narrative that can be further analyzed through an intersectional lens. Foss’s (1989) perspective on narrative criticism and other scholars’ use of her method, specifically her attention to events, character, theme, and setting, guide my rhetorical criticism.

Central to analyzing a narrative is acknowledging the role “event” plays within the function of the narrative, or as Foss (1989) articulates, “the what” in the narrative (p. 30). According to Foss (1989), events are “actions, happenings, or changes of state, some of which are more important than others in a narrative” (p. 231). Through employing narrative criticism to examine the “coming out” narrative of the character Jack on *Dawson’s Creek*, Meyer (2003) focuses on specific events within the narrative. In her analysis, she specifically examines a conversation Jack has with his friend Jen about his love life and an instance of homophobic violence enacted against Jack’s friend, Tobey.

Meyer (2003) utilizes narrative criticism to focus on these events to argue for the significance media holds in constructing perceptions about queer identity.

Also central to narrative criticism is a focus on characters within the narrative. Foss (1989) states “characters are the people, figures, or creatures who think and communicate in the narrative” (p. 231). In addition to defining what she perceives to qualify characters in a narrative, Foss (1989) includes questions that critics may consider when focusing on characters, “are there conflicting traits within a character?... do the traits of the characters change over the course of the narrative?” (p. 231). Though she does not directly reference Foss (1989), Olson (2013) conducts a narrative criticism of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* and centers the experiences of the inanimate character Chip. Specifically, Chip is the heart of Olson’s (2013) claim that *Beauty and the Beast*’s flippant attitude toward depicting intimate partner violence as a romantic aspect of healthy relationships influences children’s perceptions of romantic relationships; this is illustrated by Chip seemingly being the only household item to question the stability of Belle and Beast’s relationship, only to be shushed and assured by older household items.

Characters and events do not take place in a vacuum, setting provides an instrumental role to the narrative. Foss (1989) describes setting as “the place in which characters think and act” and adds questions critics may consider, like “how does the setting relate to plot and character?” (p. 231). Similar to Olson’s (2013) use of narrative criticism, Eguchi et al. (2018) do not directly reference Foss (1989); however, they do take a specific interest in the setting of narrative they are criticizing. Eguchi et al. (2018) examines the narrative of a Black queer rapper named Miles on the VH1 reality series *Love & Hip-Hop: Hollywood Season 2*. In their analysis, they find that Miles’

interactions with his same-sex partner, Milan, are primarily in private settings and contain intimate behavior (shots of the two in their bedroom and out to dinner at a dimly lit restaurant) (Eguchi et al., 2018). These intimate and private settings are juxtaposed with Miles's interactions with his ex-girlfriend, Amber. Miles and Amber are only ever depicted in public spaces and shots portray their distance (meeting at a dance studio and having no physical contact) (Eguchi et al., 2018). Juxtaposing these private and public settings, Eguchi et al. (2018) theorize, "by interspersing Miles' coming out narrative in tandem with the difference in visual cues of public/private, distance/intimacy, this sequence disallows the audience to imagine [Miles and Amber] in a heterosexual relationship" (p. 185).

Finally, narrative's characters, events, and settings combine in producing themes. Foss (1989) articulates that themes "[are] a general idea illustrated by the narrative; it is what a narrative means or is about" (p. 232). She provides the example of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* which centers on the character Offred, a handmaid in the totalitarian state Gilead, and her acts of resistance. This combination of character, setting, and events manifests theme of "repression and control of women" (Foss, 1989). As previously mentioned, Olson (2013) focuses on the character of Chip to make the argument that themes of intimate partner violence are romanticized in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, "it introduces immature viewers to an ideological microcosm (or cultivation theme) of popular culture's conservative interpretation of romantic violence and shapes/shares community norms for coping with it" (p. 465). Olson (2013) also utilizes theme to analyze media response to the film and divided these themes into subsections of positive and negative. The positive themes focused on Belle's "liberated"

personality and the technical competence of the film (Olson, 2013, pp. 455-456).

However, the negative themes argued that Belle's character was just as misogynistic as Disney's previous princesses, just with "liberated" themes sprinkled in (Olson, 2013, p. 457). Ultimately, the lesson Belle learns over the course of the film "is not greater self-awareness, but how to appreciate a partner in spite of his rages and selfishness and to coax beauty from his beastliness" (Olson, 2013, p. 457). Her extensive and complex narrative criticism of *Beauty and the Beast* aptly combines examinations of character, event, setting, and themes; it is for this reason that this analysis informs the rigor I aim to accomplish in this master's thesis.

The events, character, theme, and setting of Mateo's narrative convey differing, and, at times, intersecting forms of his identity. Thick intersectionalities of his identities and an analysis of the interlocking forms of the resulting oppression are the best fit for my research question. Mateo's status narrative is often conveyed through the events of the show (Mateo realizing his status, being outed to his supervisor) and the settings (some settings of the show include inside an ICE detention center). Those intersecting identities (gay x Filipino x undocumented immigrant x and working-class) are also portrayed through the narrative features of setting (the majority of the show taking place in Cloud 9 store 1217, a big-box retailer), events (Mateo's romantic encounters), themes (reinforced stereotypes), and substantive dimensions of his character (the growth his character experiences over the first five seasons).

My applied method of narrative criticism. The method of narrative criticism creates the nuanced description necessary for an intersectional analysis. For my narrative criticism, I simultaneously conducted a close textual narrative analysis of Mateo's status

narrative. In her analysis of media representations of Black and Asian interracial romantic relationships on medical dramas, Washington (2012) employs close textual analysis, repeatedly viewing television episodes, “subsequent viewings were spent looking specifically for the narrative arcs involving Black and Asian interracial relationships, noting when the characters and their storylines appeared. I rewatched sections making sure to pay close attention” (p. 255). I employed this form of close textual analysis in my master’s thesis. I closely followed the dialogue of episode parts that have implications for Mateo’s status narrative and Foss’s (1989) elements of events, character, theme, and setting. As a critic, I analyzed intersecting parts of Mateo’s identity and drew conclusions about how Mateo’s status narrative is constructed in relation to those intersecting marginalized identities. As required in a close textual analysis, I watched episodes from season one through season five that have significant implications for Mateo’s status narrative, twice (and more if specific episodes require it), took extensive digital notes pertaining to character’s dialogues, and dedicated heightened attention to Mateo’s status narrative.

After rewatching seasons one through five of *Superstore* on Hulu (the streaming service) to remind myself of the general events, I identified fifty-three episodes out of the ninety-eight that had significant implications for both Mateo’s status narrative and his intersectional marginalized identities. I then rewatched those fifty-three episodes twice, taking detailed digital notes. I took note of each character’s tone while speaking, attire, dictated dialogue, and described nonverbal communication. Also included in these notes were time stamps of when important events occurred. I did this so that if I needed to return to an episode, I would not need to watch the entirety of the episode to find what I

was looking for. In all, these notes were sixty-seven pages of single-spaced observations of the fifty-three episodes. Next, I reviewed these notes several times, jotting down reoccurring themes that I noticed were created through the events, setting, and character of the narrative. This method of rhetorical criticism will allow for a nuanced description and an understanding of the thick intersectionalities of Mateo's intersecting identities and the interlocking forms of oppression he faces in the context of work.

Although not always practiced in rhetorical criticism, I also believe it is important to address my positionality as a critic herein. This statement is in part inspired by the call from Jensen et al. (2020) for researchers to examine their identities in relationship to the context of their research. In this way, I attempt to move beyond positionality and reflect on how my identities interact with my master's thesis. I am a cishet, white, middle-class, woman who is a citizen. It may perplex others as to why I chose this text, and the character of Mateo, to conduct my master's thesis about. During my academic career I have found myself drawn to the rhetoric, pop culture, and media characterizations of those who are marginalized. In an effort to dismantle oppressive systems and structures, I find that understanding different forms of resistance from those on the margins is a meaningful first step. I resonate with the writings of rhetorical and intercultural queer scholars of color in communication studies like Eguchi and Chávez who rage against the normative and ask others to join them. I recognize the problematic nature of a cishet, white woman building analysis off of queer of color theorists, and I do my best to center those voices while also advocating for my contribution. I do believe that Mateo's story is important, as it depicts the stories of undocuqueer folks within the context of work. His story must be analyzed with the best tools available, and those tools are queer of color

intersectionality theorizing and narrative criticism. Now that I have expounded on my investment in undocuqueer resistance and justice, I will advocate for the importance of *Superstore* as a text to examine worker's intersectional identities.

Justification of Text

Rich in portrayals of fictional worker's challenges, I analyzed NBC's sitcom *Superstore*, which offers scholars an opportunity to examine intersecting identities at work within the majority of their characters. NBC's *Superstore* exemplifies the complexities of diverse characters at work as the show centers on workers at a fictitious big-box retailer, Cloud 9 store 1217 in St. Louis, Missouri. Contrary to typical workplace sitcoms, *Superstore* follows the lives of retail workers who are paid slightly more than an hourly minimum wage. Most of the previously mentioned workplace sitcoms centered on white, cishet, able-bodied, middle-class characters. However, *Superstore* has a Latina as its main protagonist and a cast of characters with differing sexual orientation, abilities, bodies, and races that are centered, rather than pushed to the margins. Characters in *Superstore* encounter unique challenges not regularly depicted in television portrayals of work in contrast with other sitcoms due to this social class difference and representation of retail work, such as not being able to afford medical help when they are sick and the possibility of losing hours to the store's automation. In my thesis, I argue that *Superstore* is rhetorically significant because it addresses the intersecting challenges faced by its characters due to their multiple marginalized identities. *Superstore* illustrates these intersecting challenges within the context of the workplace, which, as detailed in my section on work and media representations of work in chapter one, is not typically done in workplace sitcoms. Other shows do examine intersections of difference and the

challenges faced by those with multiple intersecting marginalized identities; however, these representations are not within the context of work. Mateo is a unique characterization of an undocumented worker, as his entire narrative and character is not purely composed of his legal status.

Superstore has been a media darling and in an oversaturated market of workplace sitcoms, has been lauded as the most diverse (Macaluso, 2019). The show began to fill out with seven series regulars, and like *The Office*, peripheral characters began to break out and many crew members became a part of the central “crew” at Cloud

9. *Superstore* writers utilize the difference of their cast to their advantage “the cast features LGBTQ characters, characters of non-Christian religions, characters of different body types, and characters who bridge all sides of the class divide” (VanDerWerff, 2019). The show also depicts working-class struggles and intersecting forms of oppression in the workplace. Unlike most television depictions of work, the topic of social class is heavily discussed on the show: an episode where the floor employees go on strike, another where two main characters try to create an employee-funded “health fund,” and a two season-long story-line where the store’s workers attempt to unionize. I chose not to include season six of *Superstore* in my thesis as it had not yet started to air when I began my analysis. I also found six seasons of television to be too daunting for a master’s thesis. It is because of the show’s focus on its character’s identities, and Mateo’s intersecting identities, that I chose to employ narrative criticism to understand the thick intersectionalities of Mateo’s identities and the interlocking forms of oppression he faces at work. This project merits a thesis sized project due to the amount of source material required to accurately analyze Mateo’s status narrative. To complete an appropriate

analysis of Mateo's intersecting identities, attention must be paid to the events, character, theme, and setting of his status narrative. Anything less than a master's sized project would be disrespectful to the writers who created Mateo, Nico Santos (the actor who portrays Mateo on *Superstore*), and the queer of color intersectionality literature I seek to contribute to.

The moral objective of narratives should be to deconstruct limiting and binary understandings of communities. Mateo's status narrative on *Superstore* accomplishes this objective in several ways. Most importantly, Mateo is a unique media characterization of an undocumented immigrant as he is both queer and Filipino. Understanding how his intersecting identities contribute to his status narrative is integral as it provides an intersectional understanding of queer, API immigrants at work. Compounding forms of oppression are a reality for workers across the country. An analysis of these specific intersections is not only additive to the already strong field of queer API communication studies, but could also prove to impact dominant narratives about queer, undocumented folks. A thick intersectional understanding of marginalized identities shines light on the systems that continue to devalue non-white, queer, working-class, undocumented lives. The culmination of Mateo's intersecting undocumented, queer, working-class, and API identities and my study will lead to the first necessary steps towards dismantling oppressive structures: comprehending the mechanics of systemic marginalization and actively jamming their gears. What follows are my analysis chapters that examine how Mateo's status narrative are constructed in relation to his intersectional gay x Filipino x working-class x undocumented immigrant identities. Chapter three centers on Mateo as an individual while chapter four focuses on his relationship to a larger organization.

III. MATEO REIFIES AND DISRUPTS STEREOTYPES

When I was a senior in college, I wrote an anonymous essay for *The Daily Beast* about what they wanted to call my dirty little secret, that I was undocumented. This was in 2011, before DACA, and I was one of the first undocumented students to graduate Harvard. The essay got me some attention, and agents wrote me asking if I wanted to write a memoir. I was angry. A memoir? I was 21. I wasn't fucking Barbra Streisand. I had been writing professionally since I was 15 but only about music. I wanted to be the guy in *High Fidelity*. And I didn't want my first book to be a rueful tale about being a sickly Victorian orphan with tuberculosis who didn't have a social security number, which is what the agents all wanted. – Karla Cornejo Villavicencio

Mateo's character is complicated because *Superstore* constructs him to reinforce stereotypes about gay men and API immigrants, only to subvert those stereotypes through both his status narrative and working-class identity. Once Mateo discovers that he is undocumented, this cycle of reifying and subverting occurs simultaneously. This theme was created through the events, setting, and character of Mateo's status narrative, following Foss's (1989) method of narrative criticism. According to Foss (1989), themes are composed of the events, setting, and characters within the narrative. The character of Mateo is not written as an idealized portrayal of someone with multiple intersecting marginalized identities.

Just as Villavicencio did not want to play the part of a pathetic undocumented immigrant in the epigraph, Mateo is not a one-dimensional character defined by the obstacles he faces. While Villavicencio did exemplify the "immigrants, we get the job done" (Miranda, 2015) narrative that U.S. media loves to uplift in a route to alleviate responsibility for devastating consequences of immigration policy, she refused to perform her identity in a route that would be comforting for others. Similarly, Mateo's characterization is not designed to comfort and congratulate audiences with how progressive they are for having sympathy for the story of a woeful undocumented

immigrant. As will be detailed in this chapter, Mateo is often demeaning to his co-workers and consistently lies to make himself appear better than others. His character as a stereotype of gay men and API immigrants is reinforced through the events of the show in the first season.

However, Mateo's character is complicated through the events of his status narrative, beginning in season two of *Superstore* when he learns that he is undocumented. The setting of Cloud 9 store 1217 serves as the backdrop for these events that complicate Mateo's previously stereotypical character. The events within this theme include Mateo discovering his undocumented status and concealing his undocumented status by breaking up with a boyfriend. This chapter argues that Mateo's status narrative is constructed to disrupt the stereotypical representations of the intersection of Mateo's gay, Filipino, and undocumented immigrant identities. Also, Mateo's working-class identity collaborates with his status narrative to disrupt the stereotypical depictions of his previously mentioned identities.

In order to properly organize the narrative examples, the chapter will split the theme into two parts: one examining how Mateo upholds stereotypes and the other examining how his status narrative complicates those stereotypes. Each section will begin with an especially noteworthy narrative example and proceed with other salient narrative examples from *Superstore*. In addition, each narrative example will be followed by analysis ascertaining how Mateo's marginalized identities are impacted by the narrative (gay, Filipino/API, working-class, and undocumented immigrant). Furthermore, each section will also build upon research, blog posts, and news in conversation with narrative examples centering on stereotypes of gay men in the media, the model minority myth,

and respectability. What follows will be analysis aimed at the rhetoric of the status narrative within the example, examining the setting, events, and characters manifesting the theme.

Mateo Initially Reifies Stereotypes

Though Mateo does eventually become a nuanced, multilayered character in *Superstore*, in the first season of the show he is portrayed as a stereotype of both gay men and API immigrants. The first episode of *Superstore* coincides with Mateo's first day at Cloud 9 store 1217 (the focus store for the series) and Jonah's first day, another new employee (Spitzer et al., 2015a). Jonah is a super "woke," cishet white man who seems to have come from a middle-class upbringing. During the team meeting which occurs in store 1217's break room, Mateo sits in the front row of the break room, listening to their store manager Glenn (an older, naïve, cishet, white, man who is an evangelical Christian) speak and vigorously taking handwritten notes; this behavior becomes common place throughout the series as Mateo continues to be incredibly attentive during team meetings.

When Mateo is introduced as a new employee, he stands up in the room full of his co-workers and dramatically declares "My name is Mateo Fernando Aquino Liwanag, and I'm here to make something of myself" (Spitzer et al., 2015a). He then bursts into song belting "Spread my wiiiiings" before exclaiming in excitement and adding "see how far I can fly" (Spitzer et al., 2015a). His flair for the dramatic and subsequent quips in this first episode code Mateo as gay, though this coding is not confirmed until episode eight later in season one. This first episode thus sets up Mateo's character as catty and competitive.

Mateo also immediately views Jonah as a threat. At one point in the episode,

Jonah attempts to get to know Mateo on the store floor, and Mateo shortly retorts that Jonah is his competition, “so I’m actually rooting for you to fail, ‘kay byyyeee” (Spitzer et al., 2015a). Throughout the episode which centers on Mateo and Jonah’s first days, Mateo continuously undermines Jonah, points out his short-fallings to their floor manager, Amy (a pessimistic, cishet, married Latina woman who is a mother and has a high school education), and even asks Glenn who did a better job on their first day, Jonah or him. Mateo is wildly competitive, seemingly willing to do whatever it takes to succeed at his job, and stand out to management. In these early episodes, Mateo repeatedly tells his co-workers that he is “not here to make friends,” which mirrors contestants on highly produced reality television shows (Mather, 2020; Zimmet et al., 2016a). This behavior also mirrors stereotypes of how gay men—historically white, cis, gay men—are portrayed in television as shallow, materialistic, fashionable, obsessed with their appearances, and, most importantly, sassy (Scheffler, 2015). This portrayal rarely allows for gay male characters to develop any kind of complexity or have significant relationships with anyone besides their cishet (mostly women) friends (Linnell, 2020). Also, Mateo’s shortness with Jonah, especially the conversation that ends with Mateo saying “‘kay thanks byyyeee,” contributes to his coding as gay. A long drawn out “hi” or “bye” has become a common saying in popular culture and originated in the drag scene. Asian-American queen Ongina coined the drawn out “hi” and “bye,” and the phrases were popularized by another white drag queen Alaska Thunderfuck (Ru Paul’s Drag Race Fandom, n.d.). The introduction of Mateo’s character in this episode connects to stereotypes about gay men in addition to stereotypes about API immigrants, which will be examined later in this chapter.

Mateo's cattiness, in combination with his competitiveness, is expanded on as season one progresses. In the season one episode six of *Superstore*, Mateo and his co-workers are anxious for the arrival of a secret shopper from their corporate offices (Zimmet et al., 2016a). There is a rumor circulating that if store's staff does well, they will be given raises, and if staff perform poorly, everyone will lose their jobs. One of Mateo's co-workers, Garrett (a sarcastic, cishet, Black man who uses a wheelchair) is flirting with a customer and offers to help her find a hat for her father. Wanting to stand out for his service, and assuming the woman is the secret shopper, Mateo interrupts Garrett's conversation and attempts to show the customer where the hats are, stating he has "personally tested every hat we sell, and Garrett is a sexual predator" (Zimmet et al., 2016a). Mateo then adds that while Garrett is not convicted, "we all know" (Zimmet et al., 2016a). The customer is rightfully appalled and walks away from the two. When Garrett fervently objects to Mateo's statement, Mateo responds "There are raises on the line, and sorry not sorry, I'm not here to make friends" (Zimmet et al., 2016a). Again, the phrase "I'm not here to make friends" mirrors statements made by contestants on highly dramatized and produced reality shows (Mather, 2020). Interestingly, the genre of reality television has connections to the LGBTQIA+ community. Typically there is a sole, or handful of "sexual minorities" on reality shows which creates problematic understandings of the closet for audiences (Kachgal, 2004). In the first season of *Superstore*, Mateo is also willing to falsely tell a complete stranger that his co-worker is a sexual predator in order to receive recognition and a raise.

Both Mateo's cattiness and his competitiveness reinforce tired stereotypes. His competitive impulses reinforce the model minority myth of API immigrants who are

hardworking (Kraus & Eun, 2020; Yi et al., 2020). Mateo seems desperate to stand out to his managers Amy and Glenn, by consistently pulling them aside during season one episode one and highlighting his relentless work ethic; in one of these conversations with Amy he says “I enjoy hard work. It’s like my mom always says, ‘if you don’t work hard baby Jesus will cry’” (Spitzer et al., 2015a). While this is not confirmed in *Superstore*, it is implied that Mateo’s extended family is Catholic, and because of Mateo’s ethnicity, it would track that specifically his extended family adheres to Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholicism is the primary religion of Filipinos due to the Spanish colonial legacy in the country (Ocampo, 2016). Religion distinguishes Filipinos from other ethnic groups within the API racial umbrella, as the amount of Roman Catholics “in other Asian countries – China, Japan, and Korea included – is negligible” (Ocampo, 2016, p. 18). The addition of this anecdote about his mother reinforces that hard work is important in Mateo’s family and connects to a concept in organizational communication called the “ideal worker norm.” This norm props up late stage capitalism. It argues that workers should have “total commitment to career” and rewards those who adhere to the norm through promotion and recognition (Drago, 2007, p. 7).

Mateo’s competitive nature also calls upon stereotypes of API immigrants being high achievers and eager to impress, a stereotype perpetuated by the model minority myth (Kraus & Eun, 2020). This myth overemphasizes economically valuable traits of API immigrants while glossing over the immense differences between those from the continent of Asia (Chow, 2017; Kraus & Eun, 2020), which can lead to harmful impacts on API communities (Yi et al., 2020). Pulitzer prize winner Viet Thanh Nguyen reflects on the model minority myth and ultimately defines it as “this is what it means to be a

model minority: to be invisible in most circumstances because we are doing what we are supposed to doing... until we become hypervisible because we are doing what we do too well” (2020).

Though this episode is before Mateo’s status narrative is introduced, this scene sets up Mateo’s urge to make himself valuable to his workplace throughout *Superstore*. Because of his working-class and immigrant identities, Mateo realizes that his minimum wage retail job is precarious, as minimum wage workers in reality are constantly reminded that they are replaceable. The precarity of Mateo’s employment and how it impacts him will be explored further in the next chapter. Perhaps it is because of Mateo’s immigrant and working-class identities that he feels the need to compulsively compete with his co-worker Jonah. This perspective complicates Mateo as a character. What initially appeared to be a typical reification of tired stereotypes, deepens to reveal a complex character.

Mateo’s Undocumented Status Complicates His Narrative

In the first episode of season two, Mateo finds out that he is undocumented due to a conversation with Jonah (Green et al., 2016). From this season on, Mateo begins to gain depth as a character, cycling between reifying stereotypes and countering hegemonic expectations of undocumented immigrants. This second portion of the theme will focus on three narrative examples from *Superstore*: the first narrative example is when Mateo learns he is undocumented, the second is when Mateo breaks up with his boyfriend to protect himself, and the third is when Mateo undermines a fellow immigrant.

Mateo learns he is undocumented. The first episode of season two is dominated by rhetorical significance, occurring during the summer Olympics and titled “Olympics.”

The two dominant narratives of this episode involve Glenn naively engaging in nationalism and Mateo discovering his undocumented status. The setting of this episode is in the Cloud 9 store 1217, providing the milieu for the imbalance of power between Glenn and Mateo. In the break room during their daily morning meeting, Glenn confronts Mateo about wearing a Filipino flag pin on his vest, questioning why Mateo is not rooting for the United States. This prompts several instances where Glenn harasses Mateo at work, trying to convince Mateo that “America’s number one” (Green et al., 2016). Glenn confronts Mateo as he is working with Jonah, and points out that he is wearing “American blue jeans” (Green et al., 2016). Glenn then says to Mateo “good luck finding a pair of these in Man-eye-la” mispronouncing Manila, the capital of the Philippines (Green et al., 2016).

Given Glenn’s persistent ethnocentrism, Jonah apologizes to Mateo about Glenn’s behavior, saying he means well. What follows is a conversation between Jonah and Mateo that reveals to the both of them that Mateo is undocumented.

Mateo: It’s not that I don’t love America, I do. But it’s not perfect. You guys are way too into brunch. I wish Asians were allowed to vote. And I - I don’t really get the whole basement thing –

Jonah: Hold on - hold on a second. What are you- what are you talking about?

Mateo: Yeah, I know - it’s a democracy. One person, one vote - oh, unless you’re Asian-American. Tell me why that is.

Jonah: I don’t know that I can. Are you - Mateo you’re an American citizen right?

Mateo: (seemingly offended) Oh, just ‘cause I’m Asian, I can’t be a citizen?

Jonah: (apologetic and self-conscious) No, no, I’m - I’m sorry. It’s just that I’ve read about so many situations where parents bring their kids into the country illegally and then, you know, they don’t even tell them that they’re undocumented.

Mateo: (confidently) Believe me, I have plenty of documents. I went to the green card store personally with my grandmother.

Jonah: (confused) The... green card store?

Mateo: Yeah, they sell green cards and knockoff handbags and bootleg *Spider-Man* DVDs.

Jonah: (looks at Mateo meaningfully, confused and also concerned)

Mateo: (a look of realization washes over his face) (Green et al., 2016)

This dialogue is how Jonah learns that Mateo is undocumented. The scene then cuts to Mateo in the back hallways of the store near the break room on his cell phone alone, calling his grandmother. Mateo is frantically speaking Tagalog (the primary language of the Philippines) and English words are interspersed throughout their conversation (green card, counterfeit, American citizen, Spider Man, Netflix).

Later in the episode, Mateo enters Glenn's office looking scared. Mateo tells Glenn that he found out that he is not "an American," attempting to disclose to Glenn that he is undocumented (Green et al., 2016). However, Glenn misses the point of Mateo's confession, assuming Mateo is talking about Glenn's declarations of ethnocentrism. Glenn interrupts Mateo, stands up from behind his desk, and insists that Mateo is American "and I'm Filipino. And everybody's everything. So it's like nobody's anything. And that's beautiful" (Green et al., 2016). Interestingly enough, Mateo's national pride for his home country is railroaded by the realization that he is undocumented, and the Olympics are an event where nationalism and ethnocentrism are encouraged. Glenn's ethnocentrism serves as a catalyst for Mateo's realization, and Glenn's guilt prevents Mateo's undocumented status from being discovered in this episode. Mateo also encounters obstacles to his romantic life in addition to those in his work life.

Mateo ends his relationship with Jeff. Later in season two, Mateo begins a romantic relationship with store 1217's district manager, Jeff (Miller et al., 2016). Mateo's relationship with Jeff (an older, mild-mannered, cisgender, gay white man) runs parallel to the beginning of Mateo's status narrative. As is now an established characteristic of Mateo, when Jeff first visits the store, Mateo is eager to prove to Jeff that he is a hard worker. Several episodes are devoted to Mateo's attempting to get Jeff's attention while working on the floor (Clarke et al., 2016; Ledgin et al., 2016). Near the end of one of these episodes, Jeff assures Mateo that he has noticed him, while touching his arm and giving Mateo a lingering, meaningful look (Ledgin et al., 2016). As Jeff walks away, Mateo is left shocked and exclaims "Holy *bleep*" (Ledgin et al., 2016). The censored word is assumed to be "fuck," but *Superstore* airs on NBC so expletives are censored with a bleep and blurred image over the actor's mouth. This episode begins the narrative of Mateo and Jeff's romantic relationship.

In the following episode Jeff asks out Mateo and the two begin dating in secret, as Jeff is not permitted to date employees that he supervises (Miller et al., 2016). Mateo does not disclose his status to Jeff. It is not until episode eight of season two that Mateo tells his best friend at work, Cheyenne (a young, ditzy, cisgender mother who is also API), that he is undocumented and also dating Jeff (Kyle et al., 2016). This brings the total amount of people who know about Mateo's status to three people (Mateo, Jonah, and Cheyenne). Ultimately, Mateo's co-workers discover that Mateo is dating Jeff in season two episode sixteen (Ellickson et al., 2017), and as a result, Jeff must disclose their relationship to corporate Cloud 9 in episode seventeen (Miller et al., 2017). Jeff tells Mateo the good news, that they can continue their relationship as long as Mateo transfers

stores so that Jeff is no longer supervising the store where Mateo works. However, in episode eighteen, Mateo faces a difficult decision when Jeff tells him that in order to transfer stores, he needs to provide Cloud 9 with his physical social security card (Green et al., 2017).

Mateo is uncertain of what action to take and shares his concerns with Jonah and Cheyenne. He is adamant to Jonah and Cheyenne that he does not want to tell Jeff about his undocumented status. Jonah offers to marry Mateo so that he can remain in the country, and Mateo turns him down saying “ew” (Green et al., 2017). There are two possible interpretations of Jonah’s offer. First, Jonah could be attempting to queer the commonly depicted storyline of undocumented immigrants marrying someone of the opposite gender to remain in the United States. However, due to Jonah’s characterization as a pretentious, well-meaning, bleeding liberal heart, I view this offer as one rooted in a mix of white and citizenship guilt. Within this interpretation, Jonah feels sympathy for Mateo and the obstacles he encounters because of his undocumented status, so to relieve himself of that guilt he offers to marry Mateo so that he can stay in the country.

In order to seek more information for Mateo’s options, the three characters head to the store’s electronics section to look up provisions for how undocumented people can avoid deportation. Jonah, reading from a computer says “you’re not a refugee, you’re not a special agricultural worker, any interest in joining the military?” (Green et al., 2017). Mateo responds that he does not want to join the military because “I don’t trust myself with a weapon. I would enjoy killing too much” (Green et al., 2017). Cheyenne notices and shares a special provision for undocumented immigrants that are victims of violent assaults. Mateo asks “so I would just need to get punched?” and Cheyenne responds “no,

it seems like you'd have to get your ass beat pretty bad" (Green et al., 2017). Jonah incredulously exclaims he cannot believe that this provision is real and again offers to marry Mateo. Mateo smiles and touches Jonah's shoulder, thanking him "When you put it like that... the ass beating doesn't sound so bad" (Green et al., 2017). Mateo walks away from the two and searches for an employee to antagonize into assaulting him.

After none of his co-workers will fight him and Jonah refuses to beat Mateo, Mateo decides to break up with Jeff. The scene is heart wrenching. The two are in the parking lot of store 1217 as Jeff is picking up Mateo after his shift has ended. Jeff cheerily suggests they go to dinner to celebrate his transfer, adding that he has made reservations at a restaurant the two like. Mateo uncomfortably tells Jeff that he cannot transfer stores. Jeff, confused, says that they had talked about this and Jeff would transfer, but it is a much more difficult process due to his position. Mateo says he is not asking Jeff to transfer. The two talk over each other as Jeff tries to understand what is going on, and Mateo attempts to explain. Mateo appears to begin to tell Jeff that he is undocumented then says that he is not in love with Jeff. Hurt, and shocked, Jeff is silent for a moment then asks Mateo if he is breaking up with him. Emotional and holding back tears, Mateo says he is sorry and walks away. Jeff stands by his car shocked and upset. Mateo, now crying, walks back into the store. Cheyenne asks Mateo if he is okay and Mateo shakes his head, voice breaking, and says "Not really. I just – I don't know if I did the right thing" (Green et al., 2017).

Ultimately, this decision to end a relationship with someone he loves to keep his undocumented status a secret is informed by all of Mateo's intersecting identities. Mateo certainly engages in closeting communication, and while this master's thesis will not

examine this aspect of Mateo's status narrative, Miller and Eger (2019) analyze this facet of intersectionality in *Superstore* in their essay. This specific storyline centers around Mateo's undocumented immigrant and gay identities, and it is also informed by his working-class, and Filipino identities. Mateo is unsure whether he should disclose his status to Jeff because of Jeff's job at corporate. He fears that Jeff will report him, and he will be deported. However, Mateo does care for Jeff and wants to continue his relationship with him. Cheyenne and Jonah both implore Mateo to tell Jeff and assure Mateo that Jeff will understand. So instead of making himself vulnerable to the will of his boyfriend, who is also his superior, Mateo breaks up with Jeff. This decision is also informed by Mateo's immigrant and working-class identities.

As previously stated, Mateo is aware of the precarious nature of his employment. If Mateo were not in the working class, he would be able to continue his relationship with Jeff and quit his job at Cloud 9. However, Mateo needs the income from this job and is likely unsure that he would be able to find other work due to his undocumented status. Throughout the series, Mateo is characterized as working twice as hard as his co-workers in order to be successful. Mateo volunteers to do extra tasks at work and also pursues promotions. For example, in season one episode three Mateo volunteers to man a salsa sampling station but is passed over by Glenn when Mateo shares that he is Filipino and not Hispanic (Spitzer et al., 2015b). Later on in season one episode eight, Mateo assists Glenn in constructing a gay wedding display during the store's wedding sale (Ornelas et al., 2016). When Dina (a cishet, white woman with an intense personality) steps down as assistant manager in season one episode ten, Mateo prepares an elaborate, fantastical presentation for his "audition" for the open position, including loud 80s music, a

slideshow, and a mic'd Mateo carrying lit sparklers (Zimmet et al., 2016b).

In addition, I theorize that Mateo's undocumented status is undiscovered for so long because of his Filipino identity. Most people, including Mateo's naïve and ignorant store manager Glenn, envision undocumented immigrants as being Hispanic or Latinx. Glenn finds out that Mateo is undocumented four years into his employment and chooses not to report him to corporate, allowing Mateo to continue working at the store (Gatewood et al., 2018). Previously depicted as frivolous and shallow, Mateo is revealed to be a complex character, struggling to navigate his love life while protecting himself from deportation. Mateo experiences additional instances where his undocumented identity is threatened to be exposed.

Mateo undermines a fellow immigrant. Finally, in season four, a new employee joins Cloud 9 store 1217 named Sayid (Gatewood et al., 2018). Sayid (a reserved, cishet, Muslim man) is a refugee from Syria, fleeing the ongoing civil war. While having a conversation with Cheyenne at the entrance of the store in season four episode eight, Mateo accidentally loudly says something about his being undocumented, just as Sayid enters the store. Concerned that Sayid is going to report him, Cheyenne and Mateo conjure up several ridiculous plans to discredit Sayid, including fabricating a phrase "lying like a Syrian" and woodenly explaining to their co-workers what the phrase means (Gatewood et al., 2018). Due to a concern that Sayid will have his refugee status revoked if he keeps Mateo's secret, Sayid reports Mateo to Glenn. Ultimately, Mateo gives Glenn a fake social security number to run through E-Verify, and Glenn decides to keep Mateo's secret.

This is another complication of Mateo's character. In order to prevent himself

from being deported, Mateo turns against his co-worker Sayid who is in a similarly vulnerable situation as Mateo. Also, Glenn's decision to not report Mateo gives Glenn power over Mateo. While he is safe momentarily, at any moment, Glenn could change his mind and decide to report Mateo to corporate or to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This episode also illustrates Mateo's lack of knowledge about the U.S. and its immigration process. After Mateo accidentally mentions that he is undocumented within earshot of Sayid, he attempts to cover his tracks, feigning that he can never remember the difference between being documented and undocumented; Mateo also tells Sayid that he was sworn in by the president at his citizenship ceremony (Gatewood et al., 2018). When Sayid asks Mateo which president swore him in, Mateo says "one of the white ones, I want to say Henderson" (Gatewood et al., 2018). Unfortunately, this conversation, in addition to other instances of Mateo attempting to discredit him, leads Sayid to report Mateo to Glenn. It is obvious that Mateo does not understand and/or has not researched the process of immigrating to the U.S. While this storyline does emphasize Mateo's tendency to be catty with his co-workers, it complicates the reason behind this behavior. Mateo is not harassing Sayid because he wants to get a raise, he is doing what he feels needs to be done to prevent being deported; if that means discrediting a fellow immigrant, then so be it.

This storyline also disrupts respectability politics of "good" immigrants, selfless, educated, and kind. While Mateo certainly loves his friends and family, it would be difficult to classify him as kind. Mateo disrupts meritocracy narratives of undocumented immigrants who fall within the "good immigrant" category. According to undocuqueer activists, these narratives "perpetuate respectability politics and contribute to the erasure

of millions of people” (A, 2017). Respectability politics is rooted in the Black community,

What started as a philosophy promulgated by black elites to ‘uplift the race’ by correcting the ‘bad’ traits of the black poor has now evolved into one of the hallmarks of black politics in the age of Obama, a governing philosophy that centers on managing the behavior of black people left behind in a society touted as being full of opportunity. (Harris, 2014)

Recently, Black women who lead the Black Lives Matter movement have called for an end to respectability politics, as it impedes social progress (Richardson, 2019). Other immigration rights activists emphasize that “it is important to celebrate the accomplishments” of immigrants who have been able to achieve wealth in the U.S.; however, “we should be wary of assigning value to ‘successful’ immigrants, and we should be aware of how the stream of ‘feel-good’ refugee and immigrant narratives may seem humanizing, but can actually have the reverse effect” (L, 2017). Mateo is not a heterosexual doctor, lawyer, or high-ranking business official that immigration laws and visas typically target; he is a gay man who was raised in the U.S. without knowledge of his undocumented status working in a minimum wage retail position.

Conclusion

Ultimately, *Superstore* demonstrates that Mateo simultaneously reifies stereotypes of gay men and API immigrants while also complicating representations of marginalized groups through his status narrative. His status narrative reveals underlying reasons for why Mateo acts in the ways that he does. Perhaps Mateo is toxically competitive because he knows as an immigrant, he has to work twice as hard as his other co-workers to stand

out. After he finds out that he is undocumented, this toxic behavior possibly continues so that Mateo can remain under the radar. Mateo has to make incredibly difficult decisions to ensure his safety, including breaking up with a boyfriend that he loves dearly and putting a refugee co-worker in a burdensome situation. The characterization of Mateo contributes to the rejection of hegemonic expectations of what qualifies someone to be a “good immigrant.” Guidelines for morality of undocumented immigrants are based in heteronormativity and cisnormativity, excluding undocuqueer immigrants. This significance will be examined further in the concluding chapter. Next, this master’s thesis shifts to examine Mateo’s relationship with the organization that employs him. Cloud 9 is portrayed as an abusive organization that cruelly mistreats its workers; Mateo, due to his intersecting working-class and undocumented immigrant identities, experiences the brunt of this organizational violence.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MATEO

Yuliana Rocha Zamarripa was cleaning a hotel room in 2010 when she slipped on a bathroom floor and slammed her knee on the bathtub, leaving her with pain and swelling so severe she was unable to walk. Lion [the insurance provider] sent her to a doctor but quickly denied her claim based on a false Social Security number. With few options, Rocha, now 32, settled her workers' comp case for less than \$6,000 plus attorney fees. But she never got the medical care she needed. The week before she was to receive the check, she was arrested while making breakfast for her 4-year-old son... Rocha eventually received her settlement but had to spend all of it securing her release and dealing with immigration. She now walks with a limp because her injury didn't heal correctly. "I think it's an injustice what happened to me," she said. "All because I fell, I slipped." (Grabell, 2017)

While the previous analysis chapter focused on Mateo as an individual character, this chapter centers on Mateo's relationship to Cloud 9, the organization that employs him and how his intersecting marginalized identities place him in a unique position to experience violence from the organization. Chapter three examined how Mateo's status narrative and working-class identity complicated the stereotypical portrayals of his gay and API immigrant identities; it also emphasizes Mateo's individual character and the events of his status narrative occurring within the setting of the Cloud 9 store 1217. Chapter four builds on that individual understanding of Mateo and his intersecting marginalized identities, examining how those identities are impacted through a larger system of the organization of Cloud 9. Mateo's status narrative is intertwined with Cloud 9's organizational violence. His status narrative is constructed in a manner that highlights the callous nature of organizations and how they treat their workers. While documented workers and citizens at Cloud 9 store 1217 are not treated ethically, Mateo is especially vulnerable to harm due to his undocumented immigrant status. Because of his intersecting marginalized identities, Mateo experiences heightened and specific forms of abuse and violence from Cloud 9.

This chapter is focused on how organizations exercise control over their workers through policies in addition to practices, and how organizations can enact violence against their workers. I build upon critical organizational communication scholarship of violence as intersectional in organizing. Kate Lockwood Harris' work is instrumental here. Harris (2013) examines how organizations can enact sexual violence through policies, shifting away from solely holding individuals *in* organizations responsible, "by developing a communicative approach to organizational sexual violence, I hope to make the organization's role in assault – accomplished through invisible reference to whiteness and heteronormativity – less subject to dismissal" (p. 589). In their #ToneUpOrgComm forum responses, Harris (2020) and Leslie (2020) narrate how organizational and systemic violence impact non-normative bodies; Leslie (2020) describes their feelings as they navigate the National Communication Association (NCA) conference of 2019, "I hesitate walking in – it would be all too easy to head back to my room and avoid the awkwardness that always happens when (this) queer meets org comm" (p. 134). Harris (2020) conveys her bodily response to a traumatic event at the 2019 NCA Organizational Communication Division's Top Paper Panel, "It was hard to stay grounded, and I wanted to flee my body and the discipline and the profession altogether. Encounters with systemic violence can do this" (p. 148). This chapter will elucidate how Cloud 9 as an organization enacts control over Mateo and executes violence against him, characterizing him as an example of embodied organizational violence.

Similar to chapter three, this chapter will be composed of several narrative examples from *Superstore* and will be split into two sections. The first section is based on Mateo's experiences with organizational violence from ICE, Cloud 9, and a supervisor at

a new job; the second section will center on sustained organizational violence around Mateo's intersectional identities that impacts his health. Analysis will begin with an especially salient narrative example, and each narrative example will contain explanation of the events, setting, and character that compose this chapter's theme (Foss, 1989). Finally, I will analyze narrative examples of how Mateo's marginalized identities are impacted by violence from Cloud 9. The paramount example of this argument is Cloud 9's decision to send ICE to Mateo's workplace, store 1217, in order to scare off the floor workers from unionizing (Spitzer et al., 2019).

Organizational Violence from ICE, Cloud 9, and Dan

The following section examines instances of organizational violence Mateo encounters while an employee at Cloud 9 store 1217. These instances include his employer authorizing an ICE raid, his detention, and violence he experiences upon his release on bond from the detention center.

Cloud 9 sends ICE to store 1217. In *Superstore*'s season four, Amy is now the store manager at store 1217 and is attempting to keep the workers from unionizing to prevent corporate from shutting down their store. Episode twenty-two is ironically titled "Employee Appreciation Day," as the events of the episode detail just how violent organizations can be. In a change of scenery, the beginning of the episode shows a group of mostly white men in suits presumably at Cloud 9 Headquarters. This change of setting is unique for *Superstore* as most all of the episodes take place exclusively in store 1217 with rare exceptions. Jeff, Mateo's ex-boyfriend, is also in the room as the CEO and other higher-ups discuss the unionization rumors at store 1217. The CEO (a presumably white cishet man) asks to be updated on the "union stuff" at store 1217 (Spitzer et al., 2019).

An unnamed executive (a presumably white cis het man) responds “we’ll get legal into it,” and the CEO asks to be kept in the loop about the situation (Spitzer et al., 2019). The executive responds, “then it’s all about slowing down their momentum. We’re running background checks on all the floor workers; we’ve authorized ICE to do a worksite enforcement; we’re trying to isolate the agitators” (Spitzer et al., 2019).

At this point in *Superstore*’s narrative, Jeff is aware of Mateo’s undocumented status, as Mateo discloses this information to him earlier in season three episode fourteen (Kyle et al., 2018). Mateo’s disclosing that he is undocumented to Jeff will be explored later in this chapter. However, in this corporate meeting, with the mention of ICE, Jeff visibly perks up. In a concerned tone, he asks “ICE? You’re bringing in ICE? Wow, that’s, uh, that’s extreme” (Spitzer et al., 2019). The executive dismissively responds to Jeff and states “Yeah, Jeff, that’s why we’re doing it. It’s extreme” (Spitzer et al., 2019). Jeff looks around the boardroom frantically and loudly exclaims he has to use the restroom, quickly exiting. After several failed attempts to contact Mateo, Jeff facetimes Amy to alert her of the ICE raid, accidentally using a virtual puppy filter overtop his image. Amy then bursts onto the floor frantically screaming Mateo’s name, exclaiming “ICE IS COMING!” (Spitzer et al., 2019). Amy is able to get Mateo off of the floor and into the warehouse just as ICE enters the store.

Throughout the remainder of the episode, a core group of Mateo’s co-workers attempt to brainstorm ways to get him out of the store safely (including Dina, Amy, Jonah, Cheyenne, and Glenn). They settle on inviting every single person they know (friends, family, exes) to flood the store and make it more crowded so they can sneak Mateo out past ICE disguised as a customer. Cheyenne and Mateo piece together a

disguise out of clothes from the lost and found. Cheyenne laments that she “couldn’t find any [hats] that said ‘make America great again.’ The closest I could find was ‘fart police’” (Spitzer et al., 2019). Cheyenne and Mateo’s attempt to locate a MAGA hat for Mateo’s disguise is indicative of the lengths the two were willing to go to secure Mateo’s safety. MAGA hats have become rhetorically significant artifacts, indicating to the general public that the wearer is a supporter of President Donald Trump, and specifically indicating a threat of safety to people of color and immigrants (Givhan, 2019). Cheyenne and Mateo, two API people, are searching for a MAGA hat as it would be the ultimate signifier that Mateo is a Trump supporter, and therefore could not be the undocumented immigrant ICE is looking for. Mateo chooses instead to wear a brown hat and black hoodie, ditching his Cloud 9 vest and nametag.

Cheyenne and Amy, equipped with a walkie talkie, attempt to guide Mateo out of the store. Dina, the assistant manager, watches them from the security room, keeping an eye out for ICE agents and directing the three on how to safely exit the store. Dina sends them through multiple sections of the store “You’ve got agents coming your way from menswear and electronics. Make a left at aisle nine, and we’ll lose them in grocery” (Spitzer et al., 2019). After several twists, turns, and redirections from an increasingly panicked Dina, she laments that there does not seem to be a way out for Mateo, “Okay, hang on! Just wait! Wait! I don’t... I don’t know. They’re... they’re everywhere. I’m sorry” (Spitzer et al., 2019). Unfortunately, Mateo is cornered in the store and detained by ICE. Co-workers, managers, and friends who were inside the store to help Mateo gather outside the store and watch as Mateo is taken away. Mateo attempts to wave to everyone from the back of the ICE car while his hands are zip tied. As the car moves out

of sight of his friends, Mateo's face drops out of a smile, and he appears frightened, corresponding with Mateo's character construction of hiding his true emotions behind sarcasm and humor.

This episode also portrays ICE and its agents as racist and awful. During the episode, an ICE agent who is a white (and presumably cis het) man speaks with Amy as he is going through the store's records in her office (Spitzer et al., 2019). The ICE agent tells Amy that they are looking for any possible "illegals" (Spitzer et al., 2019). Offended by the ICE agent's choice of labeling for undocumented immigrants, Amy responds that Cloud 9 does not employ "illegals" (Spitzer et al., 2019). The ICE agent is unaware of the subtext of Amy's comment and responds that it is hard to tell, adding that "they look just like you and me. Well... you" (Spitzer et al., 2019). Amy is Latina, and this jab reveals the ICE agent's assumption that undocumented immigrants look like her and are predominantly from Latin American countries. This scene corresponds to my previous argument in chapter three that Mateo's undocumented status may have remain concealed as long as it did because he ethnically does not match presupposed ideas of where undocumented immigrants come from and look like in contemporary immigration rhetoric.

"Employee Appreciation Day" is a rare example of network television portraying an ICE raid. With ICE raids being depicted in *Superstore* and Netflix's *Orange is the New Black*, television critics have identified ICE as television's new boogeyman (Feder, 2019). Detectives, patrol officers, the FBI, and other forms of law enforcement have a decades-long history of being portrayed positively by television (i.e., *Brooklyn 99*, *Law and Order* and its many spin-offs). However, ICE is different from these forms of law

enforcement, being relatively new (created post-9/11 by the Bush administration) and therefore not having a formula for how they are portrayed in television. Here, *Superstore* snatches the opportunity to set the tone for mainstream television depictions of ICE. As Christopher Yogerst, assistant professor of communication at UW-Milwaukee, shared with the *Daily Beast*, “Once you give one highly politically charged storyline to a character that’s already gained trust or sympathy from an audience, it forces them to think about, well, what if it happened to you or your friend?” (Feder, 2019). Seeing Mateo be dragged away from his friends—friends who worked so hard to protect him—positions audiences to have empathy for Mateo and his situation. *Superstore* utilizes the fear that ICE brings to citizens and non-citizens alike to situate Mateo’s status narrative as an opportunity for Cloud 9 to inflict violence.

The storyline of ICE’s conducting a raid on Mateo’s workplace is a perfect example of an organization enacting violence. At his place of work, Mateo’s co-workers decide to begin a unionization process to advocate for better health insurance and job security. Cloud 9 executives purposefully used the ICE raid as an intimidation tactic, after mandatory anti-union meetings and videos did not do the trick. While Cloud 9 executives did not have specific knowledge of Mateo’s status, they ordered the raid to frighten their workers into submission. Here the whiteness and heteronormativity of organizational violence (Harris, 2013) is on full display; a room full of mostly white presumably cishet men flippantly decide to enact violence against their workers, violence that impacts Mateo in his position of intersectional precarity. By intersectional precarity I mean that, because of Mateo’s working-class and undocumented immigrant identities, he occupies an especially tenuous position at his place of work. The storyline of the ICE raid

provides support for my argument that Mateo's status narrative is constructed through a means that illustrates the intersectional violence organizations inflict on their workers. Mateo is able to avoid detention momentarily because his ex-boyfriend Jeff alerts Amy that ICE is coming, intersecting his gay, undocumented immigrant, and working-class identities. His identity as an undocumented immigrant is impacted because ultimately ICE agents are able to confirm through E-Verify that Mateo is employed at the store, though they initially overlook him because of his Filipino identity.

Mateo's detention. After Mateo is detained by ICE, he does not appear much in the following episodes before he is released on bond, which happens at the end of the second episode of season five. In season five episode one, Amy pressures Cheyenne to visit Mateo at the detention center after finding out she has not been to see him. Cheyenne resists initially, concerned that going to see him will make him feel worse due to her previous experience with visiting an incarcerated parent. Finally, Cheyenne agrees to visit Mateo, and the two have a heartbreaking exchange (Clarke et al., 2019).

Cheyenne enters the detention center visiting area, glass separating the visitors and the detained immigrants. This change of setting to an ICE detention center enhances the impact of the following scene. Mateo is led in by a guard and is wearing an orange jumpsuit. As the two lock eyes and sit down facing each other through the glass, their eyes well up. They speak through telephones connecting opposite sides of the glass. After brief gossiping about other co-workers, the two break down and cry. Mateo shares with Cheyenne that he is terrified,

Girl, it's bad in here. It's cold, and there aren't enough blankets. I mean, it is flat out disgusting. And apparently this is one of the nicer places. The guards think all undocumented people are Latinos, so they just keep yelling at me in Spanish. And I don't understand what they're saying. I just - I just want to go home. (Clarke et al.,

2019)

Mateo's exhaustion is tangible, his voice shaking as he speaks. Seeing the character of Mateo suffer from the consequences of the ICE raid (an event) illustrates the embodied impacts of organizational violence. His bodily reaction is entirely justified, "encounters with systemic violence can do this" (Harris, 2020, p. 148).

Mateo's Filipino identity impacts his experience inside the detention center. Mateo shares with Cheyenne that the guards in the detention center think that all undocumented immigrants are Latino and yell at him in Spanish, a language he does not understand (Clarke et al., 2019). Importantly, Mateo's detention narrative also mirrors the stories that have emerged from immigrant detention centers in recent years: not enough blankets, a dirty environment, and hostile guards (ACLU, 2021). His experience also illustrates the erasure of API undocumented immigrants. The public, politicians, and law enforcement assume undocumented immigrants are Hispanic/Latinx. This assumption is not only incorrect but also harmful to API undocumented immigrants, as "Undocumented Asian immigrants remain in the shadows. Neither researchers nor policymakers pay much attention to their unique experiences, instead focusing on undocumented Latinx and the perceived need for physical border security" (Kim & Yellow Horse, 2018, p. 70). Not only is Mateo's experience as an undocumented API immigrant erased during his stay in the detention center, but he experiences additional abuse in his workplace once he is released on bond.

Mateo's exploitative working conditions after he is released on bond. As mentioned previously, Mateo is released on bond because his immigration lawyer finds out that ICE conducted a raid at the direction of Cloud 9. The organization's utilization of

ICE during a labor dispute is illegal, and while he is out on bond, Mateo has to wear an ankle monitor as a condition of his bond. While it may seem improbable that Mateo would get out of the detention center on bond, in reality Mateo would probably qualify to be released.

U.S. immigration law is tricky on who does and does not qualify to receive bond. Those who do not qualify for bond usually have criminal records and are held under “mandatory detention” while waiting for their case (About Bail, 2021; Illinois Legal Aid Online, 2020; NOLO, n.d.). There are two kinds of bonds where undocumented immigrants can be released. The first is a delivery bond, which the character of Mateo appears to have received; the delivery bond allows the undocumented immigrant to be released from a detention center while they wait for their deportation hearing (About Bail, 2021). This delivery bond also includes an arrest warrant and custody conditions from ICE in order to assure that the undocumented immigrant appears for all their immigration court dates (About Bail, 2021). The other form of bond is a voluntary departure bond, where undocumented immigrants voluntarily leave the U.S., pay for their bail, and return to their country of origin (About Bail, 2021).

Realistically, Mateo would probably qualify for a delivery bond as he does not present as a flight risk. The significance of Mateo’s release on a delivery bond is two-fold. First, a voluntary departure bond includes the undocumented immigrant paying out of pocket for their bail and to return to their country of origin (About Bail, 2021). A voluntary departure bond allegedly involves the bail payment being refunded by the United States Federal Government to the undocumented immigrant, though this follow through is not consistent. Mateo likely could not afford the out-of-pocket cost of paying

his bail *and* relocating back to the Philippines due to his working-class identity. Second, a delivery bond allows Mateo's status narrative to continue in *Superstore*. By being out on a delivery bond, Mateo is able to encounter additional events that further his character development in the setting of store 1217.

After Mateo is released upon bond, *Superstore* begins a new narrative of Mateo's unique position to experience organizational violence in season five episode five (Gube et al., 2019). Mateo has difficulty finding work after being released from the detention center and shares with Garrett that, "these interviews all go the same way anyway. I slay with the Q&A, it's electric, then they ask for my Social and I go, 'I don't have one.' Then they go, 'Thanks, we'll be in touch.' Guess if they're ever in touch, Garrett?!" (Gube et al., 2019). Soon after this conversation, Mateo has an interview at the optometrist center that is located inside Cloud 9 store 1217. He is able to work there because the optometrist center is owned by a different company than Cloud 9. This setting allows Mateo to continue to interact with his friends and further his status narrative at store 1217. The optometrist, whose name is Dan (an offbeat, cishet, white, middle-aged, married man), interviews Mateo, commenting on how qualified he seems to be for the job. Dan then offers Mateo the job, and Mateo enthusiastically accepts. Shifting quickly to concern, Mateo then asks Dan if he needs his information. Dan gestures widely with his arms behind the optometrist counter, suggestively saying that he forgot to do any paperwork, winking at Mateo. Dan then says he knows Mateo is undocumented and exclaims that he feels like a "white savior," obviously not understanding what the term means (Gube et al., 2019). Mateo's body tenses up, and he appears uncomfortable. This comment sets up a problematic power relationship between Dan and Mateo's characters. Dan consistently

feels that he is doing Mateo “a solid,” so in turn, Mateo owes him. Dan quickly begins requesting these “solids” from Mateo which range from benign to completely ridiculous.

For example, Dan asks Mateo to give him a makeover during his lunch break, makes him tell his wife that he does not like her cooking, and asks Mateo to come to their house and cook for his wife and him (Gube et al., 2019). Mateo incrementally becomes more and more hesitant to complete these tasks for Dan, saying that they are not in his job description; Dan, in turn, responds that technically Mateo should not have the job because he is undocumented. Also, when Mateo explains his discomfort with coming to Dan’s house to cook for his wife and him, Dan asks what he is supposed to do, “Ask someone else? I mean, someone documented probably wouldn’t do any of this stuff anyway, right?” revealing that Dan is purposefully taking advantage of Mateo because of his status (Gube et al., 2019). These depictions of Dan’s exploitation of Mateo’s labor has an impact on Mateo as a character. Mateo becomes stressed during his time at work and complains about Dan to his co-workers. The setting of these events in the optical center (located in store 1217) illustrates that the organizational violence Mateo encounters is not exclusively from Cloud 9. Organizational policies can enable individuals *in* organizations to enact violence against others, as Dan uses the policy that allows Mateo to be employed at the optical center to exploit Mateo.

Mateo does draw an eventual boundary with Dan once he asks Mateo to tell his wife that he does not want to have children. Finally cracking, Mateo incredulously responds, “My job is not to fix your life. It’s to work in the vision center. And maybe the fun fashion stuff, but that’s it” (Gube et al., 2019). Dan looks like he has been punched in the gut, sitting down and profusely apologizing for exploiting Mateo. Dan says that he

feels like a terrible person, before standing up and emphatically stating “Now, let’s put our heads together and figure out how you’re going to make me a better one” (Gube et al., 2019). Unfortunately, Dan continues to ask Mateo to do him “solids” until Mateo gets another job working for Amy as her assistant in season five episode thirteen (Kyle et al., 2020). When Mateo is attempting to get a job as Amy’s assistant (season five episode thirteen), he tells Amy:

I can’t work for Dan anymore. Every night, he calls me from the McDonald’s drive-thru begging me to talk him out of it. And I try, but he goes through. And then it’s just ten minutes of him sobbing and eating, and I have to forgive him every night. (Kyle et al., 2020)

Mateo also informs Amy that Dan is making him drive his wife from St. Louis (where store 1217 is located) to Indiana (Kyle et al., 2020). Turning down Dan is not an option for Mateo. It is already established that Mateo had difficulty finding a job after he got out on bond and he needs the money. Mateo’s problematic relationship with Dan functions to illustrate how undocumented immigrants within the working class are exploited at their jobs (Grabell, 2017). Again, policies within organizations can enable individuals *in* organizations to enact violence against others in the organization (Harris, 2013). Because of his intersecting marginalized identities (undocumented immigrant and working-class), Mateo is especially vulnerable to organizational violence, as are working-class undocumented immigrants who live in the U.S. today.

Interestingly, Mateo’s identity as a gay man also is involved in this storyline. Some of the tasks Dan forces Mateo to do involve assumptions and stereotypes about gay men. Dan asks Mateo to purchase shorts for his wife that will flatter her figure and implores Mateo to give him a makeover (Gube et al., 2019). While initially Mateo does not mind helping Dan with his style, aligning with his character’s affinity for fashion, he

becomes increasingly uncomfortable with Dan's requests. Dan is not only taking advantage of Mateo due to his undocumented and working-class identities, but is also coercing him into performing as a "gay best friend" for free.

The culmination of these events of Dan's exploitation illustrate that Mateo's identities as an undocuqueer immigrant and working-class man places him in an precarious position. Mateo is trapped in a job where his supervisor abuses his power and forces Mateo to do unpaid labor. Harris (2013) emphasizes that individuals *in* organizations can be enabled by organizational policies to enact violence on others, and this is precisely what Dan is doing. Dan is taking advantage of Mateo's intersectional precarity, calling on the optometrist center's ability to employ him as they are owned by a different company than Cloud 9. Through this storyline, *Superstore* illustrates that organizations, and individuals *in* organizations are capable of enacting violence against workers, regardless of intention.

Finally, the offhanded comment Dan makes about feeling like a "white savior" sets up a racial component to the exploitation and illustrates that Dan does not understand the meaning or connotation of what having a white savior complex actually means (Gube et al., 2019). Dan not only feels that he is justified requesting "solids" from Mateo, but he also feels that he is a benevolent white man saving a helpless brown person from certain destruction. This mindset is whiteness at work. Dan is not only clueless but also abuses his power over Mateo. Harris (2013) comments on the invisible power of whiteness in organizational violence, arguing that it is precisely its ability to remain unnamed that gives the violence of whiteness in organizations its power. Here in the abuse filled relationship between Dan and Mateo, Dan's whiteness is nearly invisible if it were not for

Dan's comment about being a "white savior" (Gube et al., 2019). Due to that statement from Dan, the racial aspect of their relationship is recognized and able to be critiqued. The narrative example of Dan's abuse is concerning alone, but in addition to this violence, Mateo has a history of organizational violence from Cloud 9 prior to his detention.

Sustained Organizational Violence Impacts Mateo's Health

Now I shift my analysis to narrative examples where Mateo's health is impacted by the organizational violence he experiences. These narrative examples occur before Mateo's detention by ICE.

Mateo is unable to accept compensation from Cloud 9. Another strong example of Mateo's working-class and undocumented immigrant identities placing him in a unique situation to experience violence from Cloud 9 is in season three episode fourteen when Mateo is unable to accept a cash payout from corporate due to a workplace injury (Kyle et al., 2018). This instance results in Mateo's disclosing to Jeff that he is undocumented. One day at store 1217, Mateo is injured when a hanging display breaks and falls on top of him. While Mateo overall appears unharmed, his arm and wrist are injured when he falls to the ground. After speaking with his co-workers who have also been injured while working at Cloud 9, he finds that corporate is willing to pay its workers up to one thousand dollars if the injured worker signs paperwork releasing the corporation from liability and promising not to sue. Jonah offers to assist Mateo in negotiations with Cloud 9 because he attended a semester of business school.

This negotiation occurs with Jeff, Mateo's ex-boyfriend and district manager. Over the course of the conversation among the three characters, Mateo and Jonah

discover that Cloud 9 will conduct a background check on Mateo if he signs the paperwork to get the payout, thereby exposing Mateo's undocumented status. As a result, Mateo refuses to sign the paperwork and tells Jeff that he does not want the money. Throughout the episode, Jeff incrementally offers Mateo more and more money. In the menswear section of store 1217, Jeff corners Jonah and Mateo, offering Mateo sixty-five hundred dollars. Mateo refuses, saying that it is not about the money. Jeff is obviously frustrated and quips "Wow, okay great. Congratulations, you just lost out on \$6500. Sweet dreams thinking about that" (Kyle et al., 2018). Jeff begins to walk away from the two before defeatedly turning back around and offering Mateo fifteen thousand dollars. Mateo is furious that he cannot take the money, but he continues to reject Jeff's offers.

Conflict escalates until Jeff confronts Mateo in the back hallways of store 1217, angrily claiming that Mateo is refusing the money just to make Jeff look incompetent. Jeff gives Mateo a check for ten thousand dollars and tells Mateo he is going to file the paperwork with their corporate legal offices, storming off. Mateo intensely objects, following Jeff and telling him that he cannot do that. Mateo grabs Jeff's arm and turns him around. Jeff stops walking away from Mateo and asks him why he cannot take the money. Mateo, frustrated, responds that it is complicated. Jeff, exposing his true feelings, sharply tells Mateo, "I was in love with you and you dumped me out of the blue. So unless there's some reason I just can't get my – " (Kyle et al., 2018). Mateo quickly interrupts Jeff, blurting out that he is undocumented, "That's why I couldn't transfer stores. That's why I can't take the money. And that's why I couldn't go on a Carnival Cruise with your family... I never hated you" (Kyle et al., 2018). In the following episode, Mateo attempts to get ahold of Jeff to ensure he has not reported him to

corporate or ICE (Ledgin et al., 2018). It is later revealed that Jeff quit his job at Cloud 9 so that he and Mateo could be together. The two continue to date for the remainder of season three and break up after Jeff chooses to return to work for Cloud 9 in the season three finale.

The event of Mateo's injury within the setting of store 1217 is another example of Mateo's intersectional marginalized identities placing him in a precarious position to experience the violence of Cloud 9 as an organization. Instead of providing its employees with workers' compensation for workplace injuries, Cloud 9 forces its employees to sign paperwork that bars them from suing the corporation and, in return, pays them in cash. If Cloud 9 cared about its workers, it would provide them with an avenue to claim workers' compensation for being injured. But, because the corporation knows that its employees lack bargaining power and/or social power due to their class status, Cloud 9 exploits their workers by promising cash in exchange for Cloud 9's legal invulnerability.

Though Mateo's other co-workers who are citizens were able to safely take a cash payout from Cloud 9, Mateo is unable to accept it without exposing his undocumented identity and placing him at risk of deportation. Cloud 9's policy of conducting background checks on employees who are injured in the workplace enacts violence against Mateo by jeopardizing his safety. Because Mateo is unable to accept the cash payout, he may not be able to pay for medical attention, therefore his injury may not heal properly. Mateo could deal with the lifelong consequences of Cloud 9's violence against him, similar to Ms. Rocha's experience of organizational violence detailed in the epigraph (Grabell, 2017).

Again, Mateo's identity as a gay man influences this experience simultaneously,

as he must negotiate with and prevent his ex-boyfriend (who is his organizational superior) from exposing him. As I was watching this episode, I questioned whether this position Mateo was in (having to negotiate a cash payout with his ex-boyfriend) was appropriate. While this episode does contain a scene where the three men (Mateo, Jeff, and Jonah) are connected with someone in Human Resources at Cloud 9 (Kyle et al., 2018), the situation reeks of power abuse. Jeff is the district manager of Mateo's store; however, due to their previous relationship which was disclosed to corporate, I find it hard to believe that Cloud 9 could not have sent someone else to negotiate Mateo's cash payout. To me, sending Jeff to negotiate Mateo's cash payout is another example of Cloud 9 abusing its power to intimidate its workers into submission. This event has adverse impacts on Mateo as a character, causing him intense stress. Because Mateo is undocumented, in addition to working-class, he both desperately wants to accept the payout while also incredibly concerned for his safety.

Mateo and the health fund. In addition to Mateo being injured while working, he experiences health difficulties earlier in the timeline of *Superstore*. The final example included in this chapter is from season three episode six of *Superstore* (Clarke et al., 2017). This episode does not heavily feature Mateo but does illustrate how his undocumented and working-class identities place him in a unique position to experience organizational violence from Cloud 9. The episode begins in the setting of store 1217 with Mateo in the break room with his co-workers. He loudly complains about his ear hurting, explaining to those around him that he has an ear infection. Multiple people give him advice on home-made remedies that include garlic and VapoRub.

One new employee, Kelly (a syrupy, cishet, white woman) naively suggests that

Mateo go to the doctor. Mateo is irritated with this suggestion, tells Kelly that the Cloud 9 deductible is four thousand dollars, and that his ear infections go away on their own anyways. Mateo's situation prompts his co-workers to start an employee health fund to help pay for each other's medical bills. His co-workers also set up a donation bucket with a label entitled "The Mateo Project" at the checkout stations to raise money for him. In the same episode, Mateo purchases expired antibiotics from store 1217's shady in-store pharmacist, Tate (a cishet, white man). At the end of the episode, Garrett gives Mateo the money from the donation bucket in the café section of store 1217. Mateo is touched by his co-workers' generosity and excitedly tells Garrett he is going to use the money to buy a faux Gucci messenger bag he has been pining after. Garrett is shocked and reminds Mateo of his ear infection. Offended, Mateo snaps at Garrett saying "Excuse you, my body, my choice" (Clarke et al., 2017) before happily leaving the store with his money. This line from Mateo reinforces his character trait of being devoted to fashion. It is also significant that Mateo co-opts common rhetoric used for women's rights to abortion. This exclamation is played for laughs; however it conveys Mateo's intense desire to justify his behavior and choices.

This final narrative event portrays material circumstances of undocumented immigrants who are also working-class. Mateo does not want to go see a doctor about his ear infection because it would be too costly for him, as Cloud 9's health insurance requires unobtainable deductibles for working-class employees, another example of organizational policies that enact violence on workers. Instead of going to see a doctor, Mateo illegally purchases expired antibiotics from Tate, the incredibly narcissistic and dubious cishet, white male pharmacist who works in their store.

While this is not explicitly mentioned in the episode, a possible motivation for Mateo not wanting to see a doctor is a fear that the doctor's visit could lead to deportation. This possibility complicates Mateo's choice to spend the fundraised money on a messenger bag instead of a doctor's visit. A real life impact of former President Trump's inhumane immigration policies is that undocumented immigrants fear going to the doctor could result in deportation. While this assertion is supported through only anecdotal evidence, hospitals have invested money in clarifying "the hospital is not an extension of law enforcement and that it will take care of people regardless of their immigration background" (Elejalde-Ruiz, 2018). Working-class undocumented immigrants simultaneously can be uninsured and fearful of going to the doctor because of their undocumented status.

In addition, Mateo's gay and Filipino identities could also contribute to his hesitancy to go to the doctor. Unfortunately, the healthcare industry is filled with people who believe homophobic and racist things about their patients. This intersection of medical racism and homophobia can be seen in the experiences of Black queer men. In a study centering the experiences of young, Black, queer men with health care providers, the participants shared experiences that included "lack of trust and passive-aggressive racism in health care settings, feeling reduced to their sexuality by doctors, [and] a feeling of being at a structural disadvantage" (Farrow, 2019). While in no way am I comparing anti-Black racism to the discrimination Mateo may fear, he does occupy a similar intersection of being a gay man of color. Depictions of organizational violence on television must be intersectional, as violence inflicted on workers is often due to intersectional marginalized identities. This episode narrative centered on Mateo's

sustained health challenges due to organizational violence illustrates how his intersectional marginalized identities impact the mundane aspects of his life, like getting an ear infection.

Conclusion

The totality of these storylines contributes to the theme that Mateo's undocumented immigrant and working-class identities place him in a unique position of intersectional precarity where he can be specifically harmed through Cloud 9's organizational violence. In each of the previously mentioned episodes spanning from seasons three to five, Mateo's identities as both an undocumented immigrant and working class intersect. Whether it is being detained by ICE because of his co-workers' unionization talks or being unable to accept a cash payout for a workplace injury, Cloud 9's pro-profit agenda places the character of Mateo at the intersections of structural violence where not only is his immediate health on the line, but also his safety, long-term health, and general well-being. Both organizations (Cloud 9, ICE) and individuals *in* organizations (Dan) can enact violence. This potential for violence is encouraged through policies that are powered by the mercurial hand of whiteness and heteronormativity. Nowhere is this potential clearer in *Superstore* than the impact of Cloud 9's violence against Mateo and his intersectional identities. In the following chapter, I will assert what literature my master's thesis contributes to in addition to its implications outside of academia.

V. CONCLUSION

A lot of Filipinos who are living in America know, either people from their own family or somebody through however degrees of separation, who's undocumented. It is something that's a very relatable experience for not only Filipinos, but for anybody in America. People in America underestimate the amount of undocumented immigrants that are present in the country [who] run and make this country work. – Actor Nico Santos on playing Mateo

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the departure of America Ferrera, the actress who plays Amy and was an executive producer from 2019 to 2020, *Superstore* ended its sixth season on March 25, 2021 (Del Rosario, 2021). This final season, based on my viewing, has been largely inconsequential for Mateo's status narrative, leaving Mateo's fate in the United States in a kind of limbo. That is not to say however, that Mateo's status narrative has been inconsequential. What first drew me to Mateo's character as a focus for my master's thesis was that his character presents a unique television narrative of an undocumented immigrant. But to merit a thesis sized project, my analysis needed to move beyond Mateo and his uniqueness. The importance of Mateo as a television character hinges on his intersecting marginalized identities and how his status narrative is constructed in relation to those identities. My research question asked, "How is Mateo's *Superstore* undocumented status narrative constructed in relationship to his intersectional gay, Filipino, undocumented immigrant, and working-class identities?" I answered this question through significant rhetorical analysis linking Mateo's status narrative, manifested through his lived experiences, with organizational violence and disrupting of stereotypes. Mateo's intersecting marginalized identities interact with his status narrative to illustrate how intersectional precarity can impact undocumented immigrants within the context of work.

In this final chapter, I draw conclusions about the significance of this master's

thesis and repercussions outside of academia. First, I will elucidate my theoretical contributions to queer of color intersectionality theorizing. Second, I will argue that my use of a rhetorical narrative criticism in conjunction with intersectionality theorizing broadens the methods used and provides a blueprint for examining television characters' intersecting identities. Third, I will examine how my research question and the analysis themes have implications for television and its audiences. Finally, I will suggest several future areas of studies and potential research projects that I believe could contribute to our understanding of intersectionality and fictionalized representations of work.

Theoretical Contributions

Drawing upon several diverse areas of the communication studies discipline, this master's thesis adds to those areas of literature and theorizing. The literature this master's thesis adds to includes intersectionality x immigrant queer perspectives, API queer x API queer, undocumented immigrant, working-class perspectives, organizational violence, difference at work, and media representations.

Intersectionality x immigrant queer perspectives. As this master's thesis builds on interdisciplinary research, it only felt right to return to intersectionality theorizing in my conclusion. Through following Mateo's status narrative, examining his intersecting marginalized identities, and analyzing the forms of intersecting oppression he faces, I appropriately added to Crenshaw's (1989) foremost theorizing. A reminder that Crenshaw's (1989) theory centers intersecting forms of *oppression*, not merely intersections of identities. Through both my analysis chapters, I illustrated how Mateo's status narrative interacted with his intersecting marginalized identities. Whether his status narrative was disrupting stereotypes of his gay and API identities or conveying how

Mateo experienced intersectional precarity and violence from Cloud 9, I illustrated and examined Mateo's tribulations with intersecting forms of oppression. Also, I was able to avoid an additive perspective of intersectionality, a common criticism of the theory (Bowleg, 2008). In each analysis chapter, I utilized narrative examples that brought attention to the intersections of Mateo's identities, intersections that Mateo experiences *simultaneously*. When Mateo's character is forced into a choice between protecting his safety as an undocumented immigrant and breaking up with his boyfriend, Jeff (Green et al., 2017), Mateo is simultaneously being impacted by his gay, working-class, and undocumented immigrant identities. Mateo's experiences are less "layered" oppression, but synchronic oppression, operating all at once.

Another common criticism of intersectionality theorizing I avoided was that the theory treats identities as static, denying their fluidity (Carastathis, 2016). Specifically, in chapter three, Mateo's identities were recognized as ever-changing. With the addition of the status narrative to the characterization of Mateo, he was able to evolve from his original stereotypical characterization. Even the actor who plays Mateo, Nico Santos, acknowledges the change Mateo underwent over the course of seasons one through five, "When we first started [Superstore, Mateo] was sort of just this bitchy employee, and it would have been really easy to sort of like keep him this two-dimensional character. But you know we've added so many layers to his story and then making him undocumented I think was a really brilliant move" (A Book Of, 2019).

Through portraying Mateo's identities as fluid and unstable, I was also able to examine their thick intersectionalities (Yep, 2010). The concept of thick intersectionalities (Yep, 2010) was a primary focus of my literature review and integral to

answering my research question. Analyzing Mateo's identities as fluid, unstable, and simultaneous, opens the opportunity to examine the "complex particularities of individuals' lives and identities associated with their race, class, gender, and sexuality" (Yep, 2010, p. 173). Informed by my chosen method, Foss's (1989) method of rhetorical narrative criticism, which will be addressed later in this conclusion chapter, allow for the ability to scrutinize Mateo's thick intersectionalities.

Lastly, it was my privilege to contribute to immigrant queer perspectives of intersectionality, especially building on the consequential work of Karma R. Chávez (2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2017). As is argued by Chávez (2017) and undocuqueer activists, immigration is a queer issue. I examine that intersection in the work of my master's thesis. I work to disrupt norms of citizenship, whiteness, and heteronormativity in my analysis of the narrative of a Filipino, undocumented immigrant, gay man (Chávez, 2013a). Notably, in chapter four I illustrate the organizational violence Mateo experiences as a result of his intersecting working-class and undocumented identities, an intersection Chávez (2012) examines in her work with Wisconsin immigrant workers. This master's thesis reinforces deeply important intersectionality theorizing, refusing to treat identities as static or additive, and adeptly answering the research question through examining Mateo's thick intersectionalities.

API queer x API queer, undocumented immigrant, working-class perspectives. In approaching Mateo's specific identities, this master's thesis adds to strong, pre-existing scholarship on the intersection of queer and API identities. Eguchi (2020) attends to intersecting identities as fluid and everchanging, arguing that queerness has an inherent relationship to power. My analysis also treats Mateo's intersecting

identities as fluid. I accomplish this in chapter three, which centers on how Mateo's status narrative complicates stereotypes of API immigrants and gay men. Mateo's intersecting identities are consistently being altered by his experiences and the events of his status narrative. Mateo's queerness (how he disrupts stereotypes and respectability politics) is also intertwined with power. As Mateo lacks power, he is placed in a situation where he must choose between continuing a relationship with a man he loves and keeping his undocumented status protected. As Mateo lacks power, he is in a position of intersectional precarity in his workplace, which chapter four investigated. Minimum wage work does not come with job security. Mateo's identity as an undocumented immigrant places him at a vulnerable intersection to experience organizational violence from Cloud 9. In addition to the organizational violence Mateo experiences, he also is victimized by an abusive supervisor (Dan) upon his release from detention.

Nakayama (1994) asserts that a coalitional framework must be used to disrupt white, cishet, masculinity and challenge normativities. My analysis of Mateo illustrates how his intersecting identities (Filipino, gay, undocumented immigrant, working-class) coalesce to challenge normative masculinity. First, Mateo is gay, disrupting heterosexual understandings of masculinity. He is also in two committed relationships over the course of the five seasons and is referenced to be dating in between the two. Mateo is affectionate with his partners in *Superstore*, countering the unfortunate commonality of gay characters on network television being nearly asexual. There are two depictions of Mateo kissing Jeff in *Superstore* (Ellickson et al., 2017; Kazlauskas et al., 2017) in addition to hand-holding and cheek kisses. Second, Mateo is Filipino, an ethnicity that is classified within the API race. Normative white masculinity dismisses API men as weak

due to racist assumptions (Eguchi, 2020). Mateo is unapologetically authentic and is unconcerned with proving himself to his cishet, white, male co-workers.

Queer of color intersectionality theorizing has benefited from an API perspective. Here I add to API queer intersectionality theorizing by looking at intersections of an undocumented immigrant as depicted in network television. Intersectionality has been used to examine queer television characters (Eguchi et al., 2018). However, this research has not examined how these intersectional marginalized identities impact queer people in the context of work. Though my text, *Superstore*, is a fictionalized depiction of work, it mirrors many realities that workers with multiple marginalized identities face, especially those at the intersection of being working-class and also an undocumented immigrant. Our work exerts control over our lives and consumes much of our time. Intersectional marginalized identities exist in our interpersonal relationships and are perhaps more noticeable in our workplaces. Intersectionality theorizing from a queer API perspective should continue to journey into various texts and methods, whether fictionalized depictions of work or worker's realities.

Lastly, this master's thesis adds to theory through Mateo's Filipino identity. As previously stated, API queer intersectionality theorizing is a vigorous area of study. But, the previously mentioned research by Eguchi (2020) and Nakayama (1994) focuses on Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese ethnicities within API. According to Filipino author Anthony Christian Ocampo in his book *Filipinos are the Latinos of Asia*, Filipinos straddle a line between the Latinx race and the Asian race (2016). This experience among the Filipino community is due to several factors (Spanish colonial history in the Philippines, the U.S.'s past immigration policies), but the result is Filipinos often being

overlooked in the big tent of API racial identity (Ocampo, 2016). My master's thesis contributes to a growing pool of study of Filipino identity, paying special attention to intersecting marginalized identities and the unique experience of being an undocumented Filipino immigrant. The contribution of my master's thesis is due in large part to the intersectionality theorizing I was inspired by. Literature on organizational violence allowed me to branch into implications for organizational communication scholarship as well.

Organizational violence. Chapter four was devoted to how Mateo's status narrative illustrates his position of intersectional precarity at work. His employment is precarious not only because of his working-class identity but also because of his undocumented status. These two identities place Mateo in a unique position to experience violence from Cloud 9. Harris (2013) takes an intersectional approach to organizational violence arguing that organizational violence can go unnoticed due to its whiteness. Organizational violence also has an embodied impact on those who experience it as Leslie (2020) alludes to in their #ToneUpOrgComm forum response; they specifically allude to the impact of organizational violence on queer bodies as they encounter hegemonic systems. My master's thesis builds on critical organizational communication scholarship. The organizational violence Mateo experiences from Dan is personified by whiteness and is obviously raced. The violence Mateo experiences, both from Cloud 9 and ICE, has an embodied impact on him. My addition to scholarship on organizational violence is an application of the literature to a rhetorical context, adding to an interdisciplinary perspective.

Difference at work. In a similar vein of literature from the organizational sub-discipline, informing the conception of my master's thesis was organizational communication theorizing around difference at work. I was struck by Ashcraft's (2011) assertion that the perpetual re-examination of the same white-collar workplaces and workers was centering the privileged. To paraphrase, Ashcraft (2011) argues that studying diversity exclusively among white-collar workers is an abject waste. Not only is this persistence a waste, but it is also sexist and racist, "emphasizing how diversity can be enhanced in professional settings, in the absence of common questions about other labor sites and forms, ironically perpetuates sexist and racist evaluations of work/place" (Ashcraft, 2011, p. 16). My master's thesis centered on a worker who makes minimum wage and works in an occupation few envy: retail. Certainly, the characterization of Mateo and his employer, Cloud 9, are examples of difference within fictionalized depictions of work. As will be detailed later in this chapter, I believe *Superstore* to be a rich text for communication studies scholars to analyze.

Again, I return to the idea of treating identities as fluid. Allen (2011) emphasizes that identities are ever-changing in her theorizing of difference in organizations, another theoretical contribution accomplished through this master's thesis by acknowledging Mateo's identities as unstable. My analysis of Mateo's status narrative and intersecting marginalized identities answers the criticism of McDonald (2015) that intersectionality theorizing has rarely moved beyond the realm of a feminist application.

Media representations. *Superstore* is a media representation of difference at work. As mentioned in chapter one, media representations of fictionalized work (primarily in the genre of workplace sitcoms) centers on workers who are cishet, able-

bodied, white, and middle class (see *Parks and Recreation*, *Brooklyn 99*, *30 Rock*, *2 Broke Girls*). Again, this master's thesis is not meant to be a genre criticism, but attention must be paid to the media context within which *Superstore* lies. My analysis challenges scholarship on workplace sitcoms that are devoid of considerations of workers or organizational violence (Bore, 2009; Jongste, 2017). As *The Office*, *30 Rock*, and *Parks and Recreation* center the experiences of middle-class, cishet, white, workers, these shows often neglect to depict working-class realities. To be frank, these shows, and analyses of them, are about how white middle-class people engage with their work and work challenges, erasing the experiences of those in "less enviable work/places where other bodies are historically concentrated" (Ashcraft, 2011, p. 16).

My master's thesis also contributes to an unexamined media portrayal of queer people at work. Dominant media depictions, specifically television depictions of queer people focus on their interpersonal lives (Dow, 2001; Eguchi et al., 2018; Reed, 2009; Spencer, 2020) and neglect the facet of their lives as workers. Surprise: Queer people work! As a result of our late stage capitalist system, we all have to work to sustain our lives. I find this facet of queer identity as a worker highly important as it presents an opportunity to disrupt capitalism and other normativities. Television depictions of queer life also tends to focus on those who are *white* and *middle class* (i.e., *Ellen*, *Will and Grace*, *The L Word*). My analysis of Mateo's status narrative, in conjunction with his intersecting Filipino, undocumented immigrant, working-class, and gay identities challenges these portrayals of queer life devoid of work or intersectional precarity within the workplace.

A central contribution of this master's thesis lies in its overlapping theoretical

engagements. I drew inspiration from a variety of fields within communication studies (intercultural, critical, organizational, rhetorical). These fields are rarely in conversation with one another on an individual basis, less so all at once. My master's thesis functions as a bridge between the fields of intercultural, critical, organizational, and rhetorical studies. In a discipline that is primarily defined by setting boundaries, dividing one area of study from another, and discounting those who attempt to cross over, my intersectional analysis weaves together perspectives that complement each other nicely.

Methodological Contributions

Rhetorical criticism has a history of upholding oppressive systems and dismissing the rhetoric of those on the margins. Through my use of a rhetorical narrative criticism, I aim to take steps toward correcting this problematic history. I draw inspirations from Flores (2018) who argues for an obstinate intersectionality and Chávez (2015) who rejects the ideal of citizenship within rhetorical criticism as oppressive and harmful. Chávez (2015) rejects citizenship's role in rhetorical criticism as it is inherently exclusive of the rhetoric of those who the idea of citizenship has harmed. Both these lenses were instrumental to my master's thesis. I worked to de-center whiteness in my master's thesis and focused on Mateo's experiences and identities. Additionally, to analyze Mateo's status narrative and intersecting marginalized identities through a form of rhetorical criticism that propped up citizenship would be highly disrespectful. My use of these two non-normative approaches to rhetorical criticism provides an option for future rhetorical critics.

My master's thesis narrative criticism rooted in Foss (1989) provides a modern, intersectional, blueprint for future use. While Foss's (1989) method for rhetorical

narrative criticism was thorough and fit what I needed for this master's thesis, her method was devoid of intersections. Utilizing Foss's (1989) method in a master's thesis that centers intersectional marginalized identities assists the method in moving beyond a purely descriptive evaluation of a narrative. Specifically, my thesis illustrates that Foss's (1989) rhetorical narrative criticism can be utilized to examine media texts while still remaining within the discipline of rhetorical criticism. Through the use of Foss's (1989) perspective on narrative criticism (events, setting, theme, and characters), a comprehensive, thorough analysis of media narratives can be accomplished.

An integral contribution of my master's thesis is the rhetorical perspective of a media text. Through utilizing a rhetorical narrative criticism, I was able to rhetorically analyze Mateo's status narrative across five seasons of *Superstore*. This examination allowed me to analyze Mateo's thick intersectionalities and connect my analysis to experiences of undocumented/undocuqueer immigrants. At the beginning of each chapter, I included an epigraph from the perspective of an undocumented/undocuqueer immigrant. I made this choice for my thesis because I wanted to center the voices of the people, the workers, who Mateo's characterization represents. Each epigraph connected to the theme, or a primary argument of the chapter. Disrupting respectability politics, experiencing organizational violence, or recounting what it is like to play a character who represents people they love, these epigraphs link my analysis of a fictionalized depiction of a worker to the lived experiences of undocumented/undocuqueer workers. Mateo's characterization on *Superstore* also has rhetorical implications outside of the ivory tower of academia, as chapters three and four revealed and to where I now turn.

Mateo Introduces Intersectional Oppression to *Superstore* Audiences

This thesis argues, then, that Mateo's status narrative and how his intersectional Filipino, gay, undocumented immigrant, and working-class identities are constructed have implications for fictionalized representations of work. In the first season of *Superstore*, Mateo reifies common stereotypes of API immigrants and gay men. He is shallow, competitive, and rude. While these character traits do not change immediately when Mateo's status narrative is introduced, the status narrative does assist in disrupting the previously reified stereotypes. Yes, Mateo is competitive and hard-working; his status narrative, undocumented immigrant and working-class identities provide a reasoning behind this behavior. I suggest that the writers of *Superstore* purposely reinforced stereotypes about gay men and API immigrants; "gay best friends" and "sassy gays" are draws for audiences and provide comic relief. Just as the audience was drawn in with Mateo's flamboyance, the writers dropped a heavy and highly political narrative event on their character. Mateo's status narrative stimulates questioning of a previous understanding of his character: He is no longer *just* the comedic relief, but a driving force of the show and its depictions of working-class realities.

Audiences may even question their biased beliefs about API and undocumented immigrants. As illustrated by Mateo, API immigrants exist outside of the silent, foreign box created for them. Undocumented immigrants do not have to be Harvard graduates or former heart surgeons to be deserving of empathy and humane treatment. Mateo disrupts common ideals of the "good immigrant." Undocuqueer activists themselves aim to disrupt these ideals, warning fellow immigrants to be wary of "rags to riches" immigrant stories propped up by the media, as these stories reinforce hegemonic expectations for

immigrants and “contribute to the erasure of millions of people” (A, 2017). Mateo also disrupts the model minority myth of API immigrants as he is not what would be traditionally understood as a high-achieving, educated, contributing member of society. He does not have the economic power that the model minority myth perpetuates. These disruptions have significant potential impacts for *Superstore* audiences.

As Yogerst stated in his interview with Feder, “once you give one highly politically charged storyline to a character that’s already gained trust or sympathy,” audiences are left to reckon with the repercussions of the story (2019). Audiences are left to ponder this political storyline through a new frame, one that personalizes the story. An ICE raid, detention, and deportation are no longer hypothetical situations because these events *happened to Mateo* and audiences were witnesses to them. Through Mateo’s status narrative, *Superstore* audiences are introduced to what intersectional oppression can look like. Other workers at store 1217 similarly are in complex situations because of their working-class statuses and other identities, but Mateo is in an especially precarious situation due to his undocumented status. Each episode that focuses on Mateo’s status narrative heightens audience’s stress as they wonder if this episode will be when Mateo is exposed, when he is taken away. Additionally, with the increased media attention on anti-Asian racism and violence (Lang, 2021; Nam, 2021), it is increasingly necessary that television characterizations of API immigrants are nuanced and responsible. The COVID-19 pandemic fueled racist language and phrases like “The Kung Flu” and “China Virus,” emboldening white supremacist, misogynist attacks like the tragedy in Atlanta Georgia (Nam, 2021). As was discussed in chapter one, media representations of marginalized groups have the potential to impact how they are treated by the larger public

and can expand worldviews (Lünenborg & Fürsich, 2014; Reed, 2009). In no way will television characterizations of API immigrants single-handedly dismantle white supremacy. However, responsible representations of API immigrants can influence white, cis het, citizen, middle-class audiences and do educational work.

Mateo's status narrative not only introduces audiences to intersectional oppression but also portrays the potential for violence organizations possess. Again, Mateo's co-workers at store 1217 are also mistreated by Cloud 9, but Mateo is in an especially precarious position to experience organizational violence due to his intersecting working-class and undocumented immigrant identities. The character of Mateo is constantly at risk of his undocumented status being exposed, losing his job, and having to pay for the very expensive process of having an immigration hearing. The audience feels this anxiety as Mateo struggles to get a job after being released on bond and having to accept abusive behavior from Dan because finding a new source of income would be too difficult (Gube et al., 2019).

Importantly, *Superstore* does not take a typical workplace sitcom approach to portraying a corporate organization. Supervising organizations in other workplace sitcoms are at times portrayed as ignorant to their employee's needs, but rarely is that ignorance conveyed to audiences as malicious. *Superstore* audiences view Cloud 9 corporate executives illegally call for an ICE raid of store 1217, explicitly admitting that this extreme action is to intimidate workers. *Superstore* also conveys how policies can empower individuals within those organizations to enact violence against others, as Dan exploits Mateo as his unpaid gay best friend. This portrayal of organizational violence concurs with Harris (2013) that *both* organizations and individuals *in* organizations can

utilize policies and practices to inflict violence on others. Typically light, *Superstore* displays the disturbing reality of many working-class, undocumented immigrants with the characterization of Mateo and Dan's relationship. While Mateo's abusive situation with Dan is depicted as humorous, playing up Dan's cluelessness, the depiction frames organizational violence as something that can occur regardless of intention. The executives at Cloud 9 intended to be threatening, as they admit to Jeff that they are asking for an ICE raid "because it's extreme" (Spitzer et al., 2019). Dan, on the other hand, appears to just be a desperate, sad man, forcing Mateo to be some mix of a servant and a friend. Regardless of intention, both Dan and Cloud 9 inflict violence on Mateo, and audiences see the embodied impact on Mateo.

Mateo also experiences violence from ICE as an organization. *Superstore* utilized Mateo's status narrative to set a standard for how an ICE raid and ICE agents are depicted on television. Other forms of law enforcement have a storied past of being portrayed in the media, especially television, as dedicated, compassionate, and competent people whose aim is to protect their community (Chopra-Grant, 2007; Manis, 2009). Use of force or brutality are represented as necessary actions for the safety of victims and/or the safety of the country. ICE, however, is a newer organization under the Department of Homeland Security, and as a result does not have an established formula for how they are propped up through the media. Drawing on the cultural fear of ICE, *Superstore* depicts an anxiety-inducing raid that causes all the store 1217 workers to be fearful and protective of Mateo. The depiction enters a growing trend of television positioning ICE as the ultimate villains. This positioning can impact how *Superstore* audiences view ICE the organization and ICE agents individually. Audiences may question, how is ICE keeping

citizens safe if they are traumatizing and detaining people like Mateo, people who they have grown to like and trust.

In addition to setting a standard for how ICE is rendered on television, Mateo's status narrative illustrates the physical impacts of organizational violence. Mateo is incredibly anxious after being released on bond, a shift in his character. He is concerned and upset the majority of his time on screen, whether it is about the "solids" Dan is forcing him to do (Kyle et al., 2020), documenting charitable acts for his immigration hearing (Adesokan et al., 2019), or missing out on a co-worker's wedding festivities because he must charge his ankle monitor (Ellickson et al., 2020). This physical impact of violence is most clearly seen during Mateo and Cheyenne's conversation while he is detained at the ICE detention center. The two cry as Mateo admits how fearful he is, how dreadful the conditions are, and the abuse he is experiencing at the hand of the guards. Audiences view the impact organizational violence (from both *Cloud 9* and ICE) has on a typically gregarious character. The characterization of Mateo on *Superstore* illustrates the multi-faceted lives of undocumented/undocuqueer immigrants. To borrow a phrase from Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, the stories of undocumented/undocuqueer immigrants are so much more than one-dimensional "rueful tale[s]." Mateo conveys the thick intersectionalities that inform his narrative, and the lives of undocumented/undocuqueer immigrants. Unlike other fictionalized depictions of work on television, Mateo's status narrative challenges audiences, circumvents their expectations, and exposes them to the realities of undocumented workers.

Future Studies

As this is a master's thesis, there were several perspectives, theories, and analyses that I wanted to conduct, however, due to the limit of this format was unable to.

Ultimately, I argue that intersectionality theorizing should continue to be utilized in studies of television characters. The theory could be utilized to examine how characters' intersecting marginalized identities do or do not impact their experiences. I especially feel that intersectionality theory employed in conjunction with rhetorical narrative criticism would counter mainstream rhetoric's tendency to sideline marginal voices, choosing instead to amplify voices of white, cishet men. As argued by Chávez (2015) and Flores (2018), rhetoric tends to center the voices of the most privileged. Utilizing intersectionality with a rhetorical narrative criticism would take steps toward correcting that trend.

Intersectionality theory should continue to be used to analyze the intersecting marginalized identities of characters on television. For my analysis I needed to provisionally accept identity categories, so it was necessary to employ an intercategorical approach to intersectionality (McCall, 2005). It would also be interesting to engage in an anticategorical intersectional analysis. I believe anticategorical intersectionality research to be highly important as it disrupts normativities of checking off identity boxes. It also assists in moving beyond an additive perspective of identity, resulting in rich understandings of differences. As chapter one detailed, an anticategorical perspective of intersectionality does not attribute people's experiences solely to their marginalized identities and "can thus help expose between-group and within-group differences and similarities for which intercategorical and intracategorical studies of difference cannot

account” (McDonald, 2015, p. 317). An anticategorical analysis of television shows that portray multiple characters from similar identity groups is a valuable area of future research. Anticategorical intersectionality theorizing is often implemented jointly with queer theory (McDonald, 2015). Queer theory is an additional theory that I believe should be utilized in future narrative criticisms of television. A fascinating application of queer theory to television could be to shows that queer genre expectations or established storylines.

Specifically, I believe that *Superstore* as a text provides multiple possibilities for future studies. I believe that a possible research study of *Superstore* could examine how the show counters “happy talk” in its portrayals of workers with marginalized identities. Happy talk is used mostly in conjunction with discussions around diversity and inclusion. Diversity is often communicated as optimistic and a strength; however this happy talk, which is defined by Hartmann (2012) as “upbeat, yet superficial and conflicted,” can prevent difficult conversations from being had about oppression. Television often engages in happy talk about people with marginalized identities, portraying people with disabilities as “noble and brave” or immigrants as “kind and hardworking.” *Superstore*, however, does not engage in happy talk about its large cast of characters, many of which have at least one if not multiple marginalized identities. One example is Mateo, but another is Garrett, a Black, cishet, man who uses a wheelchair. Garrett is sarcastic and openly admits to doing the bare minimum at his job (Ledgin et al., 2016). Future researchers should examine *Superstore*’s portrayal of workers with intersecting marginalized identities and compare that portrayal to other television shows that engage in happy talk.

Also, I find that *Superstore* presents an opportunity for organizational rhetoricians to study the rhetoric of Cloud 9. An ongoing joke in *Superstore* is that whenever an employee misbehaves and/or causes a conflict, the entire staff is forced to watch a corporate training video. There seems to be a training video for most every situation including sexual harassment, racism in the workplace, union organizing, etc. (see Miller & Eger's analysis, 2019). In addition, Cloud 9 also sends a corporate representative to store 1217 to discourage the workers from forming a union. The union plotline spans two seasons and ends with a near victory for Cloud 9 floor workers. This is yet another opportunity *Superstore* offers communication studies scholars for research. The videos, rhetoric, and additional communication from Cloud 9 could be analyzed by an organizational rhetorician to ascertain whether the organization's communication was toxic (for more about toxic communication and organizations, see Lutgen-Sandvick & McDermott, 2008).

In addition to *Superstore*'s potential as a text for communication studies scholars, there are theories from my master's thesis that should be employed in other contexts. Yep's (2010) theorizing about thick intersectionalities could be utilized to analyze other media characterizations of queer people. As mentioned previously in this chapter, my thesis adds to literature on media characterizations of queer people. I find that my intersectional, rhetorical narrative criticism technique could be applied to narratives of other queer characters in the media. The analysis would also need to center that character's experience as a worker. Rhetorical narrative criticism from the perspective of Foss (1989) would provide a layered analysis to expose the thick intersectionalities of the queer worker.

Finally, as ICE's actions and deportations continue into the Biden administration (Borger, 2021), media representations of ICE as an organization should continue to be analyzed by communication studies scholars. Even with its relatively young history in the United States, ICE's impact on the public consciousness has been potent. This analysis need not be exclusively from a rhetorical or media representation perspective.

Understanding the impact of an organization created to inflict violence on immigrants (deportation, detention, intimidation) becomes increasingly important if communication scholars wish to continue claiming to be dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Ultimately, my rhetorical narrative criticism reveals Mateo's status narrative is consequential for the construction of his intersecting identities. Contributing to an API queer theorizing of thick intersectionalities and providing a future blueprint for the intersectional application of Foss's (1989) rhetorical narrative criticism, my master's thesis engaged with rhetorical criticism on terms that respected the experiences of Mateo's character. Mateo's status narrative challenged previously reified stereotypes about gay men and API immigrants (theme), reinforced by the events, character, and setting of *Superstore* season one. Through depicting Mateo's intersectional precarity as a worker at Cloud 9, the status narrative highlights Mateo's working-class and undocumented immigrant identities while also illustrating the organizational violence he endures. Mateo's status narrative forces *Superstore* audiences to reckon with their biases and preconceived notions about what an undocumented immigrant behaves and looks like. His intersectional precarity illustrates to *Superstore* audiences the realities faced by many undocumented workers and the violence they experience at the hand of organizations. Mateo's future in the United States is left uncertain at the conclusion of

season five (of which filming was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic), and an hour long series finale scheduled to air on March 25, 2021, did not provide a solid answer to the question of Mateo's removal (Lawler, 2021). Cloud 9 store 1217 becomes a fulfillment center and most of the main cast lose their jobs; Mateo however, gains employment at a hardware store Glenn opens after store 1217 closes (Lawler, 2021). Regardless, Mateo's status narrative is ground-breaking for television depictions of undocumented immigrants. His impact will be felt any time a new viewer stumbles across *Superstore* and is introduced to Mateo Fernando Aquino Liwanag.

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