



Undocuqueer Latinx: Counterstorytelling Narratives During and Post-High School

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes the qualitative case of an undocuqueer Latinx. Drawing on critical race theory (CRT), Latino/Latina critical race (LatCrit), and queer people of color (QPOC) critique, the author explains how issues of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status shape the experiences of Juan, a high school student at the time the study was undertaken. Additionally, this chapter

The author uses the words gay and queer of color interchangeably. He understands that both words possess historical and political meanings. Gay is more associated to White individuals while queers of color focuses mainly on the experiences of Blacks, Latinx, Indigenous Peoples, and Asians in this country. Additionally, the author uses the term Latinx as a non-conforming male-female binary.

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discusses how the participant develops his own community cultural wealth (CCW) to challenge family and school expectations. Finally, it encourages teachers, counselors, and school administrators to advocate for undocumented and LGBTQ Latinx students to advance a social justice in education agenda.

Keyword

Homophobia

I understood that we had to talk about sexuality because the silences were killing us by contributing to our own oppression; I came to see that we did not have to live in the shadows plagued by shame. The ramifications of homophobia were evident in my family, in my community and in myself. (Pérez, 2014, p. 148)

Introduction

It was during my role as a community leader (author) when I first heard about Juan. His friend, Rosa (a pseudonym), called him for hanging out with some mischievous teenagers. As a Latinx high school teacher and community, it was obvious that many families and their children knew about me. Days later, I learned that Juan's older brother and sister were my students. Since Juan came to this country at an early age, he learned to speak the English language fluently before he reached high school. From early on, I started seeing Juan volunteering at the local library where Rosa had worked. Years later, Juan became a freshman at the same high school where I had work worked.

Again, I saw Juan many times at the school library, supporting the media specialists and other students. Later, I learned that he also liked computers. When I befriended Juan, he agreed to become one of the participants in my doctoral dissertation project on Latino boys navigating systems of oppression to remain in school. Through those interviews, I witnessed that Juan was not living with his biological parents but with Rosa and her friend Sarah (pseudonym), a local White woman. During the first interview, I also learned that Juan had tried to commit suicide while taking some painkillers that took him to the emergency room. Juan shared with me how his mother kicked him out of the house while he was still in middle school and how it is he came to live with Rosa and Sarah. Although my research at that time was to study how Latino boys resisted multiple forms of oppression while in high school, Juan never disclosed his sexual orientation.

In this chapter, I present findings from a qualitative case study about Juan, an undocuqueer Latinx whose counterstorytelling narratives can illuminate educators' understanding and inform/reform their pedagogies with this overlooked student population. I employ CRT, LatCrit, and QOC critique as theoretical framework to unpack the narratives to undocuqueer Latinx immigrant youth. This theoretical framework allows me to consider how these stigmatized identities intersect and create greater vulnerability for young undocuqueer Latinx immigrant youth. Finally, I offer a roadmap for educators, counselors, and school administrators to address the

specific needs of this overlooked student population and ways to do so with fierce love and care.

It is my intention that Juan's counternarratives as a undocuqueer Latinx will allow for better understanding of how he learned to face homophobia from his own family and friends. He also shared how his immigration status prevented him to do things that most teenage non-undocumented students do during and after high school. Finally, this chapter explains how Juan developed his own community cultural wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2006a, 2006b) to resist and pursue higher education.

Undocuqueer Latinx in Education: An Overview

Although there is a more robust literature on Latinx students' experiences in education, few scholars have explored the experiences of undocumented and queer Latinx students in K-12 and post-high school. Hurtado and Sinha (2016) claim that, "queer male sexuality has not been fully incorporated as a topic of research and presents a new area of expansion" (p. 178). They argue that more research needs to address how "queer Latino males struggle toward social justice throughout interlocking layers of oppression and navigate educational spaces" (p. 39). Brockenbrough (2015) claims that even though queer students of color have to deal with multiple challenges that prevent their full participation in school, this might also lead school administrators, teachers, and other staff to "miss opportunities to capitalize on, the agency that these students possess to negotiate the barriers to their academic success" (p. 28).

Recently, Latinx queer scholars and other interested queer people of color (QPOC) have explored the experiences of queer Latinx youth and undocumented queer men in higher education (Brockenbrough, 2015; Cisneros, 2017; Cisneros & Bracho, 2017; Cruz, 2008, 2013; Duran & Pérez, 2017; Fernández, 2018; Ocampo, 2012; Sandoval, 2019). Cruz' (2008) ethnographic study suggests that schools need to create safe spaces where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) migrant students feel safe in order to share their sexual identities. She claims that teachers who work with LGBTQ immigrant students need to learn about *ethnographic silence* to understand the experiences of homeless, LGBTQ, or undocumented youth. Ocampo (2012) explores the experiences of US-born Latino gay men. He analyzes how Latino gay men's experiences with issues of gender performance and race shape their identities within the dominant (White) gay spaces and their families. He concludes that "US-born gay Latino men negotiate the value systems of mainstream US society, their immigrant family and the mainstream (predominantly White) gay community when "doing masculinity" (p. 468). Ocampo notes that Latino gay men possess a stronger sense of ethnic identity than sexual identity as a result of being gendered and racialized by the larger gay community. That is, they self-identify as Latino males rather than Latino gay men. To upend this, Brockenbrough (2015), for example, urges for the introduction of a queer of color critique to critically analyze "agentive practices on queer students of color" (p. 22). He suggests that scholars need to analyze how queer students of color develop

their own agency in order to survive and to navigate multiple layers of oppression while in school. Additionally, he highlights the importance of documenting the experiences of other queers of color beyond Black queer males.

Similarly, Cisneros' (2018) study on undocuqueer immigrants' narratives explores how issues of gender, sexuality, and immigration status push undocumented immigrants to become less visible. The undocuqueer immigrants developed resilience while challenging heteronormativity, homonormative, and DREAMer discourses. Cisneros highlights how the immigrants' intersecting identities created greater criticality in challenging the social positionings that were being imposed upon them; he writes, "Undocuqueer challenged the notion of 'illegality' and the criminalization of their queer and trans bodies. Undocu- was a reminder of the how gender and sexuality are as significant as other systems of oppression within immigration politics" (p. 15).

Like Cisneros (2017), Duran and Pérez (2017) found how Latino queer men in higher education built resilience through the development of their own familial capital (Yosso, 2006a) by connecting to classmates, faculty, and administrators. As did Brockenbrough (2015), Duran and Pérez (2017) also urge scholars to analyze how "QPOC spaces can serve for queer Latino men" (p. 1152). They believe that more research needs to be done to explore how Latino undergraduate men having multiple "marginalized identities" become resilient. In order to document how queer Latinx immigrants become resilient, Cisneros and Bracho (2017) analyzed the experiences of 31 undocuqueer immigrants with issues of gender, sexuality, and immigration status. In their study, the authors discussed how the participants challenged legal and social systems of oppression and developed resilience to come "out of the closet and out of the shadows." They concluded that:

Undocumented immigrants are relegated to the margins of society and form part of a permanent underclass without legal protections or often the opportunity to become incorporated. The findings of our study reveal the ways the closet resembles the shadows in that both provide protection from the outside world, yet neither are considered suitable places for sustaining life. Such discordance is further complicated at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and immigration status, as undocuqueer immigrants must navigate the simultaneous of the closet and the shadows. (p. 14)

Although some QOCP and other interested scholars (Wimberly, 2015) have done some research about undocuqueer Latinx students, there is still a need to document and theorize multiple stories of hardships and resistance among undocuqueer Latinx individuals.

Method

Using critical race theory (CRT), Latina/Latino critical race (LatCrit), and QPOC critique as part of this research, this book chapter uses counterstorytelling narratives to echo the experiences of the participant in this qualitative case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In education, CRT analyzes how issues of race, gender, and class

intersect while shaping the experiences of students of color. It also challenges dominant ideologies such as “objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009 p. 133) while unpacking white privilege and dominant deficit-thinking models toward Communities of Color. Dixson and Rousseau (2006) claim:

CRT scholars believe and utilize personal narratives and other stories as valid forms of “evidence” and thereby challenge a “numbers only” approach to documenting inequity or discrimination, which tends to certify discrimination from a quantitative rather than a qualitative perspective. (p. 35)

Emerging from CRT studies, LatCrit explores the racialized systems of oppression based on phenotype, accent, surname, immigration status, sexuality, culture, and language in Latina/Latino and Chicana/Chicano individuals within the United States and abroad (Yosso, 2006a). In education, LatCrit examines how race and racism impact the educational experiences of Latinas/Latinos. It theorizes how racism and classism intersect other forms of subordination. Like CRT, LatCrit theory has a social justice agenda and is transdisciplinary (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Both CRT and LatCrit challenge dominant discourses about race, gender, and class as how school and government policies continue marginalizing Communities of Color. As this study is analyzing the counterstorytelling narratives of a self-identified queer Latino male, the chapter also uses QPOC epistemologies as part of its methodology, specifically, *Jotería* studies. *Jotería* studies are “aligned with feminist/muxerista pedagogy and praxis. It uses the terms *Jota* and *Joto* both derogatory terms for lesbian and gay in Mexico, which have been reappropriated to reclaim an ‘identity/consciousness of empowerment’” (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014, p. 174).

Additionally, *Jotería* studies how homophobia, heteronormativity, racism, patriarchy, xenophobia, gender discrimination, classism, colonization, citizenism, and other forms of oppression shape the personal experiences of self-identified queer Latinx and/or Chicax individuals within the United States and abroad. Alvarez (2014) claims that *Jotería* studies also pay close attention not only to homophobia but also to “transphobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, ableism, and other forms of institutional and discursive violence. . .by connecting the global, the local, and the individual” (p. 218). *Jotería* as a methodology “goes beyond resistance, as it is more about asserting, insisting, and creating from a multiplicity of spaces and modalities” (Bañales, 2014, p. 161). As a self-identified queer of color and scholar, *Jotería* studies allow me to unpack Juan’s counterstorytelling narratives of oppression and resistance from a *familia* and culturally relevant lens. It also claims for social justice for other queers of color, especially *undocuqueers*.

Yosso (2006a) posits that “counter-storytelling challenges majoritarian stories that omit and distort the histories and realities of oppressed communities” (p. 10). The narrative that I analyze here comes from my online interviews with Juan, a Latinx undocumented male queer, living in the southeastern United States. As I stated previously, Juan and I met while he was still in middle school through Rosa. When Juan reached high school, I was still a teacher in the same

building. I used to observe Juan in the school media center and also volunteering at the local library, which I used to visit frequently. Later, I learned that Juan's older siblings were my students. While at the high school, Juan and I became acquaintances. By that time, I already knew that Juan was not living with his biological parents but with two women. During the interviews, I connected with Juan through his mannerism; however, I did not address questions related to his sexuality since it was not the main target of my study. As part of my reciprocity, I decided to befriend Juan on social media. I kept an eye on his well-being and education. I knew when he finished high school and started college as an undocumented student. I also learned about his trips to California to visit his friend Rosa, who decided to join her female partner back home. When I finally witnessed Juan's coming out through his social media account, I asked him if he was willing to be a participant in my study and he willingly accepted my invitation.

I interviewed Juan three times, each time for 1–2 h over the course of a summer. I usually started with very informal questions about his life after college and his friend Rosa. I also wanted to know if he was still living with Sarah, Rosa's friend, and his answer was yes. At the beginning of the first interview, I told Juan the purpose of my project and how relevant it was for other queer Latinx students to know about his life. The questions were unstructured and informal. During the second interview, I followed up on issues and questions raised in the first meeting. I asked him about his experiences while in high school with issues of gender and sexuality. Additionally, I asked him about his experiences while in college as undocumented.

All of the interviews with Juan were very insightful and useful since he raised eye-opening issues about his educational experience that I never thought about as a former high school teacher and now a scholar. For this qualitative case study, I developed a holistic analysis of the case themes, identifying different issues within each theme (Crewell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2006). As an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995; Glesne, 2006), this study sought to analyze how Juan's counterstorytelling narratives during and post-high school graduation intersect multiple layers of oppression while he developed his own community cultural wealth. Solórzano and Yosso (2009) claim:

The majoritarian story tells us that darker skin and poverty correlate with bad neighborhoods and bad schools. It informs us that limited or Spanish-accented English and Spanish surnames equal bad schools and poor academic performance. It also reminds us that people who may not have the legal documents to “belong” in the United States may be identified by their skin color, hair texture, eye shape, accent and/or surname. (p. 136)

Using counterstorytelling as a form of methodology in this case study allowed me to document, analyze, and challenge dominant stories of racial privilege.

A Queer of Color

Family

Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (when not brutalized into insensitivity). (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 60)

When I first met Juan, he was already living with Rosa and Sarah. However, during his sophomore year, Rosa moved back to California, and he stayed with Sarah and her children. During the first interview (Ríos Vega, 2015), Juan shared with me how he tried to kill himself after he came back from visiting Rosa in California:

I was depressed because you know my mom did kick me out and (Rosa) and (Sarah) took care of me. And I barely talked to my mom because of the situation and I was staying in (state) for the summer and I wasn't doing anything and seeing (Rosa) in California doing fun things when I was just here, I kinda made me depressed. And I was suicidal every now and then. Like I never did anything, but I took the pills, like I was over it. I wanted it to be done.

It is very important to understand that nobody in school realized what Juan was going through. Instead, the media specialist, who happened to be my former co-worker, mentioned to me that Juan had done something “silly,” but he never got any type of counseling at school. It was evident that the media specialists, two White women, were using their dominant (White) biases and prejudices to understand Juan's situation. Based on my last interview, he shared with me that the reason why he tried to kill himself was because he felt very depressed since his mother had kicked him out of the house. However, what I discovered was how he changed his story. In my first book (Ríos Vega, 2015), he talked about having problems with his older brother and how his mother kicked him out of the house because of this incident. Then, as part of this study, he talked about advocating for his older brother:

Because we were going through an issue with my older brother, Ramiro. We were going through an issue with him and I standing up to my older brother and she didn't like that. And she just told me to go and not to come back.

When I asked him if he was kicked out of the house for being gay, he denied it; however, later on during the interview, I asked him about Hispanic/Latino people being homophobic, and his first reaction was to talk about his mom's attitude toward his sexuality:

She (his mom) doesn't even. . .like if I mention something about it (being gay). She doesn't want to hear it. She brushes me off right away. Like just growing up. I guess she assumed I was at one point. I think she did and she doesn't want to talk about it. Like if I try to talk about something, she walks away. And then she comes back after I forgot what I was talking about. Like trying to avoid the topic. . .and I don't know what it's about the Latino and Hispanic community that had that.

It is important to highlight how Juan tried to find acceptance from his mom and how he internalized homophobia by his own kind, especially his mom. Juan mentioned how his mom forgave his brother after he got deported for breaking the law in this country. He accepted his brother's fault as normal; however, she could not accept his sexual orientation. Due to a lack of education and religious ideologies, it is common to see poor and uneducated Latinx families accept the fact that their LGBTQ children abandon their houses in order to live a less oppressed and hostile environment from their own communities, especially *el que dirán* (what others will say), which might be considered as double standards in Latin American cultures.

Like you know for the most part, I just want to be accepted. You know, our parents carried us. Our moms carried us in their wombs for nine months. You figure, no matter what happens, you know, you will be part of your kids' lives; regardless if you are accepted or not. All they want is to feel accepted. You don't have to agree with it. They just want to know that you still love them no matter what is going on.

Duran and Pérez (2017) argue that “queer Latino men are often marginalized within their own community because of machismo” (p. 1151). Other scholars refer to this type of discrimination as internalized homophobia. During this interview, Juan also shared with me about his sister being lesbian and how his parents deny accepting her sexual orientation as well. Another salient point during Juan's interview is how he becomes resilient when his own community is homophobic. It was always impressive to witness how he developed his own mechanism to counteract people's negative thoughts about him for being gay. There were times when I felt he did not want to talk about it. It was like talking about it brought him painful memories.

All they (Hispanic people) want to do is just to bring people down. They don't know what I'm capable of. They don't know the issues that I have to deal with. They don't know anything. They just want to hurt. And whatever I do is going to prove them wrong because they are not gonna bring me down. They gonna do it but it's not gonna work. I have nothing but optimism. I have a different perspective than anybody else. After all the griefs and sadness and all of the issues that have happened in my life, things don't face me anymore.

Anzaldúa's (2007) *la facultad*, which is “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface,” allowed Juan to analyze society from a different lens (p. 60). Anzaldúa claimed that those who have been oppressed the most have the strongest *facultad*, including LGBTQ individuals. Juan's lived experiences have allowed him to challenge society and become resilient. He developed a positive attitude toward life hurdles to prove others wrong.

High School

As a former high school teacher, I witnessed how LGBTQ are victims of bullying and discrimination. I still recall when an African American male teenager introduced

himself to his new class after relocating from New York. When he announced that he used to be the president of an LGBTQ group, I overheard homophobic slurs about him. Espelage (2015) argues that “sexual minority youth have been found to be at greater risk for bullying, harassment, and peer victimization than their heterosexual counterparts” (p. 106). Similarly, I noticed that another high school had posters advocating for inclusiveness and tolerance; however, QPOC were usually targeted more than White gay boys. Juan’s comments about being bullied reaffirmed my critical comments about LGBTQ students being bullied and oppressed at schools without getting any type of support from teachers and administrators. He said:

It was a little different because of people of . . . how it was . . . at one point, I was bullied. I forgot what year it was, but I was bullied by other people because I was gay. That took a toll on me because is like you can’t do what you want to do when you are being bullied and . . . I went to the principal and they really didn’t do anything, and I told them that if they didn’t do anything, I was and then they didn’t do anything and then they never stopped. I had a couple of problems with the school because of that.

It is important to highlight how Juan agrees that some students who happened to be bullied prefer to internalize being discriminated due to being threatened by others or due to a lack of support from school administrators or teachers. Wimberly, Wilkinson, and Pearson (2015) posit that, “inappropriate and abusive behavior from students can be exacerbated by teachers, counselors, and other educators who have negative feelings or prejudice toward LGBTQ students” (p. 126).

It was during lunch time and I kinda got mad about it because all school policies are no bullying and bla, bla, and there is bullying, they deal with it. Well, at that point and time, they didn’t deal with it. Usually, when people are bullied, they don’t want to tell anybody because of the situation, but it did it because of the situation that wasn’t handled.

Juan was usually very opinionated at school, especially when things were not fair. He learned how to advocate for himself. He usually avoided being around his own Latinx community, especially teenage boys, who usually bullied him for being openly gay:

Boys were looking at me and making fun of me because I was always hanging out with girls. Because of them knew me from personal experience that I was, because they have friends of my friends and they told them that I was and some of them agreed and some of them disagreed with it. Like some people were okay with it and some people were not okay with it.

Some of Juan’s friends revealed his sexual orientation to other students to gain acceptance within their own groups. Juan always tried to stand out as a smart Latino student. It cost him to move away from his own kind. Instead, he preferred to socialize with girls, usually White, due to his sexual orientation since he felt more accepted. It also cost him to experience double discrimination. First, for being

Latino, he had to prove mainstream society that he was smart and capable regardless of his gender and ethnicity. Second, he was marginalized and oppressed by his own kind from being openly gay.

Undocumented

Gonzales (2016) mentioned that, “federal law does not expressly prohibit undocumented students from attending institutions of higher education” (p. 153). Juan learned how to navigate the system, got a job to pay for his higher education at a community college initially, and then found a nonprofit organization that supported the rest of his college expenses. Pérez (2012) argues that, “even though the community college is the most financially viable option for undocumented students, it still remains a significant challenge. Students not only have to pay full tuition, but they also are less likely to receive financial support from low-income parents” (p. 105). By the time I interviewed Juan, he was still in college. He said:

I am going to get a job in my field. . . Just because you know I studied it. And I’ve always been fascinated by computers, so hopefully I can get something on that. I have also been researching on my free time like what I can do to become a citizen. But with that it’s pretty limited because I was undocumented when I entered the United States.

Juan understood how difficult it is for him to become a naturalized citizen due to the fact that he and his relatives crossed the border without legal documentation. This brings another important oppressive system since most Mexican families who come to this country have no choice but to immigrate to this country looking for a better future (education) for their children. Unfortunately, it is frustrating when students like Juan realize that they cannot take care of their legal status even after being in this country for so long, following the rules, and getting higher education:

I wish I was a citizen but sometimes things do not work out the way they do. I am trying every way possible to try to do it but. . . hopefully talk to an immigration lawyer to see if there’s anything I can do. . . because I’m limited on stuff that I can and cannot do. It makes me feel belittled a little bit.

Like most American students, Juan was not able to start driving at age 14 due to his lack of social security number. Also, during that time certain undocumented students did not have access to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA):

I couldn’t start driving until I was 18 years old. People start at fourteen and a half. You know you have to wait three and a half years in order to be able to drive and that wasn’t until Obama passed the Dreamers or the DACA. And then when you get it, you have to pay 400 and some dollars and you have to pay some more for somebody to fill it out. You have to go through so many things before you can actually do it. And just because you fill out an application, it doesn’t mean that you will get it approved. Everything has to go through a cycle. And everything has to be reviewed and if you don’t make it, then you don’t get it.

As part of former President Obama's immigration action, DACA allowed some candidates who arrived in this country without legal documentation as children. DACA is a renewable and 2-year program that permits individuals to obtain a work permit and driver's license in the United States. Like many Latinx students who qualify for DACA, Juan had to have the financial resources to apply for this legal and painful process since it actually made undocumented students become more vulnerable to be deported or to be denied DACA if for some reason they forgot to submit the required papers or if they had broken the law in the past.

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)

Based on CRT, LatCrit, and QPOQ critique, Juan's counterstorytelling narratives explore how he developed his own community cultural wealth to resist multiple layers of oppression during and post-high school. Yosso (2006b) defines community cultural wealth as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (p. 175). She developed six forms of capital (*aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant*). She suggests that "these forms for capital are not static but dynamic, constantly building on one another" (Yosso, 2006b, p. 176). For the purpose of Juan's counterstorytelling narratives, I will focus on familial capital, navigational capital, aspirational capital, and resistant capital. Additionally, as part of this study, I decided to develop a new form of cultural capital, *reciprocal capital*.

Yosso's (2006b) CCW has been used to theorize and analyze how Communities of Color's experiences with race and racism are embedded in structural systems and practices. Additionally, Yosso challenges Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) definition of capital as a hierarchical system found only in upper and middle classes.

As part of CRT, CCW questions a deficit thinking model prevalent in US schools that blames minoritized students and their families as academically incompetent due to their cultures. As a result, when students of color do not conform to a racist and/or color-blind Eurocentric school system, they are usually targeted as deficient. Yosso (2006b) suggests that it is important to identify and document Communities of Color's cultural wealth "to transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets already prevalent in their communities" (p. 180).

Familial Capital

Although this form of capital refers to cultural knowledges nurtured within the *familia*, its history, memory, and cultural intuition, it also expands the definition of family to include a broader definition. Yosso (2006b) posits that, "acknowledging the racialized, classed, and heterosexualized inferences that compose traditional understandings of 'family,' familial capital is nurtured by the 'extended family,'"

which may include immediate family (living or dead) as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends we might consider part of our *familia*” (p. 177).

Once Juan was kicked out of his house, he moved in with Rosa and Sarah. Rosa, whose parents came from El Salvador, was born and raised in California. Due to her father’s church, she moved to the Southeast region where she met Juan. Rosa and Sarah became Juan’s new family. They both supported Juan’s education making sure he had everything he needed to succeed academically. When I asked Juan what was his favorite thing about attending high school, he talked about Rosa and Sarah. He said:

It was my friends, the ones who pushed me who I am today basically. Without them, I wouldn’t be able to graduate and even go to college without their support. They don’t care what my orientation is. They just care what’s my heart. Just because I’m gay, it doesn’t mean I don’t go to church, doesn’t mean I don’t believe in God, doesn’t mean that I don’t do regular things that other people do daily.

It is evident that Rosa and Sarah became Juan’s familial capital. They both instilled in Juan the importance of getting good grades and to pursue higher education besides sponsoring his personal needs while he was still in middle and high school. Also, Rosa used her social and navigational capitals at the local library to find him a volunteer job in the afternoons where Juan helped community members with questions about computers.

Navigational Capital

Yosso (2006b) defines navigational capital as “the skills of maneuvering through social institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind” (p. 178). Once Juan graduated from high school, his plan was to move to California to join Rosa since she had already moved. However, things didn’t work out the way he had planned:

Well, once I finished, I was set up to move to California. Everything was nice, but you know being in a small town, like _____ and then moving to California, it was overwhelming because of so many people, you have to open up. I just wasn’t ready for it. I was not ready for a big drastic change like that. That why I came back and started school. I was getting straight A’s and B’s and then all this I paid for school myself. I didn’t get financial aid, I didn’t get anything. I paid out of pocket for my own schooling, so for two years, I paid for everything myself. Now, somebody else pays for my schooling. It’s called the WFIA (Workforce Investment Act) Program and recently I went to one of their meetings, and they loved my story.

Juan found California was too big for him to handle, so he decided to move back to the Southeast and continued living with Sarah and her children. Juan first started working at a restaurant and then retail stores:

I started working at a restaurant. And then I left because I wasn’t getting what I needed from it. I applied to (department store) because one of my friends worked there. And they weren’t

hiring at the time, so I had to wait a month or two. And then they hired me as a temporary. And then I was taking two days. Usually you can take as many shifts as you want to complete 40 hours. Well, I was taking 39 ½ hours a week and going to school full time. It paid for my schooling.

Although Juan had already finished high school and with good grades, his goal was to pursue higher education. He was consciously aware that most of his friends just wanted to get a job and start making money; however, Juan had other plans for himself:

Without your education, you can't have anything. That piece of paper will take you farther than your merits. Like my friend, he dropped out of college and he knows exactly what he's doing. And I am studying, but he cannot get a better job because he does not have a piece of paper. So, I don't want that. I want to have that piece of paper regardless. So, if I have to work and work full time, that's what I'm gonna do.

Contrary to many community colleges, Juan learned that he could pay in-state tuition although he did not have legal papers. Later on, he shared with me how he used his navigational capital to find out about his college fees:

I have no idea, but I think that for me most part is in-state-tuition. I did call at one point. I called somebody at the college and his name was _____ and he said that the school may messed up and told me not to say anything about it. But later I found out that you get in-school-tuition.

Unfortunately, a lot of undocumented Latinx students get discouraged about pursuing higher education once they realize that they have to pay in-state tuition or that college/universities will not accept them because of their immigration status in the United States. Contrary to most Latinx and undocumented students, Juan decided to pursue higher education even though he had to pay for it on his own and also work full-time. Later, he discovered a nonprofit organization that supported the rest of his college education, allowing him to become resilient one more time:

If you are illegal or undocumented doesn't mean that we can't achieve certain things. I know some things are unachievable because of the immigration status, but it doesn't mean that we can't try. Like me, going to college was my dream. I knew it was gonna cost me and I knew the consequences, but here I'm; I'm gonna graduate in May. Basically, I paid \$ 7,000 to go to school. The program that supported my college education paid \$3,000 or 4,000 for me to go to school. That's a lot of money and I appreciate it from them.

While developing his own navigational capital, Juan also created his own agency within different institutions and social networks. First, he found employment at a restaurant. Soon, he realized he was not making enough money to pay for college. Then he started working at a retail store where he developed a strong work ethic, allowing him to go from part-time employee to full-time in a short period of time. Juan also learned that even though he was undocumented, he could still pay in-state tuition at the community college. Finally, he found a nonprofit organization that supported part of his college expenses.

Aspirational Capital

Yosso's (2006b) refers to aspirational capital as the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 176). Although Juan was kicked out of his house, he kept his aspirations to remain in school and to get good grades. He wanted to prove himself and others that he could overcome life hurdles. The fact that he found people who motivated him and supported his education allowed him to keep his goals to remain in school and to graduate.

Juan has always liked computers. When I met him the first time, he was a volunteer at the local library. At his high school, he was always a media specialist assistant. When I asked him what he was studying, he shared that he was majoring in computer science. "It's called computer innovation system. I am sort of double majoring in support systems and cyber securities," said Juan. His goal was to graduate in May 2018.

One of Juan's biggest frustration was the fact that he was about to graduate from college, but he could not benefit from this achievement because of his immigration status. Even before his college graduation, he knew that it would be challenging to find employment related to computer sciences and that would pay him well. However, he always found the light at the end of the tunnel with his positive remarks:

I still have dreams and aspirations. I hope one day I'll be a citizen but if it doesn't happen I can't drought. If it's meant to be, it will happen.

Although Juan experienced a lot of uncertainty due to his immigration status, he still found hope that he would eventually obtain the legal documents to find a good job. Juan still had a positive outlook on life and dreams and goals about his future in this country.

Resistant Capital

Minoritized and oppressed Communities of Color have learned to resist multiple forms of oppression from their own communities and society at large. According to Yosso (2006b), resistant capital refers to how individuals challenge inequality through oppositional behavior. Juan's coming out as gay on social media was one of the main reasons why I decided to contact him to be part of this study. I was very surprised about his willingness to share this part of his life that was not explored in my first book (Ríos Vega, 2015). When I asked him why he decided to use social media to come out, he answered that doing things online are sometimes easier than in person. He shared that he preferred not to talk to somebody in person but through texting:

Sometimes it's easier to say things online than it's face-to-face. Coming out to the real world wasn't stupid. I revealed a part of me that made me free that I don't have to hide who I'm anymore. I'd rather not going out every day with a smile on my face, pretending to be happy for something that I'm not happy about. I'd rather be happy with my decision of coming out than not being happy at all. . . I know people may talk about me for who I am on a daily basis, but I love me. I don't care what people think anymore since it doesn't face me because I have a support system.

When I asked him if he received negative messages from some people, he agreed but then indicated getting more positive messages than negative ones. The most impactful part was when I asked him about his self-esteem about coming out on the social media. He said:

I feel good. Like you know, being who you are in the closet. You have to hide a piece of who you are. And by coming out, you are putting a huge strength on yourself because the whole world knows now. The whole world knows who you are. What your sexuality is; who you like.

Juan is aware that some people will always say negative remarks about LGBTQ communities. However, what is really important to understand is a certain level of internalized guilt and oppression when he accepts being gay as a sin as a form of religious ideology. I found it really interesting how unconsciously Juan internalized homophobia and referred to being gay as a lifestyle. It is my assumption that because of his age, he has not acknowledged his comment with a critical lens. When I asked him where he got all his strength, he summarized it by saying:

It comes from not having anyone. Like when I told you when we were first talking. I didn't get the congratulations after my report card. I didn't get a birthday cake for my birthday. I didn't get Christmas presents for the most part. And that never mattered to me. I don't care about materialistic stuff. I'd rather have somebody that supports me. Like people can get PlayStation for Christmas and all I need is underwear, a pair of shoes, and shirts. Because I don't have to have the best to go out with a smiley face on my face. I just have to have the basic necessities. The world is gonna spin, things are gonna happen every day, but you can't have a bad look on the world every day. You need to start new, you need to start fresh. . . you always have to be courageous, you have to be a new person because sometimes you might impact somebody's life.

Juan's quote is like an open wound where he claims for love from his parents. He also brings to the surface issues of class (materialistic stuff). Although he has been through a lot since he was little, he is still resilient:

People will throw bad words at you for doing this and doing that. . . because you know, it's supposed to be a sin. But people commit sins daily. So what's the difference between me committing a sin and you committing seven in one day. I just might do it once a day like being gay. For me, it's my lifestyle now.

Like most oppressed individuals, Juan's story talks about obstacles and resiliency. He not only had to cope with the fact that his parents kicked him out of the house for

being gay, but he learned to create his own familial, navigational, and resistant capitals in order to survive discrimination from his biological family, Latinx peers, and mainstream systems of oppression. All of these challenges allowed Juan to become resilient and analyze society using Anzaldúa's (2007) *la facultad*.

Reciprocal Capital

As part of this study, I decided to develop another form of capital, *reciprocal capital*. Like Juan, most stories of hard work and success become exemplary discourses for others, especially minoritized communities. As part of the Latinx community in the United States, I have personally witnessed how studies of hard work and sometimes success can help others become dreamers as well. Pérez (2012) agrees that “although undocumented students recognize the obstacles, they will face due to their undocumented status, several studies note that they find ways to maintain high levels of optimism and perseverance” (p. 11). When I shared with Juan how his published counternarratives (Ríos Vega, 2015) helped others, he felt compelled to support my new study one more time. In this article, Juan helps others understand how he challenged social norms toward undocumented Latinx students and how his story can support others in the same situation (undocuqueer Latinx). He shared:

If they need anything from me, I'll be more than glad to help them. Sometimes what you need is a little bit of help, no matter what it is, but we always have to try and do what we can. . . and strive for the best. Because we're undocumented, doesn't mean that we cannot achieve what documented people can. You know sometimes people may have thought that I would never have wanted to try to graduate from college much enter college, but I'm proving them wrong. And most undocumented students do a lot. They strive for success. We have to work harder and more than others because we can get left behind.

Juan had to work harder than other Latinx or undocumented students. Due to his sexual orientation, he had to challenge internalized homophobia within his *familia* and navigate perceptions of gender, class, language, and immigration for being identified by mainstream society as Latino male (Ríos Vega, 2015). He also had to challenge people's expectations toward LGBTQ individuals. Lastly, Juan's biggest challenge was to pursue higher education knowing that he would not have access to employment commensurate to the college degree he would have, due to his lack of legal documentation in the United States. However, he still committed to be an inspiration for others to emulate. When I shared with him how his counternarratives documented in my writings had helped others to better understand the Latinx experiences in education, he commented:

I never knew like you said I was helping people; I never knew that, but now I do and that makes me feel good. I never knew that my story would become something like it did, but you know it helps and that's important because no one has to go through what I went through. They might still have to go through it because of every situation. But they don't have to be scared, they don't have to feel different. You have to live by it.

It is important to highlight how minoritized groups or first-generation immigrants in the United States possess a sense of moral responsibility or obligation to support their loved ones either back home or within their own communities. Juan's reciprocity wealth is evident when he mentioned how he would like his story to inspire other individuals like him. He does not feel less than others for not having legal papers nor does he feel less for being openly gay. On the contrary, he is still very optimistic that things will get better and feels happy to be able to give back to others.

Conclusion

In May 2018, Juan graduated from college. His excitement was evident throughout the pictures posted on his *Facebook*. I called to congratulate him. As I finalized the writing of this chapter, Juan was still working at the same retail store. Juan's case represents a story of adversity, resilience, and personal success. Being an openly queer Latinx male was never easy for him. Although he usually found the positive aspects of every situation, there were times when Juan refused to have an honest conversation about the reasons why his mother kicked him out of her house at a young age. Juan was lucky enough to develop his own familial capital with Rosa, Sarah, and community members who developed a form of empathy toward his situation at home. Personally, I witnessed how Juan learned to advocate for himself not only in school but also in the community. There were times when I saw him volunteering at the local public library, helping Spanish-speaking families use the computers. At school, I always saw him socializing with White girls. I sometimes heard him using negative comments toward Latino males, but I never understood why. However, after ongoing interviews with him, I realized that Juan's mechanism of defense against his own ethnic and gender group was to detach from them and their homophobic comments and discrimination.

When I asked Juan to reflect on his high school experiences as a gay Latino male, it was obvious that he resented the fact that the administration did not advocate for him when being bullied. I noticed that Juan got upset when he reported bullying incidents and they were not addressed. Instead, he felt nobody supported him, and when he tried to defend himself, he got into trouble.

Another adverse situation in Juan's counterstorytelling narrative was his immigration status that meant he did not qualify for the federal financial aid he needed to pursue higher education in the United States. I observed how Juan pursued countless resources to make his dreams of going to college a reality. He was fortunate to learn that the local community college accepted him to pay in-state tuition fees; however, he still continued working full-time at different low-paying jobs until he finally found a nonprofit organization that paid the tuition for his last year of college.

Early in life, Juan developed his own familial and resistant capitals. Since middle school, Rosa and Sarah became his best advocates in school and the community. However, after Rosa moved back to California, he experienced loneliness and frustration to the point that he tried to kill himself. Rosa continued supporting him

via emails and phone calls, but for Juan it was not the same. Finally, he learned to cope with the fact that Rosa was not physically around, so he became closer to Sarah and her children.

Juan's experiences with gender discrimination and racism (Ríos Vega, 2015) as a Mexican male pushed him to develop his own community cultural wealth. As I mentioned earlier, Rosa and Sarah represented his familial capital. Both women instilled in him the importance of getting a high school diploma and pursuing higher education. They accepted him as their own child. Rosa took him to California for a couple of days after his high school graduation.

Additionally, Juan's multiple experiences with discrimination for being an undocumented Latinx male and openly gay led him to develop resilience through his own aspirational capital and interconnected to his familial capital. Juan learned that pursuing higher education would allow him to become more qualified and find better jobs. His resistant capital started the minute he left his parents' house. He learned to prove to himself and others that he was going to make a difference in his life. Being the youngest of three, he was the only child who pursued college and graduated. Although things were not always easy for him, he learned how to resist discrimination from his own kin for being openly gay, and he also learned to resist discrimination for being a Latinx male and undocumented. Contrary to what majoritarian studies say about undocumented and queer Latinx males, Juan's counterstorytelling narratives showed the opposite. As a scholar of color, I feel that documenting these types of counterstorytelling narratives give minoritized individuals a place on the table.

Teachers, counselors, and school administrators need to start seeing students of color community's cultural wealth as authentic assets in their education. Instead of perpetuating a deficit thinking model toward Communities of Color with myths such as acculturation and assimilation, teachers, counselors, and school administrators need to understand and remind students of color that their best assets in their educational journey come from home.

Schools need to become safe spaces for all students, especially students who belong to the LGBTQ community. Teachers, counselors, and school administrators should be aware of the vulnerability that students like Juan go through on a daily basis. Like Juan, some students face bullying, marginalization, and even physical violence at schools for being different without any type of support from school personnel. It is important to understand that undocumented students that happen to self-identify as LGBTQ deal with more layers of marginalization than straight documented and undocumented Latinx students. They not only feel discriminated by their own kind for being gay but also my mainstream society for being Latinx, male, and undocumented.

Finally, teachers, counselors, and school administrators should find the resources to support undocumented students before they graduate from high school. Most undocumented Latinx youth are first-generation college students and do not possess the navigational capital in this country to learn how and which courses they are required to take in order to pursue higher education. Some undocumented students get discouraged to remain in school when they hear that due to their immigration

status in the country, they cannot pursue higher education. Unfortunately, those students do not get the support from teachers, counselors, and school administrators to find private institutions that support undocumented students. Supporting undocuqueer Latinx students requires all of us, who believe in social justice in education, to create a strong and reliable networking system that supports and advocates for students like Juan.

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