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## Mi Comunidad

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# Mi Comunidad

By Arianna Bucio

When I think of what community is and means to me, I consider the various aspects of my identity. As someone who is Latina, queer, and low-income, I find a sense of community in different spaces. However, my brown skin is the most noticeable aspect of my identity, and has therefore shaped my interactions within society from the moment I was born. Although a big part of being Latina is dealing with machismo, racism, and sexism, there are beautiful components of this community and culture that I want to highlight. From a very young age, I remember music and films being the largest connecting factor of my Latino community. Spanish was my first language, so Spanish sources of media were most comfortable for me. In assimilating to America and western culture, art created by Latinx was my way of “finding sequins in the rubble”. This term is accurately portrayed by Calvo-Quiro in the text, “Finding Sequins in the Rubble” by Eddy Francisco Alvarez Jr, who states, “What is impossible for us, as socially rejected subjects, becomes tangible in our drag shows, parades, parties, outfits, poetry, altars, paints, hairdo, makeup, and impersonations” (pg. 4) In this case, movies, tv-shows, and music were the way in which I chose to celebrate my Latino identity in a white-supremacist society. Specifically, I remember watching the black and white movies of Pedro Infante with my parents; although looking back now, I wish there was a more diverse representation of what Latinx looked like in the media, I still loved and rejoiced every time I would hear someone speak the tongue I was comfortable with on TV. It made me feel validated in a country where I feel alienated. In addition, the music of Vicente Fernandez was the first time I ever became invested in an artist. Although I have lost connection to my father due to his machismo, Vicente Fernandez’ music is what connected us to our Mexican community and each other. My father always had a voice fit for musica ranchera, so we would belt these songs out during car rides- singing in harmonies. As I grew older and came to terms with my sexuality, singers like Juan Gabriel were significant in my identity as a queer Latina. However, although I have come

to rejoice in my identity, it also becomes a little confusing when having to address your race; it brings up the question of, “what am I?” This is relevant in the sense that many of my family members partake in cultural Indigenous practices. For example, as far as I can remember, my abuelito always burns incense to cleanse the living room space from any negative energies. In addition, my tía practices Indigenous medicine and heals many of our community members in our small pueblo en Michoacán. I wish I could sit here and spew facts about the Indigenous ties within my family tree, however, due to colonization, I do not have the privilege to know my genetic makeup. With that being said, these cultural components of Indigenous ancestry which are present in my family are very significant to me, because it allows me to reconnect with a part of my community that was lost.

Within my Mexican community, I always felt so at home when visiting Mexicali. Although my family all came from Michoacán, I spent a lot of my childhood in Mexicali because my parents had very close family friends who lived there. This became such a meaningful space for me because I knew that many of the people who lived in Mexicali had a similar experience as me- the feeling of not being “Mexican” or “American” enough. Mexicali sits on the Mexico-United States border, so there are citizens like me who fall between both identities. The feeling of belonging and having a space where I can outwardly speak Spanglish and not be ridiculed was so significant in my self-acceptance as a Latina. This is an experience that I shared with my family, but mainly with my sister. My parents were born and raised in Mexico, so they had the ability to wholeheartedly identify as Mexican. However, my sister and I had the experience of having to conform to western-ideals while simultaneously clinging on to our Mexican culture. This space which allowed me to be authentically me in my identity showed me that there is no right way to be Latino or Mexican. Seeing as my sister broke boundaries both within western and Mexican culture, inspired me to embrace both aspects. She has broken generational curses that come along with conservative Mexican culture while representing such an icon of beauty (for me) amongst a society that values Eurocentric beauty.

By breaking the mold of what society displayed as beauty- I confronted a very large challenge that resided within my community: internalized oppression. I think back to the reading, "The Moths" by Helena Maria Viramontes, who writes, "My hands were too big to handle the fineries of crocheting or embroidery and I always pricked my fingers or knotted my colored threads time and time again while my sisters laughed and called me bull hands with their cute water like voices" (pg. 2). To me, this represents the internalized self-hatred that I had for my ethnic features. Although Viramontes writes about the girl's "bull hands" in contrast to her sisters who embodied femininity through their cute waterlike voices, I related to the main character through my skin color. Growing up and only seeing white women on TV (even on Latinx channels) messed with my perception of beauty; I believed that white, blue eyes, and blonde hair was the embodiment of feminine beauty. In contrast, I always felt so hyper-masculine compared to the other little white girls around me. I had hairy arms, a unibrow, and dark skin. Growing up with so much internalized colorism also leads you to have predisposed biases towards other people. It wasn't until I was older that I recognized that brown and darker skin is beautiful- but it took acknowledging my own traumas and repressed emotions. In addition, machismo is a large barrier that affects our community. In general, the Mexican community tends to sway more conservatively as they hold on to traditional beliefs. In this case, machismo presents the idea of the valiant breadwinning man and the subservient nurturing woman. This can create tension amongst families as kids born into these dynamics may try to break these generational curses; in the eyes of the adults, this can be seen as disrespectful. However, machismo is detrimental to both men and women. The idea that a man needs to be strong leads to them repressing their emotions and not having a safe space to feel their emotions. On the other hand, women's autonomy is greatly limited as they are often tied to the home, cooking, and cleaning for their families. This creates a cycle of mental health issues and unstable home dynamics, which if are not broken, will just be carried on for generations to come.

These collective experiences- the good and the bad- are captured through art forms within my community. In my experience, this has been through poetry. This may be something that is unique to my story, but my father writes music and poetry and so does my sister and I. Although I mentioned that machismo has ruined my relationship with my father, his poetry has also allowed me to acknowledge the cultural barriers that he faced growing up which essentially shaped him into who he is. He writes from the narrative of an immigrant who grew up in a very poor household, and although this is not my story, I am able to visualize and visit these memories through his words. His depiction of being a scared 16-year old Mexican immigrant in a country in which you don't understand a thing anyone is saying will always stick with me. In my case, I have used poetry to write of my experiences as a brown queer Latina woman, and I hope that those stories will continue to live on and be significant for generations to come as well.

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