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EMBODIED IDENTITIES:
THE EXPERIENCE OF COMING OUT AS UNDOCUQUEER

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Abstract

Queer undocumented students face obstacles stemming from both their legal status and their sexual orientation. They also experience a double coming out; that is, a coming out as undocumented and as queer, which gives them a distinct experience from other undocumented students identifying as straight. The lack of research on queer undocumented students has contributed to reinforcing a homogenous conceptualization of identity formation of undocumented students. What has been written about queer undocumented students has been through the frame of the UndocuQueer movement and therefore has focused on its development, progress, and political entity. Based on findings, this paper looks at the process of coming out as queer and undocumented, and at the rejection of the term “UndocuQueer¹” as an embodied identity.

¹ The term “UndocuQueer” stems from the recent UndocuQueer movement and is commonly used among undocumented immigrant rights activists who identify as queer. “UndocuQueer” literally merges the word “undocumented” and the word “queer” into one independent word.

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Table of Contents:

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review	2
Methodology.....	5
Section I: Coming Out as Undocumented.....	7
Section II: Coming Out as Queer.....	10
Section III: Embodiment of “UndocuQueer”	18
Conclusion.....	21
Works Cited.....	24

I don't know what was harder: to say that I was gay or to say I was undocumented... I have a hard time knowing where people stand. Even, I've met other gay friends that are actually out, men and women, and then all of a sudden I come to find out that they are extremely anti- immigrant. I have to be very careful. Just because a person is gay doesn't mean that they're going to accept the other. –Kassandra², age 36

Introduction

Undocumented migration in the United States has become a heated political topic in which undocumented individuals are increasingly dehumanized and criminalized. Due to the increasingly xenophobic political climate in the United States, interdisciplinary scholars have attempted to provide a more humanized narrative of being undocumented. However, even scholarship that claims to provide a humanized narrative of undocumented immigrants often becomes contradictory since it can reinforce narratives of good versus bad immigrants. Given that the scholarship on undocumented migration is dominated by a heterosexual focus, it automatically positions queer migrants in the category of a bad immigrant. Most significantly, the existing literature actively erases the experience and existence of queer undocumented individuals. It has become important to explicitly discuss the resistance of undocumented communities and of the various otherwise excluded groups within the undocumented community, such as queer undocumented individuals.

Through concepts such as a globalized identity and the rhizome, it is possible to expose resistance among undocumented queer individuals. The experiences of undocumented communities inhabit the global through their resistance of “official classification” (Kearney 1995, 555). Such resistance to official classification blurs

² Pseudonym

geographical lines of national border and challenges structured identity formation. While it is true that undocumented queer individuals are forced to be outside official classification regarding immigration law, their resistance to official classification lays in the way in which they navigate their undocumented status. While an individual's undocumented status generates obstacles in accessing education and employment, it also generates a double burden of a "coming out" experience during dating and friendships. When coming out as undocumented and as queer, an individual embodies blurred borders as well as displacement. To reveal the complexities of a globalized identity and to further explicate the experience of being undocumented and queer, I make use of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome. In their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome as a subterranean assemblage varying in form where any of its parts can connect to another (Deleuze, 1987). The rhizome does not rely on any one part of the assemblage for its existence or for self-definition. Instead, the rhizome is composed of multiplicities which do not dominate each other. All multiplicities are connected and coexist along with each other. The rhizome opens an abstract space in which the embodiment of identity is mapped and more specifically, it provides a space to further think about the possible embodiment of a queer identity along with an undocumented status.

Literature Review

Early scholarship on undocumented students heavily focused on the obstacles related to obtaining a higher education (Garcia Pena, 2012; Lopez, 2010; Patel, 2013; Perez, 2009; Soltis, 2015). The earliest research took place prior to "undocumented friendly" (Suarez Orozco et al, 2015) policies and examined experiences before the

passage of AB 540 or the CA DREAM Act, and before the signing of the executive order authorizing Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Since then, scholars have been following the development of such policies to discover their effects on the lives and self-understandings of undocumented youth. The earliest undocumented friendly policy in the state of California was AB 540, which not only opened educational opportunities, but also destigmatized the identities of undocumented students (Abrego, 2008; Negron, 2014). With this early piece of policy, undocumented students began to use shorthand terms such as AB 540 instead of bluntly stating their undocumented status. This strategy of using a shorthand to express an undocumented identity has continued to evolve along with policy changes and along the development of the undocumented youth social movement. This trend can be seen with the early use of the term “DREAMers” after the push for a federal DREAM Act, and currently with some undocumented youth calling themselves “DACAmended” after the executive order authorizing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Although research on “DREAMers” or on “DACAmended” individuals has served to highlight the connection between policy and identity formation among undocumented youth, it also creates a dangerous idea of a homogenous identity and recreates supposed divisions between so-called deserving and undeserving immigrants. Further, it actively erases the existence of other identities experienced by undocumented youth, such as being queer.

With the recent emergence of activism strategies such as “undocumented and unafraid” and “coming out of the shadows,” researchers began to look at the coming out aspect of the undocumented experience (Negron-Gonzales, 2014). This body of literature connects the strategies used in the LGBT movement with strategies adapted

by the undocumented youth movement, including the UndocuQueer movement (Nicholls 2013, Terriquez, 2015; and White, 2014). It is here where undocumented queer individuals are finally acknowledged by discussing the concept of a “double coming out.” A double coming out is unique to the undocumented-queer experience since individuals must navigate coming out not only as queer but also as undocumented. This attempt to break the heterosexual narrative of undocumented youth or their activism continues to be one dimensional. It demonstrates the structural intersectionality of the UndocuQueer movement, but does not go further than to show its contribution or cost to the overall undocumented youth movement. It does not fully discuss the experience of being undocumented and queer.

Anthropological work on migration and queer studies holds potential in further exploring the experience of being both undocumented and queer. Queer anthropologists have had a longstanding conversation of not only the function but the meaning of categories used as sexual identities (Lewin and Leap, 2002; Boellstorff, 2007; Weston, 1996). Further, queer studies in anthropology has begun to concern itself with questions of intersectionality and the relationship between sexuality and globalization (Boellstorff, 2007). In his essay “A Queer Itinerary: Deviant Excursions into Modernities”, Martin Manalansan IV uses notions of home to anchor the experience of queer migrants from the Philipines in the U.S. (including those who were undocumented). Manalansan disrupts the concept of home from being attributed with nostalgia and safety by also including violence and betrayal. In an almost oxymoron, he describes home for the queer migrant of color to mean being placed and displaced. This evokes Anzaldua’s borderland studies, where homophobia is described as the fear of

going home (Anzaldua, 1987). Homophobia is not the most present in the public space, but in the most intimate and familial spaces. That is where the fear of homophobia lays for queer migrants of color.

Methodology

With IRB approval, I conducted ten in depth interviews with undocumented students in Southern California who identified as queer between June 20 and September 28, 2016. The interviews touched on topics about the individuals' undocumented status, queer identity, as well as their coming out stories with family, friends, and co-workers. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The recruiting process was based on a snowball sample method to expand the diversity in educational background of my participant pool. I reached out to old high school classmates, current college peers, and then to individual people of color and LGBTQ+ organizers at the school and community levels. Individuals agreed to participate with the acknowledgement that the study was not paid and were given the option to be represented by a pseudonym or their real names.

The criteria for participant selection required that students: 1. were undocumented—DACA or non-DACA; 2. self-identified as non-heterosexual; 3. were current students, on a break, or had graduated from an institution of higher education. Individuals were at different levels of their education: One had just finished a master's degree, another was taking a break before transferring to a four-year institution, and the rest were between their third and fourth year of their bachelor's degree. The individuals I interviewed were between the ages of 20 and 36 and identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, or did not identify with any label that would signal a sexual

orientation. Seven women and three men were interviewed, and all immigrated from Mexico. Not all participants benefited from DACA, AB 540, or the CA DREAM Act. I include the experiences of those who do not qualify for any undocumented friendly policies because they are still relevant and important to discuss. These are important to discuss because with the implementation of DACA, the narratives from non-DACA eligible undocumented individuals were marginalized if not ignored.

The fact that I am an undocumented queer student worked in favor of my recruitment of participants and gave participants a comfort level to express concerns that they may not freely have expressed to a non-undocumented, or non-queer, researcher. My undocumented status and queer identity placed me as an insider of this community instead of an outsider. Indeed, one participant, named Carlos³, before and after the recording continuously expressed his concern and discomfort with what he called the “fetishizing” of non-undocumented people doing research on undocumented individuals. He felt as if his story had been abused by past researchers, and said he allowed me to interview him because of my undocumented status. I must, therefore, address how I navigated disclosing both my legal status and queer identity to my participants.

Although a few had knowledge of my undocumented status before the interview, most did not know either my undocumented status or that I identify as queer. Even those who knew I am undocumented did not know I am queer. Without exception, all participants asked me with curiosity about my status or sexual orientation at some point in the interview. Given that for most participants, our interview session was our first meeting, we built rapport during the minutes prior to and throughout the interview.

³ Pseudonym

Coming out to them as queer and undocumented became a crucial opportunity to build trust, since at that moment I stopped being treated as a distant researcher.

Findings:

Coming out as undocumented

The experience of coming out as undocumented lies in various planes of consistencies linked to each other but manifested in distinct and non-linear ways. In these planes, undocumented individuals negotiate the acceptance of an undocumented status through Pandolfo's concept of an "intimate wound". This intimate wound embodies trauma, despair and normalizes instabilities. Through various dimensions of this wound, undocumented individuals navigate the ever-increasing xenophobia in the United States.

My conversation with Christian⁴, age 20, revealed that an influential factor in navigating coming out as undocumented is the individual's comfort level with both identities. For example, it was more difficult to disclose an undocumented status when there was a higher comfort level with a queer sexual orientation. In Christian's first romantic relationship, he did not disclose his undocumented status due to his partner's conservative political views on immigration, but now—two years later—he tries to disclose his status sooner rather than later. Christian explained,

I just let them know in casual conversations rather than sit them down and be like I'm undocumented. I think I've gotten more comfortable with my undocumentedness in the last two years. It's not a big deal; it doesn't make me less than anything ... it literally means nothing. Like it does in certain contexts in ways. But like does it define, is it my full identity? Not really. Like yes and no. So if somebody doesn't want to date me because I'm undocumented or

⁴ Pseudonym

whatever it's dumb yeah... So I feel more comfortable letting people know, whoever I'm talking to, like yeah I'm undocumented. It's just a part of my identity. I'm in this type of situation.

The experience of trauma and love are merged by the fear of rejection when imagining coming out as undocumented in a romantic context. Experiencing pain along with romance consequently spurs an acceptance of an undocumented status. Pandolfo has written about a version of this pain in "The Burning," where she describes how "the person in despair comes to inhabit a border, a region of normative instability..." (Pandolfo, 349). Although she speaks of "kufr" or disbelief experienced specifically through the migration from Morocco to Europe, I found that the concept of inhabiting a border conveys a similar experience in the context of coming out as undocumented. In the moment of the imagined and the possibly lived rejection, a queer undocumented individual inhabits a border of uncertainty, despair, and transgression. These feelings of uncertainty, despair, and transgression are inevitably connected to the daily interactions with state violence. An undocumented status is thus inhabited in the form of a fragment in which it is credited as being only part of the complete identity. These identity fragments undo the binaries in identity formation to fully inhabit a globalized identity.

Similarly, Kassandra expressed having a harder time disclosing her undocumented status than her sexual orientation. Kassandra explains the following as her process of coming out as undocumented to her friends:

I'm very out as a lesbian to my closest friends. Not all of them know [I am undocumented], still up to now, even after knowing me for years a lot of them don't know... I think sometimes I keep that out on purpose because sometimes I just want to talk about normal things and not feel so...vulnerable. Because then there's the chance they might pity me and that's something I hate, that I

absolutely hate. I have different things that I say, for example when they would say why don't you know how to drive? I would say, I bike instead. I love biking because I don't want to be an extra car on the streets. Things like that ... I find ways to delude that conversation. And they end up thinking I'm an interesting person, very eccentric. So I just keep it out because I don't want to feel different from them.

Sometimes not coming out as undocumented is not only about safety concerns, but also about creating distance from the emotional baggage an undocumented status carries. The distressing effect of an undocumented status is reminiscent of what Pandolfo describes as an intimate wound in which trauma and vulnerability are embodied. Kassandra does not come out as undocumented to some of her friends, not because she feels shame about her legal status or feels unsafe, but because it gives her a space where she doesn't feel the traumatic weight of being undocumented. For that moment, she does not have to explain the legal implications of her status and thus does not relive some of the traumatic aspects of being undocumented. Both Kassandra and Christian regain their agency in balancing how much power and control they consciously give their undocumented status.

Through these various dimensions of an intimate wound, undocumented individuals are in constant negotiation with their undocumented status. They are also in constant conversation with retaining agency against the current and historical xenophobic political climate that relentlessly tries to strip them away from that possibility. Agency is maintained in my maintaining their undocumented status to manifest in their experiences as a fragment of their identity and not the center of it. It also becomes evident that coming out as undocumented is rhizomatic in its nature since it cannot help but evoke experiences related to the individual's sexual orientation. In

that way, the experience of being undocumented is linked to the experience of being queer.

Coming out as queer

Navigating the rhizome is abstract in its nature but it is lived in concrete experiences. Such an experience is the process of coming out as queer since one must navigate coming out in multiple planes. These multiple dimensions of coming out link together to form a heavier emotional experience that includes variations of happiness, sadness, and other emotions that cannot be reduced to words. Like the rhizome, there is no linear process in coming out as queer.

Both Cassandra and Italia⁵ demonstrate in their coming out stories that, although they both experienced a lack of support from their family when coming out, the impact of their coming out experiences did not follow a linear path. Cassandra was heartbroken after she experienced her first same-sex relationship break up, and her mother became suspicious of her behavior. Since Cassandra kept her relationship a secret from her mother, her mom did not automatically suspect a breakup. Instead she thought Cassandra was doing drugs. Cassandra explains,

...[A]t some point I was just so devastated that I had to tell her after she had left that well it turns out she and I were dating and you know I'm gay. Her first reaction was: I won't kick you out of the house as long as you don't tell your dad. You can't tell anyone. You tell your dad [and] I will kick you out of the house. So, I kept quiet for a while because there was nowhere I could go and I was about 20-21 years old at the time. So, at some point I got a job and rented a room with a friend and I moved out.

Although Cassandra had come out, her mother's reaction pushed her back into the closet.

Because Cassandra did not have the room to be completely out with her family, she felt pressured to move out. A parent's reaction of not talking about homosexuality or

⁵ real name

pretending as if a conversation about it never happened attempts to erase the individual's queer identity as part of the family's dynamic. In the face of family rejection, the moment of coming out can be experienced as a constraining, traumatic and vulnerable moment in which an "intimate wound" is once again exposed. While the words said at the moment of coming out can be painful, silence and erasure of that moment also pierces into an "intimate wound" of despair. In her coming out as a lesbian woman, Cassandra once again finds herself inhabiting a border marked by the regulated instability of an intimate wound. The embodiment of the trauma and vulnerability occurs in her silence. Keeping quiet after coming out becomes a survival tool to avoid any further pain. This is reminiscent of Anzaldua's shadowed beast that lives inside an individual in the attempt to suppress unacceptable parts for fear of family rejection. Anzaldua describes this beast to live in the fear of rejection is to live in a constant confrontation of the shadowed beast. This shadowed beast teaches not only to fear a possible rejection, but also to fear one's non-conforming sexual orientation. In a sense to fear rejection is to fear one's self. The trauma and vulnerability Cassandra experienced when dealing with coming out as undocumented is linked yet separated by the intimate wound caused by coming out as lesbian to her family. In a very rhizomatic manner, through the intimate wound, the space of the planes in which the experience of coming out as queer is expanded. She experiences intimate wounds in different planes of consistencies: one occurs in the intimacy of her family unit, and the other occurs in public spaces where she must navigate the state.

On the other hand, Italia's coming out story came about from a forced circumstance. Her partner was kicked out of her home after her parents discovered their

relationship which led to Italia having to come out to her family as well. Their families finally accepted their relationship almost five years after their coming out, but as Italia tells it was a slow process:

Well it's going to be five years next year. So, it's been four and a half years since then. My partner's family took a while to come around. They didn't want to see me, not even in picture. Nothing. Like in Spanish you say, "no quiero verte ni en pintura". Literally that. They would even ask my partner to take off my picture from Facebook. It took them up until recently a few months ago for her mom to see me... But when she moved back after she graduated, she was like I have to move out so we started living together. So, I think that's when her parents started seeing that it's an actual thing, it's serious, they are living together. A few months ago, they went over to our apartment, her mom did. Then I have gone over now like her mom talks to me and her dad talks to me. There's still a lot of things we don't really touch on or we avoid the conversation but you know baby steps kind of thing.

While the pain Italia experienced related to coming out began with the moment of coming out to her family and with the coming out of her partner, it was not limited to only that moment. Instead that pain continued throughout the years post-coming out.

Italia continues to explain,

And then my mom came around sooner than my partner's family did. When I graduated, my family came from Mexico to see me graduate and had a strong influence on how my mom was seeing the situation... Now she's like best friends with my partner because of her... After four and a half years, things are better. I think it's hard a lot of time to understand, you want it to be better sooner because it's been four and a half years but you know every parent or family has their own time to cope with things.

Even once the families came to terms with the relationship of Italia and her partner, the process in which that took place was a process of pain which is still felt at times. Like Cassandra, that "intimate wound" is a piercing experience which is not erased but instead exists through various levels and throughout the various stages of coming out. While both Cassandra and Italia both experienced an intimate wound with their coming out experience, their coming out experiences took different courses. This speaks to the rhizomatic nature of coming out as undocumented and queer since their experiences were

different but also connected through their experience with an intimate wound.

Other families were more receptive of the coming out moment. Monica⁶'s coming out to her family was influenced by the fear she felt after the Orlando shooting⁷.

She explains,

I thought that I had always tried to be really studious, always tried to follow the rules, do the best that I could in everything. It made me think is this the one thing that is going to make people not want to reach out to me or not respect me as much for the stuff that I have accomplished...I told my dad recently, because I came out to DC this summer which was really exciting but I was coming out here a week after the Orlando shooting. He was confused that I was feeling uncomfortable and then I told him that ... you know I'm gay and this is who I am... and then he was like it doesn't matter.

The moments before coming out to her father were filled with anxiety and fear as she thought of the possible outcomes. Her main concern was that if her family was not receptive then her valued status as a good student would be tarnished. She feared that a negative reaction about her sexual orientation would override anything else they thought about her. The Orlando shooting further increased her anxiety levels since it created a sense of urgency to come out to her family. Although her father's response could be read as neutral, in the context of coming out it functions as a positive reaction that alleviated some of the fears and trauma she was feeling from the impact of the Orlando shooting. The positive coming out experience created a safe space to be out within her family structure and contributed to the partial healing of the "intimate wound" already present in her experience. This partial healing of the intimate wound allows for Monica to navigate

⁶ Pseudonym

⁷ The Orlando Shooting: On June 12, 2016, a shooting occurred at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. There were 49 victims and dozens of people injured. The nightclub was known to be a gay and Latino club, but many of the victims were not out to their families and it was that night of their deaths that the families found out about their sexual orientation.

her queer identity where an intimate wound is not strongly present. Similarly, Juan⁸'s coming out was influenced by death caused by a mass shooting:

I was dating someone that I thought was going to be a serious thing of course on the down low when we were dating. You know what I think I want to tell my mom, and then the Charleston shooting happened that summer and I was like these folks were so young and some of them might have not been able to tell people the things they wanted to tell them, so it was in that spur. I went to a Black Lives Matter action and got home and called my mom. I said "mom, by the way ughh" and I came out to her.

The Charleston shooting⁹ became a pivot point for Juan to make the decision to come out to his family. Although coming out was already on his mind, the concept of death that the Charleston shooting presented gave urgency to coming out. The concept of death carried heavy baggage that related to his at the time in closeted sexuality. At that moment, he realized he would not be at peace without being out as queer to his family and realized the importance his sexual orientation was to him in thinking about the future. Further, that moment of realization was not only tied to the Charleston shooting but it was also connected to the Black Lives Matter action he went to since together they reflected the reality Juan lived in, that is: an undocumented gay man whose existence is constantly under attack by the state. In this context, coming out then becomes an act of resistance and protest since it declares strength even when the surrounding environment is violent. The rhizome along with the intimate wound opens an abstract space where resistance can take place. Fear of death and trauma is manifested through intimate wound that is then connected with a reflection of self-identity. To resist and to confront those fears of death, it becomes crucial for Juan to come out to his family since only then he will be able to be completely honest about his sexual orientation. As the following shows, Juan's coming

⁸ Real name

⁹ The Charleston shooting: On June 17, 2015, a white man conducted a mass shooting against black people at a church in South Carolina.

out story took a positive path:

My mom is too supportive, she's like beyond a pflag mom. She's like, "Si te enamoras con un hombre and you want to have a child que tenga la sangre de los dos I will carry his baby". I'm like mom that is GROSS. And like "no voy a tener relaciones con el" and I'm like I know it's still gross! ... I know the concept is cute [laughs]. The intention behind it is cute but I'm like mom that's kind of gross but she's like, "pos ahi esta la oferta cuando quieras". Then my dad too. I think my siblings yeah of course they were super supportive. My sister cried and was like, why didn't you tell me before? And I'm like girl this isn't about you. My dad was the hardest to tell. I was on the phone with him for two hours before I came out and he was like oh shoot alright then. He's like I'm going to look at you differently but in a good way. He's like you just look stronger to me now because you have had to deal with bigger things and all this other stuff. I was just crying! I'm like stop dad.

My mom is too supportive, she's like beyond a pflag mom. She's like, "If you fall in love with a man and you want a child with both of your blood I will carry his baby". I'm like mom that is GROSS. And like "I won't have sex with him" and I'm like I know it's still gross! ... I know the concept is cute [laughs]. The intention behind it is cute but I'm like mom that's kind of gross but she's like, "well the offer is there whenever you want". Then my dad too. I think my siblings yeah of course they were super supportive. My sister cried and was like, why didn't you tell me before? And I'm like girl this isn't about you. My dad was the hardest to tell. I was on the phone with him for two hours before I came out and he was like oh shoot alright then. He's like I'm going to look at you differently but in a good way. He's like you just look stronger to me now because you have had to deal with bigger things and all this other stuff. I was just crying! I'm like stop dad. [full English translation]

His coming out story is not completely marked by pain; instead it opens with beginning to feel pain when imagining the possible outcomes but after coming out the narrative takes a very optimistic path that even has some comical tone to it. Although Juan felt a lot of anxiety when deciding to come out to his family, the outcome of coming out to his family was an embracing experience for him. An intimate wound was starting to manifest during the pre-coming out stages through feelings of fear and pain, but the welcoming reaction of his family allowed for that intimate wound to not be fully formed. Similarly, to Monica, Juan's coming out experience does not hold the baggage of trauma found in an intimate wound. Instead, it exists in a partial form only when speaking of pre-coming

out experiences but disappears when discussing the actual coming out experience.

Equally important to the experience of coming out to family is the decision to not come out. The types of relationships with family members influence the readiness of the individual to come out. Reading the family's attitude towards LGBT+ topics also proves crucial in predicting the level of acceptance of the family and, therefore, also the decision about coming out. A close relationship with family can discourage coming out due to fears of losing that relationship. For instance, Lara¹⁰ decided not to be out with her family because she still lives with her mother. Her mother's stand on LGBT+ issues makes Lara worry about the possible changes in the household if she were to come out. She explains,

If I do let my mom know that I am gay, that I like girls, because I kind of know how she thinks already about it, it would be kind of awkward going home. We have a really good relationship so I don't want that to jeopardize our relationship in any way. She is the best thing for me, so it is hard. I am pretty sure she will be a little bit open to it, but it will take time for her to understand it completely. I am pretty sure she is going to understand it. I am her daughter. She says I am her favorite, so hopefully.

The process of weighing the possible outcomes of coming out and her current close relationship with her mom informed Lara's decision not to come out. Coming out holds the possibility of undoing current positive relationships and adding tension to them.

Although she concludes by hoping her position as the favorite daughter will help her mom be more accepting, she also holds back just because she is the favorite daughter.

Her fear of losing close ties with her mother not only prevents her from coming out but it also elicits conflicting feelings of having to choose between family and being out. Even when Lara can imagine the possibility of being out and maintaining a good relationship with her mother, she does not imagine that experience as being a smooth process.

¹⁰ Real name.

Instead, in her pre-coming out stage, she imagines it being a process of adjustment, pain and compromising for her mother. Similarly, Susy¹¹ shared a similar experience regarding not coming out to her parents. In particular she focuses on describing her father's attitudes on LGBT+ topics:

Pero, así que sea publicó así no, no lo es. I've been thinking about it but I don't know when. I don't know; it was hard when I told my friends, and my brother took it all right. No me dijo nada. Me abrazo me dijo que me apoyaba, but I have a very strict father so I don't know. He is very hard headed and I don't know how well he is going to take it, siempre ha dicho que si algunos de sus hijos es así o que no sea como se debe de ser que para él no vamos a hacer sus hijos.

But, for it to be public like that, it's not. I've been thinking about it but I don't know when. I don't know; it was hard when I told my friends, and my brother took it all right. He didn't tell me anything. He hugged me and said he supported me, but I have a very strict father so I don't know. He is very hard headed and I don't know how well he is going to take it, he has always said that if any of his children were like that or that were not how they should be, they would stop being his children.[Full English translation]

Susy begins by explaining that although she is out to friends and her brother, she is not publicly out. This association of being "publicly out" refers to being out with everyone, and for Susy this specifically refers to being out to all her family members. Even after having had a positive experience coming out to her brother, she does not expect that from her father. Her father's open homophobia has prevented Susy from coming out to him since she predicts that he will not be accepting of her. Despite the fact, she is considering the possibility of coming out, she is hesitant to do so since she believes it will disrupt her relationship with her father and therefore unsettle the family dynamics. In contrast to Lara, Susy does not think her status as a daughter gives her any leverage in the possible outcome of her father's reaction. Even as his daughter she remains exposed to her father's homophobia. The inability to imagine being out while maintaining family ties

¹¹ Real name

and emotional wellbeing are the strongest setback in coming out.

Coming out experiences are manifested in various forms which is representative of the rhizomatic nature of the coming out. For each of them, coming out was influenced by different factors, the reactions of their family were different, and most importantly the emotions they experienced took a different course. Coming out or not coming out takes place through multiple planes allowing for multiple separate-yet-connected experiences. The rhizome is navigated through the concrete and non-linear process of coming out which include the formation of an “intimate wound”.

Embodiment of “UndocuQueer”

The concept of “UndocuQueer” attempts to fuse two fragmented identities to create a whole, but falls short in creating a complete identity. While categories such as UndocuQueer fail to convey the entire experience in being, I borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s image of the rhizome to liberate the infinite ways in which identity can be expressed through the queer undocumented individual. It is through the unstructured rhizome that queer undocumented individuals embody a globalized identity. The lack of structure embodies an identity through an ever-expanding process that allows for infinite multiplicities. “UndocuQueer” is not embodied as an identity because it does not provide the space that allows for infinite multiplicities to occur. Instead, “UndocuQueer” is limiting and imposing to undocumented queer individuals since the term speaks to a linear and binary identity formation process.

Most, but not all, of the individuals I interviewed were familiar with the UndocuQueer movement. Monica for example, explained that her appreciation for the UndocuQueer movement was more about the visibility it creates. She explained,

I think there's some that I do identify with, I think I really appreciate the work that shows the diversity even in being UndocuQueer. I think that's why I like it, not exactly because I identify with everything but it shows visibility.... I don't think I say it but if I post something on social media I'll tag it like UndocuQueer, or like UndocuQueer woman of color, but I think when I am speaking to someone often as an undocumented queer woman of color, I'll say it. UndocuQueer looks cooler as a hashtag.

While Monica values the work done by the UndocuQueer movement because of the space it creates, for her, using the term is mostly relevant only through social media.

"UndocuQueer" is not a term that she uses to introduce her identity to someone to whom she is speaking in person; instead, when the opportunity comes to disclose both identities, she prefers to state both "undocumented" and "queer" as two separate words.

In this instance, Monica states both identities to introduce herself as an undocumented queer woman of color instead of using the term "UndocuQueer," which she uses on social media. The inability to reduce her identities to one, or even two, reflects the complexities of globalized identities, which are constructed not by an "either/or" labeling, but by a "both/and" (Kearning, 1995). Similarly, Christian also said he did not use the word UndocuQueer and instead introduced himself as both undocumented and queer because it feels more natural. However, his justifications for why he did that are slightly different than Monica's. He explained,

UndocuQueer still sounds weird for me to say just because it sounds like alphabet soup, it sounds like too much to say. For me I'm just like oh I'm undocumented and I'm queer, which is the same thing. But there is power in that word when you say it out loud and people listen to you when you say it. I've never used that word. It almost sounds like something that the DREAMers or older activists were using when they first were trying to get AB 540 or the DREAM Act out. I have a friend, she did all that activism work and she has

friends from that circle who identify as UndocuQueer, so by the time I got to college they already did all that work for me you know? They set up the DREAM Act they set up AB 540. So for me I had a cushiony spot—I didn't need to have such a political word attached to my identity because that work was already done. I was given that space to be undocumented and queer.

Although “UndocuQueer” may be a shorthand expression, it does not work that way in the daily lives of these individuals at a personal level, since it feels unnaturally constraining. For Christian, the term is too politically charged to be used as representation of his identity. It is not relevant for him to use it, as the term has connotations of activism in which he did not participate. He is grateful for that work because it has given him the option to not have his personal identity politicized, and it has allowed him to shape his sense of self beyond a list of policies. Although social movements and policies regarding undocumented people are connected to his identity, it is not the sole origin of his identity. To more effectively think about both the connection and the rejection of “UndocuQueer” as an identity based on political associations, I turn to Deleuze's concept of “transformational multiplicities” characterizing the rhizome. “Transformational multiplicities” expand the spatial dimension in which identity is formed by its countless connections without depending on one main link. As in the case of Christian, “transformational multiplicities” allows for politics to take part in his articulation of identity without being centralized. Through “transformational multiplicities” there is no center to an identity, instead there are various depths contributing to an expression of identity. “Transformational multiplicities” shape a fluid articulation of identity that is never fixed or linear because it is constantly developing.

Like Monica, Christian, and all the other people I have interviewed, Karla¹² does not think of the term UndocuQueer as reflective of her identity. In the following she reflects on the function of UndocuQueer:

I don't like the use of it just because of the fact that it's not something people should think of you as. Oh not only are you undocumented but you're queer. Well you're whatever you are, you're documented or came here or queer or straight. I don't personally like labels. That's one of the main reasons why I don't like some people knowing I'm bi because it's like you're this or you're that. One of each, and you can never be whatever you think yourself as. I don't always see myself undocumented and yet I am ... Growing up it was never a priority for me. Now, yeah I see the difference in it. In either one I never put much importance to it because I never like thinking of myself that I'm just this label that they put on me and being UndocuQueer it's nothing more than a label.

Karla's rejection of UndocuQueer is based on its working as an imposed category. Even though the term was created by undocumented queer activists, it still holds the potential to be perceived as an imposed identity, which is constraining of a full identity expression. She rejects labels that indicate that she is undocumented and queer because it is more liberating for her identity. The experience in being undocumented and queer lay in what Deleuze and Guattari call a "plane of consistency" of multiplicities in which various identities are mapped in the same dimension. It alludes to the coexistence of various identities in which there is no constraint to the number or the specific identities to be embodied. By undoing the polarized structure of identity formation, the rhizome also undoes the totalization of imposed categories.

Conclusion

¹² Real name

My interviews have suggested that “UndocuQueer” as a form of identification is not embodied at the individual level. Instead, the participants’ coming out stories suggest that being undocumented and queer are manifested as two fragmented, separate-yet-connected identities. For these individuals, although their undocumented status and queer identity are influential factors in their lives, they reject the term “UndocuQueer” because, to them, that term is restrictive and does not fully express their identities. This points to the complexity and partiality of a globalized identity where neither an undocumented status nor a queer sexual orientation alone accurately reflects an individual’s identity. The depolarized nature of the rhizome shows how identity is not a binary notion in which an individual embodies one single way of being. Instead it demonstrates the existence of various multiplicities and plateaus in which identity actively reconstructs and expands itself in the form of lines connected to each other but not solely to each other. An undocumented status and a queer identity then take the form of a line connected to each other, but also connected to various other lines. Through this perspective, it is impossible to shape identity formation as rooted in either simply an undocumented status or simply a queer identity.

Similarly to the rhizome, a globalized identity lacks a traceable structure. The rhizome provides a space in which the embodiment of identity can be drawn as some phenomena that are unstructured, depolarized, and in constant movement. It is through the rhizome that an undocumented-queer experience is inhabited as a globalized identity. As a globalized identity, the experience of being undocumented and queer both blurs geographical borders and inhabits borders. This blurred and inhabitable conceptualization of borders is reminiscent of Anzaldúa’s own depiction of a

geographical border as an open wound that scars but bleeds again and again. Therefore, the process in which a border is blurred includes inhabiting it though the form of an aching wound. The rhizomatic nature of a globalized identity resists the constraining and divisive purposes of national borders by creating a space that expands beyond the limits of borders. While national and geographical borders are imposed on the land, the rhizomatic globalized identity challenges the validity of those borders. Those who embody a rhizomatic globalized identity, such as undocumented-queer individuals, resist the impositions of borders.

The rhizome and the globalized identity show the messiness of constructing identity and of being undocumented. The rhizomatic globalized identity of being undocumented and queer speaks against the linear way in which academics have written about the experience of being undocumented. Being undocumented alone is not as structured as academics make it seem. Instead, being undocumented is a very complex and diverse experience. Including the experiences of undocumented queer youth will disrupt and inform the current heterosexual scholarship on undocumented youth. Given the lack of research focused on queer undocumented individuals, I argue that further research is needed across disciplines to reshape the current body of literature on undocumented youth to be more representative of the undocumented experience.

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