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## Finding Evidence of Community Cultural Wealth in Georgia: Testimonios of Latina Immigrants on Navigating Cultural, Social, and Economic Barriers

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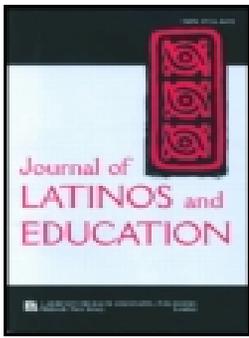
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### Recommended Citation

Yrigollen-Robbins, Michelle S., "Finding Evidence of Community Cultural Wealth in Georgia: Testimonios of Latina Immigrants on Navigating Cultural, Social, and Economic Barriers" (2022). *Educational Policy Studies Faculty Publications*. 51.

doi: [10.1080/15348431.2021.2002151](https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2021.2002151)

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To cite this article: Michelle S. Yrigollen-Robbins (2022): Finding Evidence of Community Cultural Wealth in Georgia: Testimonios of Latina Immigrants on Navigating Cultural, Social, and Economic Barriers, Journal of Latinos and Education, DOI: [10.1080/15348431.2021.2002151](https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2021.2002151)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2021.2002151>



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Published online: 02 Jan 2022.



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# Finding Evidence of Community Cultural Wealth in Georgia: Testimonios of Latina Immigrants on Navigating Cultural, Social, and Economic Barriers

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## ABSTRACT

The Latinx immigrant population in Georgia has hopes of settling in a community that provides economic stability for their families, and academic opportunities for their children. This study explores the journeys of five Mexican women, from their decisions to leave their home country to their settling in the United States. The findings are based on a qualitative study that reveals the *testimonios* of the participants' navigational challenges of crossing borders, settling in Georgia, and raising bicultural children in the New South. The participants' *testimonios* show evidence of Yosso's community cultural wealth, and the findings counter the deficit narrative about Georgia's Latinx immigrant communities by addressing the ways in which the participants and their families overcome the socioeconomic struggles that they face daily in their local schools and communities. The participants' compelling *testimonios* serve as a path for teachers' and administrators' better understanding of the community they serve.

## KEYWORDS

Migration/transnationalism; lat crit; latino/a children and families

## Introduction

In this article, I aim to expand the literature on how Latina immigrant mothers in Georgia show evidence of Yosso's community cultural wealth (CCW) theory (see Table 1). Yosso (2006) argues that while wealth can be defined as the total extent of an individual's assets and resources, community wealth can be interpreted as a community's accumulated cultural assets and resources, thus resulting in CCW.

Pierre Bourdieu (as cited in Yosso, 2005) defined cultural capital as: "[A]n accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society" (p. 76). Yosso (2005) argues that Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital (i.e., education, language), social capital (i.e., social networks, connections), and economic capital (i.e., money and other material possessions) are possessions that can be acquired two ways: through the privilege of one's family and/or through the privilege of formal schooling (p. 76). However, Bourdieu's definition of social capital is questionable because not all members of society have access to formal schooling, nor do they all necessarily derive from resourceful families. Furthermore, since not all members of society belong to the "privileged" groups described by Bourdieu, Yosso (2005) challenged Bourdieu's definition and explained that cultural capital includes an individual's assets that are present in the form of intangible capital. Yosso referred to these forms of capital as CCW, arguing that CCW is comprised of the following: aspirational, familial, linguistic, resistant, navigational, and social capital.

**Table 1.** Yosso's community cultural wealth.

Aspirational capital	"The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers"
Linguistic capital	"Intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language"
Resistant capital	"Draws on resistance to oppression . . . and refers to knowledges and skills cultivated through behavior that challenges inequalities"
Social capital	"Networks of people and community resources"
Familial capital	"Cultural knowledges nurtured among <i>familia</i> (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition"
Navigational capital	"The ability to make [your] way through social institutions not created with Chicanas/os in mind"

Yosso (2005) defined *aspirational capital* as the ability to remain optimistic despite the existence of barriers. For the Latina immigrant mothers who participated in this study, *aspirational capital* is evident from their choice to come to the United States to provide their children with a better future, including the opportunity to receive an education in the United States. Through *familial capital*, Latinx nurture a sense of community while *social capital* emerges from their networks. Through the use of their *familial* and *social capital*, the participants overcame struggles embedded in migratory circumstances (i.e., cultural differences, unfamiliarity with economic and social structures, language barriers, etc.) and successfully enrolled their children in Atlanta schools, even if they may not have had sufficient professional support from the schools staff. *Linguistic capital*, which refers to the various communicative abilities that are learned through exposure to diverse communities (Yosso, 2005), is evident in the participants' development of English language skills through formal classes or technical strategies learned from using cell phones and apps to communicate with school personnel. Yosso (2005, 2006) defined *resistant capital* as the ability to develop skills to confront acts of racism and mistreatment; and *navigational capital* as the ability to navigate institutions that are not designed with them in mind. All participants showed evidence of *resistant* and *navigational capital* as they asserted themselves as strong mothers and made their way through their children's schools despite the challenges they faced in a system that was not accessible to them.

Based on Yosso's CCW theory, I am particularly interested in articulating the challenges faced by the study participants while navigating schools where educators are hardly prepared to understand the sociopolitical context that impacts Latinx families in Georgia. Traditionally, *testimonios* have been used to document the narratives of oppressed groups; Huber (2009) described *testimonios* as a methodology used to understand how institutions adjudicate the educational experiences of undocumented students. In this study, the participants' *testimonios* were foregrounded because they serve as evidence of resilience and resistance.

This article is comprised of four sections: first, I briefly situate this study within previous literature to contextualize the gap in existing research that the study aims to fill. Second, I explain the theoretical framework that guides the data analysis and the methodology used to collect data. Third, I discuss the main themes that emerged during the analysis and how they aligned with CCW. Finally, I present my conclusions and recommendations for future research.

## Literature review

According to Odem and Lacy (2009), in recent years "all of the southern states, except for Louisiana, saw significant increases in the Latinx population. Since the 1980s, Latinx are considered the largest group of newcomers in the South." Between 2000 and 2015, demographics reflected a Latin population growth of 118% in Georgia (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). As of 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau (2019) showed that there were approximately 58 million Latinx, documented and undocumented, living in the United States. However, despite this population's growth, research on the navigational experiences of Latinx families in Georgia remains limited.

Educational researchers have increasingly used critical race theory (CRT) in qualitative research to study members of oppressed groups (Delgado Bernal et al., 2008; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Parker & Lynn, 2002). One branch of CRT, Latina & Latino Critical Legal Theory (LatCrit), challenges the dominant ideologies embedded in educational theory and practice, and aims to help researchers understand the educational experiences, conditions, and outcomes of Latinx (Yosso, 2006). Latinx critical race theorists focus research on “the ways Latinas/os experience race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also acknowledging experiences related to issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture” (Huber, 2009, p. 643). The present study draws from a qualitative approach, and specifically from a LatCrit theoretical framework, to describe how Latinx families negotiate their identities in Georgia. The participants’ *testimonios* provide the mothers an authority that is not granted in the systemic narrative of power that excludes Latina immigrants (Flores Carmona, 2018). Thus, this study uses *testimonios* as the methodology for collecting data to help understand the lived experiences of Latinx immigrants and how their intersectionality contributes to the CCW they bring to the community. In this study, I hope to answer two questions: (a) What do Latina immigrant parents identify as the main challenges they face in their children’s schools?, and (b) What ramifications can recent educational policies have on local Latinx families’ cultural capital?

## Method

### *Testimonios to understand CCW*

*Testimonios* use first-person narratives to convey a life story describing injustices suffered, and the effects of those injustices on a person’s life (Blackmer & Curry, 2012; Brabeck, 2001; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Huber, 2009). Through *testimonios*, individuals can offer an alternative to the dominant narrative. The participants’ *testimonios* refute misconceptions that Latinx parents do not value their children’s education, therefore helping educators understand how Latinx families navigate cultural tensions in metro Atlanta (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; García, 2014; Valdés, 1996).

This study was conducted over the course of two years. All participants were randomly selected at an after-school program for Latinx children in metro Atlanta, with the assistance of a gatekeeper (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), the director of the after-school program. At the time of this study, I had a personal history of involvement with the program and had the opportunity to become acquainted with many local Latinx families with school-age children. My personal relationship with the program’s director contributed to my ability to gain access to, establish a rapport with, and earn the trust of the participants. This relationship allowed us to engage in honest discussions about their immigration experiences, their perceptions of local schools, and their CCW contributions. All participants who volunteered for this study were females of Mexican origin; I therefore refer to them as Latinas. All participants had attended school in Mexico at different levels. Thus, they are familiar with the school system in their country of origin.

### *Participants’ profiles*

#### *Lidia*

Lidia is from Oaxaca, Mexico, and came to the United States in 2001. Her parents separated when she was a teenager. She then went to live with her father and two older sisters in Mexico City. She married at the age of 23 and had her son shortly thereafter. He was four years old when Lidia and her husband decided to move to the United States. They went straight to Atlanta because Lidia’s sister and brother-in-law were living there.

### **Lola**

Lola is from Zacatecas, Mexico, and came to the United States in 2003. She went to school in Mexico and studied to be an accounting assistant. She married and decided to move to the United States with her husband. Lola and her husband went straight to Atlanta because her husband had relatives living there. They have four children, all of whom were born in Georgia.

### **Claudia**

Claudia is from Monterrey, Mexico, and came to the United States in 2003 with her husband and two oldest daughters, who were one and five years old at the time. They still own a house, a car, and a business in Mexico, but prefer to live in the United States. Claudia went straight to Atlanta because her husband's sister was living there. Claudia and her husband currently have four children: the two oldest who were born in Mexico, and the two youngest who were born in Georgia.

### **Costeña**

Costeña is from Guerrero, Mexico, and came to the United States in 2005. She first moved in with her uncles in Los Angeles, California, where she met her husband. After approximately three years of marriage, they decided to move to Atlanta because Costeña's sisters had moved there. Costeña and her husband have three children, all born in Georgia.

### **Cati**

Cati is from Veracruz, Mexico, and came to the United States in 2005. Cati met her husband in Veracruz. They dated for five years, and during their courtship, he moved to Atlanta for a year. When he returned to Veracruz, they got married and decided to move back to Atlanta together. All four of their children were born in Georgia.

### **Procedures**

Three interviews were conducted with each participant. The first was an introductory interview, during which I was introduced to the group of parents (mothers and fathers) at the after-school program. During this introduction, the study was explained to the parents, as was the relevance of their experiences to this research. Those interested in participating informed the program director, who then shared the volunteers' information with me. I contacted the volunteers and scheduled the in-depth interviews. At the time of the study, four of the participants had at least one child enrolled in a public school at either the elementary, middle, or high school levels in Georgia; another participant's child had graduated from high school and was attending college.

Two in-depth interviews followed, but only the mothers were available due to their husband's work constraints. In these interviews, the participants examined and shared their lived experiences in two tiers. The first interview was comprised of their experiences prior to and upon their arrival in the United States, whereas the second interview consisted of their experiences in U.S. schools. Their willingness to share their *testimonios* concerning how they navigated metro Atlanta public schools provided a greater understanding of their struggles and resilience.

### **Data analysis**

Seidman (2013) explained that in qualitative research the process of interpreting data involves several stages: managing the data, studying, reducing, analyzing the text, sharing interview data, crafting profiles, making thematic connections from data, and interpreting the material. As explained earlier, the data for this study were primarily collected from formal and informal interviews. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, the participants' native language, and transcribed in their totality.

However, only data that addressed the research questions were thoroughly analyzed. Additionally, a reflective journal was kept for two main reasons: (a) for auto-analysis of my role as a researcher (Roulston, 2013), and (b) to revise narratives that aligned with CCW and the six forms of capital.

First, evidence of forms of capital that emerged from the interviews' *testimonios* were highlighted in the transcripts. Then, the process of a priori coding suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012) was used, which involved organizing excerpts into themes that reflected *aspirational, linguistic, navigational, social, familial, and resistant* forms of capital. Lastly, the data were contextualized with the purpose of demonstrating forms of capital exhibited by the participants, relating the findings to the theoretical framework.

## Findings

### *Lidia's story*

I begin with Lidia's story because, unlike the other participants who planned their migration, coming to the United States was not something Lidia ever intended. Lidia was attending school in Mexico and explained that secondary education in Mexico consists of grades seven through nine, the equivalent of middle school in the United States. Grades ten to twelve – or thirteen, depending on the field – are called *preparatoria* and consist of “preparation” for future careers. During the *preparatoria*, students receive training in the field of their choice. This is the level of schooling at which Lidia would have received nursing training if she had been able to afford to remain in school. Lidia's dream was to become a nurse; she became emotional when she remembered that she had disappointed her father by dropping out of school: “It makes me very sad because the day we went to the high school, my dad was able to go and register me, and I was very much hoping I could study”.

Lidia's *navigational capital* emerged years ago because her son was born with Type 4 Microtia (a birth deformity of the ear), which affected his hearing and speech. Although Lidia never mentioned the illness by name, she talked about her son being a “special” child. Lidia was motivated to come to the United States because the healthcare system available in the United States would provide Lidia's son with the resources she could not find in Mexico. Lidia and her husband had an important decision to make; she explained that they had two options: “Yes, well, we do come now with two options: risk our lives – well, now, in our case, ours and our son's – or we stay in Mexico with no life” (interview, 2018).

Per Lidia's estimate, they spent 24 hours on buses before walking for four hours in the desert to reach the destination where a “*coyote*” (human smuggler) was waiting for them in a truck. They got on the truck and rode to the Arizona border, where another *coyote* awaited. Lidia described the experience as more like “running between the mountains, the grass, between everything; everything there is between the mountains, hiding under the trees,” as they ran from one tree to another to hide from potential sightings (interview, 2018). After running and hiding in the desert, they finally arrived at a place where another man was waiting in a truck. This time, they rode in the truck with other families who were waiting to be transported to Phoenix, Arizona.

Once in Phoenix, they stayed in a small three-bedroom house. About 50–70 people were staying in that house along with them. Lidia remembered that everyone had to sleep seated because there was no room for people to lie on the floor. At this point, they had befriended some of the people they had met on the truck at the border. The next day, the *coyote* (who she described as the “main guy”) told them that they were going to fly to Atlanta but that they had to get on different flights, so as not to raise suspicion. Someone was waiting for them with boarding passes in the public restrooms. Once they had the boarding passes and Mexican passports, they proceeded to board the planes, for the first time in their lives. Lidia and her family boarded a domestic flight from Phoenix, Arizona, to Atlanta, Georgia.

Once in Atlanta, Lidia befriended a neighbor, Olivia. Olivia had only been in Atlanta for three or four months, but she had already enrolled her two children in school. Olivia became familiar with the school and its personnel, and was indispensable in helping Lidia to enroll her son in school. The *social capital* Lidia developed in Atlanta was expanding: her sister, her neighbor Olivia, a bilingual teacher at

the school, other school staff, and, eventually, the staff at the hospital where she took her son for the medical attention he needed. Lidia's *navigational capital* intertwined with her *social capital* and became evident in the network she developed through her relatives in the United States: her friend, her employer, the school staff, and the hospital staff who helped her navigate society's academic, medical, and professional institutions. Lidia admitted that she had been truly fortunate because she had always run into people who were willing to help her. The support Lidia received from her *familial* and *social capital* was essential to her *navigational capital*.

### Lola's story

Lola was attending *la preparatoria*, and at the age of 15, while still in school, she worked as an accounting assistant. Lola wanted to become an accountant one day and was doing everything she could to achieve that dream: "At the *preparatoria*, we had short career programs, and mine was 'accounting assistant.' I started working when I was fifteen years old. When I was in school, I worked; when I was done with school, I worked" (interview, 2018). She worked and continued to receive training for almost four years, but she described the job market as very difficult and without the possibility of advancement: "there was not much of a future in Mexico, and you get stuck in the same" (interview, 2018).

At the time, Lola was dating the man who is now her husband. The lack of employment opportunities, combined with their hope to have children, caused them to want to secure their children's future with a lifestyle that would be better than the one they thought they would have in their country. Lola's *aspirational capital* is unquestionable:

We . . . we talked about it before we got married. I dated my husband for three years before we got married. We, well, the truth is that, in Mexico, there isn't much of a future. You're stuck in the same . . . I thought about the future and I said: "No. I don't want my children to be here, reliving the same story as ours." (interview, 2018)

It was during their courtship that Lola and her husband discussed leaving Mexico for the United States because, if they were to have children, they wanted to give them the opportunity for a better education and, consequently, better jobs. Therefore, they decided to migrate.

Their journey began in the summer of 2002 when they left Veracruz and arrived in Arizona. They drove for two days from Arizona to Georgia: "We went up and then we went across Kentucky, Mississippi. I know the road we took. It took us two days" (interview, 2018).

Lola described the trip as unbearable: in a small truck with three other families, and one family had twins who cried constantly for days. Due to the nature of their immigration, the driver of the vehicle did not allow them to lower the windows, in order to protect them from being seen. There were very few stops along the way. Lola still remembers the smell of urine emitted by the children in the car.

Once they settled in Georgia, Lola and her husband had four children: two twin girls, one boy, and another girl. Their four children were born in Atlanta. When Lola's oldest daughter, Ana turned four, Lola realized that she had to enroll her in pre-kindergarten. Lola shared that the network of friends (i.e., *social capital*) she developed in her apartment complex showed her the school where she needed to enroll her daughter. Lola mentioned that several of her neighbors also provided her with information about the school bus, the bus route, the hours, and everything else she needed to do to enroll her child.

Well, it is because I lived in an apartment complex: you meet your neighbors and develop close relationships, and you start by asking them: "So, when do we have to start registering kids for school here?" Because where I come from, you enroll them in pre-k if you want; it is not mandatory. (interview, 2018)

Lola and her husband went to the school that the neighbors indicated. The school's receptionist spoke to them in both English and Spanish and gave them a checklist of the paperwork they needed to enroll Ana. The receptionist sent them off with the checklist and told them to return once they had everything on the list.

Lola mentioned that the first day of school was difficult for Ana because she had never been away from her mother and could not speak English. Lola and her husband had purchased all the school supplies the school had requested for each child, and Lola remembered that Ana's backpack was so heavy that they decided to take her to school themselves on the first day. Lola laughed when she remembered having to buy a blanket and a mat for naps.

You know, when it comes to pre-k, even the blanket . . . The one for when they sleep for an hour. That was new to me. There is no such thing: to sleep in school. (interview, 2018)

After the first day of school, Lola and her husband instructed Ana to take the school bus. They took their daughter to the bus stop, where they met the other neighbors and Ana's friends. Lola said that, although Ana was initially scared, she happily followed her friends once she saw them getting onto the bus: "As I said, because we lived in an apartment complex, she wasn't by herself. She was with other friends who also lived in the same apartment complex who she already knew. She went happily" (interview, 2018). In this way, Lola's *social capital* was also an asset for her daughter.

Approximately six months into the school year, Lola received the first notice from the school inviting her to participate. Ana brought home a flyer from school. In the note, the teacher was asking parents to "participate." Lola admitted that she did not understand what the teacher meant. She reached out to one of her neighbors and asked her to explain what it meant to "participate" in her daughter's education.

I called another neighbor of mine, and, well, we had the, the children in the same classroom. We helped each other: "This says that we have to do this." You know what I mean? Then, we were already helping each other. Sometimes I understood, sometimes they understood. That's how we helped each other. Because of that, we have been friends until today, we . . . we are still friends. All three of us, we are three who got together to do homework, and . . . we helped each other with that too. (interview, 2018)

Lola stated that she and her neighbors helped each other understand the messages that were sent home. She also remembered that both mothers realized that they had to help each other first, before they could help their children. Lola fondly affirmed that they became close. Through their social network, Lola and her neighbors navigated their children's school, despite their language limitations and lack of familiarity with the school's communications and procedures. Lola's social network confirms Yosso's (2006) argument that *navigational capital* shows that individuals "have agency even though their decisions and actions take place within constraints" (p. 44).

Even though they are U.S. citizens, Lola's daughters have had several encounters in which they have had to confront other students and defend themselves regarding their citizenship. Lola has encouraged her children to defend themselves and resist these forms of oppression by reminding them that they have something the other students do not have – they are bilingual. In doing so, Lola taught her children to use their *linguistic* and *resistant capital* to assert themselves as intelligent bilingual citizens of this country (Yosso, 2005, 2006). Lola's behavior was motivated by her social consciousness, and by her desire to secure social justice for her children. Despite the disparity between the two school systems and the related challenges, Lola found that being in a different school district forced her to work on her English skills and made her children more resilient. Lola's motivations continue to serve as evidence of her *aspirational capital*.

### **Claudia's story**

Claudia came to the United States from Monterrey, Mexico, with her husband and their two oldest daughters. They own a business in Mexico, a house in a gated community in Monterrey, and a car they keep in their home. Claudia is an engineer (*ingeniero industrial administrador*). She worked at a U.S. company in Monterrey for two years as a production supervisor, during which time she got married and had her first child. Claudia stayed home after the birth of her first daughter, until she was older.

Claudia went back to work at the university in Nuevo León (*Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León*), where she taught mathematics for a few years. Although they lived in an affluent community, Claudia and her husband were concerned about the family's safety. Crime was quickly becoming part of their daily lives. The financial situation, along with the family's safety, became a problem: "There, regardless, we have a house, a car, and the business, but you can't work there. You can't, with drugs. We have a house and a car. Closed, because you can't, you can't live there" (interview, 2018). Therefore, they decided to move, and relocated to Atlanta.

When Claudia and her husband moved to the United States, their oldest daughter was five years old and their second child was one year old. Claudia and her family took a 36-hour bus ride from Monterrey, Mexico, to Atlanta, Georgia. Upon arriving in Atlanta, they stayed with Claudia's sister-in-law, who was already living there. After they arrived, it only took them a few weeks to find work and move into their own apartment.

Initially, Claudia's sister-in-law helped her navigate the community. She told Claudia about the school where she needed to enroll her oldest daughter, who was five when they arrived: "My sister-in-law is the one who told me all this" (interview, 2018). Claudia's sister-in-law had a six-year-old child and was already familiar with the school and the staff. Claudia's sister-in-law also explained how school bus transportation worked – that is, the route, schedule, and availability. Through her *familial capital*, Claudia was able to take the initial steps necessary to enroll her daughter in school. Following her sister-in-law's advice, Claudia and her husband, who spoke English, went to the school on the day recommended by her sister-in-law. Claudia added that both she and her husband always attended school-related activities together.

When asked if she thought her inability to speak English was an obstacle, Claudia explained that she downloaded and used phone apps to translate the texts and messages she exchanged with teachers. She credited her own schooling with her ability to use different resources. Claudia acknowledged that her academic background gave her an advantage other immigrants might not have: "Yes, because I am an engineer, it is very easy, more so than for someone who never went to school, who didn't study, and who also doesn't know how to use the Internet" (interview, 2018). Claudia's experience is evidence of *linguistic capital* because Claudia was able to draw on her background and skills to find phone apps to communicate with her daughter's teachers.

When Claudia was asked how she found out about the schools in which she could enroll her other children, she responded that she relied on neighbors and friends who lived in the same community: "Well, I usually discuss it with neighbors, my friends from the apartments, and they tell me, 'This is the school you're supposed to go to. There are many schools here, but because we live in these apartments, they have to go to this school'" (interview, 2018). She shared that all of the neighbors would go out and wait for their children at the bus stop every day. As a result, Claudia connected with neighbors and became part of a community network that helped her navigate common issues regarding schools for her children. Although Claudia mentioned that her husband always accompanied her to school-related activities, it was through her relationships with friends and neighbors that Claudia navigated the school. Claudia explained that if she found herself in the position of helping another Spanish-speaking immigrant to navigate the school system, she would suggest they seek out the social networks found among neighbors and friends living in the same community. Claudia's reference to such a social network is evidence of *social capital*.

Claudia enjoyed actively participating in her daughters' school when, for example, she was asked to collaborate in fundraisers. Claudia and other Latinx parents would donate food, set up the kiosks, sell the food, and donate the money raised to the school. She remembered this as a very productive event, one in which the entire Latinx community was involved. During the event, which happens every year, the community would help by distributing the responsibilities: the older children would help at the fair by monitoring the rides for the younger children, while the parents would take care of the food kiosks, sell food, and collect the money. Claudia spent many years participating in these fundraisers and shared her experience in a positive tone.

And all the money that was collected was for the school. We prepared the food with our money; we did everything: we helped with the sales, and all the kids helped. The older ones helped with the rides for the little kids. (interview, 2018)

Although Claudia shows evidence of *resistant capital*, her two oldest daughters (now 22 and 19 years old) seemed to have had a difficult time adapting to the environment in U.S. schools. They never finished high school, but the two younger ones (12 and 15 years old) are still in school, and Claudia is hopeful that they will continue on and complete their schooling.

### Cati's story

Cati has been in Atlanta for more than 15 years. Cati's journey began in a small town in Veracruz, where she met her husband at a neighborhood dance. She explained that, because the town was so small, the customary way to socialize was through local dances: "I met him at a dance, dancing; it's the most common thing there" (interview, 2018). People from neighboring towns would attend these dances, which was the most common way for men and women to meet. After meeting her husband, Cati discovered that he had never attended school. She described his family as being extremely poor, lacking the resources to meet their basic needs. Because of this, her husband had to work most of the time. She relates the details as follows:

It was my husband who first suffered a lot. Him, definitely. It is very sad for me because my husband is really . . . he comes from a very poor family, uhm, they didn't have any resources, but, one option I noticed, one option I noticed in him, was his work ethic. To me, it was very important to be a hardworking man, and of course, I fell in love with him because of that, and that was enough for me. (interview, 2018)

Cati said that it was her husband who suggested they should move to Atlanta because he had been in Atlanta for a year during the five years they were dating: "We had been dating for five years. Then, during that time, he came here for a year. He came back to Mexico, and we got married. We stayed for a year in Mexico after we got married, and then we came to the United States" (interview, 2018).

During their courtship, Cati was attending school. During that period, Cati's *linguistic capital* emerged through her self-determination to learn English: "I went to the *preparatoria* (high school equivalent) to study; I spoke a little English. I could read it" (interview, 2018). Cati also explained that once she arrived in the United States, in an effort to teach herself English, she would read all the signs she saw on the street and try to translate them: "I was always reading everything; I was reading and translating" (interview, 2018).

Cati began accumulating *linguistic capital* when she learned the English language in school, and it was reaffirmed through her own style of self-teaching as a way to navigate her new community in the United States. Cati described that translating what she saw helped her adapt to the new society in which she now belonged: "I was reading to adapt to this place" (interview, 2018). Cati's development of her *linguistic capital* proved useful once she and her husband moved to the United States.

Upon their arrival, Cati described that her husband struggled to adapt. "My husband was the first one to suffer a lot. Him, definitely" (interview, 2018). Cati became emotional when she spoke about her husband, admitting she sometimes struggled with him because "he is passing on those disadvantages to the children" (interview, 2018). Cati's husband is attempting to nurture his *familial capital* by carrying out what Yosso (2005) described as the sense of memory, cultural intuition, and means of survival. Cati's *resistant capital* contrasts with her husband's *familial capital*. She describes herself as the family's manager: "sometimes, we have to manage, and that's me" (interview, 2018) because she felt she had to control her husband's obsession with poverty. Nevertheless, Cati, who graduated from high school and learned English, admitted that her husband's work ethic compensated for his lack of schooling.

Another form of *familial capital* can be seen through the close relationship Cati and her husband share with their parents, which made the decision to leave Veracruz very painful and difficult for both of them. In retrospect, however, Cati admitted that if they had they stayed in their hometown, their

families would have interfered in their relationship. Both Cati's parents and her husband's parents are sick. According to Cati, being in the United States has allowed them to provide financially for their parents, which they would not have been able to do if they had stayed in Mexico. Cati talked about her husband's *familial capital* in the following terms:

That's why this was a good option, because our families have a better quality of life. What my husband lacked as a child our parents have as adults. It is not a luxurious lifestyle, but there are the essentials. (interview, 2018).

Cati explained that being so far away from her parents had been beneficial because it had forced her to focus on her husband and children. Cati deviates from Yosso's (2005, 2006) *familial capital* because Cati's view of the family is limited to children and spouses, unlike Yosso's, in which kinship encompasses the extended family. In Cati's words: "That is why family to me is, is husband and wife and the children" (interview, 2018). Cati's concept of the familial seemingly excludes the extended family, although Cati's and her husband's actions concerning their parents prove otherwise, demonstrating that her *familial capital* is more extensive than she recognizes at times.

In addition to the *linguistic* and *familial capital* exhibited by Cati, she showed strong *navigational* and *social capital* when explaining that she had always been the type of person who would ask questions without hesitation. When her oldest son turned four, Cati had to enroll him in pre-kindergarten. Cati asked her neighbors which school was zoned for them, and where it was located. In combination with her *navigational capital*, Cati's *linguistic capital* gave her the confidence to personally go to the school to inquire about the requirements for the enrollment of her child. Cati's unparalleled *navigational*, *social*, and *linguistic capital* were exhibited repeatedly throughout her adaptation experiences.

Using her *linguistic* and *navigational capital*, Cati was able to provide the school with the items required to register her children. Cati's ability to maneuver through this process is also an example of Yosso's (2005) argument that "*navigational capital* thus acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints, but it also connects to social networks that facilitate community navigation in places and spaces including schools" (p. 80).

Cati felt welcomed by the school personnel, but unlike the other participants she was concerned by the lack of representation of Latinx culture at the school. "Back then, my culture wasn't represented there" (interview, 2018). Cati had no recollection of the school staff welcoming Latinx culture or asking parents to contribute with cultural realia such as food, traditional costumes, music, and so on. In her view, when parents were asked to participate, the school simply required her attendance in the workshops. She explained, "Participating means being there. Then, they had programs that helped us and I therefore had to attend. If they were going to teach me, and show me how to do something, then I had to go" (interview, 2018). Cati initially felt that the school staff had an indifferent attitude toward her and her son because they were Latinx. She described the attitude as follows: "They think: 'they are Hispanic; they don't learn, they don't understand, it is the system, they can't connect, there are too many distractions, their minds are not focused.' That was the conversation with them, and that didn't help me in any way. Give me strategies" (interview, 2018). Cati asked school administrators to specifically delineate their expectations and demanded that school personnel provide Latinx parents with strategies on how to become more involved in school functions. Cati's determination and confrontation of the school administration clearly evidence her *navigational* and *resistant capital*.

### **Dealing with current policies: exemplary navigational capital**

On any given morning in metro Atlanta, children and parents walk the streets of their neighborhoods on their way to school. Many of these parents are undocumented, and one or both of them could be apprehended by law enforcement and deported under the anti-immigration laws enforced by the current administration. This leads to disarray, because many Latinx undocumented immigrants are parents of underage children who are either U.S. citizens or are protected under the Deferred Action

for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy (Herold, 2017; Newman et al., 2018). Therefore, it is easy to see how enforcing the deportation of undocumented adult immigrants has placed a tremendous burden on Latino families and their U.S. citizen children.

Moreover, as Vélez (2016) observes,

Latinx parents are tasked with transforming, not just becoming involved, the spaces often allocated for them in schools. And for Latinx immigrant parents, particularly the undocumented, there is the additional burden of dealing with the legal boundaries of political membership in the United States, that complicate the terms of engagement in school reform. (p.112, emphasis in original)

Former U.S. president Donald Trump focused on the deportation of noncitizens as a matter of national security (Herold, 2017). The devastating consequences of Trump's policies for the families of undocumented immigrants have been recognized by many scholars (Dreby, 2012; Gulbas & Zayas, 2017; Negrón-Gonzales, 2014). Undocumented families' dreams to remain in the United States and allow their children to pursue higher education have become challenging. Due to Trump's promise to deport millions of undocumented immigrants, the undocumented parents of U.S.-born children are forced to confront the harsh reality of potential separation from their children by deportation. Dreby (2012) argued that "[d]eportation policies have had a widespread impact on U.S. Latinx immigrant communities" (p. 833), and therefore the biggest fear expressed by Latinx immigrant parents is that they could lose custody of their U.S.-born children.

Many Latinx families blame Trump's administration for what they describe as the worst situation in which they have lived since their arrival in the United States. The participants in this study give testament to this assertion. When asked about their perception of the impact of Trump's views on society, Claudia explained that "there is also a lot more racism" (interview, 2018). She then shared her intentions to move to another country if the situation worsens. Costeña, on the other hand, demonstrated stronger resilience: "*El riesgo está, pero, uno no puede vivir con miedo, puesto que el miedo no lleva a nada bueno, solo lleva a la desesperación.* [The risk is there, but we can't live in fear, because fear gets you nowhere and only leads to desperation]" (interview, 2018). Lola, likewise, reflected on struggles in the current policy climate:

We are close families who care about our children's education and who work in this country day after day, because we want our children to get ahead in life. We are also helping this country grow, because our children are American, and they will be the future of this country. Some of us know very well what poverty is, and we have gotten ahead. Although we did not have money in our countries, here, we are working very hard, because no one has given us anything freely. We are not all rapists or criminals. Unfortunately, what we do not have are papers, and yes, that makes us illegal in this country, but we all came here in pursuit of a dream, and most of all, in search of work. I do not think that the color of a person's skin or physical appearance matters; what matters are people's feelings, the way people express them. You understand me? (interview, 2018)

Here, Lola is referencing a statement made by Trump suggesting that Mexicans are "criminals" and "rapists" (Newman et al., 2018). Lola's description of the cultural wealth Latinx parents bring to schools in metro Atlanta constitutes a powerful lesson, not only on motivation and values, but on citizenship as well. Lola's statement summarizes the culture of the large Latinx population residing in metro Atlanta. A recent study published by the Pew Hispanic Research Center (2018), showed that five million U.S. citizen children live in households where one or both parents are undocumented. All of the families in this study include at least some, if not all, children who are U.S. citizens. Thus, these families are directly affected by the current deportation policies.

## Conclusion

Participants in this study showed evidence of cultural wealth that displays all forms of capital as identified by Yosso (2005, 2006). The participants in this study shared a resilience that must be acknowledged. Their identities of unparalleled strength and determination were shaped by their lived

experiences, from the moment they decided to embark on a transnational journey, cross the border, spend nights in the desert, expose themselves and their families to life-threatening risks, and make sacrifices.

The participants' *testimonios* serve as evidence of acts of courage and learning. The participants formed a group of parents who came together in a micro-network that is part of the ethnic, cultural, and social landscape that embodies metro Atlanta. The Latina mothers in this study are challenging decades of racism. They are powerful immigrants who are aware of the importance of the economic and political sustainability of their families. They are determined to provide their children with the educational opportunities they believe are key to their children's success, despite the risks. However, the parents' determination to contribute to their children's education is not sufficient to increase their involvement, since schools are designed for white, middle-class families (Vélez, 2016). For school officials, understanding the complexities of current policies and their effects on Latinx families is a necessary step toward reconstructing our communities along more socially just lines.

Yosso (2006) argued that the deficit in understanding cultural values leads to ignorance of the importance placed on education by Latinx families. In other words, Latinx parents' seeming lack of involvement in schools is often misinterpreted by school officials. The participants' *testimonios* challenge these assumptions because they demonstrate multiple attempts to participate in school functions, and previous research has shown that Latina mothers are able to transform educational programs when given the opportunity (Oliva & Alemán, 2019). In fact, participants in this study demonstrated that they can be critical of educational policies if they are familiar with them. Participants were also proactive when school personnel suggested anything that would benefit their children. However, one issue discussed by participants was that they did not become involved with policies because they lacked a clear understanding of how they would affect the children. Therefore, school officials should provide Latinx parents with information explaining legal issues and policies that may directly affect their children.

Latinx parents are strong advocates of their children's education. All participants described their interactions with schools as positive experiences. However, the concept of having a strong relationship with the school was not evident. When asked about how they were invited to participate in their children's education, participants shared that "food" was the main contribution sought from them by school officials as a way to connect them to their children's schools. The Latina mothers in this study expressed their desire to inform the school community about their culture (i.e., history, geography, traditions, etc.), if given the opportunity. When I asked the participants how their CCW could contribute to the school's environment, Lola suggested the following: "*Yo haría un tipo de historia, con una muralla, las raíces de México, sus tradiciones, algo pequeño pero informativo* [I would do some sort of history mural, with Mexico's roots, its traditions, something small but informative]" (interview, 2018). Another participant shared, "*Se podrían dar muchas pláticas; las personas de un estado podrían juntarse y hacer un PowerPoint. Explicar todo lo que hay, lo que se exporta, para que la gente nos conociera más* [We could give presentations; people from the same state could get together and prepare a PowerPoint – explain what they have, what is exported, so people could get to know us better]" (Claudia, interview, 2018).

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

There are limitations with this study. It can be argued that the sample size is too small and therefore not a representative sample. However, by using a small sample I was able to delve deeply into their experiences, giving each participant the opportunity to share intimate details of their lives by gaining their trust and confidence. Furthermore, since this study only features Latina mothers from Mexico, I suggest that future research should focus on participants from other Latin American countries from a feminist theoretical framework.

It is imperative that local school boards, lawmakers, and stakeholders be reminded that Latinx are the largest minority population in the United States (Araque et al., 2017) and that, regardless of their citizenship status, the Latina mothers in this study placed a high value on their children's education. Future research on Latinx immigrant families and the effects of their separation under anti-immigration laws should continue with a humanitarian approach to examine the daily struggles and uncertainties that they face. I take the liberty of calling on activists to search for initiatives toward reevaluating national policies that affect U.S.-citizen children, to ensure the welfare of this country's children. Furthermore, facilitating an environment that integrates Latinx culture contributes to an exchange of cultural knowledge that translates into concrete benefits. Thus, this study is also a call to our society to view Latinx families as a source of wealth and assets that benefit the entire community. Latinx immigrant parents' *testimonios* reflect a strong commitment to the welfare of their children as they enroll them, get them to school, help them complete homework, and communicate with school administrators and teachers, even when faced with language, racial, cultural, and political barriers. This study is a testament to previous studies showing how Latinx value education. Therefore, I emphasize that placing Latinx' *testimonios* at the center of educational research and understanding how Latina mothers navigate schools in the United States, helps the community gain a better understanding of challenges faced by Latinx families.

Finally, the participants in this study are an empirical demonstration that Latinx rely heavily on their micro-networks developed mainly through their familial, navigational, and social capital. The Latinx families in this study created bonds through their shared educational and immigrant experiences which helped them navigate U.S. schools (Bejarano & Valverde, 2012). Therefore, educators who aim to improve relationships with Latinx parents should address Latinx families as a community, rather than as single family units. For school administrators and educators to better understand the Latinx families they serve, they must recognize the strong bonds developed within Latinx micro-networks.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

The authors have no funding to report.

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