Transgenerational Experiences of Latino Youth and Immigrant Parents

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master in Social Work

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my parents who immigrated to this country in search of a better life and taught me the value of working hard, being humble, and the importance of striving for higher education. This project is also dedicated to my husband who has given me his unconditional love and support throughout my educational journey. I would also like to dedicate this to my unborn child who I am currently pregnant with. May she understand the struggles of her immigrant mother and family and may she strive for social equality. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this to all the Latinos who like myself have immigrated to this country, worked hard, and strive every day for a better life. May we continue to grow and help others to create a better future generation.
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The present research used the Photovoice method to examine the possibility that Latino youth born in the United States, who are the children of Latino immigrant parents, may experience transgenerational trauma. It also aims to explore the experiences that Latino immigrant parents have endured. Latino immigrants may suffer several types of trauma such as separation from support networks, discrimination, relocation, and traumatic events they may have endured in the process of immigrating. These experiences can influence the trajectory of an individual's' life and may be passed along to their offspring.

The Photovoice method was chosen for this study as it is a powerful approach to qualitative data which allows for disadvantaged and marginalized communities such as immigrants to tell their story through photography and storytelling. Taking part in this study were 4 adult children of immigrants who were born in the United States and 4 adult
immigrant parents, who were born in Mexico and/or Central America. Findings show common themes such as the importance of family, enforcement of education, the difficulty and strengths of being bilingual, feelings of inferiority and fear, challenges of employment, the importance of intrinsic motivation, and the coping strategies used to deal with these experiences. The authors hope that these findings can be beneficial to help this population heal instead of being marginalized. Lastly, we hope that it will provide a deeper understanding of transgenerational trauma and its long lasting effects in the Latino community.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine if Latino youth born in the United States, who are the children of Latino immigrant parents, experience transgenerational trauma. Latino immigrants may suffer several types of trauma before, during, and after migration to the U.S. Experiences such as the separation with support networks, discrimination, relocation, and traumatic events they may have endured in the process of immigrating. These experiences can be traumatizing and can also influence the trajectory of an individual's' life. According to Phipps and Degges-White (2013), parents who are struggling with their own psychological distress may also have difficulty parenting and therefore their offspring may also suffer as a result. Transgenerational trauma has been used to describe the trauma symptoms of the holocaust survivors, however little attention has been given to the transgenerational trauma that Latino youth experience (Phipps & Degges-White, 2013). This study is significant in order to help understand the issue of immigration, its impact and the effect that it can have on individuals as well as society. Understanding this issue can begin to help communities heal instead of being marginalized. Lastly, it can give professionals a deeper understanding of transgenerational trauma and its long lasting effects in the Latino community in order to provide better services and interventions as well as recognize the resilience Latino families have. Furthermore, this study can give professionals a better understanding of how trauma is defined and how the definition can be more inclusive of transgenerational trauma.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Trauma

The understanding of what trauma is has evolved over the years. A neurologist by
the name of Jean Martin Charcot first began making a connection between trauma and
mental illness in his study of hysteria. This term evolved from a male patriarchal
framework used to describe what was believed to be a disease in women originating from
the uterus (Herman, 1997). The symptoms of hysteria were described as amnesia,
convulsions, sensory loss, and paralysis. This term had its limitations as it was sexist and
was used as a medical metaphor to describe what men did not understand or found
unmanageable in women (Micale, 1989). Later during World War I the term “shell
shocked” was used to describe the symptoms of soldiers who were returning from the
war. The symptoms were characterized as screaming, memory loss, physical paralysis,
and lack of responsiveness (Herman, 1997). A few years after that war ended the
psychological effects of trauma gradually dwindled until World War II when symptoms
were described as combat neurosis (Herman, 1997). Later, in the mid to late 1970’s
soldiers returning from the Vietnam War who had suffered psychological trauma again
raised awareness about the psychological effects of war and pressured politicians for help
with psychological treatment (Herman, 1997). In 1980 the characteristics of
psychological trauma became an actual diagnosis. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was
incorporated to the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical
Manual (DSM) in 1980. Since its inclusion there has been a constant debate about what
constitutes a traumatic event and it has been changed in every edition of the DSM manual (Paris, 2013). Breslau & Kessler (2001) also argue that there is no clear definition about was trauma is. For example is trauma a stressor such as a threat to one’s own life or can it be traumatic enough just to be a bystander or a distant observer (Paris, 2013)? An additional limitation is also its historical focus as thus far the focal point has been on men and their heroic efforts but it has overlooked other traumatic events such as rape, domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and prolonged or repeated trauma. The current American Psychiatric Association (2013), DSM V describes the criteria necessary for PTSD as follows a) exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence b) presence of intrusion symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks c) avoidance or inability to recall the trauma d) negative alterations in memory and mood associated with the event, e) alterations in arousal and reactivity associated f) disturbance last more than one month g) disturbance causes impairments. This interpretation of trauma fails to incorporate a more ecological perspective regarding trauma. An ecological perspective such as the one developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) has been used as an effective framework to understating trauma (Hoffman & Kruczek, 2011). Through this lens one considers the interactions between the systems in which an individual exists such as culture, socio political factors, environment, and support systems that can alleviate or exacerbate an individual’s traumatic experience (Goodman and West-Olatunji, 2010). To address the limitations in the definition of trauma Herman (1997) developed a new understanding of trauma called Complex Trauma. Complex trauma is a term used by researchers to describe forms of trauma which are complicated and may have complex
symptoms that extend from the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (Herman, 1997). According to Herman (1997), complex trauma is experienced by those threatened for a long period of time and who suffer long-standing severe personality disorganization. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2014) defines complex trauma as a variety of traumatic events, such as physical and sexual abuse, witnessing domestic or community violence, separation from family members, and re-victimization by others. Complex trauma recognizes the complicated nature of trauma and therefore extends from post-traumatic stress disorder criteria. Transgenerational trauma is also complex and inclusive of the effects that a primary individual or group trauma can have on other generations.

**Historical and Transgenerational Trauma**

Historical and transgenerational trauma are terms that originated from studying the effects of the Holocaust, particularly how the children of Holocaust survivors were impacted by the traumatic experiences of their parents (Danieli, 1998). However transgenerational trauma has extended to understand the experiences of other populations such as the ones Goodman and West-Olatunji (2008) referenced in their study; families of veterans from World War II and the Vietnam War (as cited by Aarts, 1998; Bernstein, 1998; Rosenheck & Fontana, 1998a, 1998b), indigenous peoples (as cited by Duran, Duran, Yellow Horse Brave Heart & Yellow Horse-Davis, 1998; Raphael, Swan & Martinek, 1998) and also on survivors of domestic violence and child abuse (as cited by Gardner, 1999; Schechter, Brunelli, Cunningham, Brown & Baca, 20002; Simons & Johnson, 1998; Walker, 1999). Furthermore, Historical and transgenerational trauma can
both be understood from the effects of slavery and colonialism on people and communities.

Dr. DeGruy developed a theory, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (P.T.S.S.), it explains the cause of adaptive behaviors in African American communities that live in the United States and the Diaspora. These adaptive behaviors were at a time survival behaviors and they reflect multigenerational oppression of Africans that resulted from centuries of chattel slavery. The adaptive behaviors are then transmitted through multiple generations and they affect the systems in which we exist; home, school, work, and society as a whole. (Joy DeGruy, 2013-2016). Additionally, we can understand transgenerational trauma from the colonization of Indigenous Peoples in which their land was taken away as well as their right to self-determination and today they still face the stress and effects of colonialism in their daily lives (Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird, 2005). Colonialism refers to taking over territories through invasion, subjugation, and occupation (Yellow Bird, 2004). Latinos have also experienced and continue to suffer the effects of colonialism and oppression. The Indigenous people of the Americas, who are the ancestors to many Latinos, suffered more than 500 years of varying oppression including genocide, rape, and the demolition of their ancestral beliefs (Rodriguez & Gonzalez, 2005). Those who have origins from Mexico have endured 500 years of dominance and subordination in Mexico from European colonist that include the Spanish, English, Portuguese, and French, and by Anglo-Americans in the United States. Additionally, like Indigenous people Mexicans have been robbed of their land through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, they were discriminated against, used for cheap labor, and not given the same rights as Anglo-Americans, and this still remains true (Estrada, 2009). The
repercussions of these cultural genocides have led to economic, social, and political disparities that continues to impact the lives of Latinos across the world.

The main difference between historical trauma and transgenerational trauma is explained by Gryczynski, Johnson, & Caldwell (2012), “transgenerational trauma can be tracked over three or four generations within a family, historical trauma can be tracked over several generations in large groups of people, with multiple families experiencing the effects (as cited by Phipps, 2014). While the effects of transgenerational trauma have been studied on several populations, there is not a lot of research on the impact and transmission of immigration trauma in Latinos or on their future generations.

**Immigration and Trauma**

The reason to immigrate varies from person to person, but Phipps & Degges-White (2014) contend that many changes occur due to migration including “drastic relationship changes and disruption of connection with support networks, prolonged and adverse financial changes, as well as severe discrimination and rejection all [which] could potentially constitute traumatic experiences (as cited by Perez-Foster, 2001) and immigrants commonly endure all three of these experiences” (p. 174). Perez-Foster (2001) state that immigration in itself is not traumatic per se but rather there can be traumatic events before, during, or after dislocation, and those events could lead to psychological distress (as cited by Desjarlais et al 1995). Additionally, Perez-Foster (2001) state that new literature identifies four stages of migration where traumatic experiences can lead to serious psychological distress which include: premigration trauma, traumatic events experienced while migrating to the new county, continuing
traumatogenic experiences during the process of asylum-seeking and resettlement, and poor living conditions in the new country they are in due to unemployment, inadequate supports, and minority persecution. Premigration trauma could occur from wars that have broken out in the person’s country of birth, for example the Civil War that occurred in El Salvador in 1979 that caused 25 percent of the population to migrate in response to the repression and violence due to the onset of the war (Migration Policy Institute, 2001-2016). In Mexico’s case the higher rate of violence as a result of the drug war and with the Mexican drug cartels looking to have more control over smuggling, kidnapping, and extortion of migrants, people who decide to migrate face more danger (npr, 2016). It is clear that during the process of immigration an individual may potentially experience a traumatic event; how this traumatic event is then transmitted to youth of immigrant parents does not have a singular answer. Exploring the transmission of trauma from an immigrant parent to his/her youth can be beneficial to comprehend and help this population. Clinical studies report a wide range of affective and emotional symptoms transmitted over generations such as distrust of the world, impaired parental function, chronic sorrow, inability to communicate feelings, an ever-present fear of danger, pressure for educational achievement, separation anxiety, lack of entitlement, unclear boundaries, and overprotectiveness within a narcissistic family system (Braga, Mello, & Fiks, 2012). All of these characteristics can have a detrimental effect on the trajectory in the life of a youth.

**Transmission of Trauma**

Thus far, literature posits that those who have not experienced a traumatic event directly may show trauma symptoms that have been transmitted through generations,
from the person who experienced the trauma. There are different theories as to how the transmission of trauma occurs. Dekel & Goldblatt (2008) theorizes that the transmission of trauma can occur through the way the family functions and involvement, through family atmosphere, and through patterns of communication. Family functions and involvement refers to regulation of proximity and distance from the event that may contribute to attachment and intimacy problems which can reduce involvement in family activities (as cited by Cohen, Dekel, Solomon, & Lavie, 2003; Ruscio et al., 2002). The family atmosphere, which is whether there is violence at home and through patterns of communication, how the event is communicated, which can be through silence, partial details, or over disclosure. Silence becomes confusing and ambivalent for a child because they do not understand what is happening in their home, only knowing partial details leaves room to add the missing details and come up with a made up story that may be worse than the actual event. On the other hand over disclosure in which too many details and information is disclosed may not be developmentally appropriate for the child.

Kellermann (2001) has defined four theories to the transmission of trauma which include psychodynamic, sociocultural, family system, and biological models. The psychodynamic model posits that the children of those who experienced trauma unconsciously absorb the emotions that could not be consciously expressed by the primary person who experienced the trauma. The sociocultural model theorizes that the self-image of the children of the survivors are affected through the parents’ child-rearing behavior. The family system model explains how the transmission takes place unconsciously and consciously within a certain family environment. Lastly, biological models are based on the assumptions that there are genetic and/or biochemical
predispositions to an illness, in the case of trauma transmission for example, “memories of fear can thus be carried across generations through physiological processes and get ‘picked up’ by another mind and elements of the collective experience of the species are thus reflected in the genome (Perry 1999; as cited by Kellermann 2001, p. 263).

Understanding the transmission of trauma is complex but the families who have immigrated and experienced trauma due to immigration can offer more than just their traumatic experience to learn from. They also have other factors that helped them survive and have offspring who are successful within a world of adversity.

Transgenerational Trauma and Resilience

As the understanding of trauma has evolved so has the methods of treatment. It is equally important to understand the epistemology and the negative psychological effects of trauma but also to recognize the strengths, positive ways of coping, and the resilience that has been developed (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2008). According to Grotberg (1995) resilience is the human capacity to deal with, overcome, learn from or even be transformed by adversity. In order to recognize resiliency helping professionals often use a strengths based perspective which focuses on a client’s strengths instead of concentrating on the problem. According to Van Breda (2001) a problem does not define a person’s entire life and focusing on just the problem itself may cause more problems. Furthermore, she states that focusing on the problem only weakens a person’s self-confidence and deteriorates their strengths (Van Breda, 2001, p.203). Using existing strengths and resources is a great tool in overcoming challenges faced by those who have experienced trauma as it can aid in their recovery. It is important to give marginalized
communities, in this those who have immigrated to the United States, an opportunity to share their stories, their strengths, and their struggles as they are the experts of their lives.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

Participants

Our study includes 4 adult children of immigrant parents and 4 adult immigrant parents. The participants were unrelated. The adult children of immigrants were youth age 18-24 who were born in the United States. The immigrant parents were of any adult age, had legal citizenship status, and were born in Mexico and/or Central America. This research excludes the experiences of youth and immigrants from countries other than Mexico/ Central America. It also excludes youth over the age of 25, who were not born in the United States and those who do not live in the Los Angeles County.

Recruitment

The participants were recruited through snowball sampling. No screening device was used to select from a wider pool outside of the Los Angeles County. All participation was voluntary and participants will had the right to drop out at any time. Each participant signed an Adult Consent Form immediately after the participant told the researchers they were interested in participating in the study. No children were used in this study.

Study Procedures

The researchers met with participants two times during the course of the study. During the first meeting the researchers provided a detailed overview of the study, including confidentiality, informed consent, description of Photovoice, and to gain
background information/interview of the participants. Researchers also requested that all participants sign the Photo Image Release Form. The participants then had 15 days to take 5 photographs. Then, participants attended a second meeting to allow the researchers to collect photographs and allow opportunity for participant to discuss photographs. Researchers provided monetary compensation in the form of a $20.00 Target gift card to each participant.

**Photovoice**

The research method utilized in this study is Photovoice. Photovoice is a powerful, personal and unique approach to qualitative data which allows for disadvantaged and marginalized communities such as immigrants to tell their story through photography and storytelling. The use of “Photovoice enables people to identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang, 1999, Pg. 18). Researchers asked participants to capture their personal experiences and views as it relates to being an immigrant as well as the experience being an adult child of an immigrant parent through photography. Participants had the freedom to photograph any image they felt represents their lived experiences and helps to empower the immigrant community. This includes, but is not limited to images that reflect the following: 1) What it feels like to be an immigrant in the United States? 2) What it feels like to be a child of an immigrant living in the United States? 3) What are/ were the challenges and stressors? 4) What coping strategies did /do you use to deal with your experience? Researchers provided an overview of information regarding Photovoice during the first meeting with the participants to ensure their full understanding of this methodology. Participants were then asked to provide a short description of their photographs and how the photographs
pertain to their personal experiences. Researchers also audio recorded the oral
descriptions of the photographs given by the participants. Through Photovoice
immigrants and their children will have an empowering opportunity to share with the
world their personal experiences.
CHAPTER IV

Results

Through the interviews of the participants and their photographs we found several themes that reflect the experiences of being an immigrant in the United States and also being a child of an immigrant. Some of the different categories of participants, those who were immigrants and those who were children of immigrants, had overlapping responses. The responses paint a story of not only challenges but strengths, resiliency, and motivation. Following are the themes; family, education, language, inferiority, employment, coping strategies, fear, intrinsic motivation, and community that emerged during the discussion with participants who commented on the photographs that they took.

Family

Those who are immigrants and children of immigrants shared the role of family in their lives, and the importance of being united with their families. Youth who are children of immigrants’ view having and staying connected to as the most important thing. They shared that being able to sit and eat with their family together was a privilege. Family is so important that you choose them over other things. As children of immigrants, there is a feeling of gratitude towards their family, a feeling of owing something to them and in response to this feeling they want to help economically by supporting their families. Some parents who had immigrated to the United states also described how difficult it was to leave their families and how scared and alone they felt adapting themselves to a new country. One father stated that procreating a family here in the United States has been a
strength that was gained living in this country as it was a driving force to better his life. He also stated that sustaining a family and having a home back in his country would have been difficult due to the poor economic conditions he lived in.

Figure 1. Enough to eat

“The strengths is having my family, without a family I wouldn't be as strong as I am today...we don't have a lot but we make a lot from what we have, so you know we may not have a lot of money but at least we make enough money to eat”. -Youth

Figure 2. Having a home

“Sustaining a family and having a home would have been difficult back in my country”. -Immigrant Parent

Figure 3. Support Parents

“That is like the goal in life, to be able to support my parents”. -Youth
Education

Education for youth was important for different reasons. The reason that youth decided to seek an education, continue to college, was because it was enforced by their parents. Parents enforced education because either the youth got an education or they would end up working the jobs their parents work. For the youth there was no choice but to get an education. Youth were not ashamed of the jobs their parents did but framed them as dead end jobs with no future. Their parents enforced education by taking their children to work with them and showing them what work life was for them.

Additionally, for children of immigrants, getting an education meant being able to help their parents. One of the youth mentioned that he was getting an education to help his dad with his business. His father works for a painting company and is undocumented and the youth is a citizen so he will be able to use his licensure and degree to help his father in getting fair pay for the work that he does. While education was important, it has come with its challenges. They had to figure out on their own issues around school like homework and getting into college because their parents could not help. There was a lot of pressure to get an education and succeed. The cost of getting an education is high and this limited the range of college choices to apply to due to fees and tuition; youth did not want to be hard on parents and cause stress. Youth also felt pressure to get an education if they had older siblings who had gotten an education. Lastly, youth mentioned that while in college there was this barrier that had to be jumped in order to make sure they were at a certain level like everyone else. A couple of parents also mentioned how important it was to get an education and to learn English as it was necessary in order to succeed in this country. One father stated that having an education could help their
children succeed in this country otherwise they would also have to work hard laboring jobs. Another mother stated that going to school and learning the English language was important to her and once she couldn't go to night school she would take her children to school and be involved at their school to continue learning.

Figure 4. No Other Option

“There is no quitting in school like if we quit in school then what is the point, we're just going to end up like our parents, school is our only option our only way out”. - Youth

Figure 5. Continue Learning

“I went to night school and was involved in my children’s school to continue learning”. - Immigrant Parent

Figure 6. Sadness

“It comes with a lot of sadness [being the child of an immigrant], my mom she would always tell us like when she would take us to work with her to see how she is a housekeeper and this is what you don’t want to be, you need to finish school, you need to get good grades”. - Youth
Language

Both the immigrant parents and the youth expressed language as an important theme. The parents expressed the difficulty arriving in this country not knowing the language. While the youth saw the great value in being bilingual. One of the youth spoke of the challenges in learning as she was not just learning new academics but also learning a new language, learning English as a second language, and then having to take ESL classes. She learned how to read and speak English in school as her parents were monolingual in Spanish. One father described learning the English language as essential to succeeding in this country.

Figure 7. Bilingual Strength

“Being bilingual is obviously one of the strongest, one of the biggest strengths that one may have being the child of an immigrant, speaking both languages”. -Youth

Figure 8. Academics and Language

“Biggest challenge I had growing up was because my parents spoke only Spanish I learned how to speak English at a very late age well considered seven years old and that was a really big challenge at school because most people here speak English as their first language so I was in ESL for a couple of years in elementary school and I just felt having to learn another language on top of actually learning and going to school was at times really hard”. -Youth
Inferiority

While listening to the participants’ narratives we also found a common theme of inferiority. Some of the youth expressed feeling that they constantly had to prove their worth. This feeling affected the way the experienced education, employment, and perhaps life in general. According to Rodriguez and Gonzalez (2005), thoughts of inferiority are a common characteristic of internalized oppression. These characteristics or feelings may distort the belief of being capable to achieve educational and employment goals. One youth described that growing up she sometimes felt less than others as she had limitations and she came from an immigrant family. Another youth described how small he sometimes feels currently living in America.

Figure 9. Less than Others

“Young taking a selfie with a statue and the statue is bigger than the person that is standing underneath it... pretty much symbolizes how I felt sort of growing up, you feel less than others because you feel you have limitations because you come from an immigrant family you know even being just Hispanic in general some people look down on you”. - Youth
“The reason why I took this picture is because it’s more actually how I feel now, now growing up just because this run for presidency we are beginning to see a different side of America I believe so this is more to represent how I feel now more than anything… The Lego represents how small I sometimes feel in America today”. -Youth

“I related myself to an ant because I feel being a child of an immigrant I feel so small, I feel so underestimated, I feel like I have to proof myself, I have to defend myself in certain situations like at school, at work being surrounded by people of different races.... being an ant I would say I’m proud of being a child of an immigrant, I feel like it comes with yeah I come across these tough situations but I am still able to succeed”. -Youth

**Employment**

For those who were immigrants finding employment was a challenge because they did not have a social security number to work and therefore no identification. Some of the immigrant parents worked a lot and were not at home so much. Two of the participants shared that in order to be able to work they borrowed a cousin's social security number. Another mother described that when she was asked if she knew English she said “yes” even though she didn't really know. A father described that without education his children would also have to go stand in front Home Depot and look for employment as he had. For the youth finding employment was a necessity. One youth shares that she began working
when she was 15 to not burden her parents and to pay for her own things. Furthermore, the youth have worked with their parents and have gotten some income from them. One of the youth works in the same painting company his dad works at. Another youth remembers getting paid five dollars at the end of the day working with her mom as a younger child.

Figure 12. Skills and Pay

“What my dad works for is a company, he already has the skills, the clientele and everything, he just needs somebody who has the papers and the education so I’m going to be that person since I had the opportunity, not like him who has to work and not able to go to school”. -Youth

Figure 13. Home Depot

“Without education my children will also have to go stand in front of Home Depot and look for employment”. -Immigrant Parent
Coping Strategies

The participants described various types of coping strategies which helped them to deal with their experience as an immigrant or being a child of an immigrant. The youth described things such as music, going to the beach, taking pictures, and traveling. One of the mothers described cooking while a father described being with family as coping strategy.
“It’s a famous song by Bob Marley and I feel like music not only his music but just music in general will always be like is the medium in which I cope with things in life.” - Youth

“Traveling is the biggest thing I could ever do and it's the way of me sort of showing that I could do anything like being in the airplane and being in the air is like the sky's the limit it's like I could pretty much do anything and then even being able to carry the passport in itself you know my parents came out here with nothing and they didn’t have that and thankfully they were able to you know get their papers and now they don’t have those limits and I am so thankful I didn’t have to go through it and since day one I could have medical insurance, I could go to school when it came to college, I could afford to sign up for financial aid so yeah it’s pretty much like that I could walk in and out of anywhere without anyone telling me I can’t”. - Youth

“It’s a picture of downtown and it's just you see different things being at home which is not having opportunities it is more of what you do with yourself and how you take life and for me I just usually to go away from problems or stress from school I just go and take pictures”. - Youth
Fear

While the participants had legal citizenship at the time of the interviews they shared their experiences prior to being documented. Immigrant parents felt fear to go out in the street while not having legal citizenship. There was a fear of not being accepted, of getting deported, and of how to explain these things to your children. One participant who immigrated here with her child stated that she felt fear sending her child to school as he was undocumented. She described a time when Governor Pete Wilson was in office and bill # 187 was proposed which would not allow undocumented children to attend public schools. She feared that her child would not be able to obtain an education. Another parent described the fear she felt driving when her residence was not legal. She described the fear she felt driving in San Fernando to pick up her children from school and trying to stay away from police checkpoints as she feared they would arrest her and take away her children as she did not have a license or legal permission to reside in this country. Some of the youth shared they saw their parents experience that fear of getting caught and sent back to their home countries.

Figure 19. Fear

“I had to drive but I didn’t have my license because I couldn’t take out a California license so I was driving without a license and my fear was coming across a police and that they would take my car away and my car was used for my necessities to pick up my kids from school, do my errands, so my fear was to get stopped, get a ticket or that I would get deported for not having a California license”.
– Immigrant Parent (translated from Spanish to English).
Intrinsic Motivation

Throughout many of the interviews for both parents and youth we found a commonality of intrinsic motivation. A father described that those who have the internal motivation are those who succeed in this country. Another mother described that this country was full of opportunities and a person with motivation can start a business with a taco stand and make it into successful Mexican catering truck. Additionally, that you have to work hard and fulfill your wishes. Youth mentioned having a plan, a certain mindset, a view of life in order to succeed.
Community

Having a community seemed to buffer the negative effects, such as feelings of inferiority, that immigrants and children of immigrants encountered. One of the participants mentioned that due to growing up around other Latinos they didn’t feel left out. One youth mentioned that his friends were a community, they were all Hispanic, and they helped one another out. Another youth mentioned that Latinos are generally not accepted but he did not feel left out because he grew up with other Latinos.

Figure 22. Friends

“We've been friends since elementary. Were all Hispanic there’s not one of us that's a different race it's just all Hispanic and to be together as a group since elementary and still hang out to this day you are talking of about at least a decade...we all help each other out in a way to stay together and to push each other, some you know don't go as far but that's why there's someone actually making it far enough to pull everyone up”. -Youth

Figure 23. Latino Community

“Growing up I grew up in a Latino community and did not, growing up I never really felt left out for being Latino or being the son of an immigrant at all because I grew up with other Latinos in the Latino community but that doesn’t mean that just because I didn’t experience it doesn’t mean other people in other parts of the country are experiencing what I have they are probably experiencing like the opposite so I feel like this image of America this artwork here are two symbols of how there are two sides of America one luckily that I lived in that wasn’t that bad and this other states or cities across the countries that Latinos do not feel accepted or what not”. -Youth
CHAPTER V

Discussion

Outcomes

Interesting reflections emerged during this Photovoice study. Using the photovoice method eight Latina/o participants were able to analyze and share important aspects and experiences in their lives as they relate to either being immigrant or being the child of immigrants. As mentioned throughout the literature immigrants may experience trauma prior, during, and after migration. The experiences that immigrants face can have severe and long-term impacts not only on the mental health of immigrants but also on their adjustment to life in the U.S. (Makley and Falcone, 2010). These experiences may also affect their offspring youth as young people grow up internalizing the content of their families’ relocation experience in addition to the emotional effects that these circumstances produce within the family members (Phipps and Degges-White, 2013).

The participants who were immigrants to the United States did not talk in depth about the reasons they immigrated and whether or not they encountered possible traumatic events in the process of migrating. However, the youth participants who were children of immigrants did talk about their parents wanting a better life for them and wanting more opportunities for their children which gives some insight into why people decide to migrate. Some participants, both immigrants and children of immigrants, talked about feelings of fear as it relates to being an immigrant, fears of living in the United States. Furthermore, children of immigrants also seek better opportunities through education and seek to help their parents. It was not clear whether the youth knew their parents’
immigration story and if so in how much detail but it seems that the message that youth understood is that their parents faced many challenges, they made sacrifices, and now there has to be some way to show that those sacrifices made my parents who were immigrants was worth it. Based on this it seems that to some degree there is some internalization of their parents’ immigration experience and the emotional effects that take place within the family.

Some youth reported working hard and getting an education to live a better life than their parents. Education was not an option to progress in life rather an enforcement by their parents necessary to become successful. This enforcement caused youth to feel pressure to not only get a higher education but to do well. Additionally, it caused feelings of failure and of wasting their parent’s efforts if youth didn’t feel they were succeeding. This information seems to point to transgenerational trauma. Clinical studies report a wide range of affective and emotional symptoms transmitted over generations such as distrust of the world, impaired parental function, chronic sorrow, inability to communicate feelings, an ever-present fear of danger, pressure for educational achievement, separation anxiety, lack of entitlement, unclear boundaries, and overprotectiveness within a narcissistic family system (Braga, Mello, & Fiks, 2012). While having the opportunity to get a higher education is a privilege, the feelings of pressure seem to be attributed to transgenerational trauma. Based on the interviews it seems this pressure is coming not only from direct words from the immigrant parents of the youth but from actions such as the immigrant parents taking their children to work with them to show them hard labor work to enforce getting education. We could only
suppose that there was some pressure from further generations about opportunities and education.

Braga, Mello, & Fiks (2012) mention distrust of the world being an emotional symptom transmitted over generations. This theme was not explicitly stated, however immigrant parents mentioned fear of going in the street, of not being accepted, of getting deported and youth witnessed this fear. They mentioned learning English to succeed even lying that they knew English to be able to attain jobs and succeed. These feelings and actions seem to be tied youth feeling inferior. Youth said that at school there was a barrier to be jumped to be at the same level like everyone else and that they had to prove their worth at work where most of their colleagues were White and Asian. There seems to be a message of inequality getting passed down through generations that hard work does not necessarily mean you will succeed, there is always more to do, the world for the Latinos we interviewed is not a world of equity and this may lead to distrust of the world. Dr. DeGruy stated that there are adaptive behaviors that are transmitted through multiple generations and they affect the systems in which we exist; home, school, work, and society as a whole (Larrabee Group, 2013-2016). The feeling of inferiority affects the systems in which youth exist. Furthermore, studies have shown that trauma can have negative symptoms such as denial, anger, sadness, and emotional outbursts. While we did not find all of these symptoms, youth did mention that being a child of an immigrant comes with a lot of sadness. This sentiment was reflected as a memory of having to go to work with their parents. These findings seem to show some connection to transgenerational trauma.
Limitations

The participants were limited by four questions although there are so many other aspects of their experiences to be explored. Aspects such as the reasons to migrate and challenges during the process of immigration, taking a look at intersectionality and their experience in the United States. This study focused on first generation immigrants and second generation youth, children of immigrants, and being able to study more generations could add to the current information gathered. The sample size was small in this study, having a bigger sample could potentially open the pool to include other strengths and challenges adding more intersectionality and aspects to the experiences of Latino immigrants, youth, and transgenerational trauma. Additionally, it would be interesting to explore the experiences of other immigrant communities.

Future Research

Although there has been considerable amount of research in the Latino immigrant populations there is still much to be learned on how these experiences continue to affect generations after generations. Therefore, it is imperative that for future research more generations are studied and what behaviors have been transmitted. Furthermore, there is a possible connection between negative symptoms such as denial, anger, sadness, and emotional outbursts and the high rates of criminalization in the Latino youth population who are overrepresented in the juvenile system. The overrepresentation outcome along with low academic outcome in Latino American and African American students were found to be linked to unresolved trauma (Goodman and West-Olatunji, 2010). In this study we did not touch the topic of criminalization but it would be interesting to explore
this area more. There was one youth who briefly mentioned that he has seen things and that he chose family over other things but was not specific as to what he was referring to, he may have been referring to behaviors that could be criminalized. In this study most of the youth were in higher education and it would be interesting to add to this study resiliency factors that get transmitted through generations that help them be in this path instead of having a low academic outcome or being in the juvenile system.

**Implications for Social Work**

Those who have immigrated have faced challenges immigrating to the United States and once they are here they face more barriers like not being able to get employed and living in fear of deportation. This population needs to begin to heal, as a society we have to stop marginalizing and criminalizing this population and instead aide them in telling their story which so often is silenced by the master narrative. We must propose solutions and advocate for policy that seeks to give this population the rights they deserve as human, they need access to mental health services, to health insurance, to education, employment, housing, basic human rights. Youth should have a safe environment at school to discuss their barriers and furthermore schools should provide mental health counseling in addition to academic counseling. There needs to be more education on a more inclusive definition of what constitutes trauma and how it may play out over generations. Society needs more awareness and education in the history of this population and how they have been affected by colonialism and oppression. Lastly, we need to advocate and create spaces for people of color to be in positions of power.
Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine the possibility that Latino youth born in the United States, who are the children of Latino immigrant parents, may experience transgenerational trauma using Photovoice. The findings suggest that Latino youth who are children of immigrants do experience transgenerational trauma, however the study only captured a portion of their experiences. A wider sample pool and expanding the questions participants were asked could provide more information connected to transgenerational trauma. The participant’s stories had many things in common and while many reflected challenges there was factors of resiliency and strengths like having family, intrinsic motivation, and having a community.
References


BMC Psychiatry, 12, 134. http://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-12-134


Appendix A

ADDENDUM – Transgenerational Experiences of Latino Youth and Immigrant Parents

Transgenerational Experiences of Latino Youth and Immigrant Parents is a joint graduate project between Ana Cacao and Sheila Alfaro-Santiago. This document will explain the division of responsibilities between the two parties. Any additional information can be included in a separate document attached to this Addendum page.

Ana Cacao is responsible for all the following tasks/document sections:

- Research places to get access to voice recorders that would fit the needs of the study and buy or rent them.
- Print eight copies of each document, consent forms and mental health referrals, in both English and Spanish for both parties.
- Write the abstract after data is analyzed. The information used to write the abstract will be based on introduction, methods, results, and discussion section which will have been discussed in a collaborative fashion.

Sheila Alfaro-Santiago is responsible for all the following tasks/document sections:

- Buy eight $20 gift cards from Target after deciding this will be the compensation for participants. The cost will be split between the two parties.
- Translate the consent forms and photo release form to Spanish for participants who only spoke Spanish or preferred to do the interview in Spanish after IRB approval. Google translate was used to help with this process but used own knowledge as well.
- Write the introduction after Literature Review and Methodology section have been completed.

Both parties shared responsibilities for the following tasks/document sections:

- Find participants for the study and set up meeting times.
- Explain the consent forms, photo release form, and mental health referrals.
- Meet with participants to conduct interviews and share the recorded audio with one another.
- Research articles that pertained to the study such as definition of transgenerational trauma, immigration trauma, history of trauma, and how transgenerational trauma is transferred.

- Share the articles with one another and read through them.

- Write the literature review using a Google doc to see what each party writes and make edits to the document.

- Write the Methods section based on discussion of different options using Google doc and meeting in person.

- Write the results and discussion sections by meeting in person and collaboratively listen to data and write down common themes.

- Enter data into Google doc and communicate through google chat to complete results, limitations, discussion, future research, implications for social work, and conclusion sections.

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