

Fragments of a Broken Image: Latino Immigrant Stories

Background

Since the 2016 Presidential Campaign and the four long years of Trump’s presidency, Latino immigrants endured a revamp of social, political, and economic marginalization. POTUS¹ , or “The Leader of the Free World,” publicly labeled Latino immigrants as drug-dealers, criminals, and rapists. Needless to say, it wasn’t an easy four years to be a Latino immigrant, nor has it ever been *easy* to be a Latino immigrant in the United States.

Undocumented, Green Card, Resident, Citizen. There is always a fear of deportation or violent insults.

In this study, I interviewed Laurentino “Lauro” Ramirez, my maternal grandfather, who traveled from México illegally in 1975 when he was 17 years old (he became a legal citizen in 2000), and Jessica María Méndez, my long-time friend, who traveled from El Salvador legally with her family in 2006 when she was 8 years old.

¹ President of the United States

Methodology/Methods/Theoretical Framework

Methodology

- Portraiture: requires an overarching metaphor to fuse the themes and experiences.

Methods

- After receiving IRB approval, I began with scholarship research on anything remotely similar to my study, as well as scholarship that discussed education, language or language barriers, and migrant stories.
- I then conducted a one hour semistructured interview with each participant via Zoom
- I transcribed and coded each interview for themes
- I went on two field visits to two grocery stores (one in a predominately white neighborhood and one in a mixed neighborhood), speaking Spanish with my mom. I also coded these field notes.
- I then showed the participants the draft I had at the time for them to verify the information and the way I painted their stories.

Theoretical Framework

- Critical Race Theory
- Latino Studies

Findings

Overarching Metaphor

- The overarching metaphor comes from one of the participant’s words:
 - “I identify with the parts of culture that I brought with me when I was eight, but I was so young, it doesn’t feel like the full picture. It feels like **fragments of a broken image** that I picked up and brought with me and those are the only fragments I have.”
- This “fragments of a broken image” picture fits for both participants:
 - Jessica spoke of things that were missing in her life
 - Lauro didn’t provide a full picture of his reality

Immigration

- Although this seems like a given, it encompasses all that was sacrificed because of immigration.
- The codes to support this theme are:
 - Loss of family
 - Loss of cultural roots
 - Assimilation and sense of belonging
- To open this section, I used blackout poetry to explain how both participants immigrated to the U.S.

I came across the United States
Just like any other...
Illegally.
It takes 3 days
On a bus.
It’s hard being on a bus for three days.
It’s not easy. Back then wasn’t as
Difficult as it is this days.
I was a migrant worker
Now,
I’m part of the United States.

Lauro Ramirez

I didn’t know why we moved.
I didn’t have time to process
Anything.
The whole house was packed.
I was 8.
We wanted to do everything
The American Way...
Legally.
We came on a plane.
An immigrant in America.

Jessica Méndez

Lifestyle Changes/Cultural Differences

- This theme speaks on topics that these Latino immigrants had to deal with when they adjusted and became a part of American life and culture.
- The codes to support this theme are:
 - Isolation & Language/Language Barriers
 - Interactions with Americans & Racism
- To introduce the codes for this section, I used blackout poetry to express what the participants struggled with most when assimilating to American life.

The cultures of
México and the United States
Not similar
At all.
Life here
Is a lot easier
In México,
You have a job
That pays so little,
It’s difficult
To have a good living.

Lauro Ramirez

My mom
Has always struggled with her
accent.
Been reprimanded for her whole
life.
First day of American school,
I was just *sobbing*.
She spoke in English,
I spoke in Spanish.
I spent a lot of time alone.

Jessica Méndez

Discussion

Practical/Social Implications

- Latino immigrants had to endure feelings of isolation and not belonging in a new culture because they didn’t speak the language and are automatically branded as other.
- Despite completely changing their lives to accommodate to a new culture, to be American enough, they are still othered.

Value of the Project

- This study provides a raw, unedited perspective (to a rather small amount of scholarship) of being a Latino immigrant in America which is necessary for Americans to read, given the current political and social upheaval and injustices.

Limitations

- The study was conducted via Zoom, due to COVID protocol, which limits the interactions between researcher and participants that the portraiture methodology thrives on.
- Participants were only given one hour long interview to tell their story, that isn’t enough time.
- Only two Latino immigrants were studied, there are more stories to be heard.

Future Research

- Attain more stories to round out themes or find more themes
 - Not just Latino immigrants, but also children of immigrants (first, second, third generations) to explore potential short- and long-term effects they encountered with American life.
- There are levels of “Latino immigrant” status
 - Illegal or undocumented
 - Resident
 - Fully assimilated vs not
 - And more

Research Question

How were Latino immigrants’ expectations of life, specifically thoughts on family, culture, language, and adjustment to American culture and society, affected or altered by their immigration to the United States?

Purpose

To highlight and humanize a group of people who have been marginalized and stigmatized by the American political climate.



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