

Grandmothers Raising Grandchildren:
Educational Impacts in the Latina/o Community

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yvonne allen
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Approved:

Yvette Flores, Chair

Natalia Deeb-Sossa

Patricia Quijada

Committee in Charge

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ABSTRACT

Grandmothers raising their grandchildren is not a new phenomenon however, the practice has increased substantially in recent years. With that increase, studies have examined the relationship between grandmothers and grandchildren and the physical, mental and emotional effects on both. Studies specific to Latina grandmothers and grandchildren are scarce and what is available has been done from a dominant cultural perspective. This study challenges the normative discourse of Latina grandmothers' inability to adequately raise their grandchildren or provide an environment that engages the educational system and encourages higher education. Through a culturally relevant perspective, Latina grandmothers are given a voice to their lived experiences of raising their grandchildren, showing a reality that has for the most part been invisible. Six Latina grandmothers provide evidence of valuing education, involvement with the educational system and promoting higher education for their grandchildren.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

More than 7.8 million children lived in a grandmother household without either parent present in the home in 2009 representing a 64 percent increase since 1991 (U.S. Census 2011). Three percent of children lived in a grandmother headed household in 1970 increasing to six percent in 2012 (U.S. Census 2014). Research studies have focused on the burden on the grandmothers but not on the ways in which the children have been impacted and the adaptive strategies used by this new family structure to provide the children with the tools to succeed academically and socially (Edwards and Mumford 2005; Goodman 2005; Landry-Meyer and Newman 2004).

The number of grandmothers raising grandchildren in a skipped generation home¹ has seen an increase in the last few decades and according to studies, this is due in part to their children's incarceration, drug or alcohol abuse, chronic unemployment, death by illness or accident and abuse or neglect of the grandchildren (Goodman 2005). Social service professionals recognize in principle, that a grandmother's home is a better alternative than a non-relative foster care home, and such placement is in fact sanctioned by the state. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) passed by Congress in 1997 gives preference to an adult relative rather than a non-relative foster parent when placing a child, as long as the relative meets the regulations of the state. The majority of these relative placements are with the grandmother.

Grandmothers take custody of grandchildren and take them into their homes for different reasons that include preserving family ties, traditions, and family structure (Dolan, Casanueva, Smith and Bradley 2008). This custody is done either formally through legal processes or

¹ A skipped generation home is defined as a household that consists of a grandparent and grandchild but no parent present. Also known as custodial grandparent home or grandparent kinship care.

informally, through a simple move of the child from the parental home to the home of the grandmother with no legal process involved that would grant the grandmother custody rights or access to services on behalf of the grandchild. Although informal custody is a hindrance to all grandmothers, it is especially limiting to Latina grandmothers as 48 percent of Latina grandmothers live below the poverty line, lower than African American, Asian or Anglo grandmothers raising grandchildren (U.S. Census 2014).

The majority of Latina grandmothers have informal custody and receive no financial assistance or benefits from the state for their grandchildren (Goodman 2005). “In the United States, the majority of custodial grandparents are raising their grandchildren without a legal relationship. The lack of a legal relationship (i.e., foster care, custody, adoption) is a barrier for obtaining services and has resulted in limited access to information and public services, inadequate financial assistance, and difficulty providing medical and educational consent” (Van Etten and Gautam 2012:18). This lack of legal relationship can be attributed to many factors including, but not limited to, fear of government involvement; familial loyalty; lack of financial means to obtain custody; or simply not being aware that legal custody may be an option or resources would be available to them. Custodial Latina grandmothers were found to be the least economically stable and were more likely to be in need of social services than either African American or Anglo grandmothers but were less likely to ask for help (Goodman 2006). Moreover, Latina grandmothers or their children or grandchildren may not have legal documentation, which could prevent them from accessing government assistance.

Latinas/os in the United States have traditionally lived in multigenerational families due to socioeconomic conditions as well as close family ties. Co-parenting grandchildren is more common for Latina grandmothers than custodial care for these same reasons. “Latina

grandmothers, because they are traditionally involved in assisting with child care may coparent their grandchildren under more routine and possibly less stressful circumstances” (Goodman and Silverstein 2006, 1622). Latina grandmothers often live with their children and grandchildren, taking care of the grandchildren while the mother does chores or more recently, works outside the home. Latina grandmothers usually have a close relationship with their grandchildren, sharing in the discipline and cultural education of the grandchildren (Goodman 2002; Goodman and Silverstein 2005; Goodman and Silverstein 2006; Hayslip and Patrick 2006).

When Latina grandmothers take custody of their grandchildren, they do so with a sense of family obligation; an extension of their earlier parental roles and not as a burden as seen with Anglo grandmothers. “Custodial U. S. born grandparents² emphasized the negative impact of caregiving on them, regretted having to assume an authoritative parental role and were otherwise burdened by caregiving” (Hayslip and Patrick 2006: 179). In other words, there is a role conflict for the Anglo grandmothers that the Latina grandmothers do not report having; in fact, they often feel the opposite. In contrast, Latina grandmothers felt that “their lives had not changed, and that they not only welcomed the opportunity to parent again, but also saw their new roles as extensions of their relationships with their own adult children” (179). Centrality of the family in Latina/o cultures provides less rigid role boundaries and more continuity so that Latina grandmothers may flow easily into the role of primary caregiver.

Although Latina grandmothers may transition into the custodial grandmother role with relative ease, they are often blamed for their grandchildren’s behavioral and academic difficulties. Goodman (2011) finds that children raised in skipped generation households have “lower performance in the academic area” (649) than in two parent homes. Behavioral problems

² Hayslip and Patrick use this phrase to indicate Anglo women in their study.

such as “conduct problems, hyperactivity and inattention, peer problems and antisocial behavior” (649) were higher in skipped generation households as well, according to Goodman (2011). These findings indicate that the grandmother’s caregiving may be at fault but there is no evidence to substantiate whether the academic and behavioral problems existed prior to the children being placed in grandmother’s custody or whether the problems were caused by other factors. In addition, there is no explanation as to how these diagnoses were made; what is considered to be conduct problems or inattention may be a difference in cultural interpretations of behavior (Flores, 2013).

Edwards and Mumford (2005) go further in blaming grandmothers when they say that, “After raising their own children who lead problematic lives, grandparents often will have extraordinary trouble raising their grandchildren adequately” (21). Although there is no evidence that their own children led problematic lives, the grandmothers are characterized as “not better prepared to raise their grandchildren” (21) indicating a deficit in their parenting skills. This line of thinking indicates the grandmothers are incapable of raising children successfully; having failed at their own children, they will fail with their grandchildren as well. Looking at the reasons why the children are being raised by Latina grandmothers may reveal different reasons than is typically shown in statistics. Although Latin/a families do encounter some of the same difficulties as other families that require children to be raised by grandmothers, the reasons are often not the result of bad parenting or a lack of moral fortitude. The majority of the women in my study raise their grandchildren for reasons other than their children’s drug/alcohol abuse, incarceration or other commonly held beliefs of bad parenting.

Grandmothers, particularly Latina grandmothers are characterized in the literature as not being the best caregivers for their grandchildren because of the academic and behavioral

difficulties the children have in the grandmother's home. Further, Latina grandmothers are seen as not being adequate caregivers due to poverty, illness, inability to communicate with schools or attend school meetings (Edwards and Mumford 2005; Goodman 2005; Goodman 2011). These characterizations however, are often based in myth and stereotypical representations of some Latina/o cultures. The myths of Latina/o families not prioritizing or valuing education or not disciplining their children to behave in school are based on outdated misunderstandings or unawareness of culturally diverse behavior (Valencia 2009; Valenzuela 1999). Viewing Latina/o families through a stereotypical lens only shows what has been promulgated through media by oversimplification and superficial knowledge (Yosso 2006). Seeing Latina grandmothers through clear, unbiased eyes shows a much different perspective.

The grandmothers in my study show a positive and unrelenting value for education for their children and grandchildren. Most if not all of their own children have attended and graduated from college and they want nothing less for their grandchildren. Because of their own lack of education, the grandmothers know the value and the enormous opportunities available to their families that come with attaining a college education. They participate in school events, take the children to school and pick them up, help with homework and secure tutors if the need arises. The women are not examples of the stereotypical Latina grandmothers portrayed in the literature; they are strong, assertive, and healthy and they live above the poverty line, some well above. They raise their grandchildren as their own, participate in the school fundraisers and events and are productive members of the community.

The research studies of Goodman (2005, 2006, 2011); Balagna, Young and Smith (2013); Edwards and Mumford (2005) and Hayslip and Patrick (2006) focus on the population of Latina grandmothers who raise either formally or informally, one or more of their grandchildren

and examines how this relationship shapes the children's educational outcomes through academic and behavioral performance. I have explored the stereotypic narrative that devalues and denigrates Latina grandmother's parenting skills, which has been used to explain the grandchildren's behavioral and academic difficulties. In deconstructing this narrative, I have shown that a lack of cultural understanding and awareness of the differences in how children learn has led to the ideology of deficit modeling of the Latina/o grandchild. I have used cultural knowledge to study how this same misunderstanding and acceptance of stereotypes and myths has led to the erroneous conclusions about Latina grandmother's parenting ability. Researchers have used stereotypes and cultural myths to position Latina/o families as uncaring about education and grandmothers as incapable caregivers which they then use to explain the reasons the grandchildren have behavioral and academic problems. I show that by replacing stereotypes and long held beliefs in cultural myth with a cultural knowledge and understanding, the reason Latina/o grandchildren are not succeeding consistently in school has less to do with the grandmother and more to do with how the educational system has historically viewed the Latina/o population.

CHAPTER 2

CHALLENGING NORMATIVE DISCOURSE

To begin to understand the issues related to the perceived academic failure of Latina/o children, I examine and challenge the normative discourse promulgated by researchers that have been historically based on myths and stereotypes of the Latina/o population. These discourses begin from the assumption that Latina/o grandmothers and their grandchildren have social and cultural deficiencies that would explain the children's academic inadequacies.

Studies (Balagna, Young and Smith 2013; Edwards and Mumford 2005; Goodman 2005, 2006, 2011) have examined grandmothers as a homogenous group, not taking into account the racial, ethnic or cultural diversity of grandmothers raising grandchildren and how these factors impact the family structure, the social implications or the effects of marginalization. When studies have deconstructed the homogeneity to examine the differences in race, ethnicity or culture they have done so from an Anglo perspective, faulting the difference in culture as a deficit and the Western dominant culture as the default to which everyone else must aspire in order to succeed (Yosso 2006). Cultural differences are seen as “dysfunction in Chicana/o cultural values and insists such values cause low educational and occupational attainment” (Yosso 2006:22).

In challenging the perspective of Anglo researchers who use myths and stereotypes of Latinas/os to attribute weaknesses or defects as the foundations for academic shortcomings, I show that the deficit assumptions change when reframed to a Latina/o perspective to show how the educational system’s one size fits all standardized practices only serve to perpetuate and “reproduce educational inequities for students from nondominant sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds” (Yosso 2006: 23).

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders of the Grandchildren

Much of the published literature on grandmothers raising grandchildren focuses on the emotional and behavioral problems and disorders that frequently disrupt the grandchildren’s educational achievements and suggest that the grandmother is responsible for these problems and disorders or is incapable of facilitating treatment (Edwards and Mumford 2005; Goodman 2011). Goodman states that “emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and inattention, peer problems and prosocial behavior” are exhibited more often in children raised by

grandmothers than in two parent homes (2011:649). While Goodman attributes these behavioral problems to the grandmother, she admits that whether the problems arise from the separation from the parent, abuse prior to grandmother care, difficulty adjusting to a new environment or the deficiencies of the grandmother care is not known (2011:649). This “unknown” may indicate that the children’s problems described by Goodman (2011) and Edwards and Mumford (2005) may not be emotional or behavioral but instead reflect cultural differences and divergent learning approaches educators and school personnel have not considered.

Valenzuela’s study (1999) clearly shows that the relationship between Latina/o students and their teachers is an important component in the way the students learn. Latino/a student’s understanding of education is grounded in Mexican orientation that encompasses not only formal education but also “moral, social and personal responsibilities and serves as the foundation for all other training” (23). This is achieved through personal relationships, which includes the teacher student relationship absent in many school settings. Without this type of bonding or respectful personal exchange with teachers, Latina/o students feel uncared for, their ethnic identity threatened. When asked to care about school, “the overt request overlies a covert demand that students embrace a curriculum that either dismisses or derogates their ethnicity and that they respond caringly to school officials who often hold their culture and community in contempt” (25). Students feel that if the school and teachers do not care about them or their education, there is no reason to care about school.

Teachers exhibit lower expectations for Latina/o students than they do for Anglo students (Hill and Torres 2010). “Teachers praise Latino students less; behave less favorably toward them; and penalize them for lower levels of English proficiency” (98). For students who value and equate caring with education, this undermines their motivation to learn and damages the self-

esteem of students who do not feel respected or valued in the school setting. Students lose their connection to the school (2010). When teachers and other school personnel verbally abuse Latina/o students by calling them “immature, unambitious, and defiant of authority” (Valenzuela 1999:65) or that the students “don’t go anywhere because they don’t, can’t or won’t try” (64), students feel disrespected. Students who feel that they are being disrespected lose whatever trust they had in the educational system and resist the ways they are treated to preserve their identities, understanding that they are not expected to succeed but to only fill a space.

Balagna, Young and Smith indicate in their study of Latina/o middle school students that students exhibiting behavioral or emotional difficulties are at risk for academic failure (2013). The study was conducted to “understand the perceptions and experiences of at-risk Latino/a students to identify ways to improve interventions targeted to promote their academic retention and success” (101). Balagna et al. (2013) studied eight Latino and three Latina children between the ages of 11 and 13 who had been screened as being at risk for behavior disorders using the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD). The participants were students of a middle school in which 9% of the population was Latina/o and the remaining students were predominantly White/European American³. Five of the 11 participants were born in the United States. All spoke English fluently and all but one spoke Spanish fluently. All of the participant’s parents were born in Mexico or Central America and all were fluent in Spanish. Four of the parents were fluent in English. All parents but three had attended school in their home countries, the three who had not, moved to the United States as children and attended U. S. schools. The students were interviewed twice in the participant’s homes, four months apart to determine the student’s perceptions and experiences in the school setting. Follow up visits with families were

³ White/European American is the term used by Balagna, Young and Smith (2013).

conducted to allow parents to review interpretations of the interviews and make corrections or additional comments as required (Balagna et al. 2013).

Balagna et al. (2013) found all 11 students had “experiences of verbal aggression and microaggression at school” (107). Verbal aggression included other children calling the Latina/o children “beaners”, “wetback”, “grease bum” and saying to the Latina/o children, “where’s your green card”, “go back to your country” and “Mexicans are stupid and dumb” (107). All of the participant children “acknowledged the frequent occurrence of verbal aggressions and microaggressions as well as more intense discriminatory remarks” (107). All of the Latina/o children had experienced negative comments personally or observed friends subjected to verbal or physical aggression. Latina/o children were tripped on purpose in the hall or shoved when the teacher was not looking (107). Seven of the participants reported “becoming angry when hearing negative or discriminatory statements and six reported retaliating physically” (107). If Latina/o children retaliated verbally or physically, it was usually they who received the punishment because the Anglo children knew to make remarks or physical contact when the teacher was not aware. “We [Latino/a students] get in trouble, not them [White students]” (107). When asked how frequent the verbal aggressions happened at school, the students replied, “like all the time [maybe] every other day”, “the whole year last year”, and “daily” (107).

The participants, the researchers said, were manifesting behaviors consistent with Latina/o culture that were exacerbating school problems even though all the children interviewed “acknowledged frequent occurrence of verbal aggression and microaggressions as well as more intense discriminatory remarks” (Balagna et al. 2013:107). Student accounts of school experiences, both positive and negative emphasized interactions with peers, teachers and family.

The study cited “cultural values of *afecto, respeto, personalismo, simpatico, and familismo*⁴ with emphasis on having meaningful relationships with *personas de confianza*⁵” (111) indicating that values of respect, sympathy and affection were responsible for the emotional and behavioral difficulties the children were experiencing (Balagna et al. 2013). Having meaningful relationships with teachers was clearly missing in the children’s lives but instead of understanding that this relationship is a necessary part of their educational process, the researchers used it as a cultural deficiency. These beliefs together with others that the researchers called “cultural values” are fundamental characteristics and attributes that are essential tenets of raising well-adjusted, confident children. These values are not detriments that harm a child’s educational process or their ability to learn. The fact that microaggressions, verbal assaults and discriminatory remarks were present and frequent is more a testament to the behavioral problems than the values and morals the children have been taught.

Racial remarks from Anglo students would result in verbal or physical confrontations but while the student who made the racist remark was not punished, the Latina/o student was. The Latina/o children were punished for defending themselves against microaggressions and direct racist verbal assaults and were often labeled with a mental disorder because of their behavior, although they were not professionally diagnosed or treated for the perceived disorder. The children were screened by “teachers trained in using the SSBD” (Balagna et al. 2013; 104) and although there were Emotional and Behavior Disorders (EBD) units on the school site, the Latina/o children were not required to attend. “Although Latino/a students are often underrepresented in school EBD units, they are frequently overrepresented in other settings that

⁴ affection, respect, personalism (quality of being personal or personal relationships), sympathetic or harmonious, and familialism (family needs take precedence over individual needs or family oriented)

⁵ Trusted people or personal confidant.

serve youth with behavioral and emotional concerns, such as juvenile detention centers” (103). The EBD diagnosis of Latina/o children compromises their education, reduces self-esteem and furthers stereotypical views and treatment of children who may already be marginalized in school. Two-thirds of Latina/o children diagnosed with EBD do not graduate from high school (Balagna et al 2013).

Latina/o children, their families and their culture are blamed for the children’s lack of educational success by positioning them as not prioritizing education, incapable of learning and having language and other cultural deficits that contribute to behavioral difficulties. Teachers and school personnel who engage in verbal abuse of Latina/o children see the difficulties of Latina/o children as a personal or individual rather than a collective or social issue. Many teachers feel that “Mexican students are immature, unambitious, and defiant of authority, and that teachers have no power to change the situation since it is the students’ fault” (Valenzuela 1999; 65). The feeling that the responsibility to change resides “first with the students, their families and the community” (65) demonstrates the ignorance of cultural or ethnic differences beyond obvious color or language differences. Teachers see the difference from a “culturally chauvinistic perspective that permits them to dismiss the possibility of a more culturally relevant approach in dealing with this population” (66). The difficulties encountered by Latina/o children in the educational system can be seen as a way the system views the children through a stereotypical lens, a lack of understanding the different ways Latina/o children learn, and a lack of acknowledgement of their cultural differences and desire to learn (Yosso 2006).

Even though Balagna et al. suggest system level changes that promote an inclusive school climate and foster effective student/teacher relationships, the responsibility is still placed on the student to find a way to work within the educational system and combat racism while

maintaining their cultural integrity. This places the responsibility of obtaining an education on the student who must navigate an oppressive educational system that points to individual rather than institutional deficits (Balagna et al. 2013).

Edwards and Mumford (2005) suggest that the behavioral problems add to Latina/o grandchildren's difficulties in educational functioning. In their study they found that Latina/o children raised by grandmothers accounted for 7 – 10 percent of the school population in low socioeconomic status schools but accounted for up to 90 percent of the time spent by teachers and other staff members dealing with academic and behavior problems (2005). However, the study does not show statistical analysis of the children's grades, how the behaviors had been assessed or if the grandmother had been approached to collaborate with the school to ascertain why the child experienced academic or behavioral difficulties. Neither does the study take into account the differences in cultural orientation that could explain why Latina/o students required so much of teachers and staff member's time. Latina/o student's different understanding of schooling and education requires that teachers and school personnel care about them in a more personal way but educators tend to maintain more rigid boundaries between personal and public relationships. "When teaching effectiveness gets reduced to methodological considerations and when no explicit culture of caring is in place, teachers lose the capacity to respond to their students as whole human beings and schools become uncaring places" (Valenzuela 1999; 74). Without the perceived care from the teachers and school personnel, students feel alienated from this part of their education. "Their precondition to caring about school is that they be engaged in a caring relationship with an adult at school" (79).

How Latina/o students are viewed and understood by teachers and school personnel is markedly different than the way Anglo students are viewed. Latina/o students' differences in

culture, language and ways of learning do not coincide with Anglo student's behavior or Anglo teacher's philosophy of educating. Anglo culture is the default, the point of reference by which other cultures in the United States are measured and compared against. "Middle-class, Euro-American culture is normative, with all other cultures deviant, despite efforts and expressed goals of multiculturalism" (Hill and Torres, 2010:103). "U.S. schools subtly devalue cooperation, cooperative learning, interdependence and conformity, placing ethnic minorities, immigrants, and low-income children and families at a disadvantage" (103).

Annette Lareau (2011) explains how middle class Anglo students are advantaged over Latina/o students because of the cultural differences:

"how cultural capital is acquired and used in daily life makes clear that individuals' social position is not the result of personal attributes such as effort or intelligence. Individuals in privileged social locations are advantaged in ways that are not a result of the intrinsic merit of their cultural experience. Cultural training in the home is awarded unequal value in dominant institutions because of the close compatibility between the standards of child rearing in privileged homes and the arbitrary standards proposed by these institutions" (362).

Cultural capital or cultural wealth then is valued by institutions such as educational systems when it is similar to those institutions' standards meaning that different cultures or different social classes will not be as valued or valued at all.

Lareau describes how cultural differences work to diminish Latina/o students in the classroom. Working class Latina/o children are often judged by teachers as being uninterested in class lessons when they do not make eye contact with the teacher or when they do not assert themselves or shout out answers. However, because Latinas/os have different cultural standards and practices, looking someone in the eye is often a sign of disrespect as is yelling out when it is not their turn to speak in class (2011). These are but a few of the differences in culture that are

viewed as deficits by the dominant culture and institution but are in fact just differences in culture that need to be acknowledged and accepted as equally valuable.

Kohli and Solorzano (2012) use Critical Race Theory to frame and address the internalization of microaggressions in K-12 in regard to the mispronunciation of children's names. Seeing the mispronunciation of a name within the larger context of racism in the educational system becomes more than a simple mistake especially when it is not corrected, when it is joked about and becomes a source of humiliation for the student. Historically, the westernization or Anglicization and assimilation of minority students has been demonstrated to enforce and maintain the majority culture (Kohli and Solorzano 2012). It is suggested by the authors that sentiments of the past racialized renaming locates nonwhite names as inconvenient, unwelcome and foreign and the mispronunciation as minor and benign. In addition, "if textbooks do not reference a student's culture, if there are no teachers who look like her and she does not hear her home language the mispronunciation of her name is one more example to the student that who she is and where she comes from is not important" (Kohli and Solorzano 2012: 445). The cumulative effects of these subtle and not so subtle experiences have a lasting impact on the student and how she sees herself, her family and her culture. This may contribute to internalized racism, which is a conscious and unconscious acceptance of racial hierarchy and goes beyond stereotypes to the internalization of the beliefs, values and worldviews of the dominant culture. Students begin to believe the dominant narrative and doubt their own worth and that of their culture. Instead of putting the blame on the teacher for not being culturally sensitive, students feel like an outsider or not a member of the United States (Kohli and Solorzano 2012). This internalized racism and acceptance of racial hierarchy is experienced by some Latina/o children and has been shown to affect their educational success but is also

experienced by the grandmothers, furthering their reluctance to reach out to the school for guidance and assistance.

Latina/o children's understanding of education is different than the dominant ideology and delivery of education. Latina/o children's orientation toward a more inclusive and collective type of learning environment is in opposition to the rigid division of personal and public compartment typical in the Anglo educational system. When the expectation of a caring teacher student relationship from Latina/o students is not realized, the student is left feeling uncared for and alienated from the educational system. Their perceived academic and behavioral difficulties that are blamed on the grandmother's care giving abilities can be seen as a direct result of the cultural differences of the Latina/o population and the Anglo educational system. Although grandmothers participate in the grandchildren's education through help with homework, attending parent teacher conferences, helping with school events and taking the grandchildren to extracurricular activities, they as well as the grandchildren have been portrayed as not caring about education.

Latina Grandmother's Physical, Mental and Emotional Ability to Care for the Grandchildren

There has been scant research on Latina grandmother's physical, mental and emotional health or how health issues influence their ability to care effectively for their grandchildren. A few of the studies (Burnett 2009; Edwards and Mumford 2005; Goodman and Silverstein 2002; Goodman and Silverstein 2006) that have actually examined the health concerns of Latina grandmothers do so from a dominant culture perspective.

Researchers list many reasons why grandmothers have a difficult time raising their grandchildren. According to Edwards and Mumford, grandmothers who raise their grandchildren suffer more physical illness, depression, anxiety, alcoholism and increased

smoking (2005). Goodman et al. (2006) also find physical and mental health issues to be increased among grandmothers who raise their grandchildren compared to those who do not. Edwards and Mumford further indicate that grandmothers have less energy to help with homework, have difficulties finding transportation to get their grandchildren to school or meet with teachers and are not actively involved in the grandchildren's education or extracurricular activities (Edwards and Mumford 2005). "Moreover, grandparents are generally more often physically fragile, sicker and older than the typical parent" (2005:20). While it is true that grandmothers are usually older than the typical parent, physical and mental disorders are not an absolute consequence of older age. The researchers' generalizations may not take into account the socioeconomic status of the participants. People living at or below the poverty line typically have more health issues due to lack of health care, exposure to environmental toxins, higher stress levels, poor eating habits and other factors that influence poor health. Grandmothers living in poverty may have worse health issues than grandmothers living a middle class lifestyle as well as mental disorders associated with poverty; however, not all grandmothers are afflicted with these issues.

A study by Burnett (2009) examined 59 Latina grandmothers living in an urban area during a four year time frame. The purpose of the study was to track changes in Latina grandmother's physical and mental health while caring for their grandchildren and if these changes played a role in grandchildren's leaving the grandmother's care (2009). Participants in the study self-identified as Latina, were 50 years of age or older and provided care for at least one grandchild age 18 or under. The median age of the grandmothers was 67.6 years of age and the women were not recent immigrants. The study reports that the participants were low-income to high poverty and the majority were renters rather than home owners. One in five women were

married, the majority were U. S. citizens by birth or naturalization and fewer than 20% were fluent in English. Interviews were conducted in the participants homes lasting approximately 1.5 hours and 95% were conducted in Spanish. Interviews were done twice, once at the onset and again four years later. After numerous attempts to contact participants, 80% of the original sample were interviewed the second time (2009).

This study indicates that 54% of the grandchildren were placed with grandmothers due to drug or alcohol problems of the parent(s). Other reasons cited were parental physical or mental illness, incarceration, child maltreatment and abandonment by the parent(s). Some of the children were assessed as having developmental delays and learning disabilities. “Half of the children who entered care during the four years also had special needs, mostly hyperactivity” (281). Physical health of the grandmothers was reported to have declined during the four year period. “Two-thirds of grandmothers reported worse health at Time 2” (283). Arthritis worsened and chest pain increased. The overall self-reported health status declined from 37.3% who reported worse/much worse at the onset of the study to 62.7% during the last interview. However, the health status of the grandmother was not a factor in the grandchildren leaving the care of the grandmother. “Self-rated health did not affect change in status, which suggests that grandmothers provided care even as their health declined” (286).

Depression was assessed using the 15-item Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS). At the beginning of the study 59% of grandmothers exhibited depression, by the end of the study 66% did (284). Although the increase is statistically significant, the reasons are varied and not attributed to any one definitive factor. The reasons for the increase in depression are attributed to death of a spouse, close family member or friend, worsening health and changes in the household. A major stressor, according to the study was the presence of the grandchildren in the

household. “More than one-third of the sample reported a persistent sense of having given up their lives for grandchildren as the most salient source of stress in this area” (284).

There are several limitations to this study. First, the grandmother’s health status and changes are self-reported and could be subject to inaccuracy, bias or normal aging. Two-thirds of the grandmothers reported declining physical health but how the questions were asked, how detailed the questions were and how the grandmother was feeling that particular day could impact the answers given. Overall health tends to decline during the aging process but that was not indicated as having been factored into the study. Second, depression is assessed and evaluated but a baseline for geriatric depression was not given so it is difficult to know if 59% at the onset of the study is normal or abnormal and whether increasing to 69% is cause for alarm. Also, depression due to the death of a spouse would be considered normal while long term unspecified depression might be considered more severe.

Holding the grandchildren’s presence responsible for a major stressor suffered by the grandmothers goes directly against the findings of Hayslip and Patrick (2006). In their study of Latina custodial grandmothers, the participants reported that raising their grandchildren was a privilege and a gift. “I wish everyone were as happy as me”, “Life makes more sense now”, “I love them like my own kids” are some of the quotes by Latina grandmothers in the study who are raising their grandchildren. Latina custodial grandmothers “stressed that their lives had not changed, and that they not only welcomed the opportunity to parent again, but also saw their new roles as extensions of their relationships with their own adult children. (Hayslip and Patrick 2006:179). Finally, there is no support for the claims of the grandchildren having special needs. As this was a self-reported study, there was no evidence given that the children were properly diagnosed with any type of learning disability, developmental delays or other disorders.

Burnett's study mentions Latina/o culture very briefly. Familism "the primacy of collective over individual needs, is a basic orienting value across Latino groups" (275) is the only cultural factor described or discussed in the study. The study also briefly mentions grandmothers roles to say "Older Latinos play a central role in family life and they thus tend to expect more intergenerational assistance, derive more satisfaction from grandchildren, are more involved in raising them and provide stability in times of family disruption" (275). While this may be true, it is clear that Latina/o culture and traditions did not play a major part in the discussion or analysis of the study, again showing that the dominant cultural perspective was used to examine Latina/o culture. This is one of a very few studies that have been done on Latina grandmothers in particular and by not using a Latina/o perspective which understands the culture and traditions of Latinas/os, an opportunity was missed to gain a true and accurate representation of the ways in which Latina grandmothers experience raising their grandchildren and how that may or may not differ from their Anglo counterparts.

The study by Goodman (2002) compares the well-being of Latina grandmothers raising grandchildren to African American and Anglo grandmothers. The study was done over a three year period during which 1, 058 grandmothers were interviewed. There was very near equal representation of 360 African American, 354 Latina and 344 Anglo grandmothers. The median age of the grandmothers was 56.7 years, median educational level 11.5 years and a 23% poverty level. 43% of the grandmothers were married and 43% worked full or part time (2002). Surveys and interviews were conducted including the usage of The SF-36 health survey, The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) and Satisfaction With Life Scale. The study "investigated the impact of household structure on the stress and distress experienced by grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren" (686). The study found evidence that while there are stressful

experiences to varying degrees in all the households they examined, the “impact of those experiences on well-being is conditioned by the cultural context in which expectations of grandmothers are formed” (686). Based on culture and tradition, expectations by the different groups of grandmothers will be different and their well-being will be reflective of those expectations.

African American grandmothers had slightly higher well-being and slightly lower levels of depression than did the Latina or Anglo grandmothers. Goodman attributes this to the African American historical context of the “tradition of grandparent surrogate care that is longstanding and did not originate with the parent’s inability to parent” (686). Latina custodial grandmothers “may experience conflict with the mother, as their expectations of *familism* and close intergenerational relationships are not fulfilled. The intricate interdependence in Latino families implies future reciprocity: Adult children are expected to care for their parents in old age, as well as engage in ongoing social and supportive family involvement” (687). Anglo grandmothers raise their grandchildren less often than do African American and Latina grandmothers so “the problematic circumstances of custodial care may generate conflict with the parents in light of norms for independence and noninterference (687).

Goodman states that “the cultural lens through which grandparenthood is viewed has a marked impact on the adaptation to custodial or coparenting family structures,” (676) however, the study provides very scarce cultural information that would support this statement. In Goodman’s 2006 study, she states that “Latino families differ from African American and White families in that many are immigrants or first-generation Americans. Therefore, grandparents often play a crucial role in stabilizing the family unit in which the turbulence introduced by immigration and labor market migration is buffered by the contribution of older family

members” (1608). While Goodman acknowledges the difference of Latina/o families, there is no elaboration of what the differences are and why they occurred.

The 2006 study of Goodman’s is essentially the same as the 2002 study. Sample size is 1051, equally divided between African American, Latina and Anglo grandmothers. It took place in the same area, with the same surveys. SF-36 Health Survey, Positive and Negative Affect Scale and Life Satisfaction Scale were used. The findings in this study found that “grandmothers of all ethnicities had a similar level of depression” (1617) and there were no differences “in terms of life satisfaction” (1617) between the grandmothers. The majority of the findings were the same as for the 2002 study, which did not point to any adverse or increase in mental or emotional difficulties Latina grandmothers had in caring for their grandchildren. Again, there were no discussions of Latina/o cultural orientation in family life that might have added insight to the study.

The physical, mental and emotional health of Latina grandmothers has been questioned or cited as reasons for the academic and emotional difficulties of Latina/o grandchildren they raise. Latina grandmothers may suffer from increased physical ailments that may be due to normal aging however there is no evidence that these ailments interfere with child raising responsibilities or abilities. There is also no evidence that mental or emotional disturbances have been increased or exacerbated due to the addition of grandchildren into the Latina grandmother’s home. Looking at the grandmother/grandchild relationship through a cultural context, Latina grandmothers feel differently about raising their grandchildren as seen in Hayslip and Patrick’s (2006) study. Instead of seeing the grandchildren as a burden or interference in their life, many Latina grandmothers welcome the opportunity to raise children again, feel a stronger bond with their grandchildren’s parents and feel needed and loved (179).

Grandmother's Involvement in Grandchildren's Education

The literature that addresses grandmothers' involvement with grandchildren's education is sparse. Edwards and Mumford (2005) mention that grandmothers have less energy to help with homework and due to transportation issues, they do not attend teacher conference nor do they "actively involve themselves in the child's education and extracurricular activities" (20). Strozier, McGrew, Krisman and Smith (2005) indicates that grandmothers find it difficult to help their grandchildren be successful in school because "they themselves do not feel skilled in working with schools" (1014). These seem to be sweeping generalizations with no actual data to back it up; there is no statistical or empirical evidence to support what the researchers are saying. When discussing Latina grandmothers it is easy to use stereotypical behavior to make assumptions about this group rather than actually studying the grandmothers. Although some Latina grandmothers do not attend teacher conferences or extracurricular activities because of a language barrier or a feeling of not belonging, there are many who do attend. From my observations and my own personal experience, Latina grandmothers support and involve themselves with their grandchildren's education because they understand, through their own migration and experience in their host country that education is the only way they know of to achieve the "American Dream".

Effects of Institutional Racism on Latina/o Families and the Ability of Grandchildren to Succeed

The current Eurocentric epistemology is based on beliefs of white superiority that has viewed Latinas/os as culturally deficient, ignorant, backward and unambitious (Valencia 2009; Valenzuela 1999; Yosso 2006). This historical orientation claims a cultural and linguistic deficiency that has remained in place and is supported by political and ideological domination that excludes the Latina/o voice and translates into overcrowded, underfunded schools (Delgado

Bernal 2002:112). Latina/o students are not seen as being agents of knowledge nor is their knowledge validated because their experience is not of the dominant culture (Delgado Bernal 2002:112). Viewing this through a Critical Race Theory lens (Delgado Bernal 2002; Solorzano and Yosso 2001; Yosso 2006), these authors propose that the educational system rather than the individual is in need of change to acknowledge and validate the rich knowledge Latina/o children bring with them and to allow them to use that understanding in the classroom. Likewise, teachers need to recognize their own cultural limitations. Many Latina/o children are bilingual, bicultural and have cultural wealth of their own that may be different from other children but is valuable and can demonstrate the life experiences Latina/o children have in relation to economics, negotiation, group dynamics and other valid academically based subjects (Delgado Bernal 2002).

In addition, typically in low income serving schools, many Latina/o children are non-English dominant. These students face additional stigmatization and subordination because they are perceived to have an impairment because they do not speak English correctly, as English is not their first language. Many Latina/o students may be treated differently because they are Spanish dominant and placed in bilingual class, speech therapy classes or excluded from school activities because they do not speak English properly (Perez Huber 2011). Such practices demonstrate that many teachers and schools not only view speaking Spanish as a deficiency but as an impairment. Such practices are a form of racist nativist microaggression, which is the “justification of the perceived superiority and dominance of the native (whites) and reinforces hegemonic power” (Perez Huber 2011:382).

Latina grandmother’s involvement with their grandchildren’s education is regarded to be lax, negligent or non-existent (Balagna, Young and Smith 2013; Edwards and Mumford 2005; Goodman 2011; Strozier et al. 2004) however these assertions are not backed up with evidence

within each study. The assumptions made about Latina grandmother's lack of involvement with grandchildren's education are based on the stereotype and myth that Latina/o families do not value education (Valencia 2009). The value placed on education by the Latina/o families and the Latina grandmother is based on their own experience of lack of employment, underemployment or working more than one low paying job to support a family. The women in my study express these concerns for their grandchildren and as the reason they encourage and support their grandchildren's educational accomplishments. As immigrants themselves, they know how difficult it is to be the outsider in a country that values education as a means of economic and social mobility.

Generational Level of Migration and How Migration Legacies Influence Latina/o Families

Latinas/os in the United States face ambivalence from the dominant culture. Economic and political conditions in the United States determine to a large extent the degree to which Latinas/os are subjected to scapegoating and blame for the country's ills (Flores 2015). This can lead to an intensification of the scale of discriminatory or racist treatment Latinas/os are exposed to. Latinas/os immigrating to the United States face challenges and crises individually and within the family unit, which can last for generations (Flores 2015).

The generational level of migration has implications as to how Latinas/os culturally adapt to the new country linguistically, psychologically and physically. For the immigrant, the one who crosses the border, the adaptation may be more difficult than for a U. S. born or raised child of immigrant parents. How these children acculturate, assimilate or adapt a hybridization of the two cultures determines to some extent how they will function in the new country (Flores 2015). While the children may adapt by speaking English and expecting the same level of independence

as their peers in school, grandmothers may hold on to the values of her home country and conflict may arise.

Goodman (2005) states that “acculturation is associated with increases in deviant behavior, such as drug and alcohol abuse, and family disruption” (306) suggesting that acculturation can be one cause of placing grandchildren with grandmothers because Latina/o immigrant parents forego their culture and family tradition once in the United States.

Acculturation is the ability to adapt to a new culture while maintaining aspects of the old culture (Flores 2015). This indicates that acculturation is a process of keeping elements of the original culture while adopting elements of the new culture. Acculturation is a process of survival and it is often necessary to become bicultural to belong to the family while trying to fit into the host culture. Goodman (2005) makes the suggestion that immigrant parents “forego their culture and family tradition” (306) but this is clearly not within the definition of acculturation nor do we see that core values such as family tradition are as readily relinquished. There may be many reasons why immigrant parents place their children with grandmothers including financial difficulties or employment away from the family home; however, there is no evidence that acculturation is one of the main reasons.

Summary

Research on the Latina/o grandmother raising grandchildren emphasizes negative consequences such as the grandchildren have more behavioral, emotional and educational disorders than other children. The research indicates that Latina grandmothers are not able physically, mentally, emotionally or financially to care for their grandchildren and further states that they are not involved with their grandchildren’s education. Much of this research is based on stereotypical characterizations of some Latina/o populations and not based on empirical

evidence. The research is done through a perspective of the dominant race, class and culture, which places value only on its own race, class and culture. Viewed through a Critical Race Theory lens, it becomes apparent that there are many more facets to the Latina/o than the one dimensional model researchers try to analyze (Delgado Bernal 2002). Immigration status, generation of migration, racial microaggressions and institutional and historical racism are some of the variables that need to be addressed when studying Latina/o populations. Latina grandmothers and the grandchildren they raise have a different narrative that needs to be heard in order to accurately analyze how educational success is being impacted.

Statement of Focus

Researchers have examined the physical, mental, emotional and financial burdens on Latina custodial grandmothers (Goodman 2005; Hayslip and Kaminski 2005; Musil and Standing 2005) but have ignored the influence of grandmothers involvement in their grandchildren's education. Likewise limited information is available on how race, culture and immigration status interacts to disadvantage or advantage the grandmother/grandchild relationship and further hinder or enhance the successful academic achievement of the Latina/o grandchild. My research challenges how the Latina/o population and specifically Latina grandmothers and grandchildren are viewed and evaluated and explores the ways in which previously thought of deficits can be reinterpreted into assets that can be valued and respected. In addition, my research examines how race, culture and immigration can interact in positive ways to generate collaboration and cooperation between institutions and Latina/o families. I conduct my research in an effort to understand the following questions:

1. How can previously viewed deficits of Latina/o cultural practices and traditions be reframed and viewed as assets to the educational success of Latina/o students?

2. In what ways are Latina grandmothers encouraging/assisting/participating in the education of their grandchildren and what positive qualities are they using to promote the grandchild's success?

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research Approach

A phenomenology research methodology was used for this study. Phenomenology “describes the meaning for several individuals of the lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell 2007; 57). A phenomenon can be described as the lived reality of an individual, the reality as it is perceived by the individual. Phenomenology then is concerned with the lived experiences of individuals or several individuals who have experienced this phenomenon and understanding the social phenomena from the perspectives of these individuals (2007). Using phenomenology allowed for the investigation of Latina grandmothers' lived experiences raising their grandchildren in order to gain a deep understanding and meaning of their experiences. Interviews and observations were used to obtain a more nuanced account.

Sample selection was purposive, selecting individuals who have similar lived experiences, in this case Latina grandmothers raising their grandchildren. I used snowball sampling. Snowballing is a method of expanding the sample by asking one participant to recommend others for interviewing (Babbie 1995). After meeting one Latina grandmother raising grandchildren, I was able to meet others until I had the sample size of 6.

Procedures

This study took place at the Happy Family Center and Happy Children Center, both part of a larger county wide non-profit organization. I volunteered as an intern for both Centers during the summer of 2014 during which time I met and became acquainted with two grandmothers who used the services of the Centers. The first participant was chosen based on that acquaintance and she recommended others who would possibly agree to be interviewed. The study was described to the participants before they agreed to be interviewed as an examination of how some Latina grandmothers raise their grandchildren, the grandchildren's education experience and the grandmother's expectations of the grandchildren's educational future.

Appointments were made for the interviews and the interviews took place at the Happy Family Center in an empty office or at the Happy Children Center in a corner of the room where it was difficult for others to hear. One interview was done when the Happy Family Center was closed for the day and no other people were present. Before the interviews began, the study was again described, permission was asked for to record the conversation and the protocol for consent was administered. In addition, it was made very clear again that the participants could stop the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question. Recordings were transcribed as soon as possible and notes taken during the interview were expanded and typed.

Observations were done at the Happy Children Center once or twice a week for a 6 month period. Observations were usually between sixty and ninety minutes, usually around noon to observe interactions of the grandmother and grandchildren during the grandchildren's lunch break. Observations were as unobtrusive as possible but always with permission of the participants.

Data was collected from the participants through in depth interviews, tape recorded conversations, observation and informal conversation. All participants had experienced the phenomenon in varying degrees and circumstances. The in depth interviews were semi-structured to allow the participant to give as much information as they were comfortable with. Many times the participant had stories to tell that contributed to the data in unexpected ways adding to the richness of the data. Observation was done unobtrusively at times and as a research participant at other times. Informal conversations were done during visits with the grandmothers at the Centers and these conversations were not tape recorded but were captured in field notes later. Participants were interviewed more than once and there were many conversations with the participants. A \$25.00 gift certificate was given to each participant upon completion of the first interview.

Description of Setting

The phenomenological research was conducted at Happy Children Center⁶ located within Roper⁷ elementary school and at the Happy Family Center⁸ located in a local city in Northern California in 2014-2015 for a period of eight months. These centers are part of a larger non-profit organization serving the county. The centers are designed to provide services for the community members, including food distribution, referrals for mental health care, housing referrals, Cal-Fresh applications and other social services. Happy Children Center also offers free clothing and shoes for children who attend the school and others in the community in addition to the services outlined above.

⁶ Name of center changed.

⁷ Name of school changed.

⁸ Name of center changed.

The Happy Children Center is located in a stand-alone building, which at one time housed the music department in the elementary school. It is located at the back of the school grounds, appearing inconspicuous with just a small sandwich board sign indicating the activities of the day. This center had an uneasy start and there are still remnants of the tenuous welcome from both the neighboring residential community and the community of parents of the elementary school children. The elementary school in which the center is housed is in a predominantly white, middle class neighborhood. The Latina/o children, most of whom are poor, attended another school in their neighborhood, which was slated to be demolished as a new school was to be built. However, the new school was not built, the Latina/o children's old school was demolished and they had to attend the predominantly white elementary school. There was much protesting and complaining from the white parents in the community about the Latina/o children attending this middle class school. The principal handled the animosity towards the Latina/o children and parents deftly and today there is an uneasy resignation on the part of the middle class parents that the Latinas/os will be at the school indefinitely. However, there is palpable disdain for the center that I felt personally as I asked for directions from an Anglo woman who worked in the front office the first time I visited the site. The center is similar to one the Latina/o families used at their previous school and was initiated to offer the families services and a space to meet.

Upon entering the Happy Children Center which is one large room, the left side is lined with shelves which contain plastic bins filled with children's clothing and shoes that are collected and distributed to whoever is need of them. Opposite that wall is the office and kitchen area which houses a refrigerator, a coffee maker, sink and desk area with a screen that partitions it from the rest of the room. Behind the desk area is a bathroom. The front wall has a bank of

computers and desks where the women practice English skills on donated Rosetta Stone programs or use the computers for job applications or resumes. The back wall area has a large rug where the children play and adjacent to that is a toy closet. In the middle of the room are large multipurpose tables used for lunch, classes or crafting. There are many Latina women in attendance at any given time, having coffee and chatting, working on the computers or watching their young children play. There is a mix of young mothers and older grandmothers who attend meetings, classes or take advantage of the many services offered. Many women come to the Center to have lunch with their children or grandchildren and watch them play until it is time for the children to go back to class.

The atmosphere in the Happy Children Center is warm, welcoming and lively. Women are talking and laughing, children are playing and there appears to be a comradery among the women, which makes it feel as though one is entering someone's home. There is always coffee ready and some kind of food is offered, often fruit or pan dulce (sweet bread). There is often an activity such as English practice, math class, sewing class or health seminar going on several times a week that the women take advantage of while the children are attending school.

The volunteer coordinator named Lorena⁹ organizes activities and schedules the volunteers who operate the center and teach classes when she is at the downtown office. Lorena is a young single Latina woman, working on her Master's degree in Social Work. She has been with Happy Children Center and the Happy Family Center for less than a year and is very enthusiastic and dedicated to the community she serves. Lorena coordinates the Promotoras (paraprofessional workers) who have been trained in health care and provide classes on diabetes and hypertension management, healthy eating and other ways in which to improve the physical

⁹ Name changed to protect identity.

health of adults and children. The Promotoras are predominantly volunteers who are given health care training and receive a small stipend for teaching the classes and operating the Center.

Happy Family Center is located in a two bedroom house donated by a local Presbyterian church in 2014. There are many different women in this center as people from the greater area use the services so there are people of differing ages, races and economic backgrounds. The two bedrooms are used as offices for intake and mental health counseling. Another room is used as a playroom for the children and the dining room is used as the reception area. The living room area has computers along one wall; bookcases on an adjacent wall with books for adults that can be checked out and there is seating around the room for waiting or visiting. The atmosphere of this office is markedly different from the one located in the school in that this office serves a larger population of the community and is not designed as a safe space for mothers and grandmothers but rather as a working resource office.

Lorena can be found in the main downtown office 3 days a week, keeping up with paperwork, coordinating with other country offices and scheduling meetings for the director, Jena¹⁰. I met Jena in the summer of 2014 when I started an internship required for graduate school at the Happy Family Center. Jena is an energetic and dynamic young Latina who cares deeply for the clients she serves and goes above and beyond her job description to ensure that clients' needs are met while dealing with the administrative duties of a non-profit organization. Jena depends on interns and volunteers from a local university to supplement her staff of one full time employee that serves several hundred clients a month.

¹⁰ Name changed to protect identity.

Positionality

During my internship at the Happy Family Center and Happy Children Center, I developed relationships with some of the grandmothers who were frequent visitors of both Centers. As a Latina and a grandmother myself I felt we had some common interests. However, there were differences as well that positioned me as an outsider. I do not speak Spanish which they were all very gracious about and either spoke English to me or translated for me when someone who did not speak English spoke. I am not a member of the same culture nor do I have the cultural capital they have. For example, I do not celebrate the same religious rites or holidays, I do not regularly eat the same or similar foods or have the same core values as most of the grandmothers I interacted with at the Centers. I believed when I started observing and interviewing these women in the fall of 2014 that they and I were members of the same group but it became evident to me that I was an outsider and although I was treated with respect and courtesy, I was still an outsider.

My position as an intern placed me in a respected position. The grandmothers and other clients were aware that I was an intern but to them it meant I worked at the Centers giving me an authority position, which is respected. The women had great respect and admiration for Jena, so they respected me because I was a member of her staff. In addition, two of the grandmothers attended the English class I taught at the Center so that added another element of respect but also separation between them and me. Teachers are seen as authority figures in some Latina/o cultures and the gap in the hierarchy became wider for the two grandmothers who attended my class.

It became difficult for me to ask the women for interviews as I realized my positionality because I did not want them to think they were obligated or were being coerced or compelled to

agree to the interview. I handled this as respectfully as possible explaining, using an interpreter when necessary, the rights they had as outlined in the protocol and their right to refuse an interview or decline to answer questions during the interview without repercussions or negative consequences. In observing the grandmothers interacting with their grandchildren at the Centers, I was mindful of their guarded behavior in front of me and became as inconspicuous as possible, giving them as much freedom to behave as normally as possible. As an outsider and partial insider, it was sometimes a delicate balance and I did not and do not always know if I am doing it correctly.

Data Collection

I conducted this study from June 2014 to April 2015, acting as a participant observer and volunteer. In the almost one year I did field work I visited the Centers 5 days a week for 6 hours a day from June to August then 3 days a week for two to 3 hours a day. In my role as volunteer I taught English as a second language. I observed and worked with the women (mothers and grandmothers) who needed my assistance with food distribution, filling out forms, referrals for social services, as well as setting up appointments for them.

All interviews took place at either of the Centers. Two interviews were conducted with the aid of an interpreter, one after the ESL class and one during school lunch. Four interviews did not require interpreter services and were conducted in one of the offices at Happy Family Center. Interviews lasted from one to two hours and were transcribed in full.

The study began in the fall of 2014 although I had met some of the participants during the previous summer of that year and began to take notes and make connections. From those earlier meetings and from the English class I taught at the Happy Family Center I was able to locate Latina grandmothers to interview and also to observe. I was hesitant to ask for interviews

because of my positionality; I wondered how this would affect the relationship I had with the women and would it be awkward when I saw them again. Due to this feeling, I waited for what I thought would be an appropriate time and asked for my first interview in late September 2014. Grandmother “O” agreed and I arranged for an interpreter and we made an appointment. In early October 2014 the interview took place in the Happy Family Center after English class ended for the evening. The interview took approximately one and a half hours and was saved on a recording device as well as hand written notes. Grandmother “O” is an easy going friendly woman with whom I get along very well and she is also the one most accepting of me. She was able to offer names of other Latina grandmothers who would be willing to be interviewed and actually contacted two other grandmothers and helped set up the meetings for me. I had been given the name of a grandmother, who I ended up interviewing next, by Jena who thought this grandmother would fit the study. I called her and set up an appointment and interviewed Grandmother “L” the following week in October 2014.

I have interviewed 6 Latina grandmothers, two with the assistance of interpreters and four without as they were comfortable speaking English with me. The interviews took place at Happy Family Center and Happy Children Center between October 2014 and April 2015. I used a recording device to capture the interview as well as hand written notes to emphasize to myself especially salient information. I began with the first few structured questions¹¹ and then we began to have a conversation following the answers the women provided. I was careful to allow the grandmothers to express themselves fully and tell their story with as much or as little detail as they were comfortable with. I asked further questions to guide them within the parameters of my working questions without leading them. I also made observational notes, indicating facial

¹¹ See appendix for full list of questions.

expressions, body language or any unusual behavior during the interview that might have indicated pain or unease in answering a particular question. The notes indicated during which question or particular area of the interview the behavior took place so that I might analyze it later.

I observed 2 Latina grandmothers, twice a week for approximately 1 hour each visit during a period of twelve weeks from the end of October 2014 to January 2015. I also observed three Latina grandmothers once a week for approximately 1 hour each visit from January 2015 to April 2015. During observations which normally took place at Happy Children Center, I greeted the grandmothers and children, chatted a bit about their week and activities and then took out my notebook and a journal article I had brought with me to look like I was studying. I took notes casually as I observed what was going on around me and I occasionally participated in the conversation. I would sometimes ask a question about a behavior I saw or something that had been said that I did not understand.

Explication of the data

Explication of the data is used instead of data analysis because the term “[analysis] usually means a ‘breaking into parts’ and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon... [whereas ‘exploitation’ implies an] investigation of all the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (Hycner 1999; 161). It is a process of transmuting the data through interpretation. After thorough and repeated review of the interview transcript, statements and quotes, those which would emphasize the participants’ experiences and relevant meaning were isolated. These areas of experiences and meanings were then clustered into common themes, which were then categorized into significant topics. This process was done for each of the participant’s transcripts and then themes that were in common with all or most of

the participant interviews were found. Outliers were noted to be used as a counterpoint if needed. When all interviews were scrutinized for themes in common, summaries were written.

CHAPTER 4:

LIVED EXPERIENCE OF LATINA GRANDMOTHERS RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN

Tara Yosso states that one of the reasons cited by the educational system for Latina/o student's negative academic outcomes is that Latina/o families do not value education (2006). According to the stereotype, Latina/o parents or guardians do not think that education is a priority and that work or marriage is more important. Researchers and educators have used this stereotype to explain the failing of Latina/o students in the educational system in the United States. My findings support the work of Yosso and others that grandmothers do value education.

In an interview with Grandmothers "O" on 10 October 2014 at the Happy Family Center, she reported that she was in "very good" health and her only problem was her back ached if she worked too long during the day. She had made over 200 tamales by herself the day before for a fund raiser for Happy Family Center. "O" reported no diseases or illnesses and she takes no medication. She does not drink or smoke and she walks a great deal. "I usually walk. If it's too far I go on the car but I walk if it's not far to where I go." She is very upbeat and always has a smile on her face; she laughs and is always joking.

"O" told of her own 3rd grade education before being put to work in the fields of Mexico by her father to help support the family. Her older sister, who was the favorite according to "O", was allowed to go to school even when her father had to pay for her to attend. "O" felt her own

education was sacrificed for her sisters and she still feels the sting of resentment all these years later. “She didn’t like to go to school and she didn’t do good there either. After, she just got married and didn’t do nothing with it. It would have been better for me to go, but my dad...” “O” waves her hand. “Too late!” she says with a laugh, although the hurt is on her face. She had a strong desire to attend school and always felt that she would like to go back to school at some point. “O” was good at math and received good grades in all her subjects, she reports. Even now at sixty-four years of age she still dreams of an education for herself although she now thinks it is too late. She takes classes at the Center to improve her English and math skills and teaches sewing and other crafts. “O” says “I wanted to be a teacher. Oh! I loved my teachers in my school. They were so smart and always helping me and all of us. I wanted to be like them, to teach is a great gift”.

After she immigrated to this country in her late teens and had her four children, their education became her priority. Though she did not understand how to navigate the higher educational system or how to get her children through the application process, she found the help she needed to get her four children accepted into college. All four graduated from college and are working as a physical therapist, a teacher and a secretary. Her only son graduated from college but decided to buy his own mechanic garage and is doing well. Grandmother “O” is very proud to say that all of her children have graduated from college and she and her husband worked two or three jobs each to send her children to college. Her grandchildren are on the college track as well. A 17 year old granddaughter has been accepted to Sacramento State and “O”’s children are very motivated about getting their children into college. Grandmother “O” is raising two children of one of her daughters and is adamant that they will also attend college. When I asked her if she wanted her grandchildren to go to college she told me, “Oh yes, they will go. They

have to go. It's the only way for them to be ok. They can get a house and a good job. They can get a good job that isn't so hard." From this I understood her to mean that the grandchildren would not have to do physically demanding jobs like she has done her whole life. "O" worked in the fields upon her arrival to the United States and has also worked as a house cleaner, a day care worker and an elder care provider.

In observations of "O" and her granddaughter, I listened to her tell the child that she would go to college one day and become a doctor or a nurse as she read her granddaughter a story about going to the doctor's office. Also during observations I listened as she chatted with other grandmothers and mothers, talking about the differences between her life and her children's because of their education. "My daughter is doing good, she has a nice house and she can give her kids nice things. It is easier for her not like for me when they were little. School was hard for her, she would cry but she made it. And now look at her! Her kids too, going to college soon".

The grandchildren that "O" is raising are 3 ½ and 6. The 6 year old boy is in kindergarten attending a predominantly white middle class school. She takes him to school and picks him up from school every day and eats lunch with him 3 days a week. He could take the bus but "he is too little to be alone and he feels better if I am here to eat with him". She tells me that is because he doesn't feel comfortable in his class or eating with the other children. His teacher does not pay attention to him and some of the children are not nice to him. When asked if this is because the other children are Anglo, "O" says "well, I don't know. Maybe, I'm not sure. They keep to themselves mostly". While she is visibly uncomfortable talking about this, the feeling is she thinks this could be the reason.

“O” takes her grandson to school and picks him up every day, she eats lunch with him at school 3 days a week, she attends parent teacher conferences, she participates in classroom events and contributes supplies to the classroom and she is member of the PTA. When she attends parent teacher conferences and PTA meetings, she does not feel “comfortable” but attends because it is best for her grandson.

Grandmother “O” has kept her language, culture and core values; she practices traditional Latina behaviors as a wife, mother and grandmother. However, she understands that for her children and now her grandchildren, the path to success is education and it is absolutely a priority for her and her family. This is in direct contrast to the stereotype of Latina/o families not valuing education or wanting their children to go to college. This also challenges the cultural deficit model espoused by researchers who chose to examine Latinas/os through a dominant culture lens.

Grandmother “L” was interviewed on 29 October 2014 at the Happy Family Center. She reports that she has a mild case of high blood pressure but she takes medication and is routinely seen by her doctor. She attends an exercise class twice a week and walks in the evenings with one of her grandchildren. She does drinks socially, “maybe once every 6 months”, and does not smoke. She says mentally that she is “happy and content, my life is good.”

“L” conveyed that she had gone to community college and although she wished she had gone further in her education, she was satisfied that she went as far as she had. Her own parents did not have an education and in fact her father was illiterate. After arriving in the United States as a young girl she attended school and decided that she would go to college. Her parents were supportive and felt she would have a better life with more education. College was not easy for her because of social isolation and would have gone to a 4 year university but the financial strain

on her parents would have been too hard. She had three children and it was through her encouragement and guidance that two of them attended and graduated from college. Her son graduated from high school, one daughter became a social worker and the other, although she graduated from college chose to be a stay at home wife and mother. "It's fine. She will always have her education and can use it later if she wants". "L"'s other daughter died from illness and her son-in-law was not emotionally able to care for the children so "L" took over the rearing of her daughter's children several years ago. The grandchildren, one in kindergarten, one in middle school, one in high school know that they will go to college and that their grandmother is doing all she can to ensure that they are ready. She is not only involved in their education but also the PTA as well as swim team and soccer for the two older children. She is active in fund raisers for the schools and the teams and spends a good deal of her day driving the children to activities. She is in contact with the teachers to make sure homework and projects are completed on time and turned in. "We spend a lot of time on their activities but I think it is worth it for them to have good activities. They don't spend much time on video games or TV, they are too busy. It is good for them to be busy so they don't think about the other stuff, you know, the bad things." I asked if she meant gangs or drugs and she said, "Right, if they are busy and we are with them they won't be getting into things like that." "L" speaks perfect English but has also kept her native Spanish and has taught Spanish to her grandchildren. She had a middle class job and now has a retirement income. She practices customs of the dominant culture but has kept components of her traditional culture alive in her home. She has passed her home language and certain traditional customs on to her grandchildren.

Grandmother "A" was interviewed 2 February 2015 at the Happy Children's Center. "A" is one of younger grandmothers at 49 but has more health issues. She suffers from diabetes and

high blood pressure. Although she takes medication and sees her doctor, she has difficulty with eating healthy. “I don’t like the food they tell me. It’s not possible for me to not eat what I am used to and they want me to eat food I don’t know what it is.” She reports that her mental state is good. “I get tired and all that but I feel good in my life. I have everything I need and I am happy with everything.”

“A” attended school through the 3rd grade and her husband through the 6th while in Mexico. She immigrated to the United States as a young adult, married and had her children. “A” is raising her daughter’s three children because she says her daughter “wasn’t taking good steps in life”. Her daughter was not “doing well in life” and the grandchildren have been with Grandmother “A” for most of the oldest child’s life and the younger ones since they were born. Grandmother “A” realizes the benefit of college and although two of her three children did not attend, her oldest daughter is graduating from college this year. Grandmother “A” is very proud of the way she has encouraged her children to go to college and felt that she helped them in school by attending PTA, open houses, parent teacher conferences and other events at school. She also was able to help them with homework when they were young and when they passed her ability, she turned to extended family members to help the children with homework.

Grandmother “A” does not attend parent teacher conferences or PTA meetings at her grandchildren’s school. She says that “because my English is not too good, the parents judge me and don’t treat me good.” She says they do not engage with her and she feels uncomfortable around the other parents. When her own children were in school, she did attend PTA meetings but because there were many Latina/o parents, she did not feel unwelcome as she does at her grandchildren’s school. Grandmother “A” indicated that she sends the children’s aunt to attend parent teacher conferences with her grandchildren’s teachers because the teachers “don’t treat me

right.” She says they are rude to her and she feels uncomfortable there so she sends the children’s aunt because the aunt’s “English is good.” Although she does not attend the conferences herself, she still ensures that a family member attends for the benefit of her grandchildren and to let the teachers know that the family is interested in the education of the children.

“A” also eats lunch with her grandchildren at school. Her three grandchildren attend the same school so they can all eat together which they do in the Happy Children’s Center on the school grounds. She also attends the playgroup there with her youngest grandchild, attends classes and participates in events. She feels comfortable at the Happy Children’s Center and can meet with other women in her community.

This treatment of Grandmother “A” is an example of how some teachers and schools not only view speaking Spanish as a deficiency but as an impairment. This constitutes a form of racist nativist microaggression, which is the “justification of the perceived superiority and dominance of the native (whites) and reinforces hegemonic power” (Perez Huber 2011; 382). Although Grandmother “A” has experienced negativity through these microaggressions by teachers and parents, she found ways in which to support her grandchildren’s educational development even though she felt unwelcome in the school.

Grandmother “J” was interviewed on April 17th, 2015 at Happy Family Center. She reports being in good health with “little aches and pains, but that’s all.” She has no diseases or illnesses and goes to doctor for regular checkups “to make sure.” She does not drink or smoke. Her mental state she reports is always good. “I am a happy person, I don’t get mad or sad. I think over my problems and then if I can’t fix it myself I talk to a friend.”

Grandmother “J” is raising a teen age grandchild recently placed in her home. Her grandson came to her due to parental divorce. His father and stepmother divorced and the father felt he could not care for him adequately alone. Grandmother “J” accepted her grandson into her home. Grandmother “J” is part of the sandwich generation, meaning she is caring for her parent who lives with her and caring for a child, in this case a grandchild. She works full time and has been a widow for many years. “J” came to the United States as a child and did not attend college until her husband passed away when she found herself unable to secure a well- paying job. Her understanding of the importance of college is experiential; she has seen for herself the difference college makes. Two of her children did not attend college; one has learning disabilities and the other chose to go to vocational school. The third child goes in and out of college, knowing she should finish but has difficulty committing to it. “J” sees from her own experience and that of her children that college is a better option and wants it for her grandson. Although it was not in his plans, he is now coming around and looking at different colleges. “J” plans to take him to visit college campuses during the summer.

The transition to his grandmother’s house was difficult at first for him but “J” has made his adjustment and his education a priority in her life. She has been in close contact with the school he attends, she has encouraged him to become involved with extracurricular activities and she spends a great deal of time with him. He will apply to college next year when he is a senior and he has the grades to expect his applications will be accepted.

Grandmother “J” accepts this arrangement as normal. When I asked her if she felt overburdened caring for her parent and her grandchild, she told me, “No, they are family. That’s what we do for family. When they need you, you help them. My mother, I would never put her in

a home, I will keep her and my grandson, he needs me too. If I didn't have them, I'd be lonely." She laughs at that but I can see that she is content with how things are.

Grandmother "E" was interviewed on February 11th, 2015 at Happy Family Center. She reports that her health is "great, no problems or anything" and that she feels good. At 54, she thinks she is "good for her age." She says she "used to get tired from working because the work was hard work, you know not like I'm used to before. It was very hard." Now that she cares for her grandson, she no longer works and has time to "pay more attention to him than with my daughters." She reports her mental state is good because "my whole family is here and I have my grandson to take care of so it's good."

"E" immigrated to the United States 10 years ago after her mother and sister came here from Bolivia. She was a teacher in one school and her husband was a principal in another school. It has been difficult for her to be here because of the language. "My language in English is not good so I didn't try to get my degree here in this country. I try to learn but it is very hard for me. So, my jobs have been taking care of older people and working in the church. Cleaning houses for people too. My husband makes boxes in a factory and it is so hard for him too." She was reluctant to come because she knew it would be hard for her but she came because her mother was here and because she knew it would be good for her daughter's education.

"E" has two daughters, one a college graduate and the other attending college now. The daughter attending college left her son with "E" two years ago and although she sees him during breaks she is content with her mother raising her son. The child's father sees him most weekends. "E" finds caring for him "sometimes not so easy because I think if his mother would like it if I do this or that. She doesn't really care but I still think that because I know he is not my own." "E" takes her grandson to school each day and picks him up. She helps him with his homework

and made sure that he was in a bilingual program. Even though she speaks to him in Spanish, she wants him to learn in both languages because she says “it helps them to learn other things easier and later if he wants to learn another language, it will be easier for him.” She attends parent teacher meetings and school events. Her grandson has not yet started attending extra- curricular activities but she would like to see him get into soccer and will be a “soccer grandma” for him when the time comes. He wants to learn to play a musical instrument and will begin next school year.

“E” teaches her grandson many traditions of her home country. Since she has been here a relatively short time and because she was older when she came to this country, her traditions and culture are still very much a part of her daily life. Her grandson hears stories of her home country, eats the food and celebrates holidays of her home country. She wants him to be “a good person, a good man. I teach him what he needs to be good. We go to church, we pray, he is such a good boy and I never want to be without him.”

Grandmother “V” was interviewed on March 20th, 2015. She is 67 years old, has high blood pressure and a thyroid disease, for which she takes medication. She visits the doctor on a regular basis and reports her health as good. “I feel good, I take my medication and I don’t have no problems.” She has aches and pains but “nothing bad, in the morning maybe I feel stiff but as the day goes by, I feel better. I have a lot to do so I don’t think about it that much.” Her mental state is “always good. I’m not the type of person to be sad or get depressed or things like that. I have a good life and I have kids to take care of so I don’t have time to get depressed or anything.”

“V” has been in the United States since she was 18. She left an abusive life in Mexico and came here to escape. “V” attended school until the 4th grade at which time her mother took

her out of school to work in the home of her grandmother's friend. The friend was disabled and needed someone to help take care of her and her husband. "V" learned to clean and cook at 10 years old and was beaten when she did something wrong and was sexually abused by the husband on a regular basis. She did not say anything to her parents because she felt "they wouldn't believe me since the senora was so nice and they were paying my parents for me to be there." When she got older she got a part time job cleaning another family's house and saved enough money to leave for the United States.

After some time in the United States, "V" married and had 3 children, 2 girls and a boy. Determined that her children would not live the life she had, she encouraged and worked with her children to ensure they were ready for college. She worked three jobs sometimes to pay for the tuition and is proud to say that two of her children graduated from college and one from high school. One of her children is an engineer and one owns a restaurant. One of her daughters was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and when the symptoms became too severe, "V" took the children to live with her.

"V" has had the children for 4 years and she says she "will probably have them the rest of my life." She does everything for them and it feels like "they are my own children now even though I know they aren't. But it feels like since I do for them like I did for my kids. I feel happy to raise them, they make my life so much better. My daughter is very sick but at least I can make the children happy and give them a good life." "V" helps out with her daughter's care but her main job is the grandchildren. "I do what I can for her but I have these girls now and I have to do what is best for them."

"V" takes them to school every day and picks them up. The school is two blocks away and although they could walk alone, she thinks they will not be ready until the older one is 12. "I

don't want to take chances that something would happen to them on the way. As long as I am able to walk them, I will." "V" attends parent teacher conferences and talks to the younger girl's teacher every day when she picks them up. "I want her to know that I know what's going on with my granddaughter and if there is anything I need to know about. I want to know right away if someone is bothering her or if she isn't doing good on her schoolwork." "V" talks to them about college so much that it is a given that they will attend. They discuss what they will be when they get out of college. "V" has already attended a presentation given by a local university that gives elementary school parents the information and tools to guide their children through school so they will be prepared for college. She is ensuring that her granddaughters and their teachers know that they will be on track for college.

Latina grandmothers value education especially in light of their own or their parent's lack of education and the knowledge of what consequences that lack has for the future of their grandchildren. All of the grandmothers display a great capacity for encouraging the grandchildren in school now and in promoting and fostering a desire and expectation of college after high school graduation. Grandmothers use their participation in their grandchildren's school activities and extracurricular activities to promote success and also are involved in PTA and attend parent teacher conferences.

The six grandmothers that I interviewed are immigrants; they left their home country and traveled to the United States either voluntarily or involuntarily in the case of children who are brought here by their parents. How this migrations happens, under what circumstances and what happens once they get to the United States shapes how the immigrant deals with their life here, how it affects their world view and how they see themselves. Immigration can leave long lasting scars or it can be seen as a new beginning. While some migrants are uneducated, others have

degrees that they cannot use in this country. Some migrants come escaping poverty or fleeing war and unspeakable violence in their home countries. Some migrants travel thousands of miles on the top of a train while others casually step across a border. For the one who migrates, there is a wide variety of circumstances surrounding their migration that plays a large part in their lives in the United States (Flores 2015).

For the grandchildren of immigrants, their world view and how they see themselves may be far different. They are the third generation in this country and may have acculturated to a greater or lesser degree and have had more exposure to U. S. culture than did their parents or grandparents. They are more apt to accept the U.S. culture as their own and reject the immigrant's traditional ways (Flores 2015). How the immigrant grandmother and the U. S. born and raised grandchild relate to each other's values and ideals can determine in part if conflicts will arise (Flores 2015). The grandchildren of the interviewed grandmothers have been with their grandmothers for most and in some cases all of their lives and these children have or will grow up with more of the grandmother's traditions and values than their parents'. Growing up with their own parents, the children may have acculturated more than they will now or even assimilated although one is not the natural progression of the other. However, these children now will be raised as second generation-third generation combined with both generations' advantages and disadvantages. They likely will be closer to the grandmother's traditions and core values but may also have identity conflicts because of them. It may become difficult for these children to identify with their peers or same age relatives as they may hold different values and feel isolated from the other children who may be more comfortable living in the ways of the dominant culture.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The major findings of this research is the lived experiences of the grandmothers are in direct contrast to the available literature on Latina grandmothers raising their grandchildren (Balagna, Young and Smith 2013; Burnett 2009; Edwards and Mumford 2005; Goodman 2002; Goodman 2006; Goodman 2011).

First, the literature depicts Latina grandmothers as being incompetent or less than capable of adequately caring for their grandchildren because of physical, mental or emotional difficulties. They were cited as being “physically fragile, sicker and older than the typical parent (Edwards and Mumford 2005; 20), and suffering more physical and mental illness (Goodman 2005). The grandmothers are usually older than the typical parent but they cannot be generalized or categorized as being physically fragile or sicker than the typical parent. How the grandmothers were suffering more physical and mental illness was not detailed in the Goodman (2005) study but physical and mental health are subject to many factors, including poverty which may preclude these generalizations.

A study done by Burnett (2009) found that Latina grandmothers exhibited an increase of arthritic pain and chest pains during the 4 year study, however the health status of the individuals were self-reported which can be subjective and not always accurate. In addition, the participants of Burnett’s study were in a low income to high poverty status which impacts physical and mental health negatively.

Participants in my study were all found to be in good physical and mental health, most of them were without any major illnesses or diseases. They did not report suffering from

depression or anxiety rather, they were in good spirits and found joy in raising their grandchildren. None of the participants drank alcohol except one who did on occasion and none of them smoked. The Latina grandmothers were not fragile or sicker than the average parent although they were older. However, the ages of the grandmothers did not prevent nor deter them from their appropriate and thorough care of their grandchildren.

Second, Latina grandmothers are depicted as not being interested or involved with the grandchildren's education. Edwards and Mumford (2005) assert that grandmothers do not have the energy to help the children with their homework and do not attend teacher conferences. They do not "actively involve themselves in the child's education or extra-curricular activities" (20). Strozier et al. (2005) indicate grandmothers do not help with homework or other schoolwork because "they themselves do not feel skilled in working with schools" (1014). Latina/o families have been accused of not being interested in education in general (Valenzuela 1999; Yosso 2006). In this study, the participants have all shown to be not only interested and involved in the grandchildren's education but planning their grandchildren's trajectory towards college. They are involved in every aspect of their grandchildren's education from helping with homework to attending parent teacher conferences to making tamales or cupcakes for fund raisers. All the grandmothers in this study either walked or drove their grandchildren to school and picked them up. They all attended parent teacher conferences but one who sent an English speaking trusted relative in her place. All grandmothers helped with homework, secured a tutor when necessary and communicated with the school on a regular basis. Many grandmothers ate lunch with their grandchildren at school to help them feel comfortable at school and many attended/participated in extracurricular activities the children were involved in.

Latina grandmothers are very interested in their grandchildren's education because they themselves for the most part did not receive a college education. They are well aware of the missed opportunities and lack of upward mobility that come from an absence of higher education. Their experiential knowledge of hard physical labor, working multiple low paying jobs, and underemployment is what drives them to ensure their grandchildren have a better life than they did. The grandmothers who did in fact have a college education sent their own children to college and are confident in their goals of college for their grandchildren. They all believe the way to a better life is through higher education.

Last, the literature (Balagna, Young and Smith 2013; Edwards and Mumford 2005; Goodman 2011) blames the Latina/o children's emotional and academic difficulties on the grandmother who raises them. Goodman points out that "emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and inattention, peer problems and prosocial behavior" (649) are exhibited in grandchildren raised by their grandmothers than in other homes (2011). Edwards and Mumford suggest that children raised by their grandmothers account for almost all the time (90%) staff spends dealing with the grandchildren's academic or behavioral problems (2005). Balagna et al. cite cultural difference as being the reason Latina/o children are diagnosed with Emotional and Behavior Disorders. Cultural values are blamed for emotional and behavior difficulties which impact the children's academic success. Latina/o family values that include respect and regard for others are seen as detriments to the educational ideology instead of seeing the verbal and physical assaults on the Latina/o children by others or the lack of cultural respect by the educational system that may be causing emotional or behavioral difficulties.

Seeing these issues of emotional and behavioral difficulties as a failing of cultural and family values reaffirms the dominance of the Eurocentric epistemology, which does not value

cultures or traditions other than its own. “Middle-class, Euro-American culture is normative, with all other cultures deviant, despite efforts and expressed goals of multiculturalism” (Hill and Torres, 2010:103). Many of Latina/o children’s perceived emotional or academic difficulties stem from the hegemonic control and influence, which denies Latina/o children their culture if they are to succeed. How Latina/o children understand education is different than children of the dominant culture. “U.S. schools subtly devalue cooperation, cooperative learning, interdependence and conformity, placing ethnic minorities, immigrants, and low-income children and families at a disadvantage” (Hill and Torres, 2010:103).

Most of the grandchildren being raised by the grandmothers in my study may be too young to be diagnosed or misdiagnosed with EBD or other behavioral disorders. The two grandchildren who are 16 years of age have not had any emotional, mental or behavioral difficulties in school and they are academically successful. The Latina grandmothers have protected or insulated their grandchildren with not only family values and morals but self-confidence and self-esteem. The children know their histories, they know where their grandmothers come from and the struggles they have had to get to this point in their lives. They are aware and are reminded that the family is priority and their most important ally. When the grandchildren go to school they know that their grandmother will be there if they are needed to feel comfortable or loved in a school where they may not otherwise.

The grandmothers in my study show a positive and unrelenting value for education for their children and grandchildren. Most if not all of their own children have attended and graduated from college and they want nothing less for their grandchildren. Many of the grandmothers do not have the benefit of formal education but are aware of the value and the enormous opportunities available to their families that come with attaining a college education.

The women are not examples of the stereotypical Latina grandmothers portrayed in the literature; they are strong, assertive, and healthy and they live above the poverty line, some well above. They raise their grandchildren as their own, participate in the school fundraisers and events and are productive members of the community.

Implications of Findings

This phenomenological study was conducted to investigate the lived experiences of Latina grandmothers who raise their grandchildren in the absence of the parents present in the home. The findings indicate that the grandmothers in this study are physically and mentally in good health and they do not live at or below the poverty line. The grandmothers are committed to the academic and social success of their grandchildren and participate fully in their education and extra- curricular activities. The findings also indicate that the grandchildren are well-adjusted children with no evidence of emotional or academic difficulties. These findings are in direct contrast to the findings of Balagna et al. (2013); Burnett (2009); Edwards and Mumford (2005); Goodman (2011) and Stozier et al (2005).

The implications of the difference in findings is twofold. One is perception. How the Latina/o population is seen by the dominant culture through media, stereotypes and myths influences researchers perspective on the Latina/o experience. The lack of Latina/o historical context or the minimization of their presence in the history of the United States as taught through the educational system serves to render Latina/o contributions unimportant and therefore irrelevant. The emphasis and attention given to immigration status of Latinas/os denies the centuries of Latina/o presence in this country and their culture and traditions, some of which have been adopted by the people of the United States while others have been ignored. Without cultural awareness and cultural respect, the study of the Latina/o population cannot be done

judiciously. Research done through a dominant cultural perspective does not do justice to the Latina/o experience.

Two is Eurocentric epistemology. Valenzuela (1999), Yosso (2006) as well as other Latina/o researchers have found that some Latina/o children view education in a holistic manner, meaning that formal education is but one element of their overall life education. Many traditionally raised Latina/o children expect to have a warm, caring relationship with their teacher and peers but often find teachers who are not accustomed to this type of personal relationship and peers who are often unreceptive or worse.

This study suggests that cultural knowledge, awareness and respect are integral to researchers who wish to study Latina/o populations in obtaining findings that are closer to the reality of the Latina/o experience. This study also suggests that the present educational system that promotes only one way of teaching children often leaves minority and low income children frustrated, isolated and marginalized. Cultural difference is blamed for low academic achievement instead of placing the blame on an oppressive, inequitable educational system.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited by several factors. First, the size of the sample and the small geographical area from which the participants were selected. A larger sample size and geographical area may have modified the findings. Second, the use of a translator can produce bias in the translated version of the interview. Through no intentional fault of the translator, there may be a change in tone or a difference in dialect that can produce a variance in what was originally said. Third, because of scarcity of studies on Latina grandmothers and because they often cited each other, the literature did not offer a diverse perspective. Fourth, my role as an intern and volunteer has led me to make professional and personal friendships with some of the

participants which may have or probably did influence their responses or behavior. Finally, despite my best efforts, it is possible that my own personal experiences have formed a bias that may have placed limitations on my analysis during this study.

Future research on Latina grandmothers raising grandchildren could include a larger sample size and geographical area to expand the diversity of socioeconomic status of the family and the countries of origin. Latina/o families are diverse, coming from different regions and having different customs and traditions. Another area of future research could focus on the grandchildren themselves. Much of the available literature is centered on the effects of raising grandchildren on the grandmother and not how this relationship affects the grandchildren. Examining the grandchildren through a longitudinal study would provide insight as to the best interventions or services the family might benefit from to increase the strength and stability of the family unit.

Any future research on the Latina grandmothers raising grandchildren would increase the knowledge and awareness of a phenomenon that has rapidly increased in recent years, which could assist educational systems as well as social service agencies to incorporate grandmothers into the parent/guardian category. This would allow the grandmother/grandchildren family to access services and privileges normally reserved for parents to alleviate some of the economic and legal issues they now deal with.

Appendix

Interview Questions

1. How many grandchildren are you caring for?
2. What are their ages?
3. How long have you been caring for your grandchild/ren?
4. What is your age?
5. What is your health status?
6. What circumstances precipitated your grandchild/ren living with you?
7. How do you think your children are doing academically?
8. If your grandchild could improve her/his grades what do you think would be of help to achieve that goal? (Tutoring, homework help, teacher explaining the process, one to one time with teacher).
9. How does your grandchild feel about school? (Loves it, dislikes it, finds it difficult, easy?)
10. Do you think it is important for your grandchild to graduate from high school? College?
Explain why or why not.
11. Did her/his parents graduate from high school? College?
12. How far did you go in school?
13. How did your parents feel about education?
14. What generation in this country are you?
15. Have you noticed how raising your grandchild/ren is different than raising your children? If so, in what ways?

16. What quality do you think is the most important that you bring to your relationship with your grandchild? (Culture, values, morals, wisdom, experiences, stability, etc.)
17. What traditions if any do you pass on to your grandchild/ren that you feel are especially important? Why are they important to you and what do you want her/him to learn from these traditions?
18. What is your favorite part of your relationship with your grandchild/ren?
19. What makes you most proud of what you are doing? (Grandchild's success, school achievements, how grandchild has adapted, etc.?)
20. How much do you participate in your grandchild's education?
21. Is there a space for parents/guardians at school to gather and communicate?
22. Do you have a good relationship with your child's teacher and principal?
23. Are you able to voice your concerns to your child's teacher or principal and feel that they have been addressed?

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