

Disrupted Motherhood: Gender and International Relationships in Immigrant Families

By

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Abstract:

Research has consistently illustrated that gender roles change through migration. However, few have clearly analyzed how the role of intergenerational relationships further shifts parents' gender roles. This study not only focuses on the shift of parents' perspectives of gender roles, but specifically, how immigrant women's expectations for their children adapt to the culture of the destination. As children challenge gender roles, negotiations emerge overtime around small situations that gradually add up. By conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with immigrant mothers and their adult children, I examine how immigrant mothers' understanding of gender roles are influenced through intergenerational exchanges between them and their U.S.-born children. I find that although mothers' gender roles change, they maintain traditional expectations for their children, which children come to resent as they age into adulthood.

Introduction:

According to the American Immigration Council(AIC), one in seven residents in the United States are immigrants. In 2020, the AIC states that the United States was home to more than 23.0 million immigrant women, and the majority were Hispanic. The AIC states that they have outnumbered the numbers of male immigrants. Historically, men were more likely to immigrate due to their social positions as primary breadwinners. However, women are now more likely in comparison to males, to emigrate to the United States (Boehm, 2008; Nawyn, 2010). Now that economic demands and structures have shifted, more women are immigrating. Women immigrate to the United States for various reasons such as the economy, work opportunities, family relations, freedom, and validation. As of 2020, immigrant women account for nearly 16%

of all employed women ages 16 and older in the United States. The shift of gender roles is evident when compared to the gender roles of women in their country of origin.

Immigrant mothers' understanding of gender roles expand, not only because of their children's intertwined cultures, but also because of the growing fears of deportation. Deportation is a constant fear among immigrants, especially children of immigrants. In 2021, it was reported that nearly half a million U.S. citizen children experienced at least one of their parents being deported (AIC, 2021). Deportation is an ever-present fear among U.S. citizen-children and immigrant parents due to current immigration enforcement, laws, and regulations in the United States (Dreby, 2015). This legal vulnerability challenges and expands gender roles. Women have to take on the male gender roles as the likelihood of men being deported exceeds women (Golash-Boza, T., & Hondagneu-Sotelo, P., 2013). Not only does the event of deportation transform gender roles, but also, potentially, the imagining of the event. In other words, the experience of "deportability" begins to shift gender roles (De Genova, 2002).

Mothers' expected roles in the household and in their relationships transition to modern conceptions of gender due to their fear of losing their husband/partner and the traditional norms they were expected to hold in the household and relationship. This not only adds stress to a parent, but to a child as well. Children have reported depression, anxiety, and severe psychological distress due to detention and/or deportation of a parent (Vesely, Goodman, & Scurlock, 2014; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Foner, 1997). The emotional trauma of deportation and potential deportation is compounded by the stress of having to take on more responsibilities for both mothers and children. They now have to take on a larger financial responsibility and may also feel guilty for having "escaped" deportation and their loved ones being sent back to their country of origin (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Although shifting gender roles and intergenerational tensions have both been studied extensively, the role of intergenerational relationships further shifting parent's gender roles is understudied. I am contributing to the discussion of intergenerational tensions surrounding gender in immigrant families by tracing how these tensions that come to a head in adolescence continue to simmer into early adulthood. As an immigrant daughter to an immigrant mother, I draw from my own experience as I examine how children respond to and challenge their mothers' gender role expectations. Specifically, I seek to understand how tensions surrounding mothers' expectations for their children influence intergenerational relationships and affect both mothers and children emotionally.

I will first discuss how gender roles shift through immigration. Then I will explore how mothers specifically renegotiate and redefine traditional concepts of motherhood through immigration. Finally, I will examine literature on how parents and children negotiate gender role expectations. I expect that children will use strategies of educational-based achievement, psychological well-being and American culture to stretch their mothers' understanding of gender. To best examine how migration and cultural tensions affect family dynamics, I conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews separately with both immigrant mothers and their adult children. I argue that immigrant women's expectations for their children adapt to the new society they are immigrating to because their children challenge them to conceive gender roles in a new way overtime. However, these negotiations and mothers' attachments to their long-held conceptions of gender can cause strain in their relationships with their children.

Literature Review:

Shifting Gender Roles Through Immigration

Millions of people take on the challenge of immigrating to a new country. They decide to leave their families, friends and communities for their dreams, goals, or safety. Immigrants are faced with new ways of life, which includes new values and norms, and adapt gradually to these changes. Feminist theorists have used the foundation of gender relations theory by R.W. Connell to illustrate how gender relations shift as a result of migration and settlement. Connell focused on the four dimensions of gender relations (power, production, emotional, and symbolic relations) that interact with one another and influence the construction individual's gender performance (Connell 1987; 2002). Immigrant mother's gender roles in their countries of origin are bound by traditional conceptions of women's roles in society. Women from Ecuador, Mexico, El Salvador, and Peru are expected to be in the domestic sphere. They care for their children, husband, while also cooking, cleaning, and managing their household. This occurs because women are socialized to place family life first and their personal goals second (Smits, 2003). Women's gender roles are transformed when they immigrate. Connell's theory of gender relations argues (1987; 2002) that gender shifts as a consequence of migration and settlement which:

...allows room for individual agents to change the structure of gender while still recognizing the constraints put upon agency, and the mutually constitutive relationship between agency and structure.

In other words, gender is socially constructed within the bounds of larger social institutions and structures which allows us to understand how gender roles are being practiced, maintained, challenged, and reconstructed through the process of migration (Nawyn, 2010; Connell 1987; 2002). After migration, women are expected to not only perform traditional gender expectations,

but are also now adding new roles and expectations which causes notable changes (Boehm, 2008). The fluidity and changes in the dynamics of gender power relations can be seen through the process of immigration (Nawyn, 2010). Due to the social institutions and the four dimensions of gender relations, gender roles are changing and result in conflict and tension within migrant households. The fluidity of gender power relations ignores power differentials of household members from interests within the household (Nawyn, 2010; Nawyn et al. 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Women are performing new gender roles that only men performed causing tension within the household and the reality of fluidity of gender power relations.

The rigidity of gender roles in immigrant women's countries of origin lead them to seek better education opportunities as well as employment, escape from domestic and system violence, and a greater sense of freedom (Nawyn, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Kanaiaupuni, 2000). Due to global inequality and shifting economic structures that demand feminized labor, or dual income, women are increasingly joining the workforce to help their families financially whether it is in their current country or for their home country. Migrants wish to include some of their traditional norms and lifestyles from back home into their new home, but are challenged due to the forced adaptation into the new society.

Due to migration, women take on roles that were previously performed by men. These gender roles exposes them to new cultural norms, which redefine motherhood based on challenges associated with distance or work responsibilities (Vesely, Goodman, and Scurlock, 2014; Boehm, 2008; Smits, 2003). For example, in Boehm's (2008) ethnographic study of San Luis Potosi and New Mexico, she found that due to immigration, women are now working full-time, and responsible for public interactions (with teachers, doctors, attorneys, etc.).

However, they also continue to cook, clean, and take care of their children at home. Despite taking on a dual role, men continue to force dominance and male privilege in the household (Smits, 2003). Instead of taking on an equal share of domestic labor and responsibilities, men continue to maintain symbolic power in the household and perform an unequal share of household responsibilities.

Although men experience a shift in gender expectations they continue to maintain their patriarchal place in the household by bringing their wives or partners to the United States (Boehm, 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992, 1994). Men continue to have a semblance of freedom and authority that they had in their country of origin. In contrast, when their male partners migrate, women gain a new “freedom” when left in their country of origin. This, of course, is a limited freedom since men continue to surveil wives through transnational gossip even if they are miles away (Boehm, 2008). When women migrate to the U.S., they gain freedom from ever-present surveillance, expand their social networks, and gain social capital. By connecting with other female immigrants who have similar experience they are able to help one another with new job opportunities and resources (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Kanaiaupuni, 2000). When comparing the shifting status of men to women, Deborah Boehm (2008) reports that:

Male migrants are subjected to existing and emergent ideas of masculinity and patriarchy in both places, and neither setting offers egalitarian gender relations. And yet, in the context of transnational migration, females do contest male power, question rigid gender ideologies, and experience transformations in their everyday lives. The boundaries that limit their actions are never fixed, and transnational movement is reshaping gendered selves...

Boehm (2008) is referring that male migrants keep their ideas of masculinity and patriarchy from their country of origin into their migrating country and women are still participating in playing their traditional gender roles. Due to migration, women are now having the freedom to question and act on what they want to do instead of what they are forced to do in their country of origin. Women are now performing both masculine and feminine roles as they realized that there is more to just the imposed gender roles they grew up learning. This will continue to happen as immigrating women participate and negotiate gender.

Shifting Concepts of Motherhood

Immigration has significant influence on reconfiguring the roles, expectations and interactions within families (Lanuza & Bandelj, 2015; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994) and it continues to shift as women become mothers. In 2007, one-quarter of children born in the United States were native-born with immigrant parents (Lanuza & Bandelj, 2015; Clark, Glick and Buress, 2009). Becoming a mother after arriving in America fundamentally and permanently changes the ecology of women's lives marking it a significant reason to stay in America (Vesely, Goodman, & Scurlock, 2014). Women are now having a different focus point and all of their traditional gender roles come back (i.e. cleaning, taking care of the house/children, cooking, etc.) and are now more focused with the new gender roles in America so their family can make it. The growing responsibilities within the family change the position of females versus males (if present) and within their new communities (Boehm, 2008).

Motherhood adds financial, emotional, and logistical strains on immigrant women. Immigrant women face social isolation, distance from family, discrimination, concerns over raising a child in a new environment, navigating unfamiliar social systems, and financial worries

(Vesely, Goodman, & Scurlock, 2014). Financial instability is often already a present reality for women, which becomes magnified when they become mothers in the United States. In America, working mothers are part of the norm due to their gained access to social and economic resources (Fonner, 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Immigrant women take on any economic opportunity presented to them even if they are paid low wages (Lanuza, & Bandelj, 2015). Many women will work 3-4 jobs at a time to make sure their kids have their needs met. When comparing an immigrant mother's country of origin and the United States, mothers are more likely to work in America despite limited access to childcare. However, working mothers still face judgment for having to sacrifice their time with their children due to economic necessity. For instance, in research about women's experience of immigration and becoming mothers in the United States, many immigrant mothers express the hardship between being mothers and economic providers. One mother in particular expressed how she missed the childcare she would have received in Mexico and how she had to leave her child alone in the United States due to her work obligation (Vesely, Goodman, & Scurlock, 2014). Even though immigrant mothers are creating social networks in America with other immigrant mothers (King, 2011), women are still struggling with childcare support. Mothers are faced with the negotiation of quality time with their children and work obligations. Women become more strategic with their decisions and value the opportunities their children will have by being raised in the United States in comparison to being raised in their home countries (Lanuza, & Bandelj, 2015; Vesely, Goodman, & Scurlock, 2014).

Even though the adjustment process for immigrant women in America is difficult, the benefits to their children outweighs the cost. For example, in the study conducted by Lanuza and Bandelj (2015), they found that women's desire for permanency in the United States is enforced after becoming mothers. Motherhood serves as both a source of purpose and a strain on

immigrant women helping practitioners better serve the American population. The purpose of these findings are to better understand how the shift of motherhood changes an immigrant mother's perspective and original goals they had when immigrating. Throughout their time in America, women developed new social networks, but still remain connected with their countries of origin so they can have assistance with their new adjustments to America and staying connected with their roots.

Intergenerational Tensions in Immigrant Families

Throughout this section, I will be highlighting how previous literature illustrates that daughters can get frustrated with feeling shut in and overly controlled and expected to be at home, and the difference of sons having more freedom due to the expectations and traditional gender roles imposed by their parents. Immigrant parents came to this country with set gender roles that they were expected to follow, then they were altered in the process of migration, and are once again challenged when an American child is born. Family relations differences are caused by intergenerational differences. Independence is desired by adolescents and interdependence expected by immigrant parents (Kwak, 2003). This creates conflict with the relationship between parents and their children because parents want to have a strong emphasis on the traditional roles men and women are expected to have according to their country of origin. In Hispanic and Latino cultures, family is a critical context for the socialization of gender (Lanuza, & Bandelj, 2015). An immigrant parent selects their priorities for cultural norms and emphasizes the cultural construction of development for the next generation (Kwak, 2003). The efforts that an immigrant parent makes to maintain the flow of cultural transmission leads to variations and challenges among the next generation. In immigrant families, the intergenerational

differences can become consequential in adolescents as their parents internalize their original heritage culture. It is difficult to blend both countries' gender roles as the process of change of customs, values, and attitudes that are brought from their countries begin to shift due to new hierarchies, cultural conceptions, and social institutions they have encountered in America (Foner, 1997).

Focusing on immigrant parents, roles from their country of origin may be ingrained from a young age, which leads them to act a certain way in society. By having these traditional gender roles, it causes people in society to believe that social roles should be differentiated by gender (Updegraff et al., 2014). For example, in this study of 246 Mexican-American families, researchers found that when immigrant mothers had more traditional gender roles their adolescents reported more traditional gender roles than usual. The way gender roles unfold across their children's lives is likely to depend on the interplay among genders, family processes, and context characteristics. (Updegraff, et al., 2014). On the contrary, fathers with more traditional gender role attitudes report having daughters with similar perspectives, but their sons show differently (Updegraff et al., 2014). The idea of a traditional father is that their son should have freedom outside of their home and their daughters should be protected and remain home. This creates a division due to intergenerational relationships because the original heritage culture and the new culture may not endorse identical cultural values (Kwak, 2003).

Due to institutions children are in throughout their childhood, the concept of gender roles begins to evolve. Adolescents begin to support new norms that allow them to have freedom which parents may resist (Foner, 1997). In their early years, children are linked to having more traditional gender roles than when they are teens. One study showed that by age 13, boys have a more traditional attitude than girls. As girls get older there is a steep decline in traditionality

across time than boys because of the exposure to U.S. culture (Udpegraff et al., 2014). Literature by Foner and Dreby (2011) states that:

Strict parental control of daughters' activities and movements outside the home, which often begins the moment they are perceived as young adults and sexually vulnerable, frequently leads to strain and strife.

Adolescents are negatively affected by this as it gives a negative quality of their relationships with their parents. This is due to the lack of parental understanding throughout their lives. Even if immigrant parents decide to keep certain niche components from their ethnic cultures, cultural losses happen immensely in immigrant families due to the discontinuity imposed by the dominant culture of the larger society upon their ethno-cultural practices. Children are introduced at an early age about independence which is more permissive and encouraged in the U.S than in their parents' country of origin (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Sons have more independence than daughters as parents' traditional norms always allowed men freedom and daughters needed surveillance. Research has shown that daughters experience heightened restrictions and surveillance from their immigrant parents. They are expected to be “lockdown” or “shut-in” girls that are only allowed to leave their houses to go to school (Smith, 2002; 2006; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001). This leads daughters to have more isolated lives as opposed to sons.

Intergenerational relationships between parents and adolescents can be difficult due to the process of negotiating between two conflicting cultures and norms (Kwak, 2003). For example, immigrant parents will marry within their ethnic group, wait to have sex, and leave their home until marriage (Foner & Dreby, 2011). Children are introduced to American culture which is more permissive of premarital sex, romantic love, relationships with different racial and sexual

groups (Foner, 1997; Foner & Dreby, 2011). While this contradicts their parents' wish, it gives children the opportunity to reject arranged marriages and close supervision of their relationships. This tension is more present among daughters than sons since sexuality and dating choices cause much more anxiety and a desire for control from parents (Foner & Dreby, 2011).

In addition to children's cultural negotiations, what is and is not permissible has also evolved. Literature shows that corporal punishment in families is common and acceptable in their parents' countries but has changed since children feel more comfortable to call the police, talk to friends, or to a trustworthy adult to prevent corporal punishment (Foner, 1997; Foner & Dreby, 2011). Since America is more carefree, the tension of agreeing in clothing, drinking, smoking, partying, hanging out with friends also causes tension. Other cultures follow religious beliefs or norms society deems correct, so when introduced to these new perspectives it creates a gap between their children's lives and their involvement.

Although immigrant parents and children struggle over issues of control and independence, they also rely on each other in ways that can both strengthen and add strain to the relationship. Adolescents are supportive to immigrant mothers and families as they provide practical support to the siblings and parents. Children can be of help in interpretation and translation for siblings and their parents and play the role of a tutor in the family as well as the advisors (Lanuza, & Bandelj, 2015; Foner & Dreby, 2011). Mothers now have support at home that allows them to work and continue accomplishing their goals not only for them, but their children as well. As it can be a positive, it is also a negative as it creates tension within families.

Ethnographic studies reported parents felt frustrated and their self-esteem suffered because they have to depend on their children to translate documents, fill out forms, conduct business transactions, and they worry their children may not be translating correctly to

professionals (Foner & Dreby, 2011). Children on the other hand gain important life skills and value the ability to contribute to their parents and the household, but they can also resent having to taking on adult roles and learn family secrets from a young age (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Thus, tension is created between parents and their children.

Immigrant parents compare their country of origin to their host country when it comes to gender roles, norms, traditions, etc. Immigrant parents have conflict around their children's sense of loyalty to their host country and their identification with American culture. The idea of trying to maintain the traditions, language, gender norms, culture, etc. that their parents' country of origin has, but also incorporate the culture and society norms they were born into makes it difficult for children (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Mann, 2004). The tensions created among parents and their children when attempting to merge and understand two countries creates a division within the family.

Methods:

For my research study, I looked at self-identified immigrant women born and raised in Central/South America and their U.S. born adult children in my suburban New York community. I focused on my community as it is heavily populated with immigrants. Throughout my study, I interviewed six mothers and six adult children. I used convenience sampling and recruited through my own social networks in churches, local food pantries, and supermarkets in my community.

In order to study how intergenerational exchanges between immigrant mothers and their U.S. born children influence family relationships and immigrant mother's' understanding of

gender roles, I conducted an in-depth, semi-structured interview with mothers and their adult children. By interviewing both mothers and children, it gave me a better understanding of the perspectives of the challenge and they both went through to have this new vision of gender roles while living in America. For the interviews, I focused on asking about intergenerational parent/child relationships, peer relationships, and migration and incorporation history. I also asked questions regarding gender presentation in their country of origin and migrating country, and their family members' expectations and perspectives on gender roles. I asked the mothers what gender roles have you taught your children to follow and the similarities to their country of origin, parenting challenges, and benefits of parenting their children in America. Finally, I asked their American adult children about the challenges and inequalities they encountered being the son/daughter of an immigrant growing up, perspectives of being raised by American parents, and how different their lives would be if they were in their parents' country of origin.

Throughout my study, the main points are the intergenerational exchange between immigrant mothers and their American children who challenged the understanding and acceptance of new gender roles perspectives. I conducted inductive analysis on all of the data, and developed codes based on emergent themes from the twelve interviews (Lofland et al., 2009). Although I expected to code for the benefits of parenting a child in America, and mother's evolving gender roles, instead coding on parent dependency on children, absence of relationship between mother and child, unresolved conflict, and implementation of traditional gender roles onto their children emerged inductively. I used grounded theory to analyze my findings as it helped me explain and understand my data and to identify patterned relationships within (Charmaz, 1996). I explained to all of my participants, in great detail, that I will not be using

their names in my research study. I have changed all of their names to pseudonyms to keep their real names confidential.

Finding and Analysis:

In this section I discuss significant themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews I conducted. The findings of this study support the findings of the literature I have mentioned and reviewed above that discuss shifting gender roles through migration, shifting concept of motherhood, and the intergenerational tension in immigrant families. Originally my argument was that immigrant women's expectations for their children adapt to the new society they are migrating to because their children challenge them to conceive gender roles in a new way overtime as negotiations emerge around small situations that gradually add up. After conducting my study, using grounded theory, I have found that even though immigrant women gain new gender roles through the process of migration, they implement traditional gender roles to their U.S born children.

As U.S.-born or raised children increasingly adopt American customs, children begin to challenge the mother's authority. Conflicts between mothers and children result in chronic intergenerational tensions which can ultimately cause the absence of a relationship between mother and child. In the following pages, I will first discuss how immigrant mothers implement traditional gender roles on their U.S. born children and how it leads to parent dependency on their children. Then I will explore how children challenge their mother's authority causing unresolved conflict between mothers and their child/ren. Finally, I will examine how the absence of a relationship between a mother and their child/ren affects both mothers' and childrens' perceptions of each other and their past conflicts surrounding gender.

Implementation of Traditional Gender Roles on Children and Parent Dependency on Child

Immigrant mothers bring with them traditional conceptions of gender roles that align with their cultures and upbringings. When migration occurs, women's roles begin to evolve. They are now gaining new roles that may be played by men in their countries of origin as the American society challenges them to complete new roles (Vesely, Goodman, and Scurlock, 2014; Boehm, 2008; Smits, 2003). The six mothers that I interviewed all confirmed that they were taught traditional gender roles in the countries of Mexico, El Salvador, and Ecuador. They had the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and three of the six even dropped out of school for financial reasons and/or to take care of younger siblings. They stated that they never questioned these gender roles as they thought it was normal and just something they needed to follow as they were taught by the generation before them and felt content completing them. When migrating to America, these mother's began to work in order to pay debts for their travel, family/children responsibility in America or country of origin, and to start up their lives here.

Even though immigrant women gained new gender roles through the process of migration, once they became mothers, they began to implement expectations of traditional gender roles to their U.S. born children. Children being raised in American culture and society have now obtained a new idea of gender roles and norms, where things seem more equal for male and female and where independence and freedom is important (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Immigrant mothers did not see this as being important as they value their roots and want their children to learn from them even if they are far away from them. Shauman and Noonan (2007) show how according to gender role theory, men and women's roles within the family are not interchangeable, and therefore the costs and benefits of migration will not be calculated the same way for men and women and this impulses for them to

impose traditional gender roles to their children. This causes tension and disconnect in an immigrant household as it opens the argument as to what gender roles are correct and what is not. Focusing on the implementation of traditional gender roles on children, I'll first focus on mothers implementing the traditional household chores on their daughters. Jane, daughter of Maria, describes her mother forcing her to follow these roles and norms as:

...just because my mom was like, "If you cannot cook or clean, how are you going to take care of your husband?" My mom would say you're a girl, you shouldn't be doing the things you are doing and would say that's not something a girl would do, or that's not something a woman would do. I did feel when it came to cooking, cleaning, and laundry, she felt like that was a woman's job.

Jane was expected to do household chores as that was a "woman's job" and if she does not follow them or learn to do them she will not be able to find a husband in the long term. Her mother chastised her about not washing dishes, having a dirty room, and hanging out with boys unsupervised. By Jane being told this while growing up, it gave her the ideology that a woman will not be able to find a partner if she did not learn and respect traditional gender roles. Maria, mother of Jane, stated, "*...she is looking for a husband that will do all the female responsibilities for her...*" Maria shamed her daughter which caused tension and an understanding that certain responsibilities be exercised by everyone (Boehm, 2008) and that she cannot do the "female responsibilities" so she is looking for male to complete them.

All immigrant mothers taught and U.S born females interviewed stated that they were taught traditional gender roles by their immigrant mothers. Elizabeth was taught that she had to clean the house at all times no matter what she was doing or how she was feeling. Elizabeth also shared, "*When we were eating my parents always said women have to cook for you, women*

have to feed you, and bring the food to the table, and just serve you.” Elizabeth’s parents made her believe that a woman’s role in life is to serve a man and everyone else around her. Both Jane and Elizabeth faced gender inequalities in their households due to the idea that their parents expected women to follow these specific roles. Similar to Boehm’s (2008) ethnographic research, I found that even though immigrant mothers learned new roles due to migration, they still completed traditional roles in the household and eventually taught their daughters to follow them.

One of the traditional gender roles women were expected to follow was taking care of their siblings and taking on a maternal role early on. For women to continue working, they relied on their children to take care of the house and siblings. Additionally, immigrant parents often depend on their children to provide services such as translation of documents, handle the bills, make appointments (i.e. doctor/dentist, school, attorney, etc.), financial tracking, help siblings with homework, and speaking for parents/siblings that do not know the language (Lanuza, & Bandelj, 2015; Foner & Dreby, 2011). All six interviews of the U.S. born children stated that they started to help their parents with these services at a very young age and continue to do so in adulthood. During the interview Juan stated:

I mean I helped my parents in many ways in translating documents, helping them with medical appointments, whenever they had to speak in English I would speak for them.

Now, I still help my parents in translating documents, make medical appointments, lease paperwork for cars, apartments, any legal document, and I keep track of their expenses such as bills, finances with the bank.

Juan had to learn at a very young age how to provide all these services and had no choice in doing them, as he was expected to help because he attended school and knew the language.

Similarly, Elizabeth shares her experience of parent dependency as:

...by driving everyone, paying bills, translation of appointments, documents, taking care of my nieces and nephews, and helping my siblings since they do not know the language...

Elizabeth never had the option of not playing this role. Her privilege as a U.S. Citizen led her to fill out this role because the opportunities she had in comparison to her parents and siblings were drastically different. Finally, all six of the children being interviewed stated that on top of completing both traditional gender roles and the new dependency parental roles, they were still pushed to be focused on school and strive to reach their goals as the opportunity was given to them being born in America. Because children were going to school, they were also in charge of helping out siblings with homework assignments and taking the role of teacher/tutor (Lanuza, & Bandelj, 2015; Foner & Dreby, 2011) as many immigrant parents did not finish school in their country of origin. Bryan shares his experience as:

I'm a first generation student. Both my parents have some high school education level. Neither of them completed high school. So once you got to the trickier subjects like upper, middle and early high school in terms of algebra and, and stuff like that, it was like a foreign language to them and had me teach and explain to my younger brother how to do all of this. I was a student and at the same time a teacher...

Bryan not only had to be a student and succeed in his own studies, but had to provide help to his younger brother in his studies. The examples of implementation of traditional gender roles and

the new role of dependency on children provides support to my argument of the tension created by mothers to their children that started at a very young age.

Even though children completed these norms throughout their childhood without questioning them, it led to tension and disagreement with their mothers as they entered adulthood. Looking back at Foner and Dreby's (2011) ethnographic studies, parents felt frustrated and their self-esteem suffered because of how dependent they had become of their children. Moreover, they worried their children may not be translating correctly to professionals or providing the correct assistance to younger siblings. Finally, they felt guilt about their children uncovering family secrets at a very young age (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). In contrast to the anxiety and guilt that immigrant parents felt about their dependency on their children, they never questioned their teachings of traditional gender roles. Children on the other hand experienced pressure and anxiety to help their parents navigate different systems, while providing childcare, but still being expected to excel in school. In both my own and previous research, this was not normal as the institutions they were going through taught more egalitarian gender expectations (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The two different approaches to the world led many children to challenge the authority and expectations of mothers.

Children Challenging Authority of Mothers and Unresolved Conflict

Throughout childhood, second-generation children in this study did not question or choose to go against their parents' gender expectations until they began to enter adulthood. This is when tensions emerged and children began to challenge their parents' authority. As U.S.-born children rebelled against their parents' expectations, family tensions began to characterize

intergenerational relationships. Looking at the six interviewed immigrant mothers, they all followed the traditional gender roles without questioning them. They then proceeded to teach their children these traditional gender roles, dependency on them, and to be independent all at the same time. There was a mix of the roles as mothers learned new roles through the process of migration. While growing up, their American children began to challenge their authority as the idea of gender roles was not something they agreed on. When it came to traditional gender roles, Jane, daughter of Maria, challenged her mother by stating:

No, because I feel like once I became an adult and grew up, I just started questioning my mom. Why should a woman have to clean, cook, or do laundry for a man? If I can do it for myself, I'll do it for myself but like why is it considered a woman's responsibility when it can also be a man's responsibility. At one point I told my parents that if I have a husband, I will have a husband that will cook, clean, for me because why is it just a woman's responsibility for that to be done? I don't mind doing them, like one day I'll do the dishes and one day they will do that, but I don't think it is just a woman's responsibility.

Jane questioned the traditional gender roles that she grew up hearing were a “woman’s responsibility” as something that should not be gendered but should be done by everyone (Nawyn, 2010). As previous literature suggests, these tensions are common between daughters and their parents since they resent having to shoulder all of the household chores that they feel place women into subservient positions (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Valenzuela 1999). My research details exactly how daughters explicitly challenged their mothers about these gender roles, and further details how mothers maintained rigid gender expectations in spite of strong opposition from their daughters. Previous research stresses that Latina women are expected to prepare and

achieve the concept of nurturing mother figures and embody “marianismo,” or a family-oriented ideal of a pure and loving caretaker (Niemann, 2004). Mothers and daughters’ perception of housework as symbolic of love versus patriarchal oppression illustrated how tensions and conflict could transform from a small household issue to a more serious undermining of the mother-daughter relationship. Daughters also found hypocrisy between mother’s implementation of traditional gender roles and how mothers are now completing modern gender roles (i.e. working) in America and heavily depending on their children to have the traditional roles completed on their behalf. Jessica states in her interview:

Well, it was because I'm like, you are a woman too, raising three daughters. And sometimes, unfortunately, my mom, it's like she wanted us to cook. She wanted us to clean, she wanted us to do all the things around the house, but she didn't even follow her own gender role. She was the one who was always working and came home and didn't do anything. She never cooked for us. She never cleaned for us. It was always our responsibility. So I think that was one of the main reasons me and my sisters had problems with my mom growing up because we feel as if maybe if she had a son or if we had a brother, he would be treated differently. She would have to cook for him. And she would have to clean for him. So it's like, just because you have daughters, like why do you treat us that way? So you still always feel like that growing up was unfair.

Jessica and her two sisters grew up following the traditional gender roles that their mother implemented on them at a young age, but their mother was not an example and contradicted the idea of following this. Their mother worked as it was the new role she had to follow, but it caused their roles in their family and as a woman to be altered (Boehm, 2008) validating their daughters perspective that a woman does not just have to follow these traditional gender roles.

Challenges of authority did not only occur to mothers, but to fathers as well. Men also undergo a change in their traditional gender roles, but with the goal to form a family in America to maintain their patriarchal place in the household as they had or were expected to have in their country of origin (Boehm, 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992, 1994). This goes back to practicing traditional gender roles at home for both male and females and taking away the initial idea of “freedom” and other reasons women gained through the process of migration (Nawyn, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Kanaiaupuni, 2000).

Although the children in this study primarily discussed tensions with their mothers, they also discussed issues with their fathers. For example, Jane and Elizabeth had fathers that showed machismo to their families and forcefully implemented traditional gender roles for the whole household. Elizabeth illustrated how her father had a traditional mindset and expressed machismo by stating, *“Women are supposed to do everything for a guy, meanwhile as long as the guy is outside working and providing for the family, he is all set. Meanwhile women have to do everything for a guy, everything in the house.”* Elizabeth is against the traditional gender roles while her siblings born in their parents' country of origin tend to follow these traditional roles without question. In contrast, Elizabeth had a very hard time following and understanding traditional gender roles because she believes this shouldn't be the way to live life. Elizabeth saw her seven brothers and sisters agreeing to follow these roles and she not only had developed an issue with her mother, but with her siblings as well. She could not understand why they thought it was okay to follow this. She questioned her dad's patriarchal place in the household. Elizabeth argued a lot with her mom and sisters and questioned them asking:

“Why would you allow him to tell you what you can and cannot do?”

Elizabeth questioned how her mother and siblings allowed their father to treat them in a machista sense to have total control of their household. Even though mothers are contesting male power (Boehm, 2008), men still have authority over everyone causing tension to alter the dynamics of a “modern” American family.

Because of the father’s position of power within the households of my interviewees, other members of the family lacked authority to intervene in conflicts with fathers. For example, when fathers and sons have tensions in their relationships, mothers tend to stay quiet from their lack of authority. Derreck had a lot of conflict with his father because he was expected to follow in his father’s footsteps in learning the same trade as him and having the same interests as him. He shared:

“An example will probably be the instances of maybe having my dad introduce me to sports and being athletic and having my dad not understand that it was not something I wanted to do. I preferred music, orchestra, marching band and obviously my dad was very big on athletics and wanted me to get active and stuff. I was not interested in that and until today he does not see that not everyone thinks the same way as he does or does the things he likes to do. My mother did not fight him on this, rather she stayed quiet and it just brought the question as to is anyone listening to me?”

Derreck wanted to follow his own hobbies and likings but did not have the support from his father. Because of the authority his father held in the household, his mother did not speak up as gender roles expectations were not being practiced causing a loss of relationship due to feelings of isolation at home.

Derreck stated he was not following the traditional gender roles that his parents expected him to follow and believes everyone should follow what they want. Gender roles unfold across

children's lives because of the interplay among gender, family process, and context characteristics (Updegraff, et al., 2014). As previously stated in the literature review, fathers with more traditional gender roles attitudes report having daughters with similar perspectives, but their sons show differently causing a division due to intergenerational relationships (Updegraff, et al., 2014). The tension that accumulates because children are challenging immigrant parents authority leads to conflict that often remains unresolved as parents lack the cultural capital and vocabulary to negotiate gender within the home.

When it came to children resolving conflict with their parents, all six children interviewed stated that it was never easy and they could not even find a middle ground with their immigrant parents. Children challenging their parents' authority and intergenerational perspectives has led to unresolved conflict between parents and children. The six interviewed children would talk back, yell, and argue with their immigrant parents. They believed that this was the only way to forcefully have their opinions and voices be heard by their parents. Jane shared her experience of conflict resolution:

"I didn't resolve conflicts when I was younger. I mean I would outwardly tell them why should I have to do this when others are not doing this? I guess at that point, I just rebelled against them by saying why do I have to clean the house and translate all of these documents when I know people my age do not have responsibilities like these. Their reply would be yelling why do I have you in school when you cannot even do any of this."

Jane would outwardly question her parents on her traditional gender roles and dependency on her. Her parents' reaction to that was to question the education that "they" are providing for her as the justification as to why she should be completing all these norms. Another example we see of unresolved conflict with Jessica when she states:

“Any problem you bring to her, any problem you have with her, she will flip it back to you. She will try to find a way to blame you in the process. So like an example, sometimes I would bring up to my mother, mother, like, you don't cook around the house. And it's like, I cook now, I'm self-sufficient now, but like as a kid you need that, like, that cooking someone to cook for you, she would bring it back onto me. Like, why don't I cook? Why don't I clean? Meanwhile I'm going to school. Yeah. And I'm trying and I didn't, I think that was like, even today with my mom, it's really hard to do conflict resolution with her because she will either find a way to blame you or she will find a way to, um, I don't know what the word I'm looking for is, but she'll just try to find a way to blame you or my education obtained. Like, she's never the problem. It's someone else who's the problem or in this case I'm the problem.”

Jessica did not resolve conflict with her mother as her mother always turned it to her being the problem or someone else. Jessica attempts to question her mother on the traditional gender roles implemented on her and her mother would not discuss it or give Jessica the opportunity to share her perspective. Seeing the reaction of both Jane's and Jessica's parents when they wanted to resolve conflict, shows that immigrant parents are avoidant of the topic of traditional gender roles. Even though immigrant mothers see raising a child in America to be positive because of all the opportunities they will have when compared to their country of origin (Lanuza, & Bandelj, 2015; Vesely, Goodman, & Scurlock, 2014), they often struggled to maintain positive relationships with their children in part due to the opportunities that encouraged children to step out of their traditional gender roles .

Because children were challenging their immigrant mothers, immigrant mothers felt that there needed to be discipline to resolve the “reckless behavior/attitude”. Previous literature

shows that children were not aware of the corporal punishment in immigrant families and that it was acceptable in their immigrant parent's country of origin (Foner, 1997; Foner & Dreby, 2011). Children growing up, due to the institutions and American society children participated in, they knew they could be vocal to other adults and should not be allowed (Foner, 1997; Foner & Dreby, 2011). But regardless of this knowledge, children were still punished for their behavior. The six children knew that there were consequences for these actions, but felt the need to do this to rebel against their parents. Bryan states that:

When I was a child disobeying meant I would have besides being yelled at and explained to why what I did was wrong if I didn't learn. It wasn't like baseball where it's like three strikes and you're out. It was more like, we told you once, so don't do it again. If I did it again, then the punishment would be greater. And in that sense, like I did, um, receive physical punishment, whether that was being hit with a sandal or some other apparel could be like a belt. I would receive a physical punishment to varying degrees, obviously, depending on what I did wrong. Um, and it could be as simple as one and done. One hit on my backside or on my buttocks. Some once or twice on my hands...

Bryan explains how growing up he received corporal punishment by his parents by them hitting him with apparel and their hands. He did not receive many chances to learn from his wrongdoings but was expected to learn after the first time they told him not to do it again. This imposes fear on children and leads to them hiding when they think they made a mistake. According to Mann's (2004) study, this is the start of the struggles between children and their immigrant mothers' relationship due to unresolved conflict and the battle of understanding traditional and modern gender roles.

The six adult children that I interviewed had a difficult time understanding the implementation of traditional gender roles their mothers expected them to follow. The idea of having these gender roles and being told while they were growing up in their American social institutions to follow others. Looking back at Nawyn's (2010) study she explains how through the process of migration gender roles change, but she also states how there is a strong fluidity of gender. Even though mothers are going through this fluidity of gender power relations (Nawyn, 2010), they cannot come to a middle ground with their U.S. born children to understand that there are more to just traditional gender roles to learn. This is only creating an absence of relationship between them.

Absence of Relationship Between an Immigrant Mother and U.S. Born Child

After reviewing literature, studies, and conducting my own study, we see that immigrant mothers gain new gender roles through the process of migration but are implementing traditional gender roles to their U.S born children. This has pushed children to challenge their mothers' authority and have unresolved conflict between each other. Children are now drifting apart from their mothers and causing an absence of relationship to appear between mother and child. The mothers and children interviewed all agreed and acknowledged that there is a significant space between their relationships with their children. Since we start to see an absence of relationship, we begin to see children not trusting their parents, disconnecting from their parent's country of origin due to different perspectives on gender roles and culture, and children relying on others for help.

As previously discussed, one of the main gender roles mothers receive through the process of migration, is the availability and opportunity to work in America. Previous literature

has shown that immigrant women in America are expected to work due to the new access to social and economic resources (Fonner, 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Women are taking on roles that were previously performed and expected by men to complete their goals before and after motherhood (Vesely, Goodman, and Scurlock, 2014; Boehm, 2008; Smits, 2003). Because mothers are working long hours, they are relying on hispanic/latino community care for their children (King, 2011) or for older siblings to do this role, so they can continue working to provide for their families. When mothers left their children with babysitters, they feared something would happen to them or if they were being taken care of correctly. Maura states that she saw the biggest challenge in raising a child in America as not having time and fearing what would be happening:

“I did not have her all the time and to leave her with someone made me fear if I was going to see my daughter afterwards or if something will happen to them”.

Maura shares her fear of someone else taking care of her daughter and something bad happening. Even though a woman from the same country (King, 2011) as Maura took care of her daughter, she still feared something happening to her daughter.

Mothers also blamed themselves for not spending enough time with their children, but justified it as it was in the best interest of their children. Adela says:

“Because I am an illegal immigrant, I had to work long hours and 3 jobs so sometimes you do not have time to spend with them. As a mother that hurts, and I have to remind myself that I am a good mother because I am doing everything so he can have a better future even if that means losing important time and connection with my son.”

Adela explains how she had to work various jobs which caused her not to spend quality time with her son. She questioned herself if she was being a good mother. As mentioned previously,

children resent their mothers for working all the time while also being expected to pick up the slack at home. The children often did not understand the economic necessity or the guilt felt by their mothers. Instead, children only focused on what they perceived as hypocrisy. Not only were their mothers not spending quality time with them but they were also imposing so much responsibility on them. Previous studies have shown that mothers tend to negotiate the loss of quality time with their children and work to strive for a better future for their children with as many opportunities open to them as possible (Lanuza, & Bandelj, 2015; Vesely, Goodman, & Scurlock, 2014).

Since children are challenging their mother's authority and immigrant mothers are not spending time with their children due to work responsibilities, children also experience disconnecting from their parents, and heritage cultures as well. During the interview Juan shared that:

"Growing up in America with immigrant parents that weren't present due to work isn't always the easiest thing to do, to live through, especially if a lot of your friends are American born, you know, white kids. That makes it a little bit hard because then you grew up with a sense of, you know, am I gonna be a little bit ashamed of who I am of showing my culture or do I have to, you know, when you're growing up, that's when you have to kind of start to think about what culture you're gonna express, your parents' culture that's at home, Mexican culture, the immigrant culture or the, the school culture with the white kids you're in school with, or the American culture there. So it's not the easiest thing growing up and it's kind of like, you're almost two people when you grow up as an immigrant, a first generation with immigrant parents. It's kind of like you have to pick where you're gonna be and what you're gonna be depending."

Juan explains that due to his immigrant parents not being present throughout his childhood he had a difficult time knowing who he truly is. Juan struggles with knowing which culture to identify with. He was learning a new culture and at the same time being expected to follow another one at home. Oftentimes these two cultures conflicted with one another and left him questioning which one was the “right” one. Elizabeth also shares a similar experience that she used to get bullied at school because her parents kept dressing her in traditional Mexican attire. Elizabeth states:

“I was an easy target for bullying as I dressed completely differently than everyone else and did not know the language. I didn’t know what was right and what was wrong. Did I need to wear those uggs or can I continue wearing my rancho boots? What was right and what was wrong? Home or school? How do I tell my parents this if they will not understand or were even there for me to speak to them? Do I tell my siblings who did not attend school in America?”

Elizabeth struggled with feeling shame with a culture that she learned at home and the culture she was learning at school. For both Juan and Elizabeth we see how they struggle with self-identity as two cultures are attempting to mix and they do not know which one is right to follow. Due to their mothers not being present or thinking they will not understand, they found it difficult to address this crisis of identity. This correlates to previous literature as children face inequality and negative outcomes across multiple life domains (Wallace, Wilson & Darlington-Pollock, 2022; Mann 2004) due to the confusion of what culture they truly belong in (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Children do not know who to talk to about their problems as they fear their mothers will not understand them which leads to a bigger separation of relationship between a child and mother.

Children of immigrant mothers fear that their mothers do not understand them, which is why they began to rely on other people to communicate their feelings and problems. All six children interviewed stated that they would rather talk about social and personal problems with other people, such as their friends, partners, or other trustworthy adults. Others would rather internalize their feelings due to the unresolved trauma of expressing their feelings out loud. The children interviewed do not trust their mothers with their personal issues due to their histories of conflict in their households. Jane, daughter of Maria, shared her personal issues with talking to her mother as:

“Sometimes it is very difficult for me to bring up my mom. I feel like she was born in a different time period and will not really understand what I can go through whether it could be mentally or emotionally. I fear her judging me but it is very difficult for me to open up to her because I do fear what she says and I don’t want to disappoint them because I know I have disappointed them so far. I think it has been difficult as a child and an adult because my parents have so many expectations of me in the sense as a child they did not really know what was going on with me because there was a point in my life where I was babysat so that they could work and [something bad happened with the babysitter], and I never told my mom about it and kept it to myself because I knew she were working to provide for the family. And I thought it would somehow be my fault. Being the disappointment of not going to college, having a close friend that committed suicide, and then getting [assaulted], and not being able to tell my mom how I feel. I can’t tell her because I am afraid of how she will feel or might say to me. She will not understand that in their times it would not have happened because she would have been married and had kids already.”

Jane believes that her mother would not understand and blame her for the traumatic things she experienced as a child and young adult. The fear of disappointment is what drives Jane to shut down the relationship with her mother. She uses the intergenerational exchange as the reason her mother will not understand where Jane is coming from. Literature shows that once adolescents mature, their parents become “old fashioned” and adolescents to be “modern” (Quinones-Mayo and Dempsey, 2005). This pushes adolescents to believe their parents will not understand them and instead believe their child is just living the American “vida loca” (crazy life) due to the double bind of cultures (Quinones-Mayo and Dempsey, 2005).

Conclusion:

This study contributes to the discussion of intergenerational tensions surrounding gender in immigrant families by tracing how these tensions that come to a head in adolescence continue to simmer into early adulthood. In my study, there were limitations due to sample size and snowball sampling methods. As I am an immigrant daughter, it was easy for mothers/children to express themselves, but at times they did not say everything in great detail because of the expectations of knowing the circumstances already. For future research, researchers could look into families that have found ways to overcome the distance between an immigrant mother and their U.S.-born child/ren caused by tension.

Through in-depth interviews, it is clear that there is an absence of relationship between an immigrant mother and their U.S.-born child/ren due to tension created in their childhood. There was tension that arose around housework, care work, and gender in immigrant households. Interviewed daughters were expected to follow traditional gender roles of housework, and care work. Interviewed sons were expected to be independent and follow a similar lifestyle as their

fathers. Both sons and daughters were expected to follow these traditional gender roles without question and on top help their parents with services (ex: translation of documents, understanding of bills, making appointments, financial tracking, and speaking English for them). This continued to affect children as they transitioned into adulthood. I also found that young adults held onto the hurt they felt as adolescents and they blamed their parents for placing expectations on them that at times countered their own behaviors and perspectives on the society and culture they were raised in America.

In contrast, parents lacked an understanding of their children's perspectives. These tensions resulted in a loss of trust that for some severed the ability to process traumatic events as a family and it followed onto their adulthood relationships. For others, the fear of parental disappointment or lingering anger at parents led to a gradual distancing from parents that seemed increasingly difficult to mend. U.S.-born children had a difficult time overlooking this lingering resentment they had with their parents. This not only caused an absence of relationship between them, but some attributed the emotional residue that they carried with their parents from their childhood into adulthood. Children blamed their troubled relationships with their parents for hindering their ability to form trusting relationships with friends and partners.

As the youngest immigrant daughter to an immigrant mother, it was very difficult to grow up with the traditional gender roles my mother expected me to follow. Being the youngest of three siblings and having the most "American education", I was and still am expected to help my parents in any way possible due to my knowledge of the English language and procedures in the U.S. Growing up I remember mainly arguing with my mother. I always thought it had to do with the intergenerational differences we shared, but as I got older I saw it was mainly due to our ideologies on gender roles as they did not mesh. Even though I was raised in Ecuador until the

age of six, most of my perspectives on gender roles came from American institutions and the idea of freedom and equality we should have as humans and not based on sex or gender. Having different perspectives and ideologies as my mother just drifted me apart from her causing an absence of relationship with her similar to the U.S.-born children I interviewed.

I had this resentment of abandonment growing up as both of my immigrant parents worked long hours. I remained home with my brother or cousins and only spent quality time with my parents for a couple of hours during the week. Until today I fear that I will disappoint them or will not be good enough due to countless arguing and fights throughout my childhood, but I try my best to succeed and keep pushing forward because I know and I am aware of all of the struggles and obstacles they went through in the process of immigration with a family of five.

Luckily, I now understand my parents. They were only trying to provide for our family and push themselves and us to achieve our "American dreams". I appreciate, admire, and respect my mother and father for their hard work and the difficult decisions they had to make in the United States in order to get us where we are today.

Connecting my own experiences to the stories of others illustrates the need for more education on cross-cultural understanding and communication on issues of intergenerational family tension. School programs, community education, and community organizations for both parents and their children could incorporate more programming to foster communication and encourage mutual understanding across generations and cultures. Educating immigrant parents and their U.S.-born children on cross-cultural understanding and communication on issues of intergenerational family tension is essential. It will help create a deeper emotional and mental bond for present and future generations.

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