

Chapter 11

Rompiendo Cadenas: Breaking Down Intergenerational Trauma in the Latinx Community

Charmaine Mora-Ozuna

University of Georgia, USA

Inés Rodríguez

Georgia State University, USA

Marjory Vazquez

Kaiser Permanente, USA

Jacqueline Fuentes

University of Georgia, USA

ABSTRACT

Four first-generation Latinxs use their personal lived experiences and the experiences that they bear witness to as mental health practitioners to provide a critical lens on the decolonization of intergenerational trauma (IGT) in the Latinx community. The authors acknowledge that IGT is rooted in systemic oppression and colonization. They explore the systemic, cultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal bidirectional impact that these areas have on the well-being of Latinxs. They highlight the inherent resistance and resilience skills that Latinxs have to survive and thrive from trauma. The authors share culturally responsive interventions that reclaim the cultural values of Latinxs to promote holistic healing and end the transmission of trauma.

BREAKING DOWN INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN THE LATINX COMMUNITY

Like other chapters, this chapter speaks not only from an academic perspective but includes the professional and lived experiences that have impacted the authors of this book. Although these four practitioners

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come from different paths of life, one thing that the authors have in common is their passion to eradicate the intergenerational trauma that is present in their beloved Latinx community. None of the authors are immune to the impact that intergenerational trauma has had on their families, communities, and clients that they serve in their respective roles.

The first author, Charmaine Mora-Ozuna is a cisgender woman, a *Mexicana* from California, and currently a doctoral candidate in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Georgia. Charmaine provides therapy to marginalized communities across the lifespan, and her niche is supporting the healing journey of survivors of intimate partner violence. The second author, Inés Rodríguez, is a gender non-conforming *afro-latine* with their Master's of Social Work, who was born in New York and has roots in the Dominican Republic. They work with Black, queer, and migrant community leaders and social service organizations as an equity trainer, dialogue facilitator, and program manager. The third author, Marjory Vazquez, is a Mexican and Salvadorian cisgender woman from Southern California who is currently working as a psychologist at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Northern California. Marjory also has a private practice, The Sana House, in which she serves Latinas and women of color in healing past traumas. The fourth author, Jacqueline Fuentes, is a cisgender *Xicana* from Southern California and is currently a doctoral candidate in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Georgia. Jacqueline provides bilingual Spanish and English counseling to Latinx individuals across the lifespan, college students, and African American women who have experienced trauma.

We four have searched for ways to resist the difficulties of being first-generation Latinx college students while also uplifting other women of color. Charmaine and Ines are co-founders of the Alpha Pi Chapter of Sigma Lambda Upsilon/ Señoritas Latinas Unidas Sorority Inc., at Georgia State University and Marjory and Jacqueline are co-founders of the Zeta Chapter of Phi Lambda Rho at The University of California at Irvine. Although these individuals attended their undergraduate institutions on two different coasts, their intentions were similar; to create counter spaces that honored and nurtured their whole selves, while also making space for others coming after them.

Much like the authors of this chapter, who thrived in institutions not created for them, Latinx folks hustle to make a way out of nothing in the U.S. Their very presence is an act of resistance and resilience. We believe this is how the Latinx community deals with trauma and hardships. However, just because we push through as individuals or as a collective, does not mean that the oppressive systems do not need to change. Because along the way to thriving, surviving entails struggling, breaking down, and doubting our capabilities, all of which can be re-traumatizing. Dismantling intergenerational trauma is an act of liberation, and we hope that this chapter highlights how we can collectively work together towards ending this cycle of trauma and retraumatization.

INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational trauma (IGT) is the transmission of trauma or the effects of trauma from one generation to the next. Symptoms can include things such as depression, anxiety, shame, guilt, and physical health problems (Dass-Brailsford, 2007; Sangalang & Vang, 2017). While the concept of IGT is not new, the term was originally utilized to speak about survivors of the Holocaust. Researchers noticed that children of Holocaust survivors, even if they were not in the Holocaust, were overrepresented with mental and physical health disorders (Cerdana, Rivera, & Spak, 2021). Thus, there was some pathway for trauma to be transmitted across generations.

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