Intergenerational Trauma Following Sexual Violence:

The Effects of Sexual Violence on Subsequent Generations within the Mexican-American Community

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Abstract:

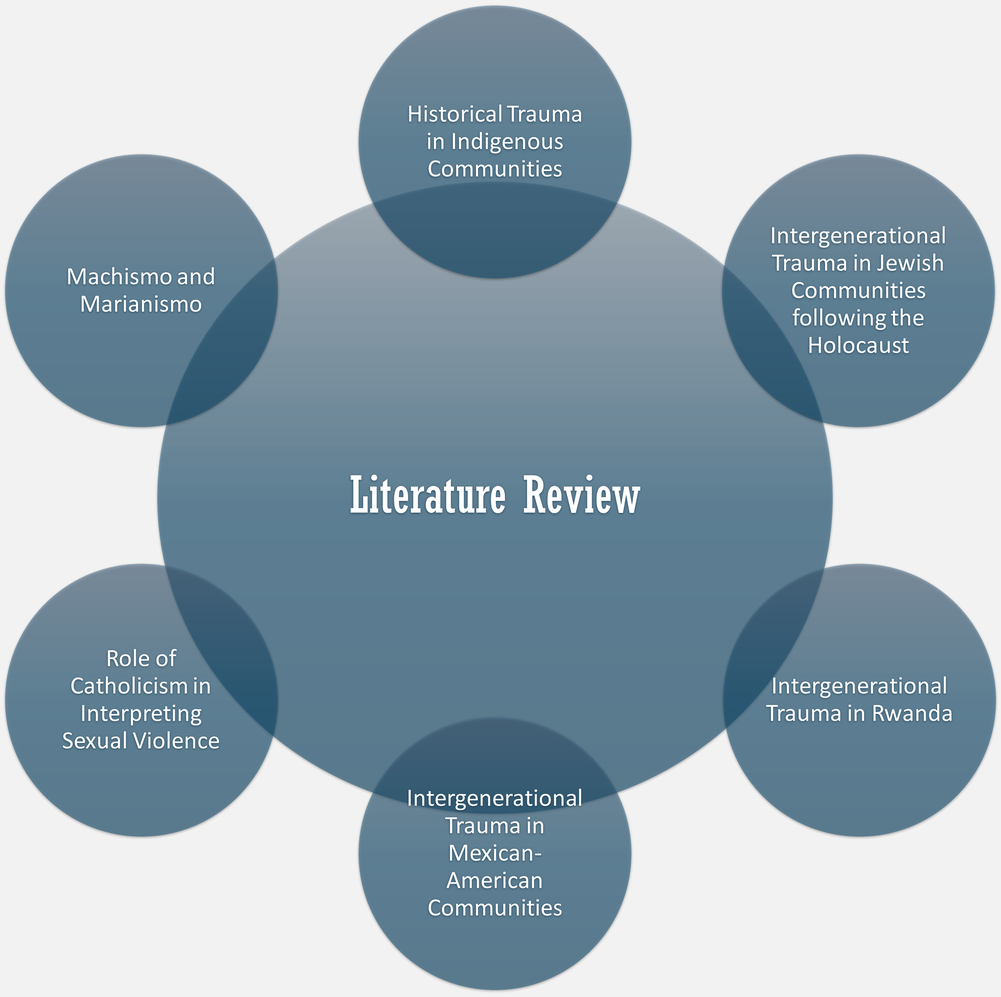
Recent literature has begun to examine the mechanisms which might facilitate the transmission of trauma to subsequent generations, including epigenetic changes in the DNA of survivors, the parenting practices of survivors, or the narratives utilized to describe the traumatic event to successive generations. Intergenerational trauma has been increasingly studied, but there is a need to investigate the intergenerational effects of a mother's experience with sexual violence. This study examines the possible effects of sexual violence on mothers and their children within the Mexican-American community. This literature review was conducted with the hope of developing an intervention to disrupt the transmission of a trauma to future generations.

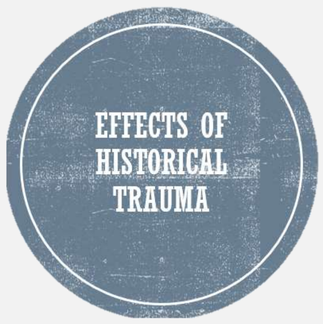
Research Questions:

- Focusing specifically on Mexican-American women, how might a woman's experience with sexual violence prior to motherhood affect successive generations?
- What is the role of religion and culture in an individual's interpretation of the trauma?

What is Historical Trauma?

Historical trauma connects a historically traumatic event experienced by a group of people to the present-day experiences of a community. The descendants of the original group continue to experience the consequences of the original trauma, which may affect their psychological or physical health.





- Groups with a history of trauma more vulnerable to psychological disorders in later generations
- Children of Holocaust survivors typically display heightened PTSD symptoms, but also incredible resilience
- Insecure-ambivalent attachment prevalent among children of Holocaust survivors
- Within Lakota communities, alcoholism death rate 13 times the national average
- High rates of PTSD among Native American communities in the U.S.
- Native American children almost twice as likely to enter foster care system in comparison to White children
- Life expectancy for Native Americans 5 years less than national average
- In Rwanda, children born as a product of rape are stigmatized and experience limited social opportunities
- Mothers who experienced sexual violence as a child or adolescent more likely to have their child experience sexual violence
- A mother's negative experience might shape her parenting attitudes and practices

Mitigating Factors:

- Sense of spirituality
- Focus on community
- Engagement in cultural rituals
- Family cohesion
- Communal healing rituals

Gaps in Literature:

- Literature focuses mostly on childhood sexual abuse
- Lack of studies focusing on intergenerational trauma in Mexican-American communities
- Very little research on the transmission of trauma symptoms following sexual violence
- Need to focus on resilience as a mitigating factor

Future Directions:

- Partnership with DARCC Clinical Team
- Focus group to build sense of community
  - Client-led focus group
  - Hope for communal and individual healing

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