Learning from the Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants: Narratives of resilience

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Resilience

- A positive response to adversity
- Is resilience a better public health tool than healthy aging?
  - “... individuals who face adversity or experience functional declines can still demonstrate resilience, whereas they would not be classified as healthily ageing” (Cosco et al. 2017)
- How can we foster resilience across the life course?
  - “three areas that work in concert to foster resilience in the face of adversity: individual, social, and environmental resources” (Wister et al., 2016 as cited in Cosco et al., 2017)
Figure 3. Lifecourse Model of Multimorbidity Resilience (Wister et al., 2016, p.300); DOI: 10.1177/0091415016641686.
## Resources

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**Table 1. Individual, Social, and Environmental Resources (Wister et al., 2016, p.301); DOI: (10.1177/0091415016641686)**
“We argue that resilience should be seen as a contextualised process which can be both individual and environmental. Older people's experiences highlight the need to consider the effectiveness of environmental community resources and social–political structures such as state-funded service availability, as well as the personal characteristics that are usually focused on when considering resilience in old age.

We also argue that it is important to consider different aspects of resilience, so that a person or group might face constraints in one area, such as physical or economic wellbeing, but be strong in other areas such as social relationships or mobility. Resilience can mean acknowledging and incorporating ‘vulnerability’ and balancing wellbeing across a range of areas” (Wiles et al. 2012, p.416).
“Why rise from the ashes without asking why you had to burn?”

(Sehgal, 2015)
Lived Experiences: Narratives of Resilience

- To share stories of diverse older immigrants’ experiences over the life course, as collected using life story narrative and photovoice methods, to illuminate
  - In which domains and how they respond to adversity
  - The types of adversity they have faced
  - The resources they have drawn on, and
  - The environmental and socio-political contexts that fostered adversity/resilience
Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants
A narrative-photovoice project 2014-2017
Participant origins

- Filipino
- Colombian
- Chilean
- Guyanan
- Pakistani
- Korean
- Trinidadian
- Afghani
- Guatemalan
To explore lived experiences of immigrant older adults.

To study the impact of immigration on aging within the context of their life histories.

To understand the intersections of identity, social location and structural discrimination across the lifespan.

To explore the ways in which structural discrimination across the lifecourse shapes interactions with family, community and formal services.

To encourage knowledge exchange with service providers and policymakers.

Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants: Objectives
## Methods & Framework

<table>
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<th>Framework</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Lifecourse</strong></td>
<td>Sequences (and consequences) of meaningful events and how they are organized, connected and evaluated were explored. Notably we employ a critical approach, drawing attention to structural and institutional components of the lifecourse.</td>
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<td><strong>Intersectionality</strong></td>
<td>This framework acknowledges the existence of distinct but inseparable categories of oppression which inform individual identities. The voices of marginalized people are central to the inquiry and individual experiences of marginalization and resilience are interpreted within the context of structural inequality.</td>
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<td><strong>Photovoice</strong></td>
<td>Alongside interviews, photographs capture the distinct lived experiences of immigrant older adults in context, and underpin the recommendations for service providers and policy makers.</td>
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Situating categories of identity on life trajectories

Birth  First job  Retirement

Marriage

Categories of identity
Son/daughter  Partner/single  Parent/childless  Employee/er  Grandparent/not  Care provider/care receiver

Family
Situating structural forces on life trajectories

Primary or secondary labour markets
Globalization
Politics of retirement

Birth
First job
Retirement

Marriage
Family

Racialization of poverty
Heterosexism
Politics of migration
Neo-liberal policies of care
Intersections and impacts on identity and resilience

- Gender
- Family cohesion
- Socio-economic status
- Country of origin
- Type of immigration
- Period of immigration
Oppression versus agency
• All names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of participants.
• All fictitious names were chosen by the participants themselves.
• Most photos have no visible faces to respect the anonymity of the participants.
• When the face of a person is visible on the photographs, written consent has been obtained.
Donicia: Resilience and identity

“I thought it was only men doing [this] because men usually do harder stuff. Women [are] more involved in sewing, and ...the feminine type of work. ...It makes me feel good [and] proud to do it.”
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<th>Adversity – pre-migration</th>
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<td><strong>Growing up in poor family (13 siblings, “heavy-handed” discipline)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Racially determined social class system (‘Blacks’ at the bottom)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Limited career opportunities: teacher or nurse</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Training as nurse, but menial jobs and subjected to sexism until hired as psychiatric nurse (18 years)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Financially supported siblings (3rd oldest)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Marriage at age 33</strong></td>
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Adversity – post-migration (sexism)

- Husband emigrated to Canada (Donicia not consulted, expected to follow, gave up her nursing job)
- Husband did not find housing for them – she had to as a new immigrant
- Husband’s annual visits to Trinidad, lack of interest in budgeting, and failure to consult with Donicia put them in debt
- She took over paying bills and budgeting, and is still paying off his debt
- Distant relationship – little in common; considered but resists divorce, against Catholic faith
Adversity – post-migration (racism)

- Nursing credentials and even high school diploma not recognized in Canada
- Took high school courses then 1 yr nursing asst. course to work ASAP
- Diploma not granted without French – took 10 years, 10 attempts!
- Completed BSc in Community Health
- Worked 13 years as nurse clinician in Montreal
The ingredients of resilience?

- Strong independent personality
- Racism
- Poverty
- Sexism
## Resources - Donicia

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<td><strong>Socioeconomic Resources</strong></td>
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<td>Cultural-specific coping</td>
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Table 1. Individual, Social, and Environmental Resources (Wister et al., 2016, p.301); DOI: (10.1177/0091415016641686)
Resilient leadership

**BUT** resistance needed to address
- Sexism, racism, poverty
- Migration, language policies
Resist the tyranny of long presentations
Son Jung Suk: Resilience and social networks
War and interrupted education

- Born 1938, northern Korea
- Age 11 – war halted school
- Escape to South, extreme hardship
- Age 14 – war, ended, return to school, but got TB – out of school
- Age 18 – started nursing training but quit to support family
Servitude at age 11
Migrations

- 1964-68: Married and had 2 children, but political insecurity and economic hardship
- 1968: Watchmaker husband accepted on points system – emigrate to Eastern Canada
- 1969: Have 3rd child – isolated by motherhood, no English, poor
- 1973: Re-located family to Vancouver for husband’s health and work
Busy working

- Many jobs over the years: key cutting, hotel chambermaid, fish processing (seasonal), office cleaning, factory work
- Gift shop owner for 13 years (long hours)
- Dry cleaning business for 19 years with son and sister-in-law
**Jung Suk**: “I always working, and then those three children talking together, watching together. They speaking English, they don’t know the Korean language.”

**Jung Suk**: “I feel sorry about my children because all the time, when they young, I didn’t have any money. When they grow, I didn’t take care of them because I can’t speak English.”

**Interpreter**: “One or two words to say that, to come, eat it, and then why don’t you go to bed? That’s it. Didn’t speak any Korean. She mentioned about there’s no connection with her children.”

**Jung Suk**: “That’s the... feel sorry about them. I didn’t take care of them. They grow themselves.”
Strength from survival, God and community

- J.S.: “(Today’s generation)... they never understand what I have my life. They couldn’t understand in the war.”

- Interpreter: “the war made her ... strong. Because the war changed everything - nationality and the personality.”

- Viewed as a respected elder within her church community

- Maintains connection with Korean culture and community

- Now retired and enjoying computer and English classes, walking group.
Dimensions of resilience: Jung Suk

Adversity:
- War and related effects
- Interrupted education
- Migration/language
- Low income/busy work

Resources
- Church – culturally relevant
- Social connections
- Husband’s skill
- Programs & services

Areas of potential vulnerability
- Disconnect with children/grandchildren
- Husband has cancer
Cesar: staying the course for family

- Grew up poor in the Philippines
- Met his wife in the factory where they worked
- Married and had a son
- Wife migrated as domestic worker when son was 2 y.o.
- Cesar primary carer for son for 6 years
- Cesar and son join wife in Canada in 1988
Loyal worker

• Initially hard to find work
• Secured a job in a factory
• Won an award for loyal service (10 yrs) then fired
• Son and his children moved in with them after his divorce
• Both he and wife worked always until wife hit by a snow removal truck (2013)
• She had to stop working; he became her caregiver
“As long as I can do, I’ll do it”
Dimensions of resilience: Cesar

Adversity:
- Life of poverty
- Domestic worker policy
- Migration – loss of extended family support
- Low income/busy work

Resources
- Family and Filipino community; other domestic workers
- Sense of purpose and work ethic
- Programs & services (church)

Areas of potential vulnerability
- Economically vulnerable
- Wife’s disability
- His ability to keep up the hard work as he ages
I was happy to hear our stories told. I want our grandchildren to know that we survived hardships by loving & helping each other. Thank you for amplifying our voices.

See Brotman et al. 2017 (online exhibit catalogue)
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<td>What resources promote resilience?</td>
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<td>Where is resistance needed?</td>
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What does resilience look like?

- Resuming her profession as a nurse; leadership of older black women’s group; resisting gender norms (woodwork, steel pan); assuming control over family budgeting and bills to avoid financial ruin.

- Surviving extreme hardship; creating economic stability for her family through hard work; being physically and socially active; lifelong learning.

- Loyalty and sacrifice - continuing to work hard to support his family in the face of ongoing financial hardship; securing the future of his grandchildren.
What resources promote resilience?

- Religious organizations – natural social networks
- Community-based programs and services
Where is resistance needed?

- Language policies (QC)
- Deskilling
- Gender inequity
- Access to language courses
- Workplace exploitation
- Immigration policies

References provided in notes
Contact: skoehn@sfu.ca

Thank you

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Salamat