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Food Systems' Adverse Health Impacts on Latinx Immigrant Communities

Graduate Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of Masters in Migration Studies
University of San Francisco

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master in Migration Studies


Lisa Marquez

March 2020

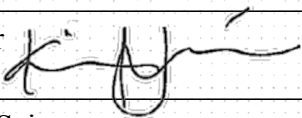
Abstract: This thesis focuses on the adverse health impacts food systems have on Latinx immigrant communities. Marquez looks closely at emergency services programs using the food bank run by the Our Lady of the Pillar in Half Moon Bay, California, and interviewed five Latina immigrants from Mexico and Central America. While the food banks provided these families with fresh produce, the women expressed that it is substandard to the produce in their home countries. The interviews are supplemented with the analysis of three spoken word poems by youth who are second generation or whom have spent the majority of their lives in the U.S. through the Bigger Picture Project. The Latinx immigrant youth discuss other aspects of the food systems they lived in, such as living in food swamps and deserts and having an overwhelming amount of processed foods and sugary beverage ads racially targeted towards them. For the poets, the injustices in the food systems are a catalyst to the creation of their spoken word videos. The interviews present how Latina immigrants feel about the food at the food bank and in the U.S. in general, as compared to their memory of their food back home, and the structures that have influenced their food choices. Meanwhile, the poems discuss the health repercussions that descendants of the immigrant food bank beneficiaries might experience in the future. Together the interviewees of this study and the words of the spoken word poems articulate injustices in the food systems and how this has influenced high rates of chronic illnesses in Latinx immigrant communities.

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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Introduction

Throughout the globe, many countries are transitioning towards a western diet that is fueled by processed foods (Siegel, 2016). These junk foods have led to developing lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States (Heron, 2019). It is the number one killer in Mexico (Gálvez, 2018) and the fourth and sixth leading cause of death for Guatemala and El Salvador, respectively (CDC, 2020).

Mexicans have the highest rates of diabetes compared to other Latinx¹ groups, with 13.8% of the Mexican population diagnosed, and Central and South Americans having the lowest rates within those who are from Latin America, at 8.5% (ADA, 2017). It is unclear if these statistics are accurate because of the “... underreporting of health conditions by Mexican immigrants in the United States...” (Martinez et al., 2015, p. 900). The underreporting is a consequence of Latinx immigrants not having enough health services resources. Latinxs are the least likely to be insured as compared to other minority groups, with almost 20% of the population under 65 not being insured. Within the uninsured Latinx group, 46% do not have citizenship (Martinez et al., 2015).

The situation for immigrants in general is grave, as they do not even have the opportunity to “receiv[e] federal subsidies to purchase exchange coverage or enroll in Medicaid and CHIP” (Health Initiative of the Americas, 2018, p. 1). Though, every state is different, with California being the first state to provide federally funded medical services to the undocumented population

¹ Latinx' will be used throughout this thesis rather than using Latina/o as an alternative for gender neutrality and non-binary

under age 26 (Bollag & Ashton, 2019). Other obstacles Latinxs face when using health care services include not knowing what they are qualified for, various cultural misunderstandings from health care professionals (i.e., language), and lack of confidence in using health services (Health Initiative of the Americas, 2018). There is much research that focuses on acculturation as the culprit for the high rates of chronic illnesses in Latinx communities (O'Brien et al., 2014, López et al., 2016, Winham et al., 2018). The goal of this thesis is to examine further the nuances of why Latinx communities, more specifically the first generation of immigrants from Mexico and Central America and their descendants, have a high propensity to develop chronic illnesses. A food system that will be closely examined is the food bank, while also considering other factors such as ad targeting and policy implementation, in the food system that lead to the manifestation of diabetes for Latinx immigrants and their descendants.

This thesis uses an interdisciplinary approach to consider: what happens when we listen to the words and expressions of immigrants from Mexico and Central America and first-generation descendants regarding their relationship with food systems? Two sub-questions supplement the central question. 1: How do Latinx immigrants' experiences in the food systems in their countries of origin influence their impression of the nutritional impact the food bank can provide for their families? 2: How are these communities using self-advocacy to articulate how food systems and policies can lead to adverse health impacts? The focus of this paper will predominantly be on 1 and 1.5 Latinx immigrant generations.

Feeding America, the U.S.' most prominent emergency food assistance program, found that Latinxs are more likely to rely on emergency food programs such as food banks over the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Feeding America, 2009, Mares, 2013).

SNAP is known as the foundation of emergency food programs in the U.S., so it is vital to understand the significance of why Latinxs have higher rates of using emergency food programs over SNAP. Over 50% of Latinxs who use Feeding America's services live in mixed-status homes. Feeding America found that "one out of every three Hispanic children and their families received services from the Feeding America network annually over the past four years" (Feeding America, 2009, p. 1). Food bank services are integral for Latinx immigrants. It is crucial to understand not only the food systems they are placed within in the U.S., but those they are leaving behind from their home countries as well. Policies that have impacted the high rates of chronic diseases will be examined, both in terms of sending countries and within the U.S.

Five food bank beneficiaries in Half Moon Bay, California, who are first-generation immigrant women either from Mexico or Central America, shared their experiences with the food bank for this study. There was also an additional interview with the head volunteer at St. Vincent De Paul making it a total of six interviews that were done. The food systems in the interviewees' home countries were brought into the conversation organically. The interviewees spoke of the consistent comparison of what was typical back in their homelands to what is typical here in the U.S.. They must accept that the new diets they must eat here compared to their old diets that the majority expressed were much more nutritious than what is accessible to them here in the U.S.. These interviews answer the questions of what is happening right now in terms of how Latinx immigrants participate in their food systems. However, interviews from Latina first generation immigrants do not provide enough information to completely answer the central question of this thesis, which is equally concerned with the impact such encounters with food systems may bring to bear for their future generations.

Thus, the analysis of spoken word poem videos aims to supplement the interviews, by providing additional context to the issues the Latina immigrant interviewees bring to light. The poets talk about the effects of past policies, advertisement targeting, and how cultural practices have shifted to center processed foods in daily aspects of their lives. The spoken word poem videos are part of The Bigger Picture Project (TBPP) which is part of a larger organization, Youth Speaks, that gives youth a platform to creatively speak about their life experiences (Youth Speaks, n.d.).

TBPP is a direct response to the high rates of type 2 diabetes in marginalized communities. The three spoken word videos chosen for analysis focus on migration and how the 1.5 plus generations have been affected by the dietary habits passed onto them by their older family members, vulnerable for having recently arrived in the U.S.. The poems are a counter-argument to and critique of their environments. They are a response to issues that prompted their communities to accept sugary drinks and processed foods as a guaranteed daily intake in their lives.

While the poets center the high rates of diabetes in their spoken word videos, the Latina immigrants interviewed do not mention chronic illnesses, but rather an overall take of the food they are eating and how food banks can make participants feel like they are making the best choices for their families with the resources they have.

This thesis will primarily focus on food systems, in Mexico and Mexican immigrant communities in the U.S., which have led to the high rates of chronic diseases, especially diabetes. The majority of interviewees from the food bank in Half Moon Bay, California, and likewise, a majority of the poets addressed, have Mexican roots. To a lesser extent, food systems

in Central America and the effects the U.S. food systems have on Central American immigrants and their descendants are taken into consideration as well. Both the interviews and spoken word poems testify to the speakers' concerns of food in their communities. The poems are a direct form of self-advocacy and while the interviews were not initiated with the intent to create awareness, the interviewees use the opportunity to recognize and express their concerns regarding their participation at the food bank.

Media outlets found that of those advancing interventions against diabetes in the public health sector 12% of media outlets publications looked at root causes as the indicator of diabetes compared to 40% looking at the individual action (Rogers et al., 2014). This study contributes a deeper understanding of how crucial it is to put the voices directly impacted by the root causes of the significant rates of chronic diseases in their communities at the forefront of the discussion of food systems. It aims to highlight meaningful ideas and critiques in these poems and food bank interviews that have not been available in the scholarly literature about food systems. The data and literature provided give those who work closely on food accessibility in regards to Latinx immigrant communities insight on how Latinx immigrants and descendants themselves feel about their environment.

Methods

The five interviews conducted for this research took place in Half Moon Bay, California, with Latina immigrants who used the Our Lady of the Pillar pantry. In order to provide confidentiality, pseudo names are assigned to all the women interviewed for this thesis. Three interviewees are from Mexico; two of these are from Oaxaca, Lucia and Camila, and one is from Guerrero, Ana. Two other interviewees are from Central America, one from Honduras, Isabella,

and the other from Guatemala, Sofia, and one is with the head volunteer of the food bank, Regina.

Three of the interviews were conducted during food pantry hours at the St. Vincent De Paul premises. One interview analyzed for this study was based on a transcription provided by Hernandez-Arriaga, who conducted the interview, with Shenny, from Guatemala, in the interviewee's home; Marquez was not present for that interview. Belinda Hernandez-Arriaga, the faculty coordinator for the University of San Francisco's Masters in Counseling program, introduced Marquez to the food pantry at Our Lady of the Pillar. Hernandez-Arriaga also assisted Marquez in translation services due to Marquez not being fully fluent in Spanish.

The interviewees agreed to take the time to talk to Marquez and Hernandez-Arriaga. Marquez has an intermediate level of Spanish, thus Hernandez-Arriaga's presence was crucial for translation purposes. Across the cumulative interviews, the Latina immigrants' length of time in the U.S. ranged from eleven years to two months. The Latinas who have been here the longest were from Oaxaca, Mexico. The two Latinas from Central America had been here between two and three months at the time of their interviews.

When initially starting this project, the poems "A Taste of Home" and "Lost in Translation" performed by Monica Mendoza and Yosimar Reyes were the only two that were selected to be analyzed. These videos were not originally chosen because they were part of The Bigger Picture Project; rather, they were chosen organically due to their voices echoing concerns in Latinx immigrant communities and for how they resonated with the mission of this thesis. However, after reviewing the twenty-two other videos part of TBPP, "Perfect Soldiers," created by Gabriel Cortez, was added. Cortez's poem speaks about the injustices committed by the

U.S. Army in his family's country of origin, Panama, as well as the injustices the Coca-Cola company has created there, and how the impacts have manifested harmful drinking habits. These three videos represent the intergenerational issues that have created such high rates of chronic diseases in Latinx immigrant communities.

Throughout this thesis, when referring to processed foods, these foods will be labeled as 'junk food'. Soft drinks and other beverages that are detrimental to health are labeled as 'sugary beverages'.

Literature Review

Alyshia Gálvez's *Eating Nafta* (2018) and Julie Guthman's *Weighing In* (2011) have been crucial to understanding the relationship between food systems and their impacts on migration. They have set the foundation on how to critically examine other scholars discussing this issue. These authors challenge the food justice theories and highlight how the movement fails to provide the space necessary for matters of migration and its impacts on chronic illnesses in Latinx immigrant communities.

Siegel, 2016 brings attention to why Mexico has such a high rate of chronic diseases and how that rate is a direct consequence of NAFTA. NAFTA made cheap, highly processed foods cheaper to buy and farmers in Mexico were unable to compete against the lower prices of corn coming from the US. Gálvez, 2018 interviews families in Mexico, and emphasizes how it is easier and cheaper for them to rely on highly processed foods that would not have been possible to consume without the influence of NAFTA.

Viladrich & Tagliaferro's 2016 study brings to light other aspects besides food, such as stress, lack of time, and their environments. These factors have led Latinx immigrants to eat

more junk food. Both of their research discuss the food festival and food nostalgia theories, respectively, which lay the groundwork of imperialist nostalgia that Gálvez, 2018 explains.

The combined literature aims to examine the food systems in the countries of origin and the impacts of the dietary habits, and forces that created these habits, in the US. The literature will analyze how the realities of the policies, advertisement targeting, and cultural practices are a lived reality for those who are stuck in these food systems. The food bank interviewees and poets who are affected by these food systems will bring the literature to life as a voice for the movement of change in the food systems.

Half Moon Bay Background

Half Moon Bay currently has a population of 12,565 and has a 28.3% Latinx population, which makes up the largest ethnic group living in poverty in this city. Half Moon Bay also has one-fourth of a foreign-born population, which is almost double the national average (DataUSA, n.d.). 12% of the Half Moon Bay population do not have U.S. citizenship. Of the 37% of non-English speakers, Spanish speaking people make an overwhelming 27%. The median household earns almost \$111,000 (DataUSA, n.d.), making it only \$10,000 short of being double the national income household average (Iriondo, 2018).

Initially, the Ohlone Indians established themselves throughout Half Moon Bay and other areas in San Mateo County. Mexicans started to arrive in the 1840s due to receiving land grants. The gold rush created waves of migration to Half Moon Bay, but a large number of Spanish speakers were present in this area at the time (Visit Half Moon Bay, n.d.). Mexicans are the largest foreign-born population in Half Moon Bay (DataUSA, n.d.). As of 2000, San Mateo County has a population of almost 1,600 immigrants from Oaxaca, Mexico, as Half Moon Bay is

one of the central communities for Oaxacans (Kresge, 2007). Kresge, 2007, claims that they lack an existing network in the U.S. to provide them the assistance of transitional programs such as health. However, the two women I interviewed from Oaxaca shared that it was because of their social network in Half Moon Bay that they found out about the food bank when they first arrived.

Oaxacans migrated to the Central Coast near Half Moon Bay because of the agricultural industry that provides opportunities for laborious work in the fields. Farming jobs are almost 2.4 times higher compared to other places (DataUSA, n.d.). Other employers of Oaxacans in this area are in the tourism industry (Kresge, 2007). Immigrants, in general, are found to be more likely to work low wage jobs compared to those who have documents, and they receive little to no additional benefits (National Council of La Raza, n.d.).

As of 2017, the population of immigrants from Central America in San Mateo County is not significant enough for the “ U.S. Immigrant Population” n.d. or DataUSA, n.d. to have detailed data . Surrounding areas, including the San Francisco, Oakland, and Hayward area and Sant-Cruz and Watsonville area, have been shown to have a significant population of Central Americans. With the high rates of outmigration happening from the Central American Northern Triangle, it is predicted that there will be a demographic shift in this population (Huber, 2019).

Study Site: St. Vincent De Paul Society Food Program

St. Vincent De Paul Society is a program connected to Our Lady of the Pillar Catholic Church located in Half Moon Bay, California. This program provides many services for those in need. Services include assisting the displaced and elderly communities through home visits and

their emergency shelter and transportation programs which have been running for about twenty years (Our Lady of the Pillar, n.d.).

The food bank was established because the community saw the need for food redistribution services for the displaced and recently arrived immigrants. For the food bank program, there is no official head or director, but gracious regular volunteers who keep this program running. One of the regular volunteers includes Regina. She shared through an interview that “the majority of food comes from Second Harvest Food Bank, which is located in San Carlos, California. About 75% of the food they redistribute is from Second Harvest”. They also receive leftovers from Safeway.

Regina estimates that between 65-70% of the food bank beneficiaries are Latinxs, with the rest being Asian or white. Food banks have been notorious for donating sugary drinks and high-calorie foods to their beneficiaries (Guthman, 2011). Regina confirmed that though they do regularly receive junk food, they commit to rejecting redistribution of that sort of food to their beneficiaries.

Food Bank

Non-profit organizations that distribute food, whether a surplus of food or donations to those facing food insecurity, can be defined as food banks (Middleton et al., 2016). Food banks’ mission is to help people who need extra support but never wholly rely on these services for their food intake. However, in reality, many people do rely on these programs as their primary source of food (Bazerghi et al., 2016). Food banks are only a temporary solution to systemic issues that have caused an increase in food-insecure communities.

SNAP is the most fundamental federally funded U.S. program that aids people in need of food security (Feeding America, 2009). Thus, those who are low-income yet lack access to SNAP are vulnerable to food insecurity (Martinez-Schiferl & Zedlewski, 2010). The New Orleans Children Health Project that only has immigrant patients, found that 65% were experiencing food insecurity (Hylton, 2019). Food insecurity then leads to chronic illnesses that are rampant in Latinx communities (Seligman et al., 2010 & Sano et al., 2010). Latinxs are more likely to not use SNAP compared to other groups, even though they are more likely to live in food vulnerable households compared to other groups in the U.S. (Salinas, 2013 & Sano et al., 2010).

Latinxs have been reported to have double the amount of food insecurity than the national average. They tend to live in communities of only Latinxs and are not able to learn about resources they could use to alleviate their food insecurity, which is especially true for those living in rural areas and cities (Sano et al., 2010, p. 120). Half of Latinxs live in big cities and predominantly live in low-income and under-resourced communities. They live in an environment that already disadvantages them, and the more concentrated Latinxs are, the more overweight that area is (Abraído-Lanza, 2016). Food insecurity is a consequence of other disadvantages as well, such as depression and living in indigent communities. Food insecurity is more prevalent for immigrants without citizenship or English skills; in fact, English speaking adults experience double the rates of food security (Sano et al., 2011). The food insecurity Latinxs face is enhanced by “...environmental factors such as poor quality housing, as well as cultural and language barriers” (Sano et al., 2010, p.111).

Marking the discrepancies between accessibility to food banks and SNAP is essential to understand why Latinxs have higher rates of food insecurity. Even if Latinxs are using SNAP, they still lack resources that would provide them sufficient nutritious food. Latinxs that have SNAP tend to diminish food at a faster rate than Anglos because they are reported to have larger households (Feeding America, 2009).

Mares, 2013, p. 18, concludes from her interviews with Latinx immigrant food beneficiaries in Seattle that they did not think the food was culturally appropriate. However, interviewees were grateful that they had the resources the food bank distributed. The dissatisfaction of food bank beneficiaries with food quality is found in other studies as well, with claims the food was “‘unhealthy,’ ‘expired,’ ‘moldy,’ and ‘rotten’” (Middleton et al., 2016, p. 702). The beneficiaries in Middleton et al., 2016 collated study of experiences of food bank users stated that they have no choice and are not in a position to be rejecting food. There is also the understanding that food banks are a charity, and beneficiaries do not feel like they are in a position to share their critiques. “...The ability of these individuals to make claims on these providers is constrained by their social positions as consumers who, by virtue of not exchanging money for the foods that they are consuming, are stripped of any negligible consumer rights...” (Mares, 2013, p. 18). When people rely on food banks as a supplement to their food or rely on them entirely, they often lack the autonomy to create a change in the types of foods they would like to see distributed because they feel they do not have the right and should be grateful for what they receive regardless of the condition it is in or if it is culturally appropriate.

Eligibility of Federally Funded Food Programs

Understanding eligibility for public services, relevant to food-based programs, is confusing as there are a lot of different requirements about who might be qualified. The confusion and vagueness of the policies of nutrition programs are manifested in migrants' uneasiness when using public food programs (National Council of La Raza, n.d.).

However, some states, including California, have given immigrants, under certain circumstances, the ability to use their services. As this research is based in California, there will be a focus on the eligibility of noncitizens using food programs in California. A document provided by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has provided information on eligibility of applying for CalFresh, and stated that using CalFresh will not "affect immigration status. Immigration information is private and confidential" (HCDHHS, 2016). Children with citizenship who have parents who are not citizens can have their parents apply for CalFresh for them. However, there are no age specification requirements provided on the CalFresh information page. Even with the public charge rule in effect as of 2019, family members that have children who use SNAP will not be struck as a negative factor (HealthWatch Wisconsin, 2019).

A document created by "CalFresh & Medi-Cal", n.d., provides an information sheet on who is eligible to apply for CalFresh. It provides a chart of immigration status relative to eligibility for CalFresh and Medi-Cal. Ultimately, noncitizens, including DACA recipients, do not qualify. Green card holders are eligible, but after five years of obtaining their green card. Noncitizens who have a sponsor can apply, but "the gross income of the sponsor will generally be considered in determining eligibility and benefit level" (HCDHHS, 2016).

CalFresh has many restrictions on who is eligible, which include DACA recipients. On the Snap website, they include a list of what is considered a ‘qualified immigrant’: Green card holders who are Amerasians or those seeking asylum or entering from Haiti and Cuba and trafficking victims. There are many qualifications restrictions that CalFresh has a 187-page guide for the eligibility criteria for noncitizens, which goes over the scope of the focus of this research (LSNC Guide to CalFresh Benefits, n.d.).

In general, youth, and those who suffered human trafficking, as well as refugees are eligible to apply for CalFresh. However, it does not explain how such persons prove that they fit in these categories (LSNC Guide to CalFresh Benefits, n.d.). They have also not updated their Public Charge fact sheet which has changed since their last update of 2011. Even if one is now considered to be a ‘qualified immigrant’ from the criteria listed, the individual needs to meet one of the conditions (LSNC Guide to CalFresh Benefits, n.d.).

Policies Inflicting Immigrant Participation in Food Programs

Commonly, those who live in mixed-status households avoid applying for SNAP. The essential rationale as to why Latinx immigrants do not use SNAP is that they believe it will impact their path to citizenship (Feeding America, 2010). Fear ignites from notions that “their ability to live and work in the United States” (Feeding America, 2009, p.4) is at risk.

The data from interviews collected for this thesis also concludes that the food bank beneficiaries are confused about qualifications and do not trust documents they have to provide to apply for the food stamp program. Two women who had used CalFresh, California’s SNAP program, in the past, stated they do not know why their benefits ended. One woman stated that she knows she qualifies but is confused by the process.

Feeding America, 2009, posed a question to users for their reasons on why they do not apply for SNAP, and twenty-four percent of Latinxs stated it was due to their citizenship status. Only six percent of black and one percent of white participants stated citizenship status as a reason for not applying. Around forty percent of the Black and Anglo Feeding America users do not use SNAP because they had too much income, while only fifteen percent of Latinxs reported the same rationale (Feeding America, 2009). In sum, Latinxs are more likely to rely on food assistance programs, as compared to other nutrition programs, namely SNAP, due to a lack of resources as well as concerns around eligibility.

Title 9 has impeded access for undocumented immigrants to food assistant programs such as SNAP. The welfare reform bill created in 1996 made it unreachable for legal immigrants to access federally funded programs, including SNAP. Two years after the welfare reform bill went into effect, much collaboration took place with legislators and grassroots organizations. The goal was to alleviate some of the barriers for certain immigrants with legal statuses but did not fully restore the impacts of the welfare reform bill (National Council of La Raza, n.d.). Four of the five federally funded nutrition programs are for the benefit of children rather than the family unit (Mares, 2013). Even though immigrants inevitably have to pay taxes, they do not get to benefit from it (Mares, 2013).

Ever since the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PROWRA) in 1996, it has created confusion in immigrant communities about what kind of citizenship you must have to use federally funded food programs. It has dissuaded many immigrants who do qualify from pursuing these services due to fear, as well as confusing and constantly changing policies (National Council of La Raza, n.d.). After the

passage of PRWORA, public officials brought up the implications of using public services that some legal immigrants were still qualified for. The same politicians spread disinformation that individuals that they would not be able to sponsor family members and there would be possibilities of deportation. (National Council of La Raza, n.d.).

The concern of being a public charge has scared many Latinx immigrant communities into not using public services even though it does not affect their status (Abraído-Lanza, 2016). Three years after PROWRA, the administration assured immigrants that there were still programs they would be able to use. SNAP are fine to use, and if a qualified immigrant uses this service, they will not be a public charge (National Council of La Raza, n.d.). The public charge rule affects those who are applying to green cards. The public charge rule was primarily created to increase fear in the immigrant population for not using federally funded services (News 19 WLTX, 2020).

The fears of using food banks still exist. Lucia and Camila, who were interviewed for this research, did not go to the food bank for the first six months of the forty-fifth president's administration. Immigrants, in general, have shared their fears of using food bank services because it would hurt their children's chances of citizenship, and these are the same concerns some of the interviewees at Half Moon Bay expressed as well (The National Council of La Raza, n.d. & Salinas, 2013 & Sano et al., 2010).

The Obama administration had strict controls over the border (Guthman, 2011) and Obama was known as "Deporter in Chief." In his first term, he enacted and signed other policies that created inequality for migrant communities, which included cutbacks on food assistance and "...extending the Bush tax cuts, exacerbating the nation's increasing economic inequality"

(Guthman, 2011, p. 186). This inequality has led to the most impuissant populations, including immigrants, to become more vulnerable to food insecurity because “...our food system is part of a political economy that systematically produces inequality...” (Guthman, 2011, p. 186). The succeeding Obama administration has immensely exacerbated all aspects of the migration experience (USCIS, 2020). Immigrants have always been easily exploitable, but these two administrations have made immigrants more vulnerable to needing assistance (Guthman, 2011, & Gálvez, 2018).

The two previous administrations helped support the current president as of 2020 build off the inequality of food insecurity for immigrant families. In September 2018, the public charge rule was proposed. Since the proposal, those who are eligible to apply for federally funded assistance programs have decreased. It was finalized in August 2014 and has impacted those who have aspirations to become permanent residents and greatly affects recently arrived immigrants. This public charge gives power to immigration officers to deny or approve those who are “lawfully present on a visa seeking to change your status, and you will now have to go through the assessment of whether or not you should be admitted”. The criteria immigration officers will look at to approve an individual will not be a public charge including if the individual has private health insurance, education, and financial, personal gains. Criteria that will work against the favor of the applicant include the use of public benefits, excluding the Women, Infants & Children federally funded nutrition program (HealthWatch Wisconsin, 2019). However, most immigrants do not qualify for federally funded programs, as stated previously.

There is a predicted increase in food banks and other emergency food programs because of the restriction of food stamp usage and those experiencing hunger because of this rule. In New

York alone, 25,000 have given up access to their SNAP since the rule was announced (Food Bank for New York City, 2019). As noted in the past, even though this public charge rule affects less than half a million individuals, those who are not impacted, but who are immigrants and refugees, will “stop using public benefits because the nuance of who counts and who does not is too slight” (HealthWatch Wisconsin, 2019).

Importance of Culturally Appropriate Food

It is crucial to have culturally appropriate food present at food banks, but also for food banks to be aware of the sensitivities certain groups, such as Latinx immigrants, might have in using public services. A huge concern for Latinx immigrants when using food banks is that some food banks ask for personal information that undocumented immigrants cannot provide, such as a social security number (National Council of La Raza, n.d.). This sentiment is shared by the Latina immigrants interviewed for this thesis. They expressed that there was another food bank in Half Moon Bay, but preferred the St. Vincent DePaul because they only ask for a name, phone number, and household income.

Every food bank functions differently, so it is challenging to measure their ability to effectively serve Latinx immigrant communities. Bazerghi et al., 2016, p. 739, study collected research about food banks and concluded that there were many issues food banks had, but the most successful ones who met the most needs of the beneficiaries were culturally appropriate in the donations they distributed. The conclusions of this study resonates with the interviewees for Marquez’s study. Lucia describes the types of American food that she does not eat,: “...noodles, like salmon, chicken, like canned chicken, canned tomato ... it's really different, the flavor is really different.” Lucia explains that fresh produce, rice, and beans meet her cultural needs.

Themes from Interviews

The most significant concern interviewees from the food bank had with the food they received was the canned food. They are not accustomed to eating canned food because they were used to the freshness of the food they have left behind in their country of origin. “Even if I have a more rotten tomato, it will taste better than a canned tomato” comments Camila, who is dissatisfied with canned foods.

The women interviewed shared that they had more room to grow their food back home, and they also did not have the same resources to create the same meals as back home due to space in their kitchens and tools that assisted them with making their tortillas such as a metate. Herbs were a vital component of their meals, but they have experienced difficulty in finding the herbs. Three of the five women expressed that the food tasted different here because it is packaged or canned, and it has been a challenge to utilize.

The freshness of the food back home was linked to the practice of daily preparation. Four out of the five interviewees stated that they kill the animals, such as chicken, or they buy it fresh from the butcher. The four out of the five interviewees also share that the food is fresh and they have a certain amount of land to cultivate their food, whether it is their garden or their fields of corn. Their food was a process and they discussed the labor and time commitment involved in the food they used to eat in their home countries. In other research, interview participants are glad they are not in Latin America anymore because the food preparation was laborious (Mares, 2012). The women Marquez interviewed preferred the labor of making their meals because the food tasted better and they felt safe knowing what is in their food. Two of the women used words such as “simple” and “plain” when they were describing the food they like to eat. It is interesting

how they chose to use those words when they both stated the long hours and the labor it took to create the “simple” and “plain” meal or staple food, including the tortilla. Lucia became animated and excited when she explained the process of making tortillas, including the time and preparation.

All but one woman shared the difficulties they experienced in their home country. They shared poverty, food insecurity, and lack of employment as reasons why they left their countries of origin. Two of the women brought up multiple times in their interviews that they want to go back home, but know it is difficult to return home as much as it is challenging to stay in the U.S.. The same women discussed how there are many resources for their kids here in the U.S. Camila shared her desire to take the resources here, such as the clothing donations, back home to Oaxaca, Mexico because there is nothing over there. Four of the five women answered “yes” when asked if they felt the food bank was helping them live a healthy lifestyle. Lucia shared “I don’t know where else I would get my vegetables from if it was not for the food bank”.

Three of the women interviewed did not know where they would get their food if it were not for the food bank. The food bank has been instrumental in the daily lives and support for the woman interviewed. It is essential to understand that the food bank is crucial for Latinx immigrants who migrate to the U.S. without any resources and cannot apply for SNAP because of the restrictions of using this service if one does not have citizenship.

Importance of Spoken-Word and Youth Empowerment

Spoken-word, also known as performance poetry, is poetry written to be publicly performed, rather than only read. Spoken-word takes into consideration the performance that includes body gestures and movements and tone of voice of the poet, along with the words

themselves, when a poem is being executed (Weinstein, 2010). Spoken-word gives youth space where they can feel empowered by performing about their struggles and issues they know other people in their community can relate to “and address racism and other inequality in order to affect social change” (Johnson, 2014)

Youth who participate in spoken-word have been empowered by the awareness their voices can bring to particular issues. Spoken-word programming has traditionally centered the voices of youth who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and youth in these programs have been more successful, academically and personally, than socioeconomically disadvantaged youth in other after school programs (Weinstein, 2010 & Johnson, 2014). The success of spoken-word programming is owed to spoken-word programs not centering the disadvantages of the youth they are serving, but rather centering their strengths and developing the youths' self-efficacy. Spoken-word has not only aided participants academically but psychologically, and self-confidence too. Youth have found that in dark times in their life, spoken-word was able to uplift them and help them find meaning in their lives (Weinstein, 2010).

The mentors for spoken-word programming are crucial for the growth of youth who participate in these programs. Mentors need to create a space for youth to feel comfortable and vulnerable enough to talk about problems in their lives and then use this as a form of empowerment (Weinstein, 2010). Mentors and educators were able to create this space for the creators of the poems analyzed in this study. Public health educators were present throughout the workshops to inform the youth of the high rates of chronic disease youth of color have, and how that has been the result of systematic conditions (Rogers et al., 2014).

The Bigger Picture Project

The Bigger Picture Project was created after the University of California San Francisco's (UCSF) director of Center for Vulnerable Populations Health Communications Program (CVP) saw a young poet in her family present a spoken-word poem inspired by diabetes. Then the UCSF reached out to Youth Speaks about a collaboration on using spoken word as a form of a PSA and their collaboration began that led to The Bigger Picture Project (TBPP). This platform is taking an alternative approach to conventional public health ads, as campaigns reach out to Latinx communities. Instead of centering campaigns with pure statistics, they humanized the statistics and put a face and community behind the numbers (SaludAmerica, 2017). The mission of The Bigger Picture Project is to empower youth to use poetry as a form of spreading awareness to fellow youth. Through the poet's platforms for TBPP, they bring attention to the issues of racist marketing tactics and contest the perception that this is an individual problem.

In the context of diabetes awareness, there is an extensive amount of research that focuses on genetics, lifestyle (Schillinger, n.d.), and individual choices (Rogers et al., 2014). The driving force of this project was to center "environmental determinants" (Rogers et al., 2014, p. 5) rather than individual actions. They wanted to create awareness in communities that are hit harder by diabetes that live in obesogenic environments. Traditionally, people of color, particularly Latinxs, have been explicitly targeted by big corporations such as Coca-Cola because of their heavy usage of technology (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2017).

Impacts of The Bigger Picture Project

After these videos were presented to stakeholders and the target audience, there was a better understanding that youth do have the power to harness platforms that overwhelmingly affect them (Rogers et al., 2014). TBPP reached out to schools that were representative of the

“audiences” they wanted to target, which include predominantly low-income youth of color. They went to schools that had large populations of the youth of color and where all students qualified for the School Lunch Program free or reduced. TBPP found that from their surveys that there was a significant difference in opinion about how systemic causes affect diabetes. There was a 22% increase in those who agreed diabetes was preventable after watching the spoken word videos. There was over a double increase in those who thought that environmental causes influenced rates of diabetes. There was another statistic that stated a thirty percent increase in caring about diabetes after the workshops. These videos are counteracting what is ingrained in society, the notion that living in obesogenic environments is standard, and that it is not something to fight, but rather to accept (Rogers et al., 2017).

As of March 22, 2020, these videos have generated a combined 1,095,545 views of the 24 videos. The dates of publication took place between June 2012 and November 2018. Two videos, in particular, have a significant amount more views than the other videos. The most-watched video is by Ivori Holson titled “Thin Line,” with 793,949 views. Gabriel Cortez’s video, “Perfect Soldiers,” is the second most viewed video, which is drastically less with 142,799. “A Taste of Home” by Monica Mendoza generated 10,799 views and “Lost in Translation” 13,750 views.

TBPP has made their information accessible through their website (which is in English and Spanish) and through their YouTube channel. They also provide easy to digest “information about diabetes” and downloadable documents of the poems, workbook, and information about how to construct workshops about bringing awareness of diabetes which was the main issue expressed in the videos (Rogers et al., 2014).

Summary of Spoken Word Videos

Two of the poets, Yosimar Reyes and Monica Mendoza, speak about their connection to a Mexican migration experience. Reyes arrived as a child, but Mendoza does not clarify if she arrived as a youth or is a second-generation immigrant. Gabriel Cortez showcases his experience as a second-generation Panamanian. These three particular videos provide an understanding of the 1.5 plus generations and health issues that arise from the consequences of the habits taught to them by earlier generations. All poets use code-switching throughout their poems. However, Mendoza and Reyes use Spanish more frequently than Cortez, who only says one word in Spanish, 'maize'. Mendoza and Reyes have a Spanish translation of their videos (DeWolf Films, 2014a & DeWolf Films, 2014), but the English language version of the poems will be analyzed. When sentences or words are referenced from their poems in Spanish, there will not be a translation in order to maintain the integrity of their original meaning. However, interviews of the Latina immigrants will be translated into English.

Mendoza's video poem takes place mostly in her home and exclusively in her kitchen and dining room area. Many scenes in the clip in this video had someone holding, drinking, or laughing with a Coca-Cola bottle, enforcing the pervasiveness of sugary drinks as an everyday staple in her household. There are several scenes in this poem where the father is outside working and Mendoza is outside, releasing a bag filled with soda cans to represent letting go of these sugary beverages in her family's lifestyle. The visual in the video of her family shows how intertwined Coca-Cola is in cultural norms. Culture has popularized soda and other junk foods. She expresses the larger forces which have created the importance of Coca-Cola in her family. The video begins with Monica sitting at a kitchen table with three glass Coca-Cola bottles and a

meal in front of her before she speaks her first verse. She is evoking the prominence of Coca-Cola in her life. Soda cans, bottles, and processed food are present in every scene.

Reyes and Mendoza share the same statistics that begin and conclude their videos. The beverage industry is especially targeting Latinx children and youth by increasing their marketing efforts on Spanish-language TV.

Latinx children saw one and a half times more ads for sugary drinks and energy drinks, and Latinx youth saw twice as many ads. The same young people that are targeted by the beverage industry are the first generation expected to live shorter lives than their parents due to obesity and related diseases like diabetes.

These statistics demonstrate the need to bring awareness to the ubiquity of sugary beverages in the Latinx immigrant community. These beverage industries are explicitly targeting Latinx youth and have increased spending on Spanish-language television ads. The poets speak on how it is affecting their generation, as children who were brought to the U.S. from Mexico. These statistics also highlight the generational difference between chronic diseases. The idea that dietary behaviors from older generations have passed down to younger generations is a common theme throughout all the videos. The following quote is at the end of both Reyes' and Mendoza's spoken word videos. This quote highlights the influence sugary drinks have on generation Z, and if regular consumption continues for this age group of Latinxs, it will have serious health repercussions. The following statistics concludes both Reyes' and Mendoza's spoken word videos:

Sugary drinks are the number 1 source of calories in young people's diets. Drinking one or two sugary drinks each day increases the risk of type 2 diabetes by about 25%. Nearly 1 in 2 Latinx

children born in the year 2000 will get diabetes in their lifetime... Unless we do something about it. Raise Your Voice and Join the Conversation about Diabetes.

In Reyes' video, public spaces are the setting. He is sitting in a playground, using visual imagery to emphasize his youth which he centers in his poem. The video shows a community center where a family is sitting and talking to each other. He uses murals and farmers' markets to highlight the need to go back to eating traditional foods and the practices of his ancestors. Reyes uses the line, "How far we have come", repeatedly. The first time he recites this in the video, there is a mural of corn and squash in a bowl, along with other vegetables rooted in the land. The depiction of food from the land is representative of what is back home, in Mexico. He uses clips of himself with a white background, in between the clips of the community setting. When Reyes speaks about the community and his family, he integrates imagery with a more community-based setting. When he focuses on a particular processed food product, he focuses on that product during the video. In the end, Reyes is seen emptying the glass coke bottle and the camera pans back and forth between the emptying of the bottle to Reyes walking around the farmers market, touching the fruits and vegetables reciting, "Nosotros somos la respuesta". He suggests that to combat eating processed foods that harm our bodies, we can go back to more traditional ways of eating.

Yosimar begins his poem by explaining an endearing childhood name, which was gordito, he received and how his family expressed love to him by giving him junk food. He reflects on this love, and the nickname gordito and how growing up, these foods sold their culture to them. In other words, culture and food targeting have led to his eating habits as a young adult.

He explains the vulnerability of his family, and several times uses phrases such as, “How far we have come” to express how far away his family is from Mexico, from which he and his family emigrated. Reyes explains that his family do not know the language, but they have to trust that what is sold to them is good enough for their health because they live in low-income areas where liquor stores are present and that their food source lies in these stores that have an overabundant amount of highly processed foods and lack of fresh produce.

According to his spoken-word video, Reyes was raised to eat junk food that was present since his childhood. They are far from home, literally and symbolically. “How far we have come. From the origins of our lands. Our cuerpos lost in translation and our costumbres left to dry in the deserts”. This line symbolically represents their culture has changed for the worse in the U.S. They have lost the once healthy habits they had, such as only being familiar with the sweet taste of mangos: “mangos were the only sweets our tongues rejoiced in.”

Cortez shares the same sentiments as Reyes and focuses on how sugary drinks are inevitable in his community. Cortez’s poem examines his grandpa’s participation in the U.S. army and the prevalence of Coca-Cola and other soft drinks in his life. This poem is a love letter to his grandpa, situating the historical, political, and cultural contexts that influenced his grandpa towards the high consumption of sugary drinks. Cortez compares sugary drinks, specifically Coca-Cola, to dangerous, and deadly weapons used in the war. “Dr. Pepper lines our refrigerator door like a vest of dynamite in an arsenal of ways for us to self destruct”. There are multiple scenes of the Coca-Cola cans exploding as Cortez explains the prevalence of sugary drinks in his life. “Don’t it sound like the linchpin of a grenade? Both explode under pressure. Ain’t we just time bombs then?” While Cortez is speaking these lines he is opening up a coke can that is

sputting out Coca-Cola and throws it to the wall after saying “under pressure”. Cortez compares how threatening being in the army and soda are to livelihood. Cortez introduces the following statistic at the beginning of his video, setting the scene of dangers drinking soft drinks has on this generation of Latinx youth.

Type 2 diabetes has changed from a disease of our grandparents and parents to a disease of our children. Most children who develop Type 2 diabetes have a close family member with the disease.

Cortez’s constant comparing and contrasting of the harmful influences of joining the army and drinking soft drinks is portrayed with the following statistic that concludes his video. This quote draws attention to the dire situation of diabetes and its prevalence.

Since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan over 1,000 Americans have had all or part of their leg amputated due to injury. In that same time period, over 70,000 Californians have had all or part of their leg amputated as a result of diabetes. Nearly 1 in 2 children of color will get diabetes in their lifetime... Unless we do something about it. Raise Your Voice and Join the Conversation about Diabetes.

This statistic is heavy, but towards its end, there is hope that, by “rais[ing] your voice and join[ing] the conversation,” we do not have to see so many youths of color suffer the consequences of diabetes. These three videos have portrayed the experiences of being descendants of immigrants, whether they are one point five or second generation. They each highlight how political contexts and Latino-American cultural habits forced on our communities, as well as issues such as redlining, require more extensive recognition, in a form that is more intense and relatable than traditional interventions of chronic illnesses for Latinx immigrants.

Indeed, rather than traditional interventions such as workshops on how to eat healthier (Guthman, 2011), the goal of TBPP, as a campaign, is to change the food system itself by having these spoken word videos inspire change for the viewers to recognize their harmful dietary habits (Rogers et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The food system perspective “consider[s] the entirety of social and ecological issues that arise from the production, distribution, and consumption of food” (Guthman, 2011, p. 115), which Marquez applies in this thesis with a focus on the Latinx immigrant experience. This study was born from the idea that everyone deserves access to fresh, affordable, and culturally appropriate food, which defines the Food Justice framework (Gálvez, 2018). However, after reviewing the literature that intersects migration and an examination of food justice, along with data from this thesis, there are several crucial concepts that the food justice framework does not encompass. Such fundamental concepts include the high levels of food advertisement targeting in these communities (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2017), and how trauma has been recently found to lead to chronic diseases (Gálvez, 2018). Though this thesis does not address it, Latinxs are more likely to live in areas where there is more exposure to toxins that lead to chronic diseases (Guthman, 2011). In general, the food justice movement has focused on what people eat, rather than how the food they eat is produced, and inequalities that arise when attaining food within the food system, and environments that Latinx and immigrant and other marginalized communities live in. For this reason, Marquez utilizes the food system perspective, which looks at all aspects of the food system, rather than the food justice framework.

Background of Food Movements

Along with the food justice movement, two other movements intersect food and the right to accessibility-- Food Sovereignty and Food Security. The more limited of the three is food security, which aims for all people's right to be food secure. Food sovereignty and food justice share almost the same definition of their movements. They both agree that people have the "... right to healthy and culturally appropriate food..." (Counihan & Siniscalchi, 2013, p.47). Food sovereignty goes further, by adding "... produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their food and ag systems" (Counihan & Siniscalchi, 2013, p. 47). La Via Campesina created the food sovereignty movement and argues that there cannot be real food security without food sovereignty.

The food justice movement was created explicitly for those left out of the alternative food movement. The alternative food movement began from fears of the obesity epidemic and understanding the importance of supporting local farmers rather than big corporations. The food availability promised by the food justice movement does not "...chan[ge] the conditions of exploitation and oppression or address the privilege that also results from pervasive inequality" (Guthman, 2011, p.161). We can make fresh produce and other nutrient-rich foods accessible in low-income, people of color communities, including-Latinx immigrant communities. If we do not address issues on a macro level of what the Latinx immigrant community faces, such as experiencing trauma from migration and lack of healthcare, the food justice movement will only be a band-aid solution. Thus, we must examine the food in these communities alongside other injustices in their environments, such as past traumas, which also lead to high rates of obesity and diabetes.

The food justice movement aims to make the local food movement more accessible in “... communities of color or working-class neighborhoods... with alternative food to make good food more culturally and economically accessible... and attractive to people of color” (Guthman, 2011, p. 153). The leaders of this movement have been thin, Anglo, such as Michael Pollan, and focused on a fear of gaining weight rather than more significant issues that cause injustices of chronic disease prevalence in marginalized communities, such as the environment (Guthman, 2011).

The food justice movement tries to make healthier fresh food options available in low-income communities by exposing communities to fresh produce and educating them on how to make these foods. Implied in these efforts is the logic that, if we turn these communities into their affluent white counterparts, they will have achieved the right to healthy, affordable, and fresh food, and this alone will help them combat the chronic diseases that are so much higher in their communities. Though when we turn a marginalized neighborhood into a more privileged wealthy neighborhood, it inevitably causes gentrification and misses the nuances of the new environment offering culturally appropriate and relevant food.

The majority of the women Marquez interviewed for this research shared their proximity to, and the reliability of, gardens and other spaces they had to grow their food and crops in their home countries. These immigrants already know the importance of and preference for cultivating food and their connection to the land, but this is not the same experience for later generation Latinos, such as the poets addressed in the prior sections (Mendoza, 2013 & Reyes, 2013 & Cortez, 2014).

Compare and Contrast of Interviewees and Spoken Word Poems

There are two distinct discrepancies between the food bank interviews and spoken word poems. One of them is the concerns of chronic diseases, more specifically DM2, and the other is the distrust the Latina immigrant women have of canned foods and other processed foods while the poets shared their reliance on these types of foods. The Latina migrants' lack of concern for diabetes suggests that diabetes is not a concern for recent immigrants. Rather, its prevalence is the result of generations of being in the U.S. Thus, where they are suspicious of the canned food, the generations following them have learned to rely upon such foods, rather than freshly harvested food, which is directly related to the health issues in the communities.

None of the women interviewed discussed DM2 or any other chronic disease. Camila is the only one who talks about illness in her family, but it was a non-chronic related illness. The poets primarily focus on DM2 and the factors leading to its prevalence in their community. Three of the women stated that they know that the food they are eating in the U.S. has chemicals, regardless of whether it is fruit or vegetables. They expressed that their food is healthier back home, compared to Half Moon Bay, California. Camila does not like for the children to eat "on the streets," referring to fast-food restaurants, because she doesn't know what is in the food. All the women but one discussed canned foods and their aversion to them. Sofia describes how her mother advises her not to give her children canned foods because it is not suitable for her children's health. "[My] mom tells [me] not to give them canned foods, and it affects the kids especially." The poets discuss their reliance on processed foods (though not canned foods in particular) and, more specifically sugary drinks, pointing to cultural norms of their upbringing that have influenced the massive consumption of sugary beverages and junk foods in their

communities. Every interview Marquez conducted with the Latina food bank beneficiaries had at least one child waiting for the interview to be over or the mothers having to pause the interview in order to assist their child. Camila and Lucia centered their sacrifices for their family.

“It’s better here for the kids, they have more services and school ... [I’m] tired of being here... so frustrated with the rent, [I] live in one room, before [I] lived in a garage, [I] cried, why am I here living in one garage, my little boy shaking, freezing. [I] cried, [I] told [my] husband, why, why are we here with my kids like this... and then it’s been like a year ... [My] husband said we have to stay for the kids, think of the kids. We are one family, but [I] think of [my] mom”
(Camila, 2019).

Camila returns to the idea of wanting to go back home to Mexico to help her mother in her interview, but knows that it would not be best for their children.

In all the videos of the poets, the family was present as well. In Cortez’s, 2014 poem, we learn of how crucial his relationship with his grandpa is that led him to pick up the same practices, as he “learned to drink like grandpa, like Colon, Panama.” Cortez’s grandfather’s habits of drinking Coca-Cola were picked up in Panama and continued in the U.S., playing a significant role not only on his health but the health of his descendant, his grandson, Cortez. Sofia shares that it was much easier to buy sugary drinks and other junk food in her town in Guatemala. However, during the interview, one of her children had a cup filled with Coca-Cola. It is difficult obtaining junk food products in Half Moon Bay for families like Sofia’s because she does not own a car and has to walk or use the bus. Sofia and her children are used to buying hot cheetos down the street from a vendor in Guatemala. In Half Moon Bay, Sofia has to be strategic about when she plans on going to the corner or grocery store in order to buy her

processed foods and sugary beverages. For this research, Marquez only went to Sofia's house to conduct the interview.

The other five interviews were conducted at the St. Vincent De Paul food pantry. Questions pertaining to what kind of neighborhoods the other Latina immigrants lived in were not asked. However, the neighborhood Sofia lived in was on a hill, and a significant walk to the closest store that sold junk food. Half Moon Bay has an average median household income of \$110,900 (DataUSA, n.d.), while the national average is \$63,179 (FRED Economic Data, 2019). Half Moon Bay is generally a population with a well-off population according to the data. There is no data on the accessibility of grocery stores in Half Moon Bay. Traditionally, higher-income cities have more accessible and abundant access to foods rich in nutrients comparable to cities with a smaller median household income (Guthman, 2011). Individuals, like Sofia, who live in cities with a high median household income, still face obstacles when accessing food, even junk foods. This lack of access is due to not having the means to transportation.

The experiences of Cortez's grandfather and Sofia suggest that Coca-Cola, and the diabetes that goes along with it, is not developed through habit in the U.S. alone. So, perhaps while processed foods are something some immigrants might be newly exposed to in the U.S., Coca Cola is already a standard part of their diet.

Though Coca-Cola was a common household beverage in Sofia and Cortez's grandfather's home countries, fresh produce was familiar as well. Reyes, 2013 and Cortez, 2014, share the stories their grandfathers shared with them that there was "a time in which we ate from the land, that cocos fell from trees, and mangos were the only sweets our tongues were rejoiced in" (Yosimar, 2013). Cortez revealed that his grandfather "tells us of our ancestors, how they

raised maize and yuca from the earth, hands steeped in indigenous soil. House warriors, we drank cacao and water bitter from the gourd, a medicine sacred to the gods.” Cortez illustrates his ancestors’ dependency on the land. The cultivation of food was evident in the interviews with the Latinas and the previous generations of the poets. However, there was a disconnect the poets had with cultivating their own food.

Though four of the interviewees shared that they used to grow or kill their food, that is not a reality for them in the U.S. None of the interviewees grow their food in the U.S., but two of the women described in length the detail it took to make a tortilla or to kill their meat for consumption back in their home countries. Sofia states: “We are indigenous people. People that plant, cultivate things like corn, beans, carrots, all of that. People like to plant those kinds of vegetables.” Cultivating their food was intrinsic in Sofia’s culture. In the U.S., Sofia did not have her garden, but there was always somewhere for her to grow food.

Additionally, Lucia grew her food and relied on the land to provide. In contrast, Cortez, 2014 does not resonate with relying on the land for nourishment, explaining that instead of learning how to cultivate his food, he was taught to ingest sugary beverages. “Because we ain’t never learned to pull maize from the soil, but we did learn to pull the tab of a coke can.” Cortez puts his hand to his temple as if he is shooting himself, representing how by drinking these sugary drinks, we are committing suicide. He speaks of the consequences of replacing knowledge of cultivation with the consumption of sugary beverages. The knowledge lost from the previous generation to the next leads to a change in the diet. The younger generation is exposed to advertisements of products that are sold cheaply and easier to consume, such as Coca-Cola, rather than cultivating and cooking nutritious food such as maize.

The stories Cortez's grandpa spoke about relying on the land to feed them was never a reality for Cortez. As he states the line, "... but we did learn to pull the tab of a Coke can" (Cortez, 2014), he opens a Coca-Cola bottle with coke spewing out. "Don't it sound like the linchpin of a grenade?" Then we see Cortez throw a Coca-Cola can toward a large brick structure with garbage on the ground. "Both explode under pressure." The soda can explodes as it hits the brick wall. "Ain't we just time bombs then?" Cortez uses a simile to amplify that a linchpin used in the war is just as dangerous as soda consumption. Cortez might as well have been in the army and risking his life in war, because that is what he is doing when he drinks a soda.

A final contrast of the poets and interviews concerns the extra labor women traditionally have to do regarding food security within their own households. Mendoza, 2013 never states it, but it is apparent in her video that the mom is doing all the laborious housework by making family dinner and calling the children to the family table for dinner. Marquez did not intend to seek only Latina immigrants, but that is how it naturally happened. Two of the Latinas Marquez interviewed were single moms, two others had supportive partners, and one did not indicate whether she was single or not. However, since all the women interviewed explained that it was part of their weekly schedule to go to the food bank, this indicates the time and labor these women put into supporting their families through domestic work.

Data Analysis

CAFTA & NAFTA

It would be challenging to create this thesis without explaining the health impacts the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) have had throughout Mexico and the Central American countries. NAFTA is an agreement between Canada, Mexico, and countries in CAFTA including

Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic (Hawkes & Thow, 2008). NAFTA and CAFTA were enacted in 1994 and 2005, respectively. These agreements significantly lowered tariffs on products from the U.S. to these Latin American countries, consequently making it cheaper to buy American products in the respective countries (Hawkes & Thow, 2008).

NAFTA and CAFTA have created challenges for farmers throughout Mexico and Central America who can no longer rely on their land (this is discussed more in the NAFTA & CAFTA section). Many small-scale farmers in Mexico who still cultivate corn sell it to up-scale restaurants out of the country in order to make a profit (Gálvez, 2018). In the Yucatan, tourists are more likely to eat corn tortillas than the locals (Gálvez, 2018). The price of tortillas has soared since the first year of NAFTA, "...with a 'rise in of 279% since 1994'" (Gálvez, 2018, p. 47). With the decrease of tortilla consumption because of the price increase of corn, there has been a growth of junk food purchases that have become cheaper to buy because of NAFTA. The shift in the food system in Mexico and Central America has impacted the foods that Latinx immigrants from these countries feel nostalgic for.

The U.S. promised more jobs through NAFTA and CAFTA. U.S. State representatives who supported the bill promised citizens of Central America that a vote for CAFTA meant that there would be a halt to immigration from Central America and less gang violence, but that promise has not been kept. Gang violence and economic inopportunity persist in the Central American northern triangle (Perla, 2016). U.S. Politicians sold this agreement as if it would benefit the Central American countries, and there would be less migration, as if they did not learn their lesson from NAFTA that caused massive out-migration and made the overall general

population weaker than before the agreement was introduced (Gálvez, 2018). Politicians promised that these treaties would provide democracy and will allow the Latin American countries involved to prosper (Perla, 2016 & Gálvez, 2018).

Both NAFTA and CAFTA made it difficult for families to grow and sell their food because of how much cheaper it became to import products from the U.S., due to the lifting of tariffs. These treaties made it difficult for large-scale farmers to continue growing food due to how expensive it became, which resulted in having to leave the industry (Gálvez, 2018). Small-scale farming was conventional with Marquez's interviewees. "[We] had a lemon tree, cut down the lemon, and [we] would squeeze it on the crickets. [We] would grow the corn and make the corn tortillas out of the corn [we] grew..." Lucia shares how natural it was to depend on the land and described the fruits and vegetables they planted in their yards as a nutritional resource.

There is a much stronger connection to relying on produce for substance in Mexico. Corn specifically has been a symbol of identity for Mexico. Mexico's creation story stems from the notions that people are made of corn (Rodriguez, 2014). Corn has been integral to the way of life and identity for Mexican people (Rodriguez 2014 & Counihan & Siniscalchi, 2013). Gálvez, 2018 explains that NAFTA prioritized corn to not have any tariffs in the first years of NAFTA's inception. Removing tariffs for corn was considered more important than other goods. Mexico did not want its people to rely on producing their corn, and it became much cheaper to buy U.S. imported corn than cultivating it themselves. Mexico, a country that has such a symbolic and cultural tie to corn, in regards to both consumption and cultivation, had 40% of its corn imported from the U.S. within fifteen years of NAFTA's implementation.

If corn is taken away from people who have long associated it with their identity, what do they become? In its desire to become less reliant on traditional farming, viewing a 'rural' identity as the root of Mexico's problems, Mexico intended its rural population would become "de-peasantiz[ed]" (Gálvez, 2018, p.47). The Mexican government felt that people living in rural areas needed to become more educated, thus they wanted Mexicans to detach from farm working lifestyles in order to thrive and develop. The high rise in the price of tortillas since the beginning of NAFTA has led to a decrease in corn and an increase in junk food consumption because it became cheaper to import (Gálvez, 2018).

NAFTA has not only contributed to the high chronic disease by making junk foods and sugary drinks cheaper to consume and led to higher consumption of these products but has caused high rates of migration and unemployment. Mexico, in general, would have been better off without NAFTA, as an additional 20 million Mexicans were found to be impoverished in 2014, twenty years after the implementation of NAFTA, as compared to 1994, the year it was initiated. In those intermittent years, it forced families to migrate, causing trauma both in the process of migration and continued trauma in the U.S. through discrimination and poor working environments (Gálvez, 2018). Thus, NAFTA has caused high rates of chronic disease not only by what people consumed but also through their experiences of trauma and discrimination, which will be further examined later in this thesis.

The cheaply priced imports to Central America because of CAFTA have made it unrealistic for small rural farmers to thrive as they did before this agreement, making it harder for families to rely upon the land and depending more on imported processed goods (Kerssen, 2013). Before the implementation of CAFTA, Honduras exported more to the U.S. than it

imported, but now Honduras relies more on U.S. imports. Foods that the U.S. started exporting in large quantities to Central America include yellow corn and meat, creating competition which led to Central American countries and Mexico having to increase the cost of selling their meat and corn within their respective countries (Hawkes & Thow, 2008, Perla, 2016 & Gálvez, 2018). Farmers within Central America and Mexico could no longer compete against the cheaper imports from the U.S. and had to find other means to live rather than farming.

NAFTA has shifted the food system in Mexico. Before the ratification of NAFTA, Mexico was found to spend almost 2 billion on imports, but in 2011 it increased this spending to 24 billion. A majority of those imports were junk food products and made cheaper and easier to buy (Siegel, 2016). Bartley's 2015 study came out that Mexican nationals buy a total of 1,928 calories per day in packaged food and soft drinks alone. Mexico is the largest consumer of processed foods in the world, buying 380 more calories per day than the U.S.

Since the 1980s, fat and protein consumption has risen, along with the rise of diabetes and obesity in the Central American northern triangle. During this period, the tariff Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) was created. This tariff incentivized exporting from Central America to the U.S. by "grant[ing] tariff and trade benefits" (Hawkes & Thow, 2008, p. 346). Ensuingly, Central America welcomed up their countries for international imports and exports because of the incentives for trade. CAFTA had minimal impact on the Central American countries' part of this treaty, but it did have significant impacts on the U.S. exporting its goods to Central America. Preceding NAFTA's passage in 1994, only 7% of the Mexican population was obese, but as of 2016, it increased to 20% (Jacobs & Richtel, 2017). Diabetes is the most threatening disease in Mexico; Mexicans are more likely to be diagnosed with and die of diabetes than those living in

the U.S. and Canada, which are Mexico's NAFTA counterparts, even though the U.S. has a much bigger population than Mexico (Siegel, 2016).

Mexico and the Central American countries affected by these trade agreements fought to change and make their countries healthier. They ran into restrictions that were implemented by NAFTA and CAFTA, which did not allow for policies limiting the consumption of the products that were creating adverse health effects in Mexico (Siegel, 2016) and economic wreckage in Central America (Perla, 2016).

The rapid increase in developing chronic diseases and general dietary shifts in Mexico has led it to be on the verge of becoming the "...fattest major country" (Rosenberg, 2015). From the year 2000 to 2006, childhood obesity rose forty percent in Mexico. During the same period of an increase in child obesity, the waist size of Mexican women expanded to eleven centimeters more than the national average for women in a seven year span between 1999 to 2006 (Rosenberg, 2015). Within the past twenty years, the consumption of beans has decreased by half, along with vegetables and fruit intake decreasing by 30%. These staple foods in the traditional Mexican diet, such as beans, have been replaced with high-calorie processed foods and sugary beverages (Rosenberg, 2015). The Central American northern triangle has been experiencing a "double-edged sword of malnutrition" (Nagata et al., 2011, p. 299). There are high rates of babies born malnourished, but there are also high rates of obesity and diabetes throughout all age groups, starting with young kids (Nagata, et al., 2011).

How have these shifts of chronic disease in Mexico and Central American countries affected the health of these immigrant communities in the United States? By 2050, diabetes will multiply by four for Mexican citizens over fifty years old in the U.S. (Gonzalez-Gonzalez, 2017).

Though NAFTA cannot be solely responsible for the rise of diabetes in Mexico, it has certainly assisted in the accessibility of sugary drinks and processed foods that are linked to a development to chronic illness if eaten on a regular basis. It is crucial to understand how NAFTA and CAFTA have significantly impacted immigrants coming from these countries and the repercussions to their health in the U.S.

Cocacolonization

At the Austin Modern Art Museum, an art piece created by Antonio Caro displays the word 'Colombia' on the lower-center of the square of the painting, which features a red background with white lettering. Passing by, one might mistake this piece as the Coca-Cola logo. That is what the artist of this piece intends to convey. *"Here the superimposition of nation and logo points not only to a history of U.S. imperialism in the region but also to how the line between "us" and "them" - consumers and producers- has become blurred"* (Caro, 1976). This piece communicates how Colombia is synonymous with Coca-Cola. It is deeply rooted in Colombia's history, similar to Mexico and every country, territory, and region in the world (Elmore, 2013).

One of the major themes highlighted from all three poems is how pervasive Coca-Cola is in their communities. The framework used for this section is Cocacolonization. Cocacolonization is the economic colonization perpetuated by Coca-Cola. Through marketing tactics, Coca-Cola significantly influences other countries to adopt the American culture, and occupies the countries with the diseases associated with drinking Coca-Cola regularly, such as diabetes (Nagata et al., 2011). Coca-Cola has a long history of advertising in communities throughout Latin America. Due to the lack of research regarding Cocacolonization in Central America, this section will

focus on the Cocacolonization of Mexico, and briefly Guatemala. Coca-Cola began its debut in Mexico in 1897, making it one of the first countries, besides the U.S., to be exposed to this beverage (Burke, 2014). Coca-Cola has crept into being a cultural signifier not only in Latin countries but in Latinx immigrant communities in the United States. To understand how Coca-Cola has become a Mexican national symbol, we must understand the development of Mexican nationalism, mainly how Mexican nationalism formed through advertisements.

During the post-revolutionary era, Mexico was in the process of shaping its national identity through products. Politicians tried putting the Indian at the forefront of the Mexican identity, then the mestizo. This mestizo concept stuck, and Mexico began using product advertisements as an important nationalistic symbol, especially the Coca-Cola bottle (Moreno, 2003). Coca-Cola was solidifying Mexican identity through the advertisements knowing that Mexicans felt a strong affinity to mestizo imagery.

Mexico was trying to find its own identity along with embracing what we now describe as neoliberalism. Original American products were made Mexican through advertisement (Moreno, 2003). As a consequence of Mexico using its own companies to produce the classic Coca-Cola glass bottle, it influenced the idea that the glass Coca-Cola bottle is intrinsically Mexican because it was manufactured in Mexico. Mexicans incorporated the beverage as if it was inherited in their culture even though it is an American made product (Burke, 2014). In her poem, Mendoza states: "Coke in glass bottles de Mexico. That gives us that taste and sensation of home" (Mendoza, 2013). Here, home is equated with a product, coke, such that instead of simply tasting the contents of the soda, the feeling of home can be tasted and thus, commodified and consumed. Mendoza, 2013 describes that the taste of coke is emotional and nostalgic, such

that home is not only a physical place but a product to be consumed. The image of coke in glass bottles from Mexico then becomes a cultural signifier, but also a portal to go back home to Mexico. Thus, the popularity of Coca-Cola is not just based on the convenience and affordability of buying these products, but the connection felt when consuming this product.

Pepsi-Cola also created an ad in the 1950s that conveyed Pepsi-Cola as a Mexican product, “for the Mexican industry, for the Mexican people, and for the progress of Mexicans” (Moreno, 2003, p.132). This advertisement, along with other advertisements by Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola, has been another tactic in influencing Mexicans that their beverages are inherently Mexican. Almost half a century after Coca-Cola was introduced in Mexico Coca-Cola began to use the radio when it became popular in the 1940s and was able to reach more audiences (Moreno, 2003). Coca-Cola even had a time slot each evening where they gave small to large-scale awards to their listening audience. Coca-Cola used advanced technology in this era to glamorize their products to the young people who found themselves enjoying the nightlife scene in downtown Mexico City — glamorizing drinking Coca-Cola as intrinsic to having a good time (Moreno, 2003). Even before the radio, Coca-Cola, and other sugary beverage industries were the first to put billboards up on the first established highways in Mexico between the 1920s-30s (Nagata et al., 2011). During the mid 20th century, Coca-Cola started heavily advertising throughout the country, not only to young Mexico City kids but in rural areas and to small scale business owners. Coca-Cola has ““aggressively”” (Burke, 2014, p.3) advertised to rural areas in Mexico for the past 100 years. Sugary beverage corporations have targeted rural areas in Mexico not only through their aggressive advertising strategies but also by making it cheaper to buy their products in rural areas than in cities (Gálvez, 2018). Coca-Cola has become a symbol of

high-class status in Mexico through its advertisements. The symbolism of elitism resonates with those in rural Mexico. This is due to coke being viewed as aspirational, as Coca-Cola reinforces the idea that it symbolizes wealth and development and that its products are advancing Mexico (Gálvez, 2018).

Rural areas did not only see Coca-Cola as a form of wealth but as a cheap product that fills the void of hunger. Cortez delves into this idea in his poem with the following lines: “Where hunger is a canal carved deep into your belly. Where the only options for work are the docks and the army because your country is as occupied by Coca-Cola as it is by the U.S. military. When you must march to the call of whatever feeds family first” (Cortez, 2014). The setting of this scene goes back and forth between images of grandpa ambling across the cemetery with a bouquet to images of him fixing up his uniform and looking in the mirror at home. The cemetery is an ominous indicator of what heavy consumption of sugary drinks has resulted in from his personal experiences of seeing his family members and community suffer due to relying on these drinks for regular consumption. The video pans to Cortez’s family when they are at the dinner table, and then grandpa is seen holding a wooden bowl that was shown at the beginning of the video, filled with cacao. This recurrent imagery suggests that though sugary beverages are prevalent in Cortez’s grandpa’s life, so are other traditional drinks, such as cacao. The setting communicates the morbidity of the Coca-Cola and military occupation. The grandpa getting ready and putting his uniform on, and then him walking through the cemetery, is symbolic of the dire outcomes of drinking Coca-Cola and other sugary beverages. Throughout the poem, Cortez continuously compares the dire outcomes of participating in the army and drinking sugary beverages.

Coca-Cola was pervasive in Cortez's grandpa's upbringing. Coca-Cola dominates almost every aspect of life in rural Latin American areas, especially through advertisements. Coca-Cola incentivized their products to business owners by giving them furniture products, such as "branded refrigerators, tables, and chairs" (Bogin et al., 2014, p.28) if they sold a certain amount of their drinks. . These same incentives were also used to bribe Guatemalan store owners. In Guatemala, the Coca-Cola company has incentivized sales by painting stores with the Coca-Cola logo if they sell a certain amount of cases. They take advantage of these small stores in Guatemala because they know the stores would benefit significantly with assistance ("Coca Colonization of Latin America", 2017).

Coca-Cola has been intrinsic in the community of Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, which has a predominantly indigenous population. Coca-Cola has funded sports and cultural events, forcefully embedding their products at these events (Nagata et al., 2011). The Coca-Cola company has been conscious of how it markets to Guatemala and has provided appropriate flavors according to their preferences. Some Guatemalans in Santiago Atitlán have shared that they drink Coca-Cola with every meal and that it is intertwined with almost every aspect of life, including health, cultural events, and even meal preparation. A particular Coca-Cola advertisement in El Salvador reinforces the dominance Coca-Cola has in all aspects of life. In this particular advertisement, Coca-Cola pervades in a family setting. A family is sitting at a table with the Coca-Cola symbol on it while the family is drinking Coca-Cola (Amanzadeh et al., 2015). Coca-Cola advertises itself as a way to bring the family together, and the beverage expects to have a seat at the table.

Coca-Cola has heavily advertised to residents in Yucatan, Mexico. Youth in this area consume around twelve ounces of sugary beverages and one and a half items of processed foods daily (Bogin et al., 2014). In some cases, mothers were feeding their babies these sugary drinks by putting coke in their children's baby bottles because of the affordability of Coca-Cola. In Guatemala, there is more of an incentive to buy Coca-Cola over water because it is cheaper if it is bought in a reusable glass bottle. Another factor that leads some in Guatemala to rely on soda is the dirtiness of the water supply. Residents in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, suspect that their water supply is contaminated due to all the litter from the junk foods and beverages they consume, which ends up clogging the town's primary water source (Nagata et al., 2011). This community has to rely so much on the Coca-Cola industry that Coca-Cola "is synonymous with the word for water" (Nagata et al., 2011 p. 312).

While Cortez descends from Panama, rather than Guatemala, he expresses the same reliance upon coke as described in Guatemala. "It is how you learn to drink in a country where soda is cheaper than clean water" (Cortez, 2014). Before this verse, Cortez shares all of the sugary beverages that are in his grandfather's fridge that represent the prevalence of sugary drinks. There is a close-up of grandpa in this clip, in the kitchen, drinking from a glass filled with soda. This soda imbibement is something that Cortez inherited, and later expresses this by stating: "I learned to drink like grandpa, like Colon, Panama, like 14 billion dollars spent on soft drink advertising last year" (Cortez, 2014). Cortez's tone shifts for these lines. He sounds defeated that his intake of sugary beverages was inevitable because of their significant presence in his life. In the last part of this verse, Cortez is crushing a Coca-Cola can with the soda flowing over his fingers, falling to the ground. The crushing of the Coca-Cola can portrays Cortez's frustration

and resistance against Coca-Cola. This verse is the most crucial in the poem. The central theme of this poem is the advertisement targeting of his community which has influenced his grandpa to heavily partake in soda consumption, due to the lack of sufficient water resources and the investment of soda advertisements and sales. Further, he conveys how the habits his grandfather adopted in Panama have manifested into his habits.

In the 1960s, Mexicans in Chiapas, Mexico, began adopting Coca-Cola into their diet as a replacement for their traditional drink, pox, that is used for religious practices that were influenced by Christian missionaries (Burke, 2014). When the missionaries went to visit communities who use pox in religious practices, they urged these communities to use sugary drinks instead because it is purer because pox is an alcoholic drink (Bogin, 2014). Healers in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala advocate the use of Coca-Cola as a remedy for common colds, and around 33% of this population believe that Coca-Cola is healthy, according to a study by Nagata et al., 2011.

Mexico saw how influential Coca-Cola has been through institutional settings such as church. Due to the pervasiveness of Coca-Cola and its impacts on the population, Mexico put a tax on soda in January 2014. There is conflicting data that can vouch for the effectiveness of the soda tax (Burke, 2014). The Mexican government's failure to create policies that effectively aid Mexican citizens to eat less highly processed foods can be understood by examining NAFTA's vague objectives. The U.S. has manipulated NAFTA for American investors' personal gain, though most trade agreements with multiple countries do not have "such expansive protections for private investors" (Siegel, 2016, p. 205). Embedded in NAFTA is the prioritization of

American investors and features objectives that make it challenging to regulate policies that would negatively affect American investors' profits.

There is minimal research on the effects Coca-Cola has had on Panama that Cortez describes in his spoken word poem. The literature that discusses Coca-Cola's influence on Panama clumps it with Cuba, as these countries were one of the first or the first to have Coca-Cola showcase its products, after the U.S. (Bodden, 2009 & Georgia Historical Society, n.d. & Hymson, 2011 & Stafford, 2012). However, Hymson, 2011 analyzes the Coca-Cola advertisements previously discussed, as well as missionaries and American troops who were Coca-Cola influencers in Panama.

The lack of literature is no indication of how ubiquitous Coca-Cola has been in Panama. The oldest cafe in Panama City is Cafe Coca-Cola, and opened before Coca-Cola was introduced to Panama. This cafe is so influential that it is considered a World Heritage Site. The existence of this cafe showcases the importance and history of Coca-Cola in Panama (My Guide Panama, n.d.).

"I understand grandpa, but don't you know we are still at war with a country that wants us dead? How us children of Panama and America learn early to walk softly and carry a big stick. Like U.S. assault rifle in one hand, Coca-Cola bottle in the other. Our country wasn't enough. They are colonizing our bodies, our taste buds. It isn't a coincidence the military and beverage companies call us their target audience. Our black and brown bodies marching to the center of their crosshairs."

- Cortez, 2014

This verse refers to the consequences of Roosevelt's big stick policy. Cortez describes the "march" his grandpa was called to by joining the military, to provide for his family. Cortez is in front of the Panama flag and points at it while he states: "How U.S. children of Panama and America learn early to walk softly and carry a big stick. Our country was not enough. They are colonizing our bodies, our taste buds." Cortez refers to the famous quote from Roosevelt regarding his foreign policy, which is peaceful negotiation with the threatening force of his troops. This diplomacy has shaped his steadfastness of completion of the Panama Canal (Grant, 1996) and the colonization of Panama. Cortez then refers to how colonization did not end with Roosevelt but continues with the Coca-Cola industry.

The construction of the Panama canal created the hunger his grandpa experienced. The history of the U.S. military occupancy in Panama began during World War II and continued to dominate in Panama (Hymson, 2011). Cortez speaks on the root causes of why his grandpa relied on the military and Coca-Cola, which include living in poverty and trying to support his family financially, and is seen sympathizing with his grandpa. "You drink, whatever fits conveniently in your hands." Cortez, 2014 knows his grandpa was systematically influenced to intake and dependent on Coca-Cola. It did not matter if that drink is nutritious or not, it is affordable and that is why Coca-Cola and other sodas are much more convenient due to experiencing poverty.

Coca-Cola has invaded almost all aspects of life throughout Latin America. It has been creative in encouraging these countries to rely on its products. The pervasiveness of Coca-Cola in the lives of Latin Americans has, in result, impacted Latinxs in the U.S. and their relationships with these products. It has provided some Latinxs with the belief that intaking these products, which are linked to the development of chronic diseases, is part of the culture (Couric, 2014).

Health Impacts of Junk Food and Sugary Beverages

Yosimar Reyes is cognizant of the harm that processed foods and drinks have on the body. In the following line, Reyes elicits why it is so hard to break dietary habits, especially with sugar. “Your tongue becomes addicted to additive sugars found in coke. We drink pensando that our intake is harmless, but over the course of time, your body will ingest pounds of sugar... These foods we trust to give U.S. nourishment are slowly killing us. A sweet venom que corre por nuestras venas” (Reyes, 2013). There is a pan of churros frying on the word “sugar” and a pan of fat dripping from meat on an al pastor machine during the verse, “these foods we trust to give us nourishment,” referencing other food products that have contributed to what is slowly killing them along with sugary beverage products. Reyes explains why he and his family continue to eat foods with high amounts of sugar. These foods are more accessible for them to obtain due to their proximity and the social acceptance of these products embedded in their culture. Coca-Cola has become pervasive in every aspect of life for Latinxs (Siegel, 2016 & Nagata et al., 2011). It is odd to think that something as ubiquitous as Coca-Cola can be harmful. Reyes narrates the reality of what sugary beverages will cause by stating, “but slowly your body grows tired.” Becoming tired and out of energy, as Reyes explains, is not the only consequence of ingesting sugary beverages.

Latinxs have a higher chance of being diagnosed with diabetes and are “50% more likely to die from diabetes or liver disease than whites” (CDCP, 2015). The direness of these statistics reflects how real it is for the poets, for whom these statistics are more than just numbers. They are the poets’ lived realities. In her poem, Monica Mendoza describes how ingesting Coca-Cola can feel like “gas bubbles drowning our noses and mouths. That gargling feeling that takes over

our throats” (Mendoza, 2013). In these two lines, we get kinesthetic imagery. The senses are felt in this verse when Mendoza is trying to provoke a more ominous description of intaking Coca-Cola.

Some impacts of diabetes include the possibility of developing high blood pressure, which leads to greater chances of stroke and “increases the risk of heart attacks” (Diabetes.co.uk, n.d.). There is also the risk of amputations. Cortez’s poem ends with the dark statistic mentioned previously that, compared to those who had their leg/s amputated from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, California alone had 7,000 times the rate of leg amputation due to diabetes. These statistics are found at the end of Cortez, 2014 spoken word video.

Cortez makes this comparison of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with the Coca-Cola and sugary beverage juggernauts in his poem: “Grandpa is a proud old soldier marching through a never-ending war.” In this scene, his grandpa is adjusting his uniform in the mirror, but then the scene flashes to him in civilian attire, and the setting is not in a war zone, but in the kitchen pouring a can of Dr. Pepper into an empty glass. So far, Cortez has not used the word “soda” or “Coca-Cola” or anything referring to a soft drink. In these two stanzas, Cortez uses strong visual imagery by way of the video. During these verses, Cortez is seen talking in the dining area with his grandpa in the background filling up a glass from a soda can. The never-ending war Cortez is referring to is the war with sugary beverages. “At 66, we are scared that another stroke could do what no war ever could and cut him to the ground.” The setting shifts from the living room, and for the first time, the scene takes place in the cemetery. The scene in this part of the video is a morbid use of imagery, demonstrating the effects sugary drinks might have on his grandpa, as Cortez has seen the grim effects of regular consumption of sugary drinks in his family before.

In a 2016 study by Viladrich and Tagliaferro, Latina immigrants described their diets from their native countries, stating that “healthy eating was an intrinsic part of their culture and lifestyles, or habitus” (p. 105). Latina immigrants stressed that their food in their native countries is natural and organic, while they describe the food available to them in the U.S. as inorganic and emphasize a reliance on fast foods in the U.S. (p. 106). The Viladrich and Tagliaferro, 2016 interviewees, share the same sentiments as the Latina first-generation immigrants Marquez interviews for this thesis. Viladrich and Tagliaferro, 2016, and Marquez’s studies were conducted during the same time frame as these poor health statistics previously provided in this section were taking place. The diseases developed are much more real for the younger generation Latinxs. “Nearly 1 in 2 Latinx children born in the year 2000 will get diabetes in their lifetime” (Mendoza, 2013, & Reyes, 2013). This is a central statistic used both in Mendoza & Reyes’ spoken words videos, which is previously discussed in the Youth Speaks section. So, how are first-generation Latina immigrant food bank users able to talk about fruits and vegetables as inherent within their culture? In the poems, the poets describe how those foods are in the memories of their elders’ past.

Language Barriers, Lack of Education

Immigrants, in general, arrive in the U.S. with minimal English proficiency (Hill, 2011). Reyes captures the vulnerability of his family’s struggles with not knowing English and how it impacted them to be more susceptible to eat foods with adverse health impacts. “To us, we were far away from home in a strange land with a new language, too heavy for us to speak it... labels with words we can not read, much less pronounce. And Fanta commercials promising to quench our thirst” (Reyes, 2013). Reyes brings up the difficulties of his Latinx immigrant community

who are vulnerable to a new country and customs, as well as language barriers they have to endure.

Both Mendoza and Reyes similarly describe their communities as unfamiliar with the ingredients found in sugary beverages and junk food. “We think this possibly can’t hurt us without realizing we can’t even read the ingredients on the label” (Mendoza, 2013). In this scene in Mendoza’s poem, there is a counter filled with junk food with children eagerly grabbing the junk food and unwrapping it. This scene indicates that junk food intake behaviors are learned at an early age. “Labels with words we can’t read much less pronounce” (Reyes, 2013). These lines powerfully speak to the issues of how Latinx immigrants who lack English skills have another barrier to being cognizant of the chemicals that are in the contents of the food.

However, even if they were proficient in the English language, there are still barriers to understanding what the ingredients mean. “And though they tell us to read the labels, how many of our abuelos will understand words that to the average American are impossible to pronounce” (Reyes, 2013). At “impossible to pronounce,” Reyes flicks his hands to emphasize how English fluency does not matter when it comes to deciphering what the labels mean on sugary beverages and junk food.

According to Kresge, 2007, p. 1, Oaxacan immigrants face additional challenges to immigrating to the U.S. compared to those who are migrating from other parts of Mexico because of coming from indigenous communities where people predominantly speak indigenous languages. Language barriers were not evident in Marquez’s interviews with food bank participants, but Camila, who is from Oaxaca, Mexico, shared that she speaks Zapoteco as well as Spanish, and her husband only knows Zapoteco.

The National Council of la Raza study, n.d., p. 8, concluded that the most significant obstacle for immigrants who use food programs is the language barrier. There is also the worry of the food program workers not having the resources for non-English speaking clients. Language barriers in The National Council of la Raza study also state that language barriers account as a factor for food insecurity (Sano et al., 2011). Language's role as a barrier to using food programs is especially relevant for areas that are receiving newly arrived Latinx immigrants (National Council of La Raza, n.d.). Some food programs have scant appropriate language services, which prevents Latinx immigrants from using food programs. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 enforces that where SNAP are offered, they must have efficient services for non-English speakers to use their services. Even with this Civil Rights Act of 1964, many agencies are not meeting the standards to provide appropriate linguistic services for their non-English speaking communities. Immigrant families, in general, are unaware of their rights to linguistically appropriate services (National Council of La Raza, n.d.).

Further, Mares, 2013 reported negative attitudes towards communities who have limited knowledge of English (Mares, 2013). Latinx immigrants have also expressed their fear of using the food banks because of the possibility that those running the food bank will not know Spanish (Mares, 2013). Some Latinx immigrants expressed that they feel they are not welcomed to food banks because the workers there are not linguistically sensitive, and the food bank workers become frustrated that they do not know English (Sano et al., 2011). Meanwhile, large soda and junk food corporations have been linguistically sensitive to Latinx immigrant communities in order to increase their sales by using Spanish-language advertisements (Harris-Lovett, 2019). Advertisements are on immigrants' preferred channels, out on the streets, and in places where

they spend time with their communities, as they have been strategically placed in “residential areas” (Harris et al., 2019).

For Latinx immigrants to feel safe and welcomed at food programs, workers and volunteers must be linguistically sensitive to non-English speaking beneficiaries. The majority of the volunteers at the food bank where the interviews were conducted for this research only know English. The head volunteer, Nancy, shared that she and the other volunteers try their best to communicate with the non-English speaking beneficiaries. The interviewees did not state that they felt notably safer or more inclined to use the services because of the cultural sensitivity of the volunteers, but they all shared to some degree how grateful they are for the St. Vincent De Paul Society Food Program. Due to food banks largely run on volunteer service, it may be difficult to rectify the language barrier, though perhaps cultural sensitivity itself can make a difference.

Imperialist Nostalgia

There is research that analyzes the notions of food nostalgia in Latinx immigrant communities (Gálvez, 2018 & Azar et al., 2013 & Viladrich and Tagliaferro, 2016). Nostalgic foods are those for which immigrants have an emotional attachment that relates to their home country (Viladrich and Tagliaferro, 2016). Latinx immigrants have shared that nostalgic foods from their home countries are traditionally eaten during holidays, but in the U.S., they are eaten more frequently (Azar et al., 2013 & Viladrich and Tagliaferro, 2016). Traditional foods provide immigrant groups a nostalgic connection to home, despite feeling alienated in their new countries. Imperialist nostalgia in the context of food is the “tendency to mourn that which we ourselves have changed” (Gálvez, 2018, p. 175).

Food nostalgia hits deeper than the taste, cravings, the action of unwrapping a homemade tamale, or even the creator of the meal or contents of the food. The nostalgia of food “evokes, through other means, such as flavor profiles, feelings of nostalgia” (Gálvez, 2018, p. 175). Certain foods provide emotional comfort, temporarily satiating immigrants’ longing for home. “We’re desperately looking for home in our plates and cups.” This scene in Mendoza's spoken word video pans from the dinner that is served to the soda bottles on the kitchen table. The clip of the dinner and drinks give us symbolic imagery, along with the “plates and cups,” which represent her family’s longing for home.

Mendoza reverberates with the notion of imperialist nostalgia when she states: “Dinner has become an expedition. Where we lick our plates clean and swallow cups of nostalgia.” Mendoza uses nostalgia as a metaphor for Coca-Cola, the consumption of which fulfills their desires and longings of home. “Nostalgia that isn’t even from our country”. Mendoza brings to light that the Coca-Cola industry has sold its product as if it is inherently Mexican (Burke, 2014), which is discussed in the Cocacolonization section.

Mendoza continues to say: “Forget that those before us only drank water. We are literally killing ourselves trying to find parts of us in a two-liter plastic coke bottle”. While Mendoza begins this verse, two female family members are sitting down at the table, clinking glass bottles of Coca-Cola. The rest of the verse focuses on her standing outside of the dining area with her family in the background, eating their dinner. Mendoza uses an antithesis, to compare what is drunk now, Coca-Cola, to what was traditionally drunk before economic colonization in Mexico and its impacts on their dietary behavior, which continue even after migration to the US. For example, a traditional beverage, aguas frescas de frutas, has been replaced with sugary beverages

(Romero-Gwynn et al., 1992). Hot beverages drunk daily for breakfast in Mexico were being replaced with cereal products. In Mexico, only 7% use cereal as part of their daily diet, but in the US, 78% of Mexican immigrants consumed cereal. The preference for cereal over the morning beverage was one of the most notable replacements of a traditional aspect of the Mexican immigrant diet (Romero-Gwynn et al., 1992).

Festival food theory also needs to be taken into consideration to understand the dietary habits of Latinx immigrants in the U.S. Azar et al., 2013, define festival foods as those traditionally eaten in home countries for cultural celebrations or special occasions. Festival foods are equated to the same unhealthy standards as the unhealthiness of westernized diets. The nutrient-poor food is due to festival foods being "... high in carbohydrates, animal protein, sugar, and fat" (p. 954). Azar et al., 2013 provide examples of other immigrant groups such as Japanese and European immigrants that started eating festival foods as part of their daily diet in the U.S. They could not afford their festival foods daily back home, and living in the U.S. made it affordable for them to eat these rich and heavy foods daily (p. 955).

Festival foods are associated with maintaining the identity and solacing nostalgia for their native countries and establishing their status as being able to afford these once expensive foods (Azar et al., 2013). Festival foods differ among regions in Latin America. Some festival foods resonate throughout Latin America, such as tamales. Tamales used to be eaten on special occasions due to the time and effort it takes to make them, yet Azar et al., 2013 claim they are becoming more popular than hamburgers (p. 957). The manufacturing of substantial quantities of Mexican foods has made it easier for people to consume it as easy as going through a drive-through at a fast food place. Other people in the United States have been enjoying tamales

as well, but Latinxs have been the driving force in creating the regular expenditure of tamales. Latinxs spend 33% more on beef alone than other people in the U.S. They are not only eating traditional American foods but festival foods such as “... carne asadas (barbeque beef), tamales, moles, and pozoles” (Azar et al., 2013, p. 957).

The impacts of imperialist nostalgia on immigrants have led to greater consumption of sugary beverages and junk foods. It is crucial to understand that it is not merely acculturation, affordability, or the taste of a product that leads to these consumption behaviors. A key factor is that these foods elicit memories of home and represent the closest immigrants who can come to being home without actually being there.

Acculturation

“Acculturation” is adapting one’s native culture to the culture represented in their new country of origin (Schwartz et al., 2010). Reyes addresses this concept in his poem: “How far we have come. From the origins of our lands. Migrated to a place where everything is commercialized. Our grains monopolized by corporations. Our cuerpos lost in translation, and our costumbres left to dry in deserts” (Reyes, 2013). This verse captures acculturation by describing his family leaving behind cultural practices that are difficult to maintain as he describes how his customs have been “left to dry in deserts” (Reyes, 2013). From the information provided in the NAFTA & CAFTA section, it is apparent that grains in Latin America have been monopolized, as he references here. From the literature and discussions with interviewees, dependency on the land for nourishment exists in memory of their homelands.

Reyes states: “No more milpas, soil or open sky. Simply 12-hour shifts, grey concrete, and noise.” Reyes uses an antithesis to compare the dependency on land in Mexico to the

environment in the U.S., in which there is a lack of land to cultivate food, and an atmosphere which is tiring, and stressful. . Fresh fruits and vegetables were more accessible in the home countries of Latinas in Viladrich and Tagliaferro's 2016 study. The participants also described the U.S. areas they live in now as having easy access to stores filled with junk food and fast-food restaurants close in proximity (Viladrich and Tagliaferro, 2016). In Marquez's 2019 interviews at the St. Vincent De Paul food bank, there is a contrast between the foods that were regularly eaten in countries of origin and those in the U.S. . Four Latinas conferred that cultivating their food, on a mostly small scale, was intrinsic to their culture. However, Sofia mentioned how junk foods and sugary beverages were more convenient to buy in Guatemala. In her poem, Mendoza states that her familial homeland, Mexico, had the highest rates of obesity in the world. There are innate healthy cultural practices such as depending on the land, along with processed foods being as intrinsic as well. Lucia from Oaxaca expressed that she misses chapulines, but was struggling to grasp the fact that she has to pay for them here when one of the reasons why she ate chapulines is because they were free back home.

Another theme both poets and interviewees touched on was that they worked long strenuous hours. In Mendoza's poem, she states, "Mom and dad are too busy working 10 hours or more to limit the intake of junk food" (Mendoza, 2013). The father is shown working outside, hammering, , then the camera pans to a kid with a variety of pan dulce to choose from on the kitchen counter. Parents are too busy working to prioritize children's nutrition intake. "Too busy trying to make a living than live healthily" (Mendoza, 2013). The video pans to the dad painting a house. Immigrants have been prone to be exploited for their cheap labor, having to work long hours and live in cramped situations due to not being able to afford rent (Viladrich and

Tagliaferro, 2016). Families prioritize paying bills over nutrition due to expenses and the time they dedicate to their jobs (Colón-Ramos et al., 2017). Two of the women from Marquez's 2019 research discussed their struggles paying rent throughout their interviews. The concern for housing is an especially significant issue for most people living in the Bay Area (Ryder, 2018). The women interviewed are more vulnerable to the harshness of high rent in the Bay Area due to the lack of resources the women expressed in their interviews. Lucia enforces the concept of rent being too high by stating "[I] was single and working with what [I] could... [I] would get \$600 or \$700 every two weeks, and [my] rent was \$500, [I] rarely had any money at the end of the month."

Additionally, two other interviewees voiced their concerns about the limited space they had. Ana brought up that she only had one drawer to place all her things in the kitchen, and Camila shared how her family lives in a garage and explains that her kids have gone to sleep crying because the garage they live in gets cold at night. From Mendoza's verses and concerns of the women interviewed, nutrition and health are concerns that cannot always be prioritized.

In 2013, Mexico took first place as the "... most obese country in the world..." (Siegel, 2016, p. 195), with the United States taking second place. Mendoza expresses, "Forget that home is the number one obese country in the world and we're here in the U.S. living up to the same legacy" (Mendoza, 2013). Mendoza alludes to the fact that in her and her family's experiences, Coca-Cola has been manifested through advertisement and has become a dietary staple in Mexican/ Latino identity and has influenced the high rates of obesity her community experiences. She continues, "Any kind of nourishment that keeps us moving. Even if we're moving a bit slower than the rest of the world or struggling to complete everyday tasks. We are

still moving, and that is all that matters.” In this verse, the video first shows one of the children eating junk food from the counter, the father working, and then the mother displaying dinner, a chicken that she just pulled from the oven and vegetables. This visual suggests that there is healthy food alongside the junkfood. Following this, the background music changes, adding a faster beat to the steady, almost unnoticeable beat of a piano, and the tone shifts, to highlight the next part of the poem. Her family is trying to make the best choices they can with the resources they have. They must depend on junk foods and sugary beverages because it is the most readily available and convenient for them.

Reyes describes why he depended on junk foods: “Like closed borders. You grew up caged atrapado between social conditions and foods you cannot afford” (Reyes, 2013). The child in this scene, who is holding onto the bars on top of a playground structure, symbolizes Reyes’ childhood, as the bars represent the environment of “closed borders,” that prevented him from eating foods more nutritious than those he was culturally conditioned to eat. Latinxs also commonly perceive eating healthier foods as costly (Ramírez et al., 2018).

Reyes goes on to recite the words, “Uprooted from the ways of our abuelos...” In this clip, there is a mural of the roots of corn, which is symbolic of corn being a significant part of Mexican identity (Counihan & Siniscalchi, 2013). Reyes, 2013 continues, “...we are lost”. The scene cuts from the mural to a vendor, placing gummy bears in a plastic bag. Immigrants usually find themselves in low-income communities having to face discrimination and other adversities that create barriers to fresh, affordable food, which is known as downward assimilation (Van Hook et al., 2015). When immigrant families are adjusting to living in the US, they have to adjust to a food system that “is plagued with race and class inequalities” (Counihan &

Siniscalchi, 2013, p. 4). Gálvez, 2018 states, “being treated as Mexican in the United States is as detrimental to health as any potential genetic predisposition, as time in the U.S. is a predictor for onset disease” (p. 164). Living in the U.S. as a minority can trap Latino immigrants to live in unfavorable social conditions that are harmful to the body.

Migration Trauma’s Impacts on Chronic Diseases

Acculturation is more complicated than the correlation of the length of time in the U.S. and the adoption of chronic diseases. ““Diabetes is the disease of the migrant.... Not just because migrants change the way they eat, but because it is the somatization of pain, trauma, and depression”” (Gálvez, 2018, p. 160). Gálvez, 2018, discusses the effects trauma has on the body. There is emerging research on how trauma and the stress of living in a low socioeconomic status lead to increased exposure to chronic diseases. For example, trauma and stress from poverty lead to obesity and vice versa (Guthman, 2011). Trauma is a recurrent theme in the interviews for Marquez’s 2019 research. The breaking point of Camila’s migration decision was her experience of domestic violence in Mexico. Sofia described her migration experiences from Guatemala to the Texas-Mexico border. She could not believe how poorly the border patrol agents treated her and the conditions she had to live in for those days that she did with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody. From the discussions with the interviewees, they all experienced living in poverty in the U.S.. All but one share about the poverty that people in their home countries face. It is not only the lack of money for nutritional foods, but also the stress that living in poverty and the traumas they faced, both in their home countries and en route to the U.S., which have impacted their likelihood of developing chronic illnesses in the future.

Only one woman interviewed did not have their children present. The children were running around, sipping on Coca-Cola, or waiting patiently for their mothers to finish interviewing. Sofia and Isabella both came from Central America, and their children experienced food insecurity in their home countries. “Others are struggling so much in Honduras, and this makes us feel so grateful that we have food to eat for my children and sons who are growing.” Isabella repeatedly states that she is grateful for the food at the food bank because they did not have any food back in Honduras. Food insecurity for youth has the potential to “... affect the way the body metabolizes foods, contributing to obesity in adulthood” (Gálvez, 2018, p. 164). Food insecurity was also a frequent topic from both the poems and interviews. The reason four out of the five women interviewed went to the food bank initially was due to the food insecurity they were experiencing.

Camila from Oaxaca, Mexico, shared her stories of food insecurity as a child, fighting for the last drops of coffee with her brother and eating only tortillas during her youth. “[We] were fighting over a pot of coffee and the pot broke and [we] got into so much trouble but [we] were just starving. Coffee, that’s what they would eat.”

The intricacies of how food insecurity and trauma manifest into the development of chronic illnesses in Latinx migrant communities go beyond the focus of this thesis. It is necessary to keep these concepts in mind when broadening the perspective of the causes of chronic illness in Latino immigrant communities.

Food Swamps

Reyes and Mendoza speak about their experiences of their families’ consumption of junk foods and sugary beverages, which they attribute to living close by where these products are

sold. Mendoza expresses how she only needs two dollars and some change to buy a sufficient amount of Coca-Cola for her guests. The corner store is close enough that her parents trust their children to buy these products for them. “Send their children to the liquor store on the corner of the block, with two crinkled dollars and coins rattling in their pockets.” Reyes tells of how he also grew up in a similar environment: “Miles away from home. We found ourselves situated between two liquor stores on the same block. Eating poison to nourish our bodies.” Latinxs are more likely to depend on junk foods and sugary beverages because of the cheapness and their proximity to stores that sell high caloric beverages. The omnipresence of these stores has created difficulty in rejecting the consumption of these products (Guthman, 2011). The environments these two found themselves in can be described as food deserts or food swamps. The USDA, n.d. defines “food deserts” as areas that have limited access to produce and are usually in poverty-stricken areas. They also lack access to sources that sell fresh produce such as farmers’ markets and grocery stores.

“Food swamps” are environments that have an excess of junk and fast foods and fewer resources for nutrient-dense whole foods, and Latino immigrants tend to live in these environments (Viladrich & Tagliaferro, 2016). Both food swamp and food desert areas have not only “... ‘a shortage of food, but a shortage of healthy food’” (Minkler et al., 2018, p.851). From Marquez’s interviews and other research that has focused on food accessibility to fresh produce for Latino immigrants, many Latino immigrants would prefer to eat fresher, locally grown foods compared to the foods provided in their communities. Yet such foods are often not accessible.

An arm extends to give a giant soda bottle to a kid while Mendoza says: “Walk into Mi Pueblo and stock up on this week’s special of four two-liter coke bottles for a dollar.” Mi Pueblo,

now known as Cardenas, is a grocery store chain that advertises as a store featuring Latino food products (Taylor, 2018). Mendoza expresses that Mi Pueblo offers deals that make buying processed food and sugary drinks very affordable and culturally appealing. “Throw in the cheap Tampico juices and sabritas for the kids to eat after school for the next two weeks.” Sabritas is a Mexican brand and is catering to this demographic through the cheap deal, and familiarity of the product (Mexgrocer, n.d.). Mendoza continues while the video pans back and forth between her, behind the mountain of junk food, and the child who is given a big bottle of soda which they then drink. The imagery of the scene communicates to the viewer that parents buy these products for their kids without monitoring their intake. “Cheap” is a crucial word, particularly as it relates to the conveniences of kids having something to drink after school. Historically, immigrants have lived in low-income areas and or living with other low-income groups. It is vital to examine these groups since those who are low-income have synonymously had low access to health resources (Calva Sánchez & López Jaramillo, 2018). Bargain deals have been crucial to the advertisement to Latinxs due to how much food one can buy for such little money (Harris et al., 2019).

Food swamps and deserts stem from redlining laws under the Jim Crow laws. The Jim Crow laws forced Latino communities unable to be near salubrious food access (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2017). Redlining laws have been in effect since the 1930s, and Anglos had a better chance of receiving mortgages in areas where there was more access to resources such as public transportation (Sukumaran, 2019). After 30 years, the mortgage lending discriminations ceased, but there was a large wound left as years of discrimination and “... overtly racist practice spawned social, health inequities minorities still face today” (Sukumaran, 2019). Those who

now live in neighborhoods initially redlined rely on fast and processed food that are detrimental to their well-being (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2017). This is primarily due to how redlining overall leads to a lack of opportunities for higher financial gain and being closer to corner stores that sell a majority of processed foods.

Impediments to a nutritious lifestyle include food swamp environments, which make it easier for those living in them to rely on junk food because of their stress resulting from jobs, families, and school life. In Viladrich and Tagliaferro's, 2016 study, they interviewed women who live in food swamps. The interviewees expressed that they are worn out from the American lifestyle of overworking. They feel that they have to buy fast food or make meals that do not consume much time. Food swamps not only provide readily available processed foods from the U.S. but foods from their home countries that also appease their nostalgia for home.

From the Viladrich and Tagliaferro's, 2016 study and Marquez's interviews, the immigrants shared that they are less enthused about eating produce in the U.S. The taste is different from their home countries, and the cost is perceived as expensive. The distrust due to the food tasting different in the food industry resonates with the Latinas interviewed for Marquez's research. Marissa: "It's less laborious to make tortillas here, but the maize tastes sweet." Three interviewees did not like the taste of produce, or tortillas, compared to in their countries of origin, and did not trust the canned food or meat because of the preservatives.

Mothers interviewed for Colón-Ramos et al., 2017, p.1944 expressed that there were a significant number of grocery stores that provided culturally relevant food and an overabundance of sugary beverages. Some Latinas Marquez interviewed stated that high caloric beverages are cheaper in the U.S., as compared to their home countries. However, Sofia, who was interviewed

for this research, does not resonate with soda being cheaper in the U.S. than her home country. Junk food and sugary beverages were accessible and cheaper to purchase in Sofia's home country, Guatemala. Rather, she struggled with accessing the junk foods she was used to back home. Sofia, at the time of the interview, lived in a suburb in Half Moon Bay. There are no stores within walking distance from her house in Half Moon Bay. Unlike the poets Reyes and Mendoza, she does not share the same characteristics of living in a food swamp. She was the only woman interviewed in her home with Marquez, however, all the women live in Half Moon Bay. The concept of food swamps in the U.S. did not surface during interviews for this thesis. It is unclear what type of community the other interviewees lived in from the interviews. Some Latino immigrants have been successful in navigating food swamps by setting budgets and limiting their junk food groceries (Colón-Ramos et al., 2017, p. 1947). Immigrants residing in food swamps are challenged to create healthier habits. Due to a lack of grocery stores, they depend on numerous small liquor stores, which provide mostly processed foods (Minkler et al., 2018).

Advertisement Targeting

Advertisement marketers act upon specific preferences of each cultural group and target advertisements to them accordingly (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2017). Some advertisements target Latino communities in English and Spanish. Over 75% of Spanish language television advertisements were for highly processed sugary foods, drinks, and fast food (Harris-Lovett, 2015), and 84% of those Spanish language advertisements have directly targeted youth (Merck, 2013). The number of ads targeting Latino communities as compared to Anglo communities is drastically different, with Latino communities having nine times more

advertisements (Merck, 2013). There are virtually no advertisements that target Latinxs for produce and whole grains (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2017). In Cortez's poem, he references, "At home, a Coca-Cola commercial followed by a U.S. army commercial..." (Cortez, 2014). In the video, we see clips of a Coca-Cola commercial and U.S. army commercial playing on the television screen in the living room while Cortez is talking. "...Flickers across my grandfather's [golden] tooth... and they both shine like the discharge of a gun". These Coca-Cola commercials are inescapable taking place during bonding time with his family. Cortez admits, "my family watches Telemundo during dinner time," situating it as part of his cultural practice. Cortez and his grandpa "...learn to be Panamanian American, through television and food." Television is an important component of maintaining and taking part in cultural identity for Cortez. The high exposure to the advertisements Cortez lists, such as the "U.S. Army and Coca-Cola commercials" (Cortez, 2014), has impacted his consumption habits especially since television advertisements have been found to be the most influential advertising tactic for consumer consumption (Sundarapandiyana et al., 2015 & Ramirez 2016).

Both the Coca-Cola and U.S. army commercials generate the same feelings for Cortez, as he states, "they both shine like the discharge of a gun," comparing their dangers to that of a weapon. Mendoza narrates the same experiences of advertisement targeting, stating, "Coca Cola polar bear commercials playing in the background for the fourth time that hour." In Mendoza's spoken word video, someone is setting food on the table, and a similar scene from the beginning of the video is played, where there were many bottles of Coca-Cola on the table.

Processed food corporations' juggernauts have not only been linguistically appropriate, but culturally strategic regarding how they market their products. Reyes states, "Un veneno

neatly packaged in colorful wrappers and sold to us . as cultura” (Reyes, 2013). Reyes coughs in this verse, his voice overheard throughout this scene in which he holds a chip bag in hand at the playground. These foods have been embedded in his culture since his youth. A white background is shown, as he opens a bag of chips and says the word, “cultura,” indicating that the bag of chips signifies cultural norms. Junk food and sugary drink marketers have strategically been culturally relevant for Latino consumers by incorporating “ Latino -relevant ethnic symbols, linguistic styles, music, athletes and celebrities to link cultural values with certain foods” (Merck, 2013).

When food marketers are confronted with claims that they heavily market to Latino youth, they use the excuse that they are ““cultural leaders”” (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2017, p.9). They say that Latino youth are leading the way to new trends, and it is necessary to market to them more heavily than their Anglo counterparts. Latino youth have been crucially important in the maintenance and growth of food industries, especially Coca-Cola. Latinxs have been so fundamental to the Coca-Cola company growth that they contributed to “...eighty-six percent of the company’s growth through 2020 for Coca-Cola’s youth-target market [which would] come from multicultural consumers, especially Hispanic...” (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2017, p.4). Large corporations’ virtual advertising can determine, through their data, what Latinxs are most likely to buy and ways to keep marketing those unhealthy junk food products to them (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2017, p.2).

McDonald’s has gone even one step further than other companies when advertising to Mexicans in Mexico, by targeting not only their culture like other companies do in the U.S. (Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2017, p.9), but trying to shift their cultural practices.

McDonald’s has created a Facebook picture titled “LOS TAMALES SON DEL PASADO” with

the McBurrito on the bottom, and the post reads “‘If ‘it’s your turn to make tamales, you know what to do’” (Gálvez, 2018, p. 181). The advertisement implies that McBurrITOS can substitute for tamales during festive occasions like the last day of the Christmas season, Dia de la Candelaria, or Candlemas day, which is the day this advertisement was posted. Tamales have been a cornerstone of festive foods in Mexico for thousands of years and take much preparation. McDonald’s attempted to change this cultural food practice by pushing out tamales and bringing in McBurrITOS and “paints tamales as an anachronism” (Gálvez, 2018, p. 182).

From the evidence provided, it is clear that Latinxs, in general, have been sought out and targeted when marketing junk foods and sugary drinks, rather than their Anglo counterparts. Studies have proven that advertisements have considerable sway on how consumers make everyday choices (Sundarapandiyan et al., 2015 & Deraz, 2018). Reyes explains in his spoken word video how different their new environment is compared to back in Mexico. His community is vulnerable, as he states, “[They] are lost” in the new country to which they have migrated. “Trusting corporations to tell the U.S. that what we are ingesting is substantial to our living,” yet these corporations have strategically targeted Latinxs and profited from them, leading to the detrimental health effects junk food and sugary beverage consumption leaves upon their bodies.

Food Cultural Norms

Marquez’s interviews with the Latina food bank beneficiaries never expanded outside of the cultural norms of food cultivation, land dependency, and food bank usage. Nevertheless, it is pivotal to recognize how food becomes embedded in cultural norms and identity. Food has been a means of cultural identity for Latinxs, and consuming cultural food confirms their identity and is an essential practice of expressing culture (Ramírez et al., 2017 & Weller & Turkon, 2014).

Food for Latinxs has also been a means to break through the generalization of Latin countries as a whole, and meal creation has been a process for Latinxs to form their own particular identity in Latinidad. For some first-generation immigrants, food is the only way to maintain identity. Some feel forced to let go of other cultural practices such as religion and depend on food to solidify their Latino identity. For Latinxs who did not grow up knowing Spanish, regardless of immigrant generation, food has been one of the major, and sometimes the only way of confirming their identity (Ramírez et al., 2018 & Weller & Turkon, 2014).

The poets discussed in this thesis have focused exclusively on how Coca-Cola and other junk foods marketed towards them have been used as a catalyst for cultural identification. Latino youth are more likely to “adopt the modeled beliefs and behaviors as part of their self-identity” (Harris et al., 2019) from advertisements targeted to them.

One youth from Harris’s et al., 2019 study shared that she was able to resonate with the Taco Bell advertisement. “Tacos come from Mexico, and when you put it together, it is (Taco Bell) like for Latinos” (Harris et al., 2019, p. 306). The taco represents food she is culturally familiar with, and she felt that Taco Bell makes food for people who are like her culturally. Latinxs in that study stated they like the inclusiveness of the advertisement targeting, but also felt exploited (Harris et al., 2019). As she sits at a table with half-empty Coca-Cola glass bottles, Mendoza opens up her poem stating, “Every time my family and I visit tias, tios, y compadres, the first question we’re asked [is] ‘Quieres una coca?’” She sets the theme of the prevalence of Coca-Cola in her family’s lives, especially with a cultural context. “It just isn’t polite to not have soda when visitors are over. Reject it, and you’ll be labeled as a malcriado. Accept everything that is offered to you,” Mendoza states later in her poem. It is not only self-initiated consumption

of these drinks that solidifies their role in culture and identity, but also the ritual of acceptance of offerings. If the offering is rejected, such action not only represents the individual who rejects it but the family who raised that person. What kind of parent raises their child to reject an offering? Mendoza later states, “We laugh about who was passed out drunk at the last family fiesta and update each other on nuestra familias en Guerrerro while sipping on carbonated poison.” Throughout these scenes, her family is shown laughing or ingesting a sugary beverage. Thus, the prevalence of Coca-Cola in Mendoza’s family is rooted in cultural practices such as greeting family and storytelling.

In their poems, both Reyes and Mendoza provide examples of their families expressing their love to them through food. Mendoza shows the food her family offered her with a counter filled with junk foods and sugary beverages that are consistent with images throughout the video. “Coca, papitas fritas con chile, limon, y sal, los dulces Mexicanos que traemos de México la vez pasada. We use sweets as a way of showing we care. Diabetes and obesity is the last thing in our mind” (Mendoza, 2013). Similarly, Reyes states: “De cariño my familia would buy me my favorite snacks. Hot Cheetos con Tampico, y un paleta de mango con chile. Never did I imagine these sweet gestures of affection were actually poison” (Reyes, 2013). In this scene, the video pans back and forth between Reyes eating a bag of chips and an unfocused video of a little boy playing in the playground. The little boy is representative of Reyes’ youth. He did not know the consequences of these processed foods that were common in his childhood. Reyes’ family expressed their love for him through the means of the processed foods he listed, and how could something that was given through an act of love be harmful to the body?

Food has been a means of giving love for low-income families, due to its affordability and instant gratification. When giving food, the health impacts are often not taken into consideration, as indicated by Mendoza and Reyes. The most important aspect about the exchange between parents and their children is the happiness of their kids. When families live in poverty, food “... is one arena where they can take care of themselves and their families in the face of daily poverty” (Kaufman & Karpati, 2007). In his poem, Reyes reveals: “Growing up, my nickname was gordito, an enduring term that a lot of our familias use to show us their affection. In English, gordito translates to fat. I guess it’s true when they say some things simply get lost in translation... Nobody really tells you that being gordito is cute when you’re a baby. But slowly, your body grows tired” (Reyes, 2013). Reyes explains the meaning of his childhood nickname and alludes to the fact that the English translation of his nickname is harsher and does not have the same loving affection as gordito, though he says that he was never told he was cute for being fat. However, there is evidence that shows that Latina moms value the extra weight of their children because they think they look more adorable than if they were thin, and the weight means that they are not frail and cannot be easily harmed (Kaufman & Karpati, 2007).

Kaufman & Karpati’s, 2007 study provided data of cultural clashes the health workers had with a Latina participant. The nutritionist informed the Latina mom that she needed to restrict food and provide more opportunities for her child to exercise due to her being overweight. The mother did not see her child’s weight as an issue because in her family, being overweight is common. The Latina mom knows her daughter enjoys eating and does not want to take that away from her, even though she knows from nutritionist visits that her daughter has been steadily gaining weight. The advice of the health care worker was confrontational to the

mother, and the cautions of the health care worker made her feel that she was not a good mom. When other health workers did not use negative words to describe her child, she felt more open to accepting the health issues of her daughter. Latinxs are cognizant to the negative health impacts of the foods that target them, but they eat the foods regardless because of the taste, cheapness, accessibility of location, and the catchiness of the advertisements (Harris et al., 2019). Mendoza references how it is part of the culture not to waste food. “No desperdicias la comida, eso me costó.” For the first time in Mendoza’s video, there is food shown that is not junk food, as a bowl of mashed potatoes with cilantro is placed on the table. Though Mendoza portrays processed foods and sugary drinks as dominating her and her family’s diet, there are still healthy foods that are customary to their diet. Interviewees for Marquez also expressed that they did not waste food. If they saw food at the food bank that they were not going to use, they did not pick them. If they had food leftover, they would share it with their friends. Two of the women shared that they did not see the value of wasting food when they know that there is so much suffering from hunger in their home countries of origin.

Reyes’ 2013 poem references Celia Cruz’ most iconic saying to stress the importance of sugar in the Latino culture: “Azucar, cantaba la gran Celia Cruz. And it’s ironic that though we are a festive people, some of us move our hips slower to the rhythm, just trying to catch our breath.” Celia Cruz started interjecting “Azucar” in her songs because a waiter asked her if she wanted sugar in her coffee. Celia said, of course, she wanted sugar, she is Cuban. Sugar is a must, and it is part of the culture (Perez, 2016). Reyes clashes with this social conditioning towards sugar, along with the impacts of sugar, as a cultural element that has curtailed other Latino cultural practices, such as dancing.

Similarly, Mendoza also implies the presence of dancing, as she recites: “Panza llena, corazon contento, our heart beats beat at the rhythm of cumbia as mom cooks her sopas and enchilada.” The interjection of dancing into the poems indicates that it is an essential part of their culture. For Reyes, the ingestion of junk foods has impeded this cultural practice due to the effects these foods have on the body.

Reyes and Mendoza both mention how dancing is part of their cultural norms, and another cultural norm common in the interviews and poems is hard work. Sofia and Camila both speak about how hard people back in their home countries have to work to provide for themselves. Camila shares, “Over there you work all day, they are so exhausted and there’s no money, they barely get paid; here [we] work and get paid....” In Mendoza's Poem, clips of her dad working outside and her mom preparing dinner are shown throughout the latter half of the video, noting how her parents work so much that it leads to less supervision of their children’s food intake. “The threat of diabetes is as common in our family as hard work, obedience, and discipline. It is as common as Coca-Cola in our refrigerator, and we drink until the glass is empty” (Cortez, 2014). Cortez compares how hard work goes hand in hand with drinking sugary beverages and how these are both intrinsic to his cultural norms.

When considering the prevalence of chronic diseases in Latino communities, there needs to be a holistic approach to understanding how culture influences these high rates, not just the food that is consumed by this population.

Decolonization

Mendoza stated storytelling as her act of resistance against intaking junk foods and sugary drinks. “We find home in each one of our stories. There's no need to pull out that coke

bottle. There's no need to almost kill ourselves trying to find memories of home.” Reyes uses the decolonization framework as his act of resistance. Before he states the following verse, he ends with how the main crop in Mexico, corn, has been “monopolized” (Reyes, 2013) and though he speaks about an aspect of the food system that is so difficult to change, he still challenges the listener by stating: “Pero, nosotros somos la respuesta” (Reyes, 2013). Reyes pours out a tall Coca-Cola glass against a white backdrop, and then we see him walking to a stand filled with vegetables where he continues, “If we remember of a time in which the land was not something we were scared of.” Then, a colorful assortment of vegetables is panned, as he states: “In which the harvest of vegetables call for celebration — Nosotros somos la respuesta. If we remember nuestra lengua, nuestro idioma, nuestra tierra, it is time for us to return to the ways of our ancestors' ” (Reyes, 2013). Throughout these verses, Reyes is looking and trying to choose vegetables, and the camera pans back to him, pouring out the glass bottle until it is empty. The scene shifts back and forth from seeing Reyes buying strawberries and pouring out the rest of the soda until there is nothing left inside. The strawberries are an antithesis to the images of him buying gummy bears earlier in the video. The pouring of the soda represents leaving Coca-Cola behind and going forward with different food options. The answer is the viewer, according to Reyes, who uses his words to empower the viewer to take the stories of elders to heart and bring back old traditions, not only regarding what was once eaten, but connecting to the language and land. Thus, Reyes suggests using a holistic approach to resisting junk foods and sugary beverages.

Although Reyes never uses the word ‘decolonization’ in the verses quoted previously, the decolonization theory can be conferred by the following definition: “*Decolonization is the*

ongoing process to end oppression and servitude and to restore respect for indigenous knowledge and ways of life (Edible East Bay, 2017). The Decolonization movement has gained much popularity in recent years. However, it is difficult to completely eradicate the society we live in and go back to traditional ways of life pre-colonization. It would be disingenuous to adopt old traditions since the experience of actually living within specific traditional contexts are hard to authentically embrace when it was not taught but learned later in life.

From the interviews, there was a convergence of traditional practices and neoliberal influence. Sofia lived within her traditions in Guatemala, waking up at two in the morning and making food for her family every Sunday, and enjoying a Coca-Cola easily bought at the tienda down the street in her neighborhood.

There is an inadequate distribution of labor, with a great bulk placed upon women when making these meals. Thus, when using the decolonial framework, we have to be clear what era we are trying to decolonize. The adaption of using the tortilla machine was a changemaker for women who had to use their hands to turn the corn into flour. The tortillerias throughout Mexico liberated women who were expected to make hand-made tortillas. Making tortillas takes hours of labor, and women interviewed in other research were fed up with the exhaustion from creating meals from scratch like they did back in their home countries, and felt liberated that they could buy tortillas in packages in the U.S. (Gálvez, 2018 & Mares, 2013). However, women Marquez interviewed shared that they did not mind the extra effort it took to make the meals they made back home. “It’s better over there making hand made, it’s actually fast, you roll it... you put it on the comal, you wait a little bit, you turn, wait a little bit and wait until it fluffs up... you’re making something that is fresh and hot... with the hot food and hot tortillas and feels really

good... it's a lot of time, but [I] prefer to make it". Lucia preferred the laborious meal making over the processed alternatives. The food tastes better than the junk foods and processed tortillas that they more frequently consumed in the U.S. Tortillas found in packages were a strange concept for Sofia, and the tastes of tortillas did not satisfy her.

Eating food from the land does not necessarily mean it is free from harmful health consequences. Non-organic produce has pesticides that cause unfavorable health effects. Those who eat an organic diet have virtually no traces of pesticides in their systems. Eating a strictly organic diet is around "10-40% higher than conventional produce" in costs (Center for Ecogenetics & Environmental Health, 2013). Lucia, Camila, and Sofia shared that they know that the fruits and vegetables from the food bank are not the best quality because they are not organic or clean like the food in their native countries. Even though the interviewees felt that their produce grown in their home countries is "clean" of chemicals, Latin America has a history of using pesticides on their crops as well (Gálvez, 2018). Lucia mentioned that she wishes she could eat organic, but it is too expensive. There is a higher exposure to diseases caused by pesticides, non-organic, and organic foods have the same nutritional value (Center for Ecogenetics & Environmental Health, 2013). Lucia is cognizant of the chemicals in her food and feels like she is trapped to continue consuming these chemicals because those are the only options she has access to from the food bank.

There must be more action taken than simply eating foods that ancestors ate when we think of decolonizing our diet. That is why the food systems perspective is imperative when addressing the regularity of chronic diseases in Latino immigrant communities. All angles of the

food system must be appraised to decipher the repercussions of the inaccessibility of produce and the ubiquity of pesticides in our food (Bitman, 2012).

How To Fight Back

“The clinks and clatters of plates and forks drown out the commercials. The sound of laughter at childhood stories de México fill up our bellies. We find home in each one of our stories. There's no need to pull out that coke bottle. There's no need to almost kill ourselves trying to find memories of home.”

- Mendoza, 2013

For the first line, the family is clinking their soda bottles together, but we cannot hear the sound. This line delivers an auditory sense of imagery using the sounds that are playing at the family dinner table. The visual of the family clinking their glass soda bottles together represents that their time together overpowers the commercials that have targeted her community. In the second line, family members are laughing, indicating the joy the family has when recounting memories of home. The stories are a metaphor for a portal to home and how her family feels full when recounting the stories, compared to Coca-Cola, which only gives “that taste and sensation of home” (Mendoza, 2013).

For lines three and four, the video goes back to a clip of Mendoza outside, pouring out the plastic garbage bag filled with soda cans, with the camera gazing up at Mendoza so that it looks like the camera is receiving the soda cans being poured into the bag. The imagery used in the video emphasizes how unnecessary Coca-Cola is to reminisce about home, suggesting that storytelling is much more substantial and representative of home, as compared to a glass coke

bottle. In the last line, Mendoza sits at the table alone with empty soda bottles, and then the scene transitions to her , outside pouring the soda cans out in the garbage bag.

Mendoza articulates that one of the paramount issues of why her family is inclined to drink and eat foods that are detrimental to their health is because of the connection they feel to their home country, México. Mendoza resists this notion. In order to be liberated from products known to harm health, there must be resistance to how marketers of the large corporations use representations of home to target Latino communities. The solution is focusing on other ways, such as sharing stories and not letting junk foods and sugary beverages dictate what home is for her community.

Conclusion

Food bank beneficiaries are seldom asked about their experiences because it is a charity. The reliance on food banks for produce is especially true for undocumented Latinx immigrants who do not possess documents that would give them access to the SNAP program. Back home, the Latina immigrants are accustomed to growing some of their own food, for example, in their front yards or small plots of land, or knowing the source of their food, such as knowing that the meat they bought was killed that day . The interviews did not go in-depth on food cultivation, so it cannot be said that the women entirely relied on cultivation and dependency of meat made daily. However, they had a significant connection to the food and the land, while here in the U.S., the women are completely detached.

Marquez's findings suggest that within a generation or two, suspicion of processed food is converted to reliance upon it. The reliance results from the food systems in which they are placed. The poets depend on processed foods and sugary drinks because that is what their

families could afford, and has completely shifted from the food systems in their parents' home countries. The poets' stories of being far from home and placed in low-income areas exemplify the food systems first-generation immigrants and their descendants live in and how their class position leads to a lack of access to the healthier environment associated with higher income (Guthman, 2011).

The Latinas do not know where the food that is distributed at the food banks is coming from. They believe that the food they receive at the food banks are full of chemicals and particularly critique the canned foods. Four of the five women interviewed stated they used the food bank because they faced food insecurity. The food bank has alleviated, to an extent, the women's concerns of food insecurity.

The thesis found that though the food bank helps with the food insecurity the Latinas face, it does not meet the high standard of what they were used to back home. Here in the U.S., the Latinxs do not have the same sovereignty to grow their own food. Reasons the Latinx community struggle with food sovereignty include lack of space, time, affordability of food, and accessibility to foods that they are used to back home that are difficult to find in the U.S., especially if they live in an area where their ethnic group is represented in small numbers. All the women stressed that the food back home was "clean" and "organic." Organic food in the U.S. is expensive, and Camila shared she would not know where she would buy her fresh fruits and vegetables if it were not for the food bank.

From the findings from the interviews, food banks are a crucial resource and play an important part of the food system for some Latinx immigrant communities. Though the majority of the Latinas interviewed had their critiques of the food bank, they were overall grateful for the

food bank and gave them a sense of food security. Food banks need to recognize that this might be the only source their beneficiaries have access to produce. Food banks need to try their best to provide culturally appropriate foods and provide resources to other opportunities to receive produce. Especially organic produce, due to the lack of organic vegetables and fruits being one of the major concerns the Latinas had about the food bank.

Youth Speaks saw the need to create The Bigger Picture Project (TBPP). Youth are given a platform through TBPP to speak creatively about how the current U.S. food systems assist in the development of diabetes in their marginalized communities. These poems are self-initiated by three youth who are products of Latino immigrant communities. They positioned themselves to actively speak for themselves and their communities, rather than allowing someone else to speak for them, particularly regarding these entrenched food systems that are so difficult to change. They articulate, from their lived experiences, what has been the norm in their Latino immigrant communities. The norms include how processed foods and sugary beverages, such as Coca-Cola, is more than just a food or beverage, but a cultural norm object and a portal to appeasing their nostalgia for home. The norms the poets speak on stem from immigrant families having to adjust living in the U.S., they have to change to a food system that “is plagued with race and class inequalities” (Counihan & Siniscalchi, 2013, p. 4). The poets eloquently spoke on how their families live in food swamps and do not have access to fresh food or grains in their neighborhoods. The environments they live in are their norms, their realities and how it leads them to develop DM2 and other chronic illnesses.

The discussions with the Latina immigrants did not breach their experiences with processed foods and sugary beverages in great detail. The only processed food that surfaced in

the interviews were canned fruits and vegetables. Camila was the only one interviewed who brought up the distrust she has with “food on the streets” that include fast-food restaurants and processed foods. However, Sofia shares that it was much easier to consume junk foods in Guatemala, where she is from originally. Overall, the role of processed foods was not centered in the diets of the Latinas interviewed and their families, however it was present. For the poets, processed and junk foods played a role in how they expressed love with their families and how these products were so “neatly packaged in colorful wrappers and sold to us as cultura” (Reyes, 2013). The processed foods were intertwined in their upbringing and culture. However, the Latina immigrants did not share this same sentiment. Growing their own food and knowing the process of cultivating their food was the norm for them prior to migration. Though Sofia implies that processed foods were normal in her lifestyle, the connection to food and the freshness of it was standard as well. For the poets, the connection to food and land was something their family members did, and for the poets, are stories from their ancestors rather than their lived reality. Chronic illnesses were not one of the issues that emerged from the interviews. Concerns related to money were the most consistently discussed with interviewees.

The spoken word videos provided information crucial to understanding what type of adversities the Latinas interviewed are challenged with when accessing fresh, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. The conversations with the Latina women confirmed that they do not feel that the food provided to them at the food bank meets the dietary standards they are used to in their home countries. The spoken word videos spoke of the values of their families, Cortez states, “The threat of diabetes is as common in our family as hard work, obedience, and discipline. It is as common as Coca-Cola in our refrigerator, and we drink until the glass is

empty”. This quote sums up the core message of all the videos. The values of Latinx immigrant communities and how pervasive industries like Coca-Cola have on influencing their culture.

One significant finding from the spoken word videos that connect to the interviews is the following quote by Reyes: “Abuelo sits back in his memories, tells of a time in which we ate from the land when the cocos fell from the trees and mangos were the only sweets our tongues rejoiced in”. All of the poets had lines similar to Reyes, bemoaning that practices of relying on the land are now stories to be passed on, but are no longer regularly put into action. The Latina immigrants interviewed also shared stories of land cultivation and how it is not something they can realistically practice in the U.S., to the same extent as in their homelands. The interviews with the Latina immigrants and the analysis of the spoken word videos are crucial to understanding the functions of the food systems in Latinx immigrant communities. These functions are especially significant given the specific obstacles Latinx immigrant communities confront accessing culturally appropriate, chemical-free nutritious food. This thesis provided the adversities the Latinx immigrant community faces when accessing culturally appropriate and nutritious food. There are many forces against this community, but the resilience of the poets using their spoken word skills and the Latinas still keeping healthy daily cultural practices give hope that future generations will build off on holding onto these practices.

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