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A live community growing together: Communal occupation of a senior center welcoming Spanish-speaking elders

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ABSTRACT

The percentage of Latinx immigrants over the age of 65 in the United States is expected to more than double within the next 30 years. These elders face particular health and occupational disparities emerging from a transaction of individual and sociocultural factors that warrants attention by both service providers and researchers. This study employed an ethnographic approach including interviews, observations, document review, and group mapping activities. It sought to explore a county senior center as it evolves toward greater inclusion of Spanish-speaking members who are increasingly agentic in their community occupations despite facing initial constraints. John Dewey's philosophy is employed alongside critical theoretical perspectives to illuminate the juxtaposition of individual vulnerability and agency interwoven with structural elements. The communal growth experienced by the senior center and the Spanish-speaking elders is characterized by social relationships that transform, and are transformed by, shared occupation. For occupational scientists, the results offer an expanded understanding of communal occupation and its influence on community change, in this case focused on a marginalized population integrating into dominant cultural spaces and practices.

Approximately 7% of the Latinx population in the United States in 2017 is over the age of 65 (Lum & Vanderaa, 2010), and that percentage is projected to more than double by 2050 (Talamantes & Sanchez-Reilly, 2010). These older adults are especially at risk for health concerns (Lum & Vanderaa, 2010). While some immigrant populations experience better life expectancy and health outcomes than their native-born counterparts in the US, many Latinx, and specifically Mexican, immigrants have poorer outcomes (Population Reference Bureau, 2013). Foreign-born Latinx older adults reported the highest proportion of poverty (Lariscy et al., 2015). After immigration, older Latinx immigrants face significant health disparities including "poorer self-reported health, higher level of

depression, and more ADL [Activities of Daily Living] and IADL [Instrumental Activities of Daily Living] difficulties," when compared to native born participants with similar racial and ethnic identities (Lum & Vanderaa, 2010, p. 750). Among black, Latinx, and white immigrants, elder Latinx immigrants had "the worse physical and mental health and functional status" (Lum & Vanderaa, 2010, p. 746). Elder immigrants also must contend with a healthcare system that does not easily accommodate cultural differences (Brotman, 2003).

In the US, anti-immigrant rhetoric and acts of oppression, especially toward Latinx communities, continue to threaten the well-being of both travelers and long-time immigrants. Historically, the US has intertwined race with

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countless structures, cultural norms, and social systems (Allen & Perry, 2012; Kendi, 2019; Rothstein, 2017), and today, anti-immigrant structures continue to exacerbate structural racism and racial health disparities through a variety of mechanisms (Garcia-Hallett et al., 2019; Morey, 2018). Communities across the nation struggle with racial segregation; geographically, economically, and occupationally isolating Latinx communities and older adults from larger social networks, services, and opportunities (Armenta, 2017; Ayón et al., 2020; Light & Ulmer, 2016). It is critically important to develop services and interventions that target disparities in health and occupational opportunities affecting this population.

While the situation of elder Latinx immigrants is distressing, immigrants are not beholden to the challenging social structures into which they migrate. Immigrants find creative and resilient ways to negotiate societal situations that limit their occupations (Becker, 2003; Kwong et al., 2015; Lawson, 2000). The health disparities, oppression, and limited occupational opportunities of the Latinx population are complex and cannot be explained by focusing only on oppressive structures or individual decisions. Research is needed that addresses the interwoven complexities of both individual and societal action relative to the health and well-being of this population.

Situating Immigrants among their Communities

To effectively support older Latinx immigrants in the US, it is necessary to understand the community situations through which their experiences emerge, simultaneously recognizing their influential roles within those situations. Occupational scientists know little about the experience of elder Latinx immigration in the US or how communities grow and change in response. Research has focused on elder immigration in general, mostly of European retirees (Johansson et al., 2013) or has recruited participants in countries with vastly different social and health systems than the US (e.g., Wright-St Clair & Nayar, 2017). Occupational scientists have either explored how structural elements affect immigrant occupations (e.g., Bailliard, 2013; Huot,

2013) or examined their experiences through an individually agentic lens (e.g., Kim et al., 2016; Krishnagiri et al., 2013; Wright-St Clair & Nayar, 2017). The tension between societal structures and individual agency has been recognized by occupational scientists (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2011). However, using this dichotomy to analyze communities can obfuscate examination of transformation among community *relationships*. Analyses based on this dichotomy limit conceptualizations of change as occurring either at the locus of the individual or the structure. In this study, we integrate individual and structural perspectives to describe moments of community change as the communal occupation of a community doing together.

Within occupational science, there is increasing recognition that communities grow and change as their own occupational entities (e.g., Aldrich, 2018; Cutchin et al., 2017; Lavalley, 2017; Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015) and that the discipline should explore the "meso level of family and collective occupation, beyond the traditional focus on the individual" (Kantartzis, 2016, p. 26). Researchers are increasingly interested in attending to these units of analysis and how occupation can perpetuate structural and communal relationships (e.g., discrimination, cycles of poverty, greater inclusivity, improved educational systems) (Angell, 2014; Bailliard, 2016; Laliberte Rudman et al., 2019; Lavalley, 2017; Lavalley & Bailliard, 2020). Occupational scientists have begun to explore the communal emergence and sustainability of occupation through social relationships in doing together (Christiansen & Townsend, 2010; Fogelberg & Frauwirth, 2010; Fox & Dickie, 2010; Lavalley, 2017; Womack et al., 2016), occupational justice (Stadnyk et al., 2010; Valderrama et al., 2015), social movements (Frank & Muriithi, 2015), social transformation (Laliberte Rudman et al., 2019; Silva et al., 2017; van Bruggen et al., 2020), and immigration (Bailliard, 2013; Lavalley & Bailliard, 2020).

To inform community-oriented work that supports Latinx elders, occupational scientists need occupation-based theoretical frameworks that conceptualize the occupations of a community. Although other disciplines, such as anthropology, have a rich history of studying humans

from a communal perspective, occupational scientists require a framework that situates *occupation* as the primary unit of analysis. A pragmatist and relational perspective offers a firm yet realistic foundation for understanding the emergence of communal occupation (i.e., change in everyday socio-political relationships among the community as a whole) that accounts for both structural and agentic contributions to the continual emergence of communal relationships (Aldrich, 2018; Lavalley, 2017; Olivares et al., 2015). Deweyan philosophy and the transactional perspective of occupation offer effective theoretical frameworks to explore communal occupational phenomena (Aldrich, 2018; Cutchin et al., 2017; Lavalley, 2017; Lavalley & Bailliard, 2020).

Dewey's (1934) philosophy suggests that humans and environments are inextricable and emerge co-constitutively through their relationships and the social milieu. Dewey (1934) argued that everyday living entails a series of *problematic situations* during which humans negotiate relationships in pursuit of coordination and balance. Although Dewey described these phenomena mostly through individual perspectives (Aldrich & Cutchin, 2013; Lavalley, 2017), Cutchin and colleagues (2017) suggested that situations have habits and these must also become problematic for re-coordination and growth to occur. This mirrors Dewey's (1927) description of community formation and growth through *associated living,* a concept that illustrates how humans co-exist and transact together to create communal relationships (Aldrich, 2018; Dewey, 1927; Lavalley, 2017).

Although other philosophers offer different ways of considering community, Dewey's influence relative to understanding the intersection of public and private spheres (Asen, 2003) remains relevant in contemporary considerations of social institutions such as the one foregrounded in this study. When interwoven with concepts of immigration, social transformation, and a transactional perspective on occupation, Dewey's philosophy provides a valuable lens for understanding communal occupation and can support methodologies that appreciate multi-faceted conceptualizations of situations that involve living, dynamic communities.

The Study: Practical Community Change in the Everyday

The purpose of this study was to explore the communal occupation of incorporating a marginalized population – the evolving social processes of doing, being, becoming, and belonging together as a community. How was the community, as a whole, responding to new community members from a population that had been historically marginalized? Study methods sought to examine social processes of community occupation and the co-creation of social relationships across a natural context (Lavalley & Bailliard, 2020). Ethnography is well-suited to study communal occupation as it allows researchers to incorporate complex social relationships and account for the entangled processes communities experience by doing together (Bailliard et al., 2013).

A senior center experiencing such a shift was identified through the first author's community-based practice. The inquiry partnered with the center, its staff, and Spanish-speaking patrons during a 6-month ethnography and enfolded individual, social, and structural perspectives to describe the community's occupation as Spanish-speaking older adults increasingly participated. Informed by both critical theoretical perspectives and pragmatism (Lavalley & Bailliard, 2020), methods foregrounded the lived experiences of Spanish-speaking older adults as both vulnerable new-comers *and* real influencers in the community. An occupation-based examination of the community portrayed a living, vibrant, and growing community where societal structures and individual agency entangle.

The Senior Center

The Senior Center was home to a variety of services, programming, and events for elders (e.g., exercise classes, workshops, art classes, daily lunch, etc.). The county aging department managed the Center which served its older adults (55 +). Comprehensive aging services such as long-term care planning, in-home assistance, financial assistance, home safety inspections, and support groups were only available to patrons older than 60 years of age. In the 3 years prior to data collection, an increased number of

Spanish-speaking[1] patrons began meeting regularly at the Center.

Participants

Study participants included all staff and all patrons present in public spaces in the center during participant observations. Staff approximated that, prior to the involvement of Spanish-speaking seniors, the center served one-third White, one-third Black, and one-third Chinese older adults. Spanish-speaking patrons at the senior center were diverse in age, country of origin, time lived in the US, socioeconomic status, and education level. Participants immigrated from Colombia, Peru, Mexico, El Salvador, Bolivia, and Venezuela, or had moved to the US mainland from Puerto Rico. During observations, the first author engaged with 15-20 Spanish-speaking participants.

Consultants

Staff and Spanish-speaking seniors had opportunity to become more involved in the study through interviews, community mapping activities, and collaborative analysis. Seven Spanish-speaking older adults and six staff members served as consultants. Older adult consultants were from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Colombia and their ages ranged from 66 to 82 years old. One older adult was male. Staff member consultants held positions across the aging department and were all women. One staff consultant, the nutrition coordinator, was a bilingual Spanish-speaking immigrant from Mexico.

Data collection

Study procedures were approved by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Institutional Review Board (IRB). The first author conducted semi-structured individual interviews, participant observations, document reviews, and group mapping activities to broadly explore the center's community occupations. Participant observations occurred during 6 months of data collection with both Spanish-speakers and staff across various areas of the senior center. The senior center is a public space and therefore observation did not require broad consent from all center participants. Per IRB guidance, information sheets were provided before observations were conducted in social group meetings, as these groups were technically open to the public. After obtaining written informed consent from consultants for all additional data collection procedures, the first author conducted interviews in consultants' preferred language (i.e., Spanish or English). After interviews were completed, each consultant cohort—Spanish-speaking older adults and staff members—participated in separate recorded community mapping activities to solicit situational and community-oriented data directly from consultants while challenging participants to consider the community as a whole instead of from individual perspectives (Lavalley & Bailliard, 2020). For further description of study methods, see Lavalley and Bailliard (2020).

Documents, artifacts, newspaper articles, and radio broadcasts related to the center and the participation of Spanish-speakers were reviewed. Significant laws related to older adult services and immigration in the US were examined to understand the impact of national-level regulations and policies on center functioning. Throughout data collection, the first author engaged in reflective journaling to explore positionality and presence in the research process.

Data analysis

Data analysis was iterative and ongoing throughout the study. The third author was the doctoral advisor for this study, broadly contributing to analyses through discussion and supervision. The second author contributed contextual and subject matter expertise to analyses to enhance authenticity of data representation. The first author transcribed interviews and community mapping activities. To preserve participants' original sentiments, both the original Spanish transcription and English translation of quotations are presented. Consultants had opportunities to participate in a brief workshop on coding and a subsequent structured discussion of transcripts to participate in analyses and develop overarching themes. No staff members chose to participate in collaborative analyses. Five Spanish-speaking consultants participated in collaborative analysis. This collaborative

analysis guided further development of themes from transcripts, field notes, reflective journals, document review, artifacts, maps, and all other non-verbal data (Saldaña, 2013).

Limitations in depiction

The study was conducted 3 years after Spanish-speaking elders began participating in the center community. Consequently, portions of analysis relied on stories and reflections of the past. This retrospective approach provided valuable perspectives of the center's changes over time and allowed for a broad view of the community relationships that had emerged.

Another limitation was the first author's positionality. He is not a native Spanish speaker, is White, and was significantly younger than many consultants. Since his perspectives and language comprehension differed greatly from Spanish-speaking consultants, some of the metaphors, idioms, or other sentiments may not have been fully understood due to a lack of cultural understanding. Differences in positionality yielded different communication styles and connections with the two different consultant cohorts. Data collection and analyses were performed using a lens of intersectional relationships.

Results: Moments of Growth Across the Community

Moments of growth

Study results are presented as *moments of growth* instead of *stages* or *phases* since these terms suggest a linearity and distinctness that was not present in the data. We utilize Dewey's term *growth* to describe the continuous transactional process through which associations change in response to new situations (Aldrich, 2018). Therefore, these moments are pertinent sections of occupation for the community as a whole, separated in abstraction from the comprehensive history of the senior center. A community's occupation is its process of growth in response to ever-changing social relationships and is characterized by observable changes among social and communal doing together. First, we describe the situation of the senior

center before Spanish-speakers were present. Next, we describe a shift in community relationships as Spanish-speakers connected with more occupational opportunities at the center. Finally, we examine the unfolding of communal relationships as senior center members continued to do and grow together.

Setting the stage

Race

The US is built on a cultural foundation of racism and white supremacy that has persisted throughout the nation's history (Allen & Perry, 2012). Racial narratives and inequities are still deeply ingrained in the everyday doing of people in the US cultivated through years of political, structural, and cultural propagation of racist ideals (Alexander, 2010; Berrey, 2015; Kendi, 2019; Rothstein, 2017). Staff highlighted the racialization of occupation in the segregation of everyday occupations in the center.

> Each group has, the way I see it, they all have certain things that they're tied into that they specifically go to, like the Asians love the table tennis. African Americans and even some of the Caucasians, they're, the Caucasians are more into the Bridge and the card games, African Americans are more into some card games and maybe billiards, … and the Latinas, it seems like I see them doing more … [she pauses here to think for a moment] I see them more on the social setting more than most of the other groups.

Across policy, social norms, language, economics, and occupation in the US, people of color are systematically excluded and oppressed both overtly and tacitly. These cultural norms and racial structures were entangled in the emergent functioning of the center community and contributed to further barriers of Spanish-speaking presence in the center.

Aging policies

Two major policies significantly influenced the center's community structures: 1) the Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA) and 2) the county's Comprehensive Aging Plans. While

the OAA was an influential policy in the center and impacted how the community unfolded, the driving force behind the majority of the aging department's services and programs was a 5-year comprehensive county aging plan. This plan was developed through a year-long county-wide community needs assessment and included a variety of goals and strategies for the following 5 years. The plan guided and justified the aging department's priorities for programming, services, and innovation. Four out of six staff consultants mentioned the comprehensive aging plans as informing or driving their work. The 2012-2017 comprehensive aging plan, in place when Spanish-speakers began participating at the center, included few items relevant to non-English speakers' engagement and did not specifically address Spanish-speaking older adults (See Table 1). Yet, it still set a budding foundation for inclusivity in county policy.

Presence

Although the center's atmosphere was welcoming, staff consultants reported that monolingual Spanish-speaking older adults did not participate prior to 2015. According to programming archives, at that time the center offered minimal services and community advertising in Spanish such that monolingual Spanish-speakers would find few people that looked like them or who could communicate with them at the center. There were few access points for monolingual Spanish-speakers to engage at the center, even though the center was willing and interested in their participation. The presence of Spanish-speakers was minimally felt, if at all. This atmosphere set the stage for when Spanish-speakers finally connected to the community.

Connecting Spanish-speakers with occupational opportunities

In 2015, a bilingual social work student from Venezuela catalyzed community change in favor of Spanish-speaking participation. Spanish language newspaper articles, radio shows, programming archives, and consultant stories chronicled her efforts to create more opportunities for Spanish-speakers to engage with the center, including advertising open houses in Spanish media. This approach offered proactive space and occupations with which Spanish-speaking seniors could connect. She developed

Table 1. 2012-2017 Comprehensive Aging Plan Summary.

2012-2017			
Development of Plan			
No incorporation of Spanish Speakers			
Goal	Objective	Strategy	Indicator
1: Empower older adults, their families, and other consumers to make informed decisions and to easily access available services and supports.	1.1: Increase accessibility of information re. resources, programs, and services for older adults in county.	1.1.1: Create Social media Plan. *Note: this strategy omits language access in its description.*	1.1.1a: Creation of a social marketing plan to advertise programs and services available to older adults living in both rural and urban parts of county, available at all levels of literacy and in different languages.
	1.3: Ensure the attention to diversity in department programs and information sharing efforts.	1.3.1: Create dedicated program to link older adults from minority, refugee and immigrant groups and faith communities to Senior Centers.	1.3.1a: Completed assessment of the demographic information, needs, and strengths of minority, immigrant and refugee communities to provide appropriate and needed programming at the Senior Centers.
			1.3.1b: Expansion of English as a Second Language classes at the Senior Centers.
			1.3.1c: Programs offered at the Senior Centers that celebrate diversity and are advertised in relevant languages.

programs specifically targeting Spanish-speaking older adults. Most notably she organized a regular group of Spanish-speaking seniors called the 'Spanish social club.' Her efforts helped bridge Spanish-speaking patrons and the rest of the center community.

The Spanish social club met on Thursday mornings every week to engage with social and recreational occupations, educational topics, and guest speakers in Spanish. The group held a fairly strict routine, often exercising in the morning, moving to the reserved classroom for planned occupations, and then eating lunch. The social worker and bilingual nutrition coordinator worked to reserve meal tickets and space for this group during lunch. Additionally, an older adult volunteer began assisting in leading the group. Spanish-speakers were consistently in three main areas of the center: an exercise room, a classroom, and the lunchroom.

This program marked a notable moment of growth in the center's communal functioning. The social worker navigated impediments in room availability and program planning to literally hold space for this population. The social group was both an attractor and often an access point for Spanish-speaking center patrons. It was a safe welcome for patrons who often arrived feeling scared or concerned:

> … siempre uno viene como con miedo porque nadie hablaba español … cuando yo llegue, pues estaba [la trabajadora social]. Muy linda ella con nosotros. Eso nos dio como seguridad, porque ella hablaba español. (Esmeralda)

> [Always one comes with fear because no one spoke Spanish … When I arrived, well [the social worker] was there. Very nice having her with us. That gave us security, because she spoke Spanish].

The space emerged as a hub for Spanish-speaking cultures merging into a familiar community recognizable in its salutations, warmth, and priorities. Familiar cultural habits and routines contributed to positive community formation among the group or, as Francisco said, gave the older adults an opportunity "sentirse en el ambiente del idioma" [to feel in the environment of the language]. This opportunity significantly increased Spanish-speakers' interest in coming to the center. Consequently, they became more accustomed to the center's functioning and norms, offering opportunity to identify and connect with other more complicated occupational opportunities in the center.

Changing relationships through doing together

Reciprocal felt presence

The director of the aging department was the first to identify the *felt presence* of Spanish-speaking patrons as an important factor in increasing programming and accessibility at the center. She stated "*that you feel a presence. I guess that's more of what, that you feel a presence. That they would be more engaged maybe in program advisory committee or that we could get a representation.*"

The presence of Spanish-speaking seniors fostered awareness of their needs among staff. Seeing them, interacting with them during special events and lunch, seeing Spanish flyers in the center, and hearing Spanish being spoken in the space prompted staff to consider Spanish-speakers' needs. For example, Mariam, the center director reported:

> We had toilets stopped up … so when it happened the second time I went flying down the steps, the lunch line was spread out, and I knew we got everybody in there, and I didn't even think about the Spanish-speakers, but I dragged [the Mandarin-speaking Social Worker] with me and I said in English, I said, 'Only toilet paper goes in the … you know.' And I said, 'Fei, explain that, that's all that needs … ' and I happened to look over my shoulder and there was [Bilingual Nutrition Coordinator] standing there with one of the Spanish ladies who happened to be on the phone, and I said, Lizzy make sure she understands and tell any of them what I just said'.

Spanish-speaking consultants also recounted how an exercise instructor began using Spanish phrases in class when he noticed Spanish-speakers attending. When the presence they fostered through community engagement was felt,

everyday doing and cultural norms at the center changed to become more accessible.

The staff's need for a 'felt presence' placed the onus for change on the Spanish-speaking seniors. They were tacitly required to make their presence felt to staff to spur community change. Lizzy, the bilingual nutrition coordinator, challenged this condition by emphasizing the need for staff to reach out and connect with Spanish-speakers so they could feel staff's presence as well:

> Pienso que quizás los directivos, sería bueno que ellos hicieran un esfuerzo más para bajar, salir de sus oficinas, y checar un poco alrededor. Muy casual sin ninguna agenda. Sin nada en su mente. Simplemente 'hey, you know, ¿cómo estás? … Creo que eso es importante para todos. Eso es lo que yo pienso.

> [I think maybe the managers, it would be good if they made an effort more to go down, leave their offices, and check around a bit. Very casual without any agenda. Without anything in their mind. Simply 'hey, you know, how are you? … I think that is important for everyone. That is what I think.]

Casually connecting with Spanish-speakers and proactively facilitating occupational opportunities could demonstrate that staff valued Spanish-speakers' participation in the community.

During an observation, the first author sat with a group of seven Spanish speakers at tables in the common area of the lobby while they played a tabletop game. The tables were aligned alongside a high-traffic pathway to the wellness center. As they discussed news, recipes, and families in Spanish, other center patrons noticed Spanish being spoken. The transportation specialist stopped and greeted the group with a hesitant "*Hola*" and smile, staying for a moment of friendly small talk in hesitant "*Spanglish*". She recognized the importance of simply 'hanging out' with Spanish-speakers to offer an opportunity to get to know her and the services she had to offer. Consequently, she was more frequently mentioned by name than any other non-Spanish-speaking staff member. In many cases, Spanish-speakers did not even know other staff members' names. When asked why she was so popular among the cohort, she reported:

> Well I have chit chatted and said hello, I mean not chit chatted, I basically said hello to the group when they're out … right outside the wellness center … I do feel like I have connections with people, and in other words, just on a very casual basis, partly maybe from going on that trip on campus because we spent a significant amount of time together … And then the one person that I helped on the bus, you know she became like an individual, and I realized who she was by my attempt at speaking Spanish a little bit. I feel like that helped me to connect …

The person became an 'individual' after her presence had been felt and the two had spent time working together on transportation issues.

This experience of doing together in a positive way and feeling each other's presence facilitated humanization and communication across community members. Lizzy described a similar experience from a gathering of multiple cultural groups in the center.

> … una vez que nos juntamos el grupo asiático y el grupo hispano. Y estuvimos en el teatro … Y esto pienso que fue algo tan bonito porque no hubo una barrera de idioma, no hubo una barrera de cultura de nada. Todo mundo nos integramos, bailamos, nos reímos. No fue nada así espectacular de que tuvimos que hacer un planteamiento de cuatro semanas. Fue algo simple. Y creo que todo el mundo lo disfrutó.

> [… once we gathered the Asian group and the Hispanic group. And we were in the theater … And this I think was something so nice because there was no language barrier, there was no cultural barrier at all. Everybody, we integrated, we danced, we laughed. It wasn't something so spectacular that we had to do 4 weeks of planning. It was something simple. And I think everyone enjoyed it.]

The experience of felt presence from Spanish-speakers and from staff through such community occupations was influential in the ongoing construction of community norms and expectations for Spanish-speakers' community participation.

Policy changes

While policies and structures in the community created a rich environment where Spanish-speakers could connect, their overt participation was a new phenomenon in the community that impacted policy development. Through their consistent and substantial presence on Thursdays, staff became more aware of their engagement in the center. This awareness became evident in the 2017-2022 comprehensive aging plan, which was developed approximately 1.5 years after the beginning of the Spanish social group's presence in the center. Table 2 presents goals and indicators in the plan that were relevant to supporting Spanish-speaking participation.

The 2017-2022 plan significantly increased focus on Spanish-speakers and other immigrant populations. The community needs assessment for this plan included a Spanish focus group held at a local Latinx advocacy organization and sought to involve the organization's leadership in work groups developing the plan. The plan also identified diversity as an important issue cutting across all eight of its domains, rather than a single objective under a single goal. Finally, it significantly increased the number of items that support non-English speaking patrons from nine items in the 2012-2017 plan

Table 2. 2017-2022 Comprehensive Aging Plan Summary (Goals and Indicators).*

2017-2022 Development of Plan Focus Group in Spanish	Incorporation of Hispanic Advocacy Org in Development
Diversity is identified as a "Cross Cutting Issue" Goal	Indicator
5: Uphold all older adults as valuable members and resources of the community.	5.1.1a. Sensitivity and inclusivity training …
	5.1.1b. Signage is welcoming and inclusive to all.
	5.1.1c. Clientele is surveyed to learn what languages would be most important to include on signs and forms. Signs and forms are adjusted to reflect that data.
	5.1.1d. Senior centers are attended by older adults from diverse groups.
	5.1.1e. Department works with organizations and individuals who advocate for diverse populations and barriers are identified and overcome.
	5.1.2a. Awareness about department services is increased and information is shared with pertinent organizations (e.g., church refugee initiatives; churches that provide services in other languages; refugee wellness and support centers; Spanish Social Club; Hispanic advocacy organizations; apartment complexes/ retirement communities).
	5.1.2b. Department staff work with these groups to find out what services and programming they are most interested in and those services are provided.
	5.1.2c. Activities and information are offered in relevant languages.
	5.1.2d. Number of individuals from identified groups who attend the Senior Center programming and utilize services increase.
8: Empower older adults and their families to make informed decisions and to easily access available services and supports.	8.1.1a. Comprehensive list of liaisons is created and maintained.
	8.1.1b. Information sharing is facilitated by liaisons within their organizations.
	8.1.1c. Information is distributed at least quarterly to designated liaisons.
	8.1.1d. Liaisons are created with non-English organizations.
	8.1.2a. Communications are sent out to non-English media sources and posted at relevant locations and community agencies.
	8.1.3b. Additional versions of the program guide are explored, including print and online versions in Spanish and Mandarin (and other languages as needed) and an audible version.

* Objectives and strategies were omitted to preserve space.

to 27 items in the 2017-2022 plan; two of which specifically mention Spanish-speakers.

As a result of involving more Spanish-speakers and organizations in its development, the 2017-2022 plan highlights more barriers to accessing services that should be addressed for this population. While these changes were a logical progression from the 2012-2017 plan, it is likely that the consistent presence of Spanish-speakers alongside bilingual staff advocacy increased attention to Spanish-speakers during the plan's development. This led to even more robust goals for this population and is a tangible manifestation of community-level growth.

Discussion

While the senior center was a welcoming and innovative place, it required catalyzing occupational shifts to foster opportunity and space to accommodate the needs of Spanish-speaking older adults. Through their continued participation in the center, Spanish-speakers increased their felt presence and impacted future policy development. The functioning of the community transformed as Spanish-speakers began doing together with other center community members. Social expectations, rules, and habituated processes significantly affected the unfolding of community norms and doing, yet Spanish speakers contributed to the reformation of these social norms through their ongoing presence and doing.

By focusing on a living, integrated community situation, we synthesized a vision of community occupation that simultaneously considered the role of individual agency, societal structures, and their ever-emerging dynamic relations (Lavalley, 2017; Lavalley & Bailliard, 2020). This resulted in a more nuanced understanding of the community's occupation as a whole, for which we adopted the term *communal occupation*. Shifting the focus of the study in this way revealed real and observable changes in community functioning while also recognizing that the presence and actions of Spanish-speaking older adults influenced community growth (Lavalley & Bailliard, 2020). Study findings show that co-constructed processes of social change through occupation (i.e., "doing together" in community) align with a

transactional perspective informed by Deweyan philosophy (Dickie et al., 2006).

A transactional perspective of a community doing together conceptualizes individual experiences as situated catalysts or inhibitors of broader community change. In light of study findings, we contend that the Deweyan (1934) concept of *live creatures* (i.e., organisms in constant relationship and growth through their situations) can be extended to the community level to conceptualize the *live community*. A *live community* is integrally connected across its social and cultural systems, continuously emerging through transactions. This conceptualization stands in opposition to giving ontological supremacy to individuals or structures; instead, the community is a living organism in and of itself, capable of growth and transformation.

In this study, recognizing Spanish-speaking older adults as part of a live and ever-emerging community prevents them from being situated at the mercy of stagnant and determinant structures. It also liberates Spanish-speaking older adults from being entirely responsible for crafting a space for themselves in the community. This understanding of community positions the locus for change among community relationships instead of solely the individual or the structure.

To be clear, individual occupation still existed and was integral to the functioning of the community; however, a communal perspective broadened the scope and analysis to focus on the central situation. By broadening and synthesizing previously disparate components of a situation (e.g., person, structures, policy), a transactional perspective revealed the dynamic and transformative processes of the senior center community and provided a window into how the occupation of a community unfolds in both beneficial and detrimental ways. Examining the community's occupations in relation to Spanish-speaking seniors exposed communal construction of injustices, opportunities, and power dynamics through occupational processes, paralleling Dewey's concept of *problematic situations*. Through presence and participation in the center, Spanish-speakers transformed relationships among the structural, personal, physical, political, sensory, and social aspects of the community. Problematic situations where the needs of Spanish-speaking

elders were not always met offered opportunities for staff and Spanish-speakers to adjust their everyday practices in response. The community changed and grew as new opportunities and challenges were revealed for Spanish-speakers and staff, reflecting Dewey's (1927) description of community formation and growth through *associated living*. New habits, processes, and policies were tested and eventually incorporated to manage these changes. Through everyday experiences of participating together in occupations (e.g., exercise classes, classroom activities, lunch, special events), associations among center community members were re-coordinated.

Through the everyday doing of communities, privilege, structural racism, compartmentalization, and other socially constructed norms evolve through processes of associated living. In the case of the senior center, these important and real phenomena started to transform through socially situated, communal occupations of Spanish-speaking seniors and staff. Structures like information access systems, spaces, built environments, tacit social norms, and routines of everyday doing were identified as important community relationships that impacted participation of Spanish-speakers. By fostering occupational opportunities and dedicating resources for Spanish-speaking seniors, the center communicated a welcome that penetrated boundaries of language and racial stigma. Through accessing resources made available by the staff, Spanish-speaking seniors became members of the center, embodying the role of community elders similar to that enacted by members from other racial and cultural backgrounds.

By acknowledging the consistent relational emergence of community occupation through social habits, communal policies, and historical processes, we do not discount the significant role societal norms play in occupation. On the contrary, we envision space and hope for change to occur through community growth – from the political to the personal – in spite of them. This continual emergence of political, personal, and communal relationships together was evident across the senior center community. How the community was doing together was integrally connected to the situation's individual, communal, political, and societal aspects through which it functioned. Policies and societal structures

were present but not invulnerable to community shifts and re-coordination. Social transformation was possible, albeit complex.

Conclusion

As immigrants enter communities, they become situated among the social habits, structures, and norms of the new community; however, these social relationships are not unbending. Immigrants, like any community members, have power to transform their situations. Through doing together and offering presence and participation in communities, immigrants can shift how a community lives and works. Occupational scientists must further research the complexities and historical rootedness of community occupation to better inform efforts to support positive community living. Within occupational science there is minimal literature that describes the construction of communities doing together, let alone in the context of immigration. Elder immigrants in the United States constantly navigate community-level relationships to obtain needed resources and connect socially. Occupational scientists interested in understanding community and social change must take into account these communal processes to account for community growth through occupation.

Endnote

1. Over the course of the study, Spanish-speaking consultants discussed how they were categorized (i.e., Hispanic, Latinx, by origin country), and there was no clear consensus on how or if they wanted to be labeled as a group. They often pushed back against being grouped all together as one culture (e.g. Hispanic, Latinx) and much preferred identifying with their origin country. However, they still recognized a group of shared cultural habits that differentiated them from other groups in the center. Therefore, for the remainder of this article, I refer to the older adult consultants as "Spanish-speaking" because it was truly the social element that gathered them at the center. Additionally, this label does not rely on a racialized categorization of this group and more accurately represents a common element of their experience.

Disclosure Statement

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