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## Ojo Latino

### A Photovoice Project in Recognition of the Latino Presence in Pittsburgh, PA

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#### Abstract

In recent years, the Latino population has increased rapidly in areas of the United States with traditionally low concentrations of Latinos. Latinos often live scattered within these emerging communities, forced to navigate social isolation and social services not tailored to serve their cultural and linguistic needs. Latinos' invisibility in Pittsburgh, PA, manifests in the absence of records of the Latino presence in the city's museums and public archives. *Ojo Latino*, a community-engaged project, sought to advance the inclusion of the Latino community in Pittsburgh through Photovoice. This participatory expression methodology enables individuals to share their stories with the larger public through self-made photographs and narratives. The intentional organization of the project as a group activity facilitated the transfer of power over the project to participants, creating solidarity and cultivating trust. During four meetings, participants took part in a short photography training, discussed their photographs addressing the meaning of being Latino in Pittsburgh, and selected thirty-four photographs for exhibition, organizing them in four themes: Work, Customs, Family, and Landscape. *Ojo Latino* held one exhibit in a community venue and another at the University of Pittsburgh. In addition, the photographs are available in an electronic public repository. *Ojo Latino* served a dual purpose of expanding the visibility of Latinos and educating the larger non-Latino community in Pittsburgh. The *Ojo Latino* team got closer to the ways Latino immigrants see and experience the city. Their gaze challenged our own views and experiences and also spoke to the salience of nostalgia and social networks in their lives. The open discussion of what it means to be Latino in an emerging community in the United States, the opportunity to produce a visual account of it, and the public acknowledgement of the presence of this diverse population promote ethnic identity and solidarity, which have the potential to foster social and mental health and carry an important political message within a strong anti-immigrant climate.

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#### Introduction

In recent years, the Latino population in the United States has been rapidly increasing in areas with traditionally low concentrations of Latinos. In these emerging communities, Latinos often live dispersed throughout the territory, scattered and confronting social isolation. Further, the existing social services are not tailored to serve their cultural and linguistic needs.<sup>1</sup> In this situation of invisibility and lack of resources, social recognition can seem an important yet unattainable goal.<sup>2</sup> *Ojo Latino*, a community-engaged project, sought to advance the

inclusion of the Latino community in Pittsburgh through a Photovoice project, a methodology that enables individuals to share their stories with the larger public by promoting group discussions based on selected photographs.<sup>3</sup> This Pittsburgh-based project aimed at promoting Latinos' ethnic identity and recognition in a place where Latinos have otherwise remained invisible by providing an avenue for their cultural and artistic expression.

The term "Latino" has different definitions. In this article, we consider Latinos those individuals who identify themselves as Latinos, following U.S. Census Bureau parameters, which define Latinos as "those who classify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the decennial census questionnaire and various Census Bureau survey questionnaires – 'Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano' or 'Puerto Rican' or 'Cuban' – as well as those who indicate that they have 'another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.'"<sup>4</sup> We consider self-identification crucial, as nobody can decide what an individual's identity is better than that individual.<sup>5</sup> Latinos who report more discrimination, and those who perceive themselves as similar to other Latinos, exhibit stronger ethnic identification; however, the way ethnic identity develops is complex and not completely understood.<sup>6</sup> What is clear is that stronger ethnic identification protects against stressors and promotes better self-rated mental health.<sup>7</sup>

Latinos, the largest minority group in the United States, accounted for 17.6% of the total population (56.6 million) in 2015. They began moving to Pittsburgh in the early twentieth

<sup>1</sup> Samantha Artiga et al., "Health Coverage and Access to Care for Hispanics in 'New Growth Communities' and 'Major Hispanic Centers,'" *Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured*, September 1, 2006, 6, <https://www.issuelab.org/resource/health-coverage-and-access-to-care-for-hispanics-in-new-growth-communities-and-major-hispanic-centers.html>

<sup>2</sup> Patricia I. Documet et al., "Participatory Assessment of the Health of Latino Immigrant Men in a Community with a Growing Latino Population," *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 17, no. 1 (2013): 240.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris, "Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment," *Health Education & Behavior* 24, no. 3 (1997): 379–80.

<sup>4</sup> Atiya Kai Stokes-Brown, "America's Shifting Color Line? Reexamining Determinants of Latino Racial Self-Identification," *Social Science Quarterly* 93, no. 2 (2012): 316–17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>7</sup> Adriana Espinosa et al., "Ethnic Identity and Perceived Stress among Ethnically Diverse Immigrants," *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 20, no. 1 (2018): 160.

century, but since the economic recovery of the 2000s, the region has seen rapid growth in its Latino population.<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, the number of Latinos in Allegheny County, where Pittsburgh is located, increased by 71% between the last two censuses; and, in 2015, it was estimated that 24,616 Latinos lived in the area, accounting for 2% of Allegheny County's population.<sup>9</sup> In this context, Latino immigrants have settled in a scattered way because of the lack of historically consolidated Latino neighborhoods, and also because they tend to live close to their workplaces or close to transportation opportunities, bringing about social isolation. Latinos are employed mainly in construction, kitchens, and various other service industries. Social services have not kept pace with the relatively large increase in the population, resulting in an environment without adequate supports and opportunities.<sup>10</sup> Latinos' presence is rarely acknowledged, a reality made evident by the marked absence of records of the Latino population in the city's museums and public archives.

*OjO Latino* was born out of "Race-ing the Museum Pittsburgh," a workshop directed by Professors Kirk Savage and Shirin Fozi from the Department of History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh. In this workshop, a group of graduate students and faculty visited different Pittsburgh museums, libraries, and archives, aiming to look critically at how race has been publicly displayed and stored throughout the city. The absence of Latinos in these public settings was noticeable and became the impetus for the *OjO Latino* project. *OjO Latino's* goal was to fill this gap by highlighting aspects of the daily life of Latinos living in Pittsburgh. A Photovoice project based on photographs taken by Latino participants was ideally suited to this goal.

In recent decades, Photovoice, a method based on principles of emancipation and critical assessment of life developed by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, has gained popularity and has been extensively used in public health and other areas to give voice to those who are typically voiceless.<sup>11</sup> Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed is based on the principle that establishing dialogues with communities is key to recognizing existing inequalities, and that elucidating and validating the knowledge that communities have are exceptional ways to imagine and create better life conditions.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Photovoice projects are useful for producing collective meaning among marginalized groups, a goal enhanced by privileging group discussions over individual conversations with each participant or photographer.<sup>13</sup> Photovoice has served to document experiences of "invisible" communities and to address topics hard to

<sup>8</sup> Patricia I. Documet, "Latino's Health Care Access in Southwestern Pennsylvania," University of Pittsburgh, 2001, 109–10; <http://www.healthequity.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/Documet%20dissertation%202001.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> United States Census Bureau, "Community Facts. Allegheny County, Pennsylvania," accessed June 25, 2018; [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk).

<sup>10</sup> Documet et al., "Participatory Assessment," 240.

<sup>11</sup> Robin A. Evans-Agnew, Doris M. Boutain, and Marie-Anne S. Rosemberg, "Advancing Nursing Research in the Visual Era: Reenvisioning the Photovoice Process Across Phenomenological, Grounded Theory, and Critical Theory Methodologies," *Advances in Nursing Science* 40, no. 1 (2017): E1–2.

<sup>12</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Power* (London-New York: Continuum, 2005), 54.

<sup>13</sup> Robin A. Evans-Agnew, Doris M. Boutain, and Marie-Anne S. Rosemberg, "Advancing Nursing Research in the Visual Era: Reenvisioning the Photovoice Process Across Phenomenological, Grounded Theory, and Critical Theory Methodologies," *Advances in Nursing Science* 40, no. 1 (2017): E6.

explain just in words,<sup>14</sup> such as the impact of natural disasters,<sup>15</sup> minority health inequalities,<sup>16</sup> addiction recovery,<sup>17</sup> difficulties of parenting within minority communities,<sup>18</sup> or access to education for undocumented youth.<sup>19</sup> The photographs and the narratives that accompany the images shared by community members, usually in-group sessions, seek to achieve collective responses to the problems posed, and it is in those discussions where the most valuable results of the methodology emerge.<sup>20</sup>

With this premise, *Ojo Latino* relied on group discussions at all stages of the project, while sharing meals and building social bonds essential for minority group communities and intrinsic to Latino culture and essential for minority group communities. The literature likewise recommends organizing community exhibitions or other public effort to enhance visibility,<sup>21</sup> one of the most desirable outcomes for *Ojo Latino*, whose participants are members of an invisible community that holds little power—an especially urgent concern in today's anti-immigrant environment. While there is no presence of Latinos in public archives and museums, the team decided that it was most important to focus on Latinos with the least access to financial and social resources: new immigrants, those with limited English proficiency, and those who had not established professional careers.

*Ojo Latino* is part of a wave of other Photovoice projects that have been developed in emerging Latino communities all over the United States to tackle issues such as the challenges of accessing higher education among undocumented Latino youths in North Carolina, where young undocumented Latinos photographed and discussed the limbo that Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals DACA imposes on their daily lives and their future projects.<sup>22</sup> In a Photovoice conducted in Portland, Oregon, Latina mothers show how a part of the city where Latinos have been settling in the last decades is left behind by the city's progressive reforms and development, negatively affecting the community's neighborhoods and the health of its inhabitants.<sup>23</sup>

*Ojo Latino* did not pretend to exhibit professional photographic results, illustrating life in a particular region—as could be the case in the work of contemporary photographers such as Graciela Itúrbide, whose series *Juchitán* (1989), for example, offers insightful views of a specific community in her native Mexico. In *Ojo Latino*, on the contrary, all the photographs were taken by participants, none of whom had formal training in photography. In fact, some participants initially lacked confidence in taking photographs, but while going through the process discovered they had a good photographic eye. *Ojo Latino* used a research method, Photovoice, yet it was not conceived as a research project but rather as an opportunity to promote Latinos' visibility and ethnic identity.

<sup>14</sup> Amanda O. Latz, *Photovoice Research in Education and Beyond: A Practical Guide From Theory to Exhibition* (London: Routledge, 2017), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Lucy Annang et al., "Photovoice: Assessing the Long-Term Impact of a Disaster on a Community's Quality of Life," *Qualitative Health Research* 26, no. 2 (2016): 241.

<sup>16</sup> Angie Pamela Mejia et al., "From Madres to Mujeristas: Latinas Making Change with Photovoice," *Action Research* 11, no. 4 (2013): 301.

<sup>17</sup> Gretchen Miller, "Addiction Recovery Through Photovoice: Qualitative Study," *Journal of Addictive Behaviors and Therapy* 1, no. 2:7 (2017): 1.

<sup>18</sup> Uriyoán Colón-Ramos et al., "How Latina Mothers Navigate a 'food Swamp' to Feed Their Children: A Photovoice Approach," *Public Health Nutrition* 20, no. 11 (2017): 1941.

<sup>19</sup> Kashika Mohan Sahay et al., "'It's Like We Are Legally, Illegal': Latino/a Youth Emphasize Barriers to Higher Education Using Photovoice," *The High School Journal* 100, no. 1 (2016): 45.

<sup>20</sup> Wang and Burris, "Photovoice," 379–80.

<sup>21</sup> Latz, *Photovoice*, 127–33.

<sup>22</sup> Sahay et al., "'It's Like We Are Legally, Illegal,'" 48.

<sup>23</sup> Mejia et al., "From Madres to Mujeristas," 315–16.

## The *OjO Latino* Methodology

In Spanish, *ojo* means eye but it is also an informal expression to call attention to something or advise caution, invoking the power of human vision. With the name *OjO Latino*, our intention was to say “Look here!” or “Pay attention!” taking advantage of *OjO*’s spelling, visually looking like a face, easy to recognize and retain for both Spanish- and English-speaking populations. *OjO Latino* started as a student initiative from the project director (Héctor Camilo Ruiz Sánchez) and involved other students (Paulina Pardo Gaviria and Rosa DeFerrari) and faculty (Patricia Documet, Kirk Savage, Kathleen Musante, Sharon Ross, Caitlin Bruce, and Scott Morgenstern) across different schools of the University of Pittsburgh. The contributing students and faculty were in the fields of public health, anthropology, art history, communication, political science, and education. This interdisciplinary group included one Latina who had over two decades of expertise with research and volunteer work with the Latino community in Pittsburgh (Documet), and a graduate student with five years of community work with the same community (Ruiz). It also included a fluent Spanish-English bilingual graduate student with a background in public health (DeFerrari), and a professor (Savage) and a Latina graduate student (Pardo) with backgrounds in art and activism. To carry on the project and conduct the work with as much community input as possible, this multidisciplinary group obtained internal funding from the University of Pittsburgh’s Year of Diversity Initiative.

The project team used its extensive community connections to recruit participants. During a two-month period, the team distributed flyers, disseminated information through web pages and radio stations, and extended face-to-face invitations in churches, community centers, and Latino markets. The final group of participants included six men and six women who had immigrated to Pittsburgh from Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela between 1999 and 2016, and whose ages ranged between eighteen and fifty years old. Their names given by permission were: Blanca Rodriguez, Carolina Genet, Eriannys Ferrer, Gloria Herrrera, Iván Perez, Javier Alemán, Karen Chavarro, Mario García, Omar Millán, Roberto Boyzo, Roberto Hernández, and Teresa García. Only two participants were fully bilingual in Spanish and English, while the majority spoke better Spanish than English or solely Spanish. They worked in restaurants, construction, and kindergartens; some were homemakers, and some were unemployed at the time of their participation.

The project team and the participants met four times between December 2016 and February 2017 at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health to take advantage of printing and projection facilities as well as the physical space where the project team and all participants could convene. Meetings were held on Sundays, as preferred by participants, because most of them had work schedules that kept them busy on Saturdays and weekdays. Two women participants stopped attending due to religious and work duties. One woman, who did not take pictures but actively took part in the group discussions as she attended the meetings as the partner of another participant, was included in the final project as a participant. Each meeting lasted approximately four hours and offered refreshments, often typical Latin American snacks (e.g., *arepas* and *tamales*) prepared by the participants or their families and reimbursed by the project. Communication between the team and the participants was established by group text messages. This channel of instant communication enabled us to share answers and suggestions on technical issues that emerged during the photographic process and to coordinate all of the project events. The resulting meeting discussions were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded with the data analysis software NVivo 10, and a selection of photographs was publicly exhibited in two different venues in Pittsburgh and uploaded to a webpage.

At the first meeting, participants and team members introduced each other, and participants received digital cameras and a short course in photography. This brief instruction intended to give the community-photographers technical tools to visually capture their experiences as Latinos in Pittsburgh as well as to produce interesting images of aesthetic impact. It included guidelines on focus, angles, and visual symbols, stressing the importance on training the gaze on the quotidian rather than the staged subject. Participants quickly

engaged and requested that the tutorial be printed out for further reference. The course did not seek to restrict or guide the topics of the photographs; the only instruction was to document “What is it like to be Latino in Pittsburgh?” (“¿Cómo es ser latino en Pittsburgh?”). During the first meeting, we also provided ethics guidelines regarding representing other people in photographs. Photographs including body parts (e.g., a hand or feet) or people from the back were preferred to portraits. Participants received release forms to be signed by those identifiable in the photographs, in case those images were taken and shared with others as part of *OjO Latino*.

In the three subsequent meetings, each participant shared three photographs with the rest of the group, telling us why he/she took the picture and why they wanted to share it. With the help of a big TV screen, everybody could see the same picture at the same time, thus actively contributing to the group discussion by asking the participant-photographer questions and engaging follow-up comments. Each picture sparked animated discussions that brought together ideas and reactions from the entire group, enriching all of the images presented. In the first results-sharing meeting, the photographs and the overall exchange revolved around the question “What it is like to be Latino in Pittsburgh?” For the second session, participants chose to focus on one aspect of their lives, “Latino work” (“*Trabajo latino*”), because they considered it the most important to capture. While the specifics of the work carried on by immigrant Latinos (service sector, usually removed from the public eye) was one of the original premises of the project, the centrality of work in their lives organically emerged from *OjO Latino* participants, who collectively reinforced the pride they took in their professional commitments and underscored the relevance of work relations when resettling in a foreign culture.

At the end of the last discussion session, we asked participants to identify meaningful topics to guide the curatorial process of the exhibition thus transferring curatorial decisions to photographers and underlining their active engagement with the project and with their collaborating peers. In separate sticky notes, each participant wrote three topics emerging from the group discussions. We then displayed the notes and proceeded to discuss how to group the topics and structure the photographic exhibition. Four content topics emerged: work (*trabajo*), customs (*costumbres*), family (*familia*), and landscape (*paisaje*). The challenges and difficulties faced by immigrants living in Pittsburgh intersected all four topics as they were found at the core of their shared experiences.

Participants also discussed credits and authorship issues, ultimately deciding that they wanted their full name individually associated with their photographs. While the current anti-immigrant political climate was, at the beginning, a prominent concern for the *OjO Latino* team, as the Photovoice project moved from the private to the public realm of the exhibition, participants openly signaled their interest in showing their unique experiences as human beings relocated in Pittsburgh, rather than griping about political aspects of immigration situations. They confirmed the need to include pictures from all participants, giving priority, however, to those who took more pictures and attended all sessions by including more of their images in the exhibition. Finally, participants and the team looked at all the pictures and took time to select the ones that best represented each of the four topics, deciding which photographs to include in the exhibition by following agreed-upon rules. The final selection of photographs comprised a corpus of thirty-four pictures. The original plan called for two exhibitions, one in a community venue and one in a university venue. A third exhibition, a virtual repository, was added to have a long-lasting documentation of *OjO Latino*.

## Results

The account of the *OjO Latino* experiences follows the topics the participants proposed to group the photographs. Therefore, this text is organized according to the four curatorial categories of *Work*, *Family*, *Customs*, and *Landscape*. In an effort to translate the importance of these themes for the daily life of Latinos in Pittsburgh—and thus some of their experiences at the core of “What is like to be Latino in Pittsburgh?”—the photographs reproduced here are

visually analyzed in the following sections, and participants' explicate their relevance often in their own words. At the end of this section, we present an account of the exhibitions.

### Work – *Trabajo*

Work is the most robust section of the *OjO Latino* exhibition, reflecting the participants' opinion that work dignifies their presence in the United States and is, without a doubt, their main activity. Following the initial guidelines of "What it is like to be Latino in Pittsburgh?" participants chose "work" as the second topic they wanted to photograph. They said that work is the most important aspect of their daily lives and, illustratively, only two of the twelve participants could go to the first exhibition opening on Saturday at 11am because, for the rest of them, it conflicted with their working schedules.

In this context, in which work is the primary aspect of this group of Latinos' daily life, co-workers' relations have special relevance. In order to present these social relations, Omar Millán photographed two of his co-workers in downtown Pittsburgh, where they gather every morning to commute to work. Coming from different parts of the world, Omar and his co-workers speak different languages, yet they share experiences. Speaking rudimentary English during the commuting time they share every day allowed Omar to learn some vocabulary in Swahili as a means to connect with his fellow workers on a personal level. Reproduced here, one of his photographs captures Omar's co-workers' expression when he greeted them in Swahili for the first time ('habari!') (Figure 1).



**Figure 1**

Omar Millán, *With Work Colleagues at the Bus Station*, Digital photograph, Pittsburgh, PA, December 5, 2016. Courtesy of Héctor Camilo Ruiz Sánchez.



**Figure 2**

Carolina Genet, *Self-made Stilts*, Digital photograph, Pittsburgh, PA, December 5, 2016. Courtesy of Héctor Camilo Ruiz Sánchez.

Another photograph, taken by Carolina Genet, captures the renovation process of the interior of a Pittsburgh apartment done by a group of Guatemalan and Mexican men. For this image, Carolina did not focus on her own job but went in search of other Latinos at work. Besides showing the creative use of stilts to paint the ceiling more quickly and comfortably, according to Carolina, the image speaks of the workers' dedicated effort to effectively perform a professional job with excellent results (Figure 2). In Carolina's words, "We don't do this type of work in Latino countries and it is a job that must be perfect, because if you don't do it perfectly you don't get paid and the most interesting thing is how they do it, [and that they allowed] me to see the procedure of how they do it." Underscoring Carolina's statement, and according to *Ojo Latino's* group discussions, most of the participants arrived in the United States with no background in construction work and learned all their skills on the job—an accomplishment for which they showed evident pride, as reflected in several of their photographs. Carolina then clarified that the Latino workers she photographed, who came from a different country than her own, learned not only how to perform the job but also how to handle different materials as well as comprehend specific vocabulary related to their work despite not speaking English. The latter situation became evident during *Ojo Latino* discussion sessions through the participants' descriptions of photographs about Latino work and their use of specialized vocabulary to refer to specific kitchen utensils and construction tasks.



**Figure 3**

Teresa García, *Selling Tacos Under the Harsh Winter*, Digital photograph, Pittsburgh, PA, December 5, 2016. Courtesy of Héctor Camilo Ruiz Sánchez.

The third photograph pertaining to the theme of Work, reproduced here, was taken by Teresa García as she focused on Latinos' hard work and their resilience in carrying it out (Figure 3). In this photograph, Teresa captured a scene of wind and snow with one of her coworkers, whom she described as a tenacious worker who is always taking responsibility for a street taco restaurant, regardless of the weather condition, day of the week, or time of the year.

Altogether, the eight photographs composing this section present different circumstances in which Latinos acquire professional skills and perform their work. Whether showcasing an industrial kitchen or a construction site, these photographs underscore the relative confinement required in the blue-collar jobs that working-class Latino immigrants perform in Pittsburgh, thus bringing forward one of the causes for their public invisibility.

### Family – *Familia*

Participants of *OjO Latino* expressed both through their photographs and in their group sessions that family bonds are intrinsic to their lives. Moreover, one of the participants attended all four meetings with his partner and two others were siblings. In the set of photographs grouped under the theme of Family, the gaze is centered on the importance of family life by showing mother and child relations, regular trips to school and church in the company of family members, and intimate aspects of households (Figure 4). These photographs highlight parent-children relationships and domestic activities, most of them in private spaces. However, different cultural relations reach interior spaces of domestic life, thus imprinting their immigrant experience, as exemplified in Roberto Boyzo's photograph of his refrigerator which displays a calendar and drawings his daughter and son made (Figure 5). Roberto explained how, in his home country, the refrigerator's door is not usually used as a clipboard, and for him this seemed to be a distinctive U.S. habit, one that he and his family have now embraced. For Roberto, his children's drawings on his fridge reflected the paradoxes of raising a Latino family in Pittsburgh, as this photograph presents his family's adaptation to

local traditions, while the strong family bonds from his own culture remain a constant presence. In the five photographs of this section, family activities reinforce household support networks as a way to reiterate their Latino identity.



**Figure 4**

Robert Boyzo, *Attending Mass in Beechview*, Digital photograph, December 5, 2016. Courtesy of Héctor Camilo Ruiz Sánchez.



**Figure 5**

Roberto Boyzo, *Children's Drawings on the Fridge*, Digital photograph, December 5, 2016. Courtesy of Héctor Camilo Ruiz Sánchez.



**Figure 6**

Carolina Genet, *Mother and Daughter Playing Lotería*, Digital photograph, December 5, 2016. Courtesy of Héctor Camilo Ruiz Sánchez.

### Customs – *Costumbres*

In the section Customs, in which the efforts to preserve Latino traditions when living in a foreign culture become apparent, religious affiliations, home food, and traditional celebrations take a prominent role. Participants expressed that preserving these customs was a way to keep alive the links to their countries of origin, allowing them to better cope with difficulties arising throughout the process of immigration and adaptation to a strange culture. They also made clear, both in the discussions and in photographs such as Mario García's, that keeping their customs alive offers them opportunities to approach other Latinos in similar circumstances and get closer to community support networks. In Carolina Genet's picture of a mother playing with her daughter, Carolina wanted to convey the importance of intergenerational cultural transmission of traditional customs such as board games, in this case "lotería" (lottery), along with the idioms and cultural symbols that this type of game entails (Figure 6). In this photograph, she also wanted to highlight the importance of playing and sharing time with children, especially when work schedules are intense, thus becoming unique moments for parents to transmit their own culture to their children. Similarly, a photograph taken by Mario García presents religious festivities as key moments to encounter a broader Latino community rarely seen in Pittsburgh (Figure 7). It was taken in December 2016, the day of the celebration of the Lady of Guadalupe, which gathers not only Mexicans but Latinos from all nationalities, as those identified and represented in *Ojo Latino*. While individual faces are not distinguishable, and the larger context can only be imagined, religious duties expressed by gathering in church and carrying flowers are a festive opportunity to engage in public family activities that directly relate to intrinsic Latino traditions. In the ten photographs of this section, the tension between preserving autochthonous customs and adapting to new environments takes the central stage as they are expressed through food choices and newly adopted routines and appropriated spaces.



**Figure 7**

Mario García, *Lady of Guadalupe Celebration*, Digital photograph, December 5, 2016. Courtesy of Héctor Camilo Ruiz Sánchez

### Landscape – Paisaje

As reflected in the Landscape section, participants discussed the conditions of winter as an environment foreign to them all, and thus as a prominent characteristic of their immigrant condition. For some, this was their first winter, and thus its novelty was worth a photograph. Others, regardless of their time in the city, still saw the seasonal changes as a distinctive aspect of their lives in Pittsburgh, where cold temperatures are a harsh element to cope with and a metaphor of Latinos' limited social interactions. Most of the photographs displayed in this section offer a visual account of snow accumulated on tree branches or roads; winter activities such as ice-skating in downtown Pittsburgh; participants' neighborhoods; and nondescript urban landscapes.

The theme of Landscape is exemplified by Teresa García's photograph of Pittsburgh's Strip District and downtown skyline, in which Teresa captured the mural of a lion's head that she encounters daily on her way to work (Figure 8). As Teresa clarifies in relation to this photograph, "I had a problem, [...] and I said 'God, give me a sign,' and few days later this appears on a wall on my way to work, and that's why I took this picture." For Teresa, this lion represents a divine message of encouragement that appeared in moments of sorrow and despair, even though she does not understand the literal message of the mural because of her precarious English skills. Another participant, Roberto Hernandez, photographed the parking lot of one of the Pittsburgh's Goodwill stores to show the relevance of community-engaged public services (Figure 9). At Goodwill Industries, he enrolled in weekly English classes as a way to prevent depression and improve his professional skills. By sharing this photograph, Roberto underlined the importance of recurrent gathering activities as key sites of encounter that allow immigrants to counterbalance isolation. The group discussions revolved around the importance of the few family support centers, churches and institutions that help Latinos in the city by opening their doors, such as Casa San José or the Latino Family Center. Through

*OjO Latino* outcomes, participants reinforced how these are sites of refuge that provide a sense of community and practical and social tools for Latinos of different nationalities to better adapt to life in Pittsburgh. While sometimes intangible, and hence not usually directly addressed, the landscapes encountered in Allegheny County with its particular urban landmarks and seasonal variations shape the life of immigrants since they represent a marked contrast to Latinos' regions of origin, whether these are rural or urban areas from the Caribbean, Mexico, or Central and South America.



**Figure 8**

Teresa García,  
*Art on Wall- Strip District*  
Pittsburgh, Digital  
photograph, December 5,  
2016. Courtesy of Héctor  
Camilo Ruiz Sánchez.



**Figure 9**

Roberto Hernandez,  
*Parking Lot in Front of*  
*the Goodwill*, Digital  
photograph, December 5,  
2016. Courtesy of Héctor  
Camilo Ruiz Sánchez.

## The Exhibitions

The team planned three exhibitions to publicly disseminate the photographs and narratives collected within *OjO Latino*, as part of the project's goal of bringing visibility to this community. The selection of thirty-four photographs was presented at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh in Beechview and at the University of Pittsburgh. Displayed in medium-size printings (11 x 17 in.), they are also now available in a virtual repository. To advertise the exhibitions, we enlisted the help of Casa San José, a local, well-trusted Latino social service organization. Information about the exhibitions in Beechview and the University of Pittsburgh as well as the digital location of *OjO Latino's* virtual repository was further distributed through postcards featuring five of the thirty-four exhibited photographs.

The first of these three exhibitions opened on Saturday, March 25, 2017, at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh in Beechview, a neighborhood with an increasing concentration of Latinos, Latino grocery stores, and churches with services in Spanish. Forty people joined the opening, which included a round table and a question-and-answer session with two of the participants sharing their perspectives on the project and their experiences as Latino immigrants in Pittsburgh. *Tamales* were served for attendees, most of whom were friends, family, and colleagues of the *OjO Latino* photographers and the university team as well as a journalist from the city's major newspaper. A few people from the neighborhood were also in attendance. The discussion was animated and made room for emerging ideas on how to keep moving the exhibition into different formats such as having bigger prints of some of the images in public locations around the city as well as transforming some of them into graffiti art. Although these initiatives are yet to come to fruition, it was exciting to see visitors and participants engaged in thinking how the project could grow. The exhibition, with curatorial texts in English and Spanish, remained on view for two weeks, allowing neighbors, both Latinos and non-Latinos, to see the photographs in their own time and in the same context in which some of them were taken, thus making the participants' life experiences in Pittsburgh more approachable.

Taking place in a different context, the second exhibition opened on Monday, April 10, 2017, at the commons of the Graduate School of Public Health building at the University of Pittsburgh, where *OjO Latino* was available for an academic population largely composed of domestic and international students and scholars. Approximately fifty people attended the opening, most of them affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh. As in the previous opening, three community photographers participated in the round table as main speakers. They shared some of their experiences of migration and settlement, and how living in Pittsburgh represented hope, challenges and, many times, also fear. They strongly expressed that the Latino population in the City of Pittsburgh is composed of hard-working people, who many times are escaping harsh economic and social situations in their countries of origin and are shaping their futures in the United States taking blue-collar jobs, and usually with very basic English skills and reduced chances to go back home, even for visits. Beyond their photographic production, these participants' verbal contributions at the second exhibition opening—where photographs remained on view for three weeks—reaffirmed that the Pittsburgh Latino community is growing but still lacks a political and visible presence. It also confirmed that efforts to bring visibility, such as *OjO Latino*, are critical in a city that benefits from their work in service sectors but does not openly acknowledge the presence of Latinos, let alone their particular living contexts.

Based on the archival goals of *OjO Latino*, the third exhibition is a virtual repository—publicly available online at <http://ojolatinopittsburgh.omeka.net/>—containing the selection of photographs previously displayed and similarly laid out into the four curatorial categories of the physical exhibitions.<sup>24</sup> The rationale behind this virtual repository is to preserve and make publicly available material evidence of Latinos' experiences in Pittsburgh as well as their efforts

<sup>24</sup> Latz, *Photovoice*, 127–33.

to share those experiences. If the project emerged as a response to the absence of a Latino imprint in Pittsburgh's public archives, *OjO Latino's* virtual repository constitutes an effort to overcome this situation by recording both in voice and image the life experiences of this growing population.

## Reflections

*OjO Latino* served a dual purpose. In addition to enabling Latino community members to tell their story and show pride in it, the project educated the larger community about their experience. We believe that attending the exhibitions and reading the related newspaper coverage engendered understanding and dialogue by building bridges and facilitating direct communication.<sup>25</sup> The *OjO Latino* project was able to recruit and retain thirteen out of fifteen participants and make visible their presence in the city through public exhibitions and round table discussions. While the project participants explored commonalities such as religion and family, they also became more aware of interesting cultural and linguistic differences when photographing and discussing people from other Latin American countries. The project not only raised their visibility to non-Latinos but also helped them become visible to each other in their diversity. This, in turn, promoted their sense of ethnic identity, not always based on sameness but sometimes on difference within shared linguistic and cultural parameters.

Many other interested community members could not participate, citing a variety of reasons, most notably not being able to meet on weekends because of work, time constraints, or lack of transportation. Their reality of working long hours, often sixty hours a week, and of living in a city with limited bus routes on weekends highlights their difficulties in committing to collective efforts, in spite of their manifest interest. These circumstances explain why the majority of attendees to the first public exhibition were mostly people from academia and Pittsburgh's art scene, although this may be considered another expression of the reality of Latino life in Pittsburgh, a city with a significant population of international students and scholars.

Most of the *OjO Latino* team members and participants who began the project have a continued involvement with it and were even willing to extend it beyond the planned schedule. There are several potential reasons for this commitment to the project. First, since the first day, when participating in a short photographic course, participants found both aesthetic and social value in taking pictures and engaging in extended group discussion meetings, which contrasts with some of the literature saying that training Photovoice participants in photography introduces bias and imposes limits.<sup>26</sup> Second, they repeatedly spoke of the pride derived from their work, family and customs. Third, they were proud to show their photographs publicly and to display their names. *OjO Latino* was part of their ethnic identity formation and affirmation.

The *OjO Latino* team intentionally organized group rather than individual discussions with each photographer and made every effort to transfer power over the project to participants.<sup>27</sup> We encouraged them to decide on topics to focus on and to exhibit, to decide on rules for exhibitions, and to be the main speakers in openings. Participants said they enjoyed taking part in decisions about the photographs' content and the format of the final exhibition. This

<sup>25</sup> Diana Nelson Jones, "Ojo Latino' Photo Exhibition Gives Ethnic Groups a Voice," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 3, 2017; <http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/diana-nelson-jones/2017/04/03/Diana-Nelson-Jones-Ojo-Latino-photo-exhibit-Pitt-Public-Health-Commons/stories/201704030009>.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Cox and Melanie Benson, "Visual Methods and Quality in Information Behaviour Research: The Cases of Photovoice and Mental Mapping," *Information Research: An International Electronic Journal* 22, no. 2 (2017), n.p.

<sup>27</sup> Evans-Agnew, Boutain, and Roseberg, "Advancing Nursing Research," E3-4.

dynamic blurred the line of authority between participants and the project team, thus creating spaces of solidarity among all members of the project. Frequent telephonic and text communications among participants and the project director may have contributed to the team spirit. Specifically, in informal follow-up calls, participants said they found value in learning about other people's lives and different Spanish expressions from their fellow Latin Americans, enjoyed getting together, discovered aspects of photography that they found interesting to explore, and were excited about seeing their pictures exhibited. Faculty and students involved in the project likewise developed and cemented their community relationships, and challenged, as expected, their own stereotypes.<sup>28</sup> For example, we learned that community members wanted to be publicly recognized and to share their names along with their photographic work. We also learned that they wanted to tell not only their own stories, but also the stories of the people close to them, such as their co-workers, neighbors, and families. It also became evident that community members actively work to preserve their traditions while at the same time enjoying acquiring new cultural practices in the United States.

Photovoice projects frequently forgo the exhibit and often no reason is offered for this decision.<sup>29</sup> For the *OjO Latino* team and participants, sharing the work publicly was one of the main objectives because it was the one thing that would increase visibility for Pittsburgh's Latino community and also because it can have an empowering effect on participants.<sup>30</sup> This is probably one of the reasons why all photographers wanted their name associated with the photographs they took. We believe the exhibitions may have an even larger beneficial role in invisible, emerging Latino communities, such as Pittsburgh's. As we have emphasized, the extensive discussions and highlighting of the group's experience helped participants explore and strengthen their ethnic identity. Strong ethnic identity, in turn, protects against stress and mental health problems among immigrants.<sup>31</sup>

One of the objectives of the Photovoice method is to achieve social change.<sup>32</sup> With *OjO Latino*, we did not explicitly engage in action planning for policy change. This is likely the next logical step and one that needs to be undertaken in collaboration with community members and community organizations in the Pittsburgh area. Yet, through the photographs participants took, and through their narratives, we invited the public to learn about the city that is lived and transited by Latino immigrants. We got closer to the ways Latino immigrants see the city, how they navigate it and how they inhabit it. Their gaze challenged our own views and experiences of Pittsburgh such as the beauty and harshness of winter, the many kitchens in which Latinos work, or the roofs they fix. Their gaze also speaks of how nostalgia for the homeland collides with the opportunities available for Latinos in Pittsburgh to make a living for themselves and their families who live with them in Pittsburgh or who are back at home. We learned how crucial the informal connections that exist among immigrants are, and how they truly desire to better integrate with the broader society, because being isolated and anonymous creates a heavy burden in their lives.

The *OjO Latino* team believes that this project connected Latinos from different origins, linked the University of Pittsburgh with participants, and represented a step toward creating a Latino presence in Pittsburgh's public archives. This work is also part of our desire not only to document *OjO Latino* itself, but also to leave a public trace of the Latino presence in Pittsburgh

<sup>28</sup> Cox and Benson, "Visual Methods"; Sahay et al., "It's Like We Are Legally, Illegal," 59–60.

<sup>29</sup> Evans-Agnew, Boutain, and Roseberg, "Advancing Nursing," E8.

<sup>30</sup> Goldie Komaie et al., "Photovoice as a Pedagogical Tool to Increase Research Literacy Among Community Members," *Pedagogy in Health Promotion* 4, no. 2 (2018): 111; Cox and Benson, "Visual Methods"; Sahay et al., "It's Like We Are Legally, Illegal," 50.

<sup>31</sup> Espinosa et al., "Ethnic Identity," 160; Amy L Ai et al., "Racial/Ethnic Identity and Subjective Physical and Mental Health of Latino Americans: An Asset Within?," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 53, no. 1–2 (2014): 181.

<sup>32</sup> Mejia et al., "From Madres to Mujeristas," 301–2; Sahay et al., "It's Like We Are Legally, Illegal," 48; Evans-Agnew, Boutain, and Roseberg, "Advancing Nursing Research," E1; Colón-Ramos et al., "How Latina Mothers Navigate a 'food Swamp,'" 1942.

and our reflections about it. Moreover, and as a concluding reflection, promoting open discussions of what it means to be Latino in an emerging community and the opportunity to produce a visual account of it promotes ethnic identity formation. Acknowledgement of the presence of this diverse population creates space for recognition with dignity and opposes uninformed stereotypes that lead to hatred campaigns and policies that noticeably impact the social, mental, and physical health of Latino immigrants in the United States.

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