Exploring Identity Development Through the Expressive Arts among Immigrant Youth, A Literature Review

Jessika De Castro
decastro@lesley.edu

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Exploring Identity Development Through the Expressive Arts among Immigrant Youth, A

Literature Review

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Jessika De Castro

Expressive Arts Therapy

Thesis Instructor: Tamar Hadar, PhD, MT-BC

Thesis Consultant: Eve Lyons, LMHC
Abstract

According to the APA’s Presidential Task Force on Immigration (2012), the immigrant population within the US increases every year. Immigration to a new country increases risk factors for young immigrants, resulting in a negative impact on their mental health. It has been shown in the literature that arts-based approaches can be extremely helpful in the treatment of mental health issues brought on by the stressors of immigration and when people are dealing with a sense of loss towards their country of origin. For first generation immigrants, coming to the US during their adolescence, as young adults, means that they are still developing a sense of identity. In that case, the change in environment is shown to potentially have a negative effect not only on the individual’s mental health but also on their sense of identity. In my thesis I argue that participating in expressive arts-based groups may be helpful in cultivating resilience, creating a supportive community, and in providing a container for immigrants’ experiences, particularly for first generation immigrants as they develop their identities and navigate the different aspects that help to shape their identities.

*Keywords:* first generation, immigration, youth, adolescence, identity, acculturation, mental health, expressive arts therapy, resilience, community
Exploring Identity Development Through the Expressive Arts among Immigrant Youth, A Literature Review

Introduction

This thesis will focus on the benefits of utilizing the expressive arts in the exploration of identity development in first generation immigrants. In the literature it states that an individual’s identity is molded by the environment they live and by their personal experiences (Frideres, 2002). The literature shows that people tend to base their views of the world on the culture they were raised in (Esquivel et al., 2020). What does this mean for people who were born in one country and immigrated to a host country whose culture is completely new to them? When an individual or family immigrate to a new country, they go through the process of acculturation, which has been defined in the literature as the way people of the non-dominant group are influenced to take on, the norms, values, and behaviors of the host country (Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2008). Different psychological distresses that can be experienced by immigrants going through the acculturation process and one specific distress relates to the loss of identity (Farrugio, 2010). There are a few different ways that an individual can acculturate and depending on whether or not they decide to take on aspects of both cultures or reject one and completely immerse themselves in the other, stressors can be brought on for the individual as they continue to develop their identity (Cariello et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2009; Falicov, 2006; Giano et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2018; Pereira, 2019; Perez & Arnold-Berkovits, 2018; Svensson & Syed, 2019; Tikhonav et al., 2019). It is beneficial for immigrants to acknowledge the effects that their immigrant experience has had on their identities in order to lead more successful lives in their host country (Rong & Fitchett, 2008). The literature emphasizes that helpful coping mechanisms
for this population has been to develop a community and to establish supporting social connections (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).

Many cultures deploy artistic means to represent the values and unity their people share. Some have specific dances and most, if not all, have a song or national anthem that represents their country. In that sense, the expressive arts could potentially be a powerful modality for exploring identity development. Several researchers argued for the advantageous use of the arts with immigrant populations (Akthar, Z. & Lovell, A., 2018, Li, Wendy Wen, 2012, Linesch, D., et al., 2012, Linesch, D., et al., 2014). Linesch, D., et al. (2012) emphasized how the arts can help immigrants communicate their complex experiences of acculturation. I believe that an intermodal approach, often utilized by the expressive arts modality, may be most beneficial in creating a way for young immigrants to reflect upon their own immigration experience and for cultivating a space where they can feel comfortable expressing their stories, challenges they may have experienced, and the effects it all may have had on their identity development. Linesch et al. (2014) showed how the creative process supports empowerment through giving a person the experience of having a voice, community, and help relieving psychological distress. The arts can be appreciated by people of various backgrounds and can become the common language when one is absent. Linesch et al. (2014) showed that art making can become, “a form of meaning making, communication, catharsis, and emotion regulation” (p. 127). I believe that art making and community building within a group can promote and encourage the reflection of individuals immigrants in their experiences as well as support their exploration of its effects on their identity development.

My inspiration and motivation for this topic came from my own immigration experience. Growing up I can remember never speaking my native tongue out of embarrassment. At times,
my embarrassment stemmed from the fact that I was different, and at times the embarrassment stemmed from not being able to say all the words in a language that was considered a part of me, fluently. I remember rejecting my country of origin and listening intently as I was taught the history of the United States in school. It was not until I went through a transitional period in my life, when I started to think about what exactly my identity composition was. I took a course during my undergraduate program called “Global Voices”. Through the readings and assignments for that course I was able to reflect and explore what it meant for me to have been born in Brazil and raised in the United States. At the time, I wish I had had a group of people I felt comfortable sharing my thoughts and experiences with. I was grateful for the writing assignments in that course because it gave me some space to explore and share with at least one person what I was going through.

In my thesis inquiry, I would like to propose the idea of creating such a space for young immigrants experiencing the same turmoil I once did as a young adult: coming to terms with accepting not only my immigrant experience and what that meant for my identity, but ultimately coming to accept myself and who I am as a whole. In the discussion section I shall share a little more on my personal immigrant experience and how I learned the positive aspects needed for positive mental health amongst immigrants with creative expression being one of the key components.

My ultimate goal during my second placement internship was to form a group and implement an expressive arts-based curriculum designed for first generation immigrants to explore their immigration experiences, their cultural identities, and create a supportive therapeutic community of people who share similar experiences. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, my internship was completed remotely and during this time it was a
difficult process to identify clients who were first generation immigrants and fit the age range. Another limitation to trying to cultivate this group during the pandemic would have been holding group meetings virtually via Telehealth. Telehealth has proven a useful tool during these difficult times, but with an expressive arts based group, there would be some aspects of the process that would unfortunately be lost had the group been held via Telehealth. For example, members not being able to share their experiences and their art the presence of the other group members and not being able to hold the space for each other.

Focusing on the use of expressive arts with immigrant youth population, I will start this review by providing a short description of the immigrant population in the United States. I will proceed with defining acculturation and the four different ways immigrants have been seen to acculturate once living in a host country. Next, I will expand on the use of expressive arts therapy within this population. Afterwards I will explore the ways expressive arts therapy has been beneficial to support this population, as well as certain limitations that have been previously identified within the research. Finally, I will extend recommendations for further research utilizing expressive arts therapy with first generation immigrants.

**Literature Review**

The goal of this literature review is to take a look at how expressive arts therapy can be utilized in supporting first generation immigrants as they develop their sense of identity while trying to balance living in one culture and holding on to aspects of their origin culture. First, taking a look at what is known about the immigrant population in the United States. Next, what has been documented so far about the effects on a person’s mental health immigrating to another country can have. Later, taking a look at how culture plays a role in shaping an individual’s identity. And finally, looking at how expressive arts therapy can be utilized in bridging the gaps
for individuals who find they are struggling with aspects of both their host culture and origin culture and proposing an expressive arts intervention.

**Immigrant Population in the United States**

The immigrant population of the United States is made up of about 39.9 million people, most of which are naturalized or authorized citizens (APA, Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2012) and in 2017, this population had increased to 44.4 million people (Radford, 2019). Another notable fact about the US population is “One in five persons currently residing in the United States is a first- or second-generation immigrant, and nearly a quarter of children under the age of 18 have an immigrant parent”, (APA, Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2012, p. 1). The current crises the US is facing have put targets on immigrants making them viewed as being the source of all the problems and have increased the difficulty for these people to live peaceful lives within their new home (APA, Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2012). The literature shows that immigrants are resilient even though they are faced with a number of stressors and risks including poverty, discrimination, taxing, occupations, fewer years of schooling, and social isolation etc. (APA, Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2012). But despite this resilience, there are still challenges those members of the population face on a developmental level. The literature states, “Many immigrants from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa encounter racial discrimination for the first time in the United States, which can have a substantial impact on their health and mental health”, (APA, Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2012). It becomes difficult for immigrant people to live in this country when they are seen as “taking away jobs and bringing undesirable cultural practices” by native-born Americans who will then discriminate against members of the immigrant population by picking them out based on accents, unusual names, clothes, etc. (APA, Presidential Task Force,
Immigrants will be discriminated against at their places of work, schools, neighborhoods, services agencies and many other microsystems and if they are “racially distinct from the majority” this puts them at an even higher risk of discrimination (APA, 2012). Given the increased number of stressors and risks faced by immigrants, there is a great need for cultural sensitivity from health and mental health professionals working with the members of immigrant populations. The literature states that there are a number of mental health consequences that immigrants have to face after immigrating to a new country including acculturation and identity stressors along with discrimination (Cariello et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2009; Falicov, 2006; Giano et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2018; Pereira, 2019; Perez & Arnold-Berkovits, 2018; Svensson & Syed, 2019; Tikhonav et al., 2019). Given this it is of utmost importance that clinician are made aware and develop a sensitivity to the immigrant experience when working with individuals of this population in order to provide them with the help they need.

**Acculturation and Mental Health**

The process in which immigrants adapt to the culture of their host country is known in the literature as acculturation and involves the following aspects, “community of resettlement, experience of immigrant group, and economic context of the larger society” (APA, 2012). There are a few different ways a member of an immigrant population can experience the acculturation process. Someone can acculturate to a host culture by completely rejecting the new host culture and staying emerged in their origin culture (separation), assimilating completely to the new host culture and therefore rejecting their origin culture (assimilation), rejecting both their new host culture and their origin culture (marginalization), or taking aspects of both their new host culture and their origin culture and incorporating them into their identity (integration), (Sam & Berry, 2010). In the literature it stated that those who are able to go through the acculturation process
by integration are better able to adapt compared to those who acculturate through separation, assimilation, or marginalization, (Sam & Berry, 2012). It also states in the literature that there is stress that can go along with the acculturation process that has been seen as a source to mental health issues for immigrants (Sam & Berry, 2010). In the literature a number of mental health issues have been linked to members of immigrant populations including depression, anxiety, issues with identity, low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, marital problems, and substance use (Cariello et al., 2019; Dow, 2011; Negy et al., 2009; Tikhonov et al., 2019). Depending on how an individual goes through the acculturation process after immigration to a new country, they may be faced with stressors that could negatively impact their mental health and lead to the development of psychological disorders.

Another important factor in the acculturation process mentioned in the literature is the age at which a person immigrates to a new country seeing as children will learn the new language and culture with ease and quickly whereas for adults the process of learning the new language and culture may be more difficult and or take more time (APA, 2012). This means that the mental health consequences discussed in the previous section will affect the members of immigrant populations differently across the generations.

**Culture and Identity Development**

The literature states that a person’s identity develops throughout their lifetime but during adolescence is when an individual begins to consider how their identity will impact their life and are more self-conscious about who they are or are becoming (Erikson, 1968). As stated in the literature, an individual’s identity is not only influence by their genetics, internal factors, but also their environment and experiences, external factors (Frideres, 2002). We do not just create our identities on our own, there are always outside factors that come into play and shape the
development of individual identities. In the literature it states that having a more positive self-esteem is needed in order for people to develop a more positive identity of themselves (Rosenberg, 1965). Meaning an individual with a positive outlook of themselves, will most likely also develop a more positive identity. Society can also be a big factor in identity development. Frideres states that aspects like race and gender can have more importance to an individual’s identity since they can play a major role in almost all social situations (Frideres, 2002). If race can play a major role in a person’s identity, it is safe to say that cultural background also must play a major role.

**Identity formulation among youth and immigrant youth**

Erik Erikson, a psychologist in the 1960s (Erikson, 1968) argued that adolescence is a crucial time for identity development. Erikson claimed that during this time in a young person’s life they go through a process he viewed as “Identity vs. Identity Diffusion” and during this process they would either develop a secure sense of identity or a weak sense of identity (Erikson, 1968). He also claimed that adolescence’s interactions with others are what would ultimately determine weather or not they would develop a secure or weak sense of self (Erikson, 1968). This period in a young person’s life already comes with its own stresses. In the life of an immigrant youth, however, even more stress is added, which can lead to negative consequences in regards to their mental health (Kopala & Esquivel, 1994). The need to feel accepted during that time in a young person’s life can be stressful enough but for a young immigrant, who has different expectations and opinions of what is accepted and what is not constantly being thrown at them from family, friends, and social media (Phinney et al., 2001), it could very possibly lead to a conflicting sense of identity and ultimately mental health disorders (Rumbaut, 1994).

**Expressive Arts Therapy**
Shaun McNiff, a leading expressive therapist in the expressive arts field, has argued that through human history the arts have been used for healing and have been an important part of life (Malchiodi, 2004). Throughout history people can be seen turning to the arts as a form of preventative treatment and also for healing (Malchiodi, 2004). Malchiodi (2004) states that, “The creative arts therapies became more widely known during the 1930s and 1940s when psychotherapists and artists began to realize that self-expression through nonverbal methods such as painting, music making, or movement might be helpful for people with sever mental illness”. The expressive therapies began to find its place within mental health treatment because they proved useful in the treatment of patients who were not benefiting from talk therapy (Malchiodi, 2004). The arts can be a great way for people to get in touch with and connect to their personal experiences (PACFA, 2012). This can be achieved by creating one’s own art, thus creating a story and by using different forms of art such as poems, dramas, paintings, books, music, etc. to represent a person’s story (PACFA, 2012). When a client brings the arts into therapy, they can explore different experiences by tapping into memories and expressing them in new and sometimes tangible ways in order to process them (PACFA, 2012). People can choose to use one art form or multiple art forms which also allows for deeper meanings and understandings to be uncovered (PACFA, 2012). Creative arts therapy, or expressive arts therapy as it is known here in the US, can be defined as the use of artistic modalities such as visual arts, music, dance/movement, drama, etc. to provide a deeper insight and awareness of the self by tapping into a person’s imagination and creativity and ultimately increasing someone’s self acceptance (ANZATA, 2012).

*Arts based therapies with immigrant populations*
One of the most beneficial aspects of the use of arts based therapy approaches with immigrant populations relates to how “art transcends barriers of cross-cultural communication”, (Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006). Art proved to be an invaluable tool for therapists in bridging the cultural gap between themselves and their clients (Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006). Through the use of arts based practices, therapists are better able to adapt their treatment for clients of other cultures because of the universal meaning images can carry (Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006). Art can be used to find common ground between the therapist and client, whereas verbal language may highlight differences between them and prevent them from building a therapeutic relationship (Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006). Though this notion does come with some limitations. It has been stated in the literature that depending on the culture, the way people express themselves would depend on a number of social economical, gender, and racial systems (Cattaneo, 1994). It has since been recommended by Cattaneo (1994) that more focus and value be place on each client’s subjective experience. In order for art therapy to be cross-culturally sound a therapist would need to make sure that they have evaluated that it would be an appropriate approach for their client based on that individual’s experience and personal meaning (Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006). Though there is a limited amount of research in the use of arts based therapy with immigrant populations, the literature available shows a shift from focusing on the importance of art therapy being universality to concentrating on art therapy properties that can be beneficial to culturally diverse clients (Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006).

Researchers Akthar, Z. and Lovell, A. (2018), explored the use of art therapy when working with refugee children by analyzing the researchers’ perspective and experiences. For this study the researchers conducted three semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected. The sample size consisted of three refugee children and the
researchers stated (Akthar & Lovell, 2018) that this was the ideal sample size because it allowed them to collect more in depth data and to be able to thoroughly analyze the data. For transferability, the researchers separated their findings into five categories based on the common themes they found when interviewing the participants and gave in depth discussion and reports for each of the five themes. Also, throughout the discussion section the researchers made connections to previous research that supported their findings fortifying the conformability of their research article. By describing the limitations of their research, the researchers were able to increase the dependability of their article as well. Through the analysis of the art-based data collected through their research, the following themes were identified giving a voice, rebuilding trust, opening wounds, healing pain, sharing stories, and exploring identity (Akthar & Lovell, 2018). Through their research, Akthar & Lovell (2018) also determined that the use of art-based therapy approaches would be useful in therapy with refugee children because it creates a safe place for the participants to share their experiences, heal, and find their voice (Akthar & Lovell, 2018).

Linesch et al. (2012) demonstrated how the use of art therapy was beneficial in examining an immigrant family’s acculturation and experience. The participants were recruited with the help of a parish priest who identified eight families who fit the criteria: had an immigrant experience, at least one adolescent member, and were willing to commit three Saturdays to dedicate to their participation in the study (Linesch et al., 2012). The groups were separated into three focus groups (women, men, and adolescents), which were organized according to issues described in past literature based on gender and age (Linesch et al., 2012). The women’s group had a Spanish speaking female art therapist facilitating the group, the men’s group had a Spanish speaking male art therapist facilitating the group, and the adolescents’ group
had bilingual art therapists facilitating their group (Linesch et al., 2012). Linesch et al. (2012) collected data for the study through the observation of the focus groups, participant questionnaires, and interviewing the families.

Findings showed that the families were able gain some insight on the struggles and challenges they faced through the creation of art (Linesch, et al., 2012). Linesch et al. (2012), mentioned several limitations of the study, which included the small, non-randomized convenience sampling when selecting participants and also the different ways in which the focus groups were facilitated, may have influenced the result in different themes being observed if the study is repeated.

Linesch et al. (2014) conducted a follow up study to the Linesch et al. (2012) study. In this research study case study methodology was used to demonstrate the usefulness of art therapy in expressing and understanding the challenges and struggles that can occur with immigration and acculturation (Linesch et al., 2014). Similarly, the parish priest was utilized when recruiting participants for the study and the participants were separated into two groups, an immigrant women’s group and a Hispanic/Latino youth group. Each group was facilitated by a Spanish-speaking art therapist and met two consecutive Saturdays (Linesch et al., 2014). Data was collected from each group through observation of the groups and through research team discussion, which took place after the groups, revolving around the processes, artworks created and the extensive notes taken by the research team. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with two participants from each group. At the end of this study Linesch et al. (2014) did not discuss any limitations that may have been seen in the study. I think that though there were no set criteria for the participants, it was still limiting in the sense that they did not have a men’s group, which was included in the Linesch et al. (2012) study. Follow up interviews were
included in this study but only for a couple of participants from each group and I feel that each participant should have been given the chance to debrief as well after the study ended. Also, I am wondering since the participants all go to the same church, if that brings up any ethical issues around confidentiality since they all knew each other.

The results of Linesch’s study described the participants’ reactions after the group had ended. The participants found the art making process to be and invaluable experience when it comes to expressing their feelings such as fear and aggression (Linesch et al., 2014). The group of women described how making art allowed them to reflect on personal histories, their roots, and seeing themselves as a beacon to pass on their traditions (Linesch et al., 2014). The group of adolescence stated the art making process gave them a voice and supported them in regaining possession of their feelings (Linesch et al., 2014). Linesch et al. (2014) states that this study, “…illustrates the particular value of using imagery to explore the complicated experiences of members of our community who struggles with the consequences of immigration and acculturation” (p. 131).

Expressive therapies for youth immigrants

Among the positive factors that promotes positive mental health and resilience in young immigrants is art-based interventions along with resilience, family involvement, peer support, school based interventions, and accessible community resources (Harker, 2001, Linesch, et al., 2012). The literature states that art therapy-based interventions have been beneficial for immigrant clients of Latinx descent to acquire some understanding of themselves and insight into their personal experiences (Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006). Bermudez and ter Maat (2006) preformed a survey study gathering the insight of 27 therapists whom have used art therapy with their Hispanic clients. They also gathered the opinions of the therapists on what they thought are
limitations in the use of art therapy with this population and what they thought were the most beneficial techniques they used and what were the least, (Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006). Overall the participants of the study stated that they found art therapy to be “very helpful with Hispanic clients” (Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006). Arts based approaches, the authors claim, can help promote the health development of cultural identity, navigate and integrate values from both their origin culture and new host culture, and processing past traumas within their immigrant experiences (Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006). Bermudez & ter Maat (2006) also state that though there is not a substantial amount of research of the use of arts based interventions within diverse cultural populations, various authors within the field appear to agree that the use of arts based interventions would be beneficial for various cultural populations. In an earlier study done by ter Maat (1997b), the latter suggested that art based groups for Hispanic immigrant children in middle school allowed the children to cultivate a sense of supportive community amongst themselves, while also allowing them to gain deeper insight of their personal experiences and grieve the loss of their original homes. The arts can be grounding and provide a container for difficult experiences. I believe the arts can also be used to cultivate a sense of community within a group of first generation immigrants which will allow them the creative freedom to express their immigrant journeys and share them with people who have had similar experiences.

**Discussion**

The literature I explored highlighted both the need of immigrant youth for more support in the crucial stage of their identity formation (Erikson, 1968, Kopala & Esquivel, 1994, Phinney et al., 2001, Rumbaut, 1994), as well as the opportunities embedded in the expressive arts to address such challenges (ter Maat, 1997b, Bermudez & ter Maat, 2006, Akthar, Z. and Lovell, A., 2018, Linesch et al., 2012, Linesch et al., 2014).
In this regard, I wish to suggest an expressive arts group for first generation immigrants. In the following paragraph I will share a little of my own personal immigration story and how it inspired my current study.

My family immigrated to this country when I was about 2 years old in 1998. At that time we had very little knowledge of the English language and knew almost no other people around us who were immigrants let alone Brazilian immigrants. After being here for a few months, my parents started to build connections with neighbors and found people who were Portuguese, though they were not Brazilian, they did speak Portuguese and it was a very big help to have people around who spoke our language. Growing up, I got to experience first hand a lot of what had been talked about in the literature and in previous sections of this thesis. The Portuguese community I grew up in has a folk dancing group where younger members and older members of the community come together to dance and share in that cultural experience. They would meet every week and the younger members would learn these old dances from the older members in the group. The members were of various generations of immigrants and they would still come together to share in experiences that would connect them to their roots and give them a sense of community. It was very clearly apparent within the various members how important this group was to them and how important it was that they got to come together and not only dance, but play instruments and also dress in the traditional clothing that their ancestors and grandparents would have worn in their origin country. Through their creative expression they were able to build resilience and a supportive community for themselves and their children. The whole family would be a part of the community and share in the experiences.

My recommendation is to create a group for first generation immigrants with ages ranging from adolescents to young adulthood, whom are currently still developing their sense of
identity and finalizing the details of who they are. Identity development can be hard for a young person who has lived in the same place all their lives, now imagine going through all the stressors young people experience but adding on stressors that have to do with how they fit in or are perceived by the members of their host culture or even their family members who may not be able to adapt as easily. The idea is to cultivate a space where young immigrants will be able to develop resilience by gaining a sense of being part of a small supportive community of people with similar experiences. Through the arts people gain the opportunity to express their feelings and experiences without risk by providing them with an outlet and container. The arts allow us to explore difficult experiences and emotions while also providing a container for them.

Given the increase seen in immigrant populations, there is a clear need for more research to be done in regard to mental health within immigrant populations, especially with immigrant populations from cultures that have not been sufficiently researched before. As a future clinician, my hope is to maintain a culturally sensitive practice where I can sympathize with my clients who come from various backgrounds.

As an expressive arts therapist, I hope to create welcoming spaces where my clients feel comfortable enough to explore their experiences through the arts. It has been stated in the literature that arts-based interventions are among the positive factors that promotes the development of positive mental health for immigrant youths. By taking into consideration all of the risk factors these young immigrants are facing when they move to the US, we can be more mindful of the harm that can be done and how this may have an effect on these young people’s mental health. By creating a space where these young immigrants will be free to explore the artist and cultural traditions of their home lands, share them with peers, and explore the new cultural traditions of their host country, it may be possible that this could potentially help them to
find a balance between their origin culture and host culture within their developing sense of identity.

As was stated above, the Covid-19 pandemic was a barrier when it came time for me to find members for this group. Though I was not able to observe the artistic process of any clients or create art based on any transference I might have experienced while facilitating the group, I was still able to do my own artistic response. Figure 1 is an image of the painting I created in response to my immigration experience and the process of writing and researching for this thesis. During my journey as a grad student, trees have been a very big theme for me. In my artistic representation (Figure 1) there are two trees pictured, one above and one below. I used these trees to represent the two sides of my identity, Brazilian immigrant and naturalized US citizen.

Figure 1 **Blended Identity** (Acrylic paint on canvas paper, 9x12”)
The national colors for each of the countries, my origin country and my host country, were used to paint the roots, trunks, and branches. It can be observed that one of the trees is bigger and has produced some fruit whereas the other tree is a bit smaller and appears to be starting to bloom, this represents how I spent so much time nurturing my American identity and have just started to give myself the space to explore and accept the Brazilian side of my identity. Now the roots of both trees were created intertwining because they are one and the same. The roots are what supply the trees with the resources they need to survive and for me I would not be who I am without the roots I have back in Brazil. But I also would not be who I am without the roots I myself have planted here in the United States. Participants of an expressive arts based group shared that the art making process was helpful for them when it came to expressing their fears and reflecting on their past in order to better be able to share their experiences with the group (Linesch et al., 2014). Another participant stated, “…her experience with both cultures was shaping her dual identity and that her ability to integrate herself in both cultures has helped her” (p. 130). Much like the participants of Linesch et al.’s study (2014), art making has helped me to explore my fears as a young child and reflect on how my identity can be shaped by the values and ideals of both the cultures I grew up with and not just the one I am currently living in.
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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: Dr Tamar Hadar, MT-BC