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Transnational Colombian Adoptee Resilience Through the Lens of Liberation Psychology

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ABSTRACT

The Colombian transnational adoptee diaspora is a marginalized subgroup of the Latine community seldom acknowledged yet growing in solidarity. As evidence of the illicit Colombian transnational adoption practices have intensified so have the efforts to support adoptee social justice rights. This article outlines how Liberation Psychology principles serve to facilitate action to address historical injustices promulgated by illicit adoption practices. The mental health consequences impacting adult Colombian transnational adoptees are described. Implications for psychologists and mental health providers are discussed.

Keywords
Liberation Psychology, Colombian adoptees, transnational adoption

RESUMEN

La diáspora transnacional colombiana de personas adoptadas es un subgrupo marginado de la comunidad latine, rara vez reconocido pero que crece en solidaridad. A medida que la evidencia sobre las prácticas ilícitas de adopción transnacional en Colombia se ha intensificado, también han florecido los esfuerzos de las personas adoptadas en la búsqueda de justicia social. Este artículo describe cómo los principios de la Psicología de la Liberación pueden facilitar la acción para abordar las injusticias históricas derivadas de prácticas de adopción ilícitas. Asimismo, se presentan las consecuencias para la salud mental que afectan a las personas adultas colombianas adoptadas transnacionalmente y se discuten las implicaciones para psicólogos y proveedores de salud mental.

Palabras Clave
Psicología de Liberación, adoptados colombianos, adopción transnacional

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La Resiliencia Transnacional de Los Adoptados Colombianos a Través de la Lente de la Psicología de la Liberación

Introduction

> "*To know where you are going you need to know where you came from*" Colombian adoptee (Adoptees of South America, 2023).

Transnational adoption, the practice of legal adoption of a minor child, typically from a post-colonial nation, by a family from a westernized nation, proliferated during the 20th century and reached a peak in the mid 2000's (Neville & Rotabi, 2020). In the United States (US), most transnational adoptions are also transracial, frequently composed of a child of color adopted by a White identifying family (Vandivere et al., 2009). While initially praised as a lifesaving intervention for otherwise orphaned children, the practice of transnational adoption has come under considerable criticism in the most recent decades (Committee Investigating Intercountry Adoptions, [CIIA], 2021). Critical adoption study scholars have identified transnational adoption practice as a vestige of colonialism (Branco, 2021a; Kawan-Hemler, 2022; McKee, 2016) and part of a global market industry incentivized by financial benefit rather than child welfare (McKee, 2016). Further, investigative accounts revealed evidence of massive corruptive adoption practices across multiple countries resulting in program closures and temporary transnational adoption halts (CIIA, 2021). Impacted transnationally adopted persons, many of whom are adults now, are individually and collectively seeking answers about their preadoption circumstances and uniting for justice to account for harm incurred to them and their birth families.

In this article, I describe the transnational adoption reckoning of Colombia, South America, a prominent Latin American country involved in the exportation of children across the world. Throughout this article I will be using a first-person narrative as a decolonization practice and because of my own identity as a Colombian transnational adoptee. Research findings evidencing corrupt and illicit practices such as child trafficking, coercive birth mother practices, and falsification of adoption records are exposed. I apply Martin-Baró's Liberation Psychology principles, born from the sociopolitical context of Latin America, to frame the oppressive factors leading up to the Colombian transnational adoption market and describe how individual and collective

action exemplifies the resilience of the global, Colombian adoptee diaspora, representing 50,000 members worldwide (Colombian Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-repetition [CCCTCN], 2022). Mental health consequences for Colombian transnational adoptees are described and implications for mental health providers are discussed.

Liberation Psychology Rationale

Ignacio Martin-Baró, a Jesuit priest, developed Liberation Psychology based on his experiences in Central America, specifically, El Salvador, in response to the country's repressive and brutal civil war during the 1980s (Torres Rivera, 2020). Martin-Baró crafted a model of psychology that moved away from individualistic, westernized ideals and towards collectivist strategies by using concepts from Liberation Theology, an anti-oppressive, religiously based model that offered a counter narrative of liberatory principles against the Catholic Church subjugation efforts (Tate et al., 2013). Key aspects of Liberation Psychology include a focus on the sociopolitical context of marginalized peoples as well as psychologist, or counselor, embeddedness in the community in which they seek to serve (Torres Rivera, 2020). The core tenets start from the premise that macro level socio-political systems and structures create and perpetuate oppression and in turn, subjugate marginalized groups and exacerbate mental health concerns. Yet, collective solidarity can amplify resilience and strengths and outline actionable advocacy interventions to alleviate mental health concerns and the external conditions that exacerbate them (Aron & Corne, 1994). Principles of Liberation Psychology are as follows: 1) re-orientation of psychology, 2) recovering historical memory, 3) de-ideologizing everyday experience, 4) problematization, 5) conscientization, and 6) praxis (Tate et al., 2013).

Liberation Psychology and Counseling Practice

Although Liberation Psychology has its roots in psychology practice, many other mental health disciplines (e.g., professional counseling, social work) have benefited from the theory's liberatory guidance. Chavez et al. (2016) detailed how Liberation Psychology can be merged with humanistic counseling principles for therapeutic practice application. In order to facilitate this practice, there has been intentional integration of the theory into

the training and education of mental health professionals. For example, counseling psychologists described how Liberation Psychology principles guided an immersion course where students collaborated alongside members of rural Mexican communities (Domínguez et al., 2020). In counselor education, Singh et al. (2020) describe Liberation Psychology as a decolonial model and promote the theory's application to counseling practice. Last, Torres Rivera and Torres Fernández (2024) issue similar calls and offer instructional guidance on how to infuse Liberation Psychology into mental health practice.

Colombian Transnational Adoption

Moane (2003) suggested that colonized nations can apply a Liberation Psychology framework to document sociopolitical systems of oppression and advance collective social justice practice. In this vein, Liberation Psychology principles accurately frame and illuminate the socio-political and historical context of the Colombian transnational adoption industry as well as the subsequent movement of Colombian adoptee diaspora collectivism. While a full accounting of the Colombian socio-political history during the 20th century is beyond the scope of this article, there are critical touchpoints that profoundly impacted the transnational Colombian industrial complex (McKee, 2016): 1) the Catholic church campaign of "Irresponsible" parenthood (Hoelgaard, 1998; Maestranzi, 2013), 2) White supremacy and internalized oppression (Hoelgaard, 1998), and 3) legally enforced closed adoptions (Hoelgaard, 1998; Kawan-Hemler, 2022). Each touchpoint and relevant research findings will be expanded upon throughout the article as they relate to Liberation Psychology principles.

Principles of Liberation Psychology

Reorientation of Psychology

Martín-Baró developed Liberation Psychology as an antidote to individualistic focused westernized psychology by critically examining the sociopolitical structures that created oppressive circumstances. According to Tate et al. (2013), Martín-Baró "argued that the poor and oppressed of South America were victims of structural, sociopolitical oppression that was the primary cause of the region's social and individual psychological problems" (p. 376). The global Colombian adoptee diaspora and their birth families are

the victims of the Colombian transnational adoption system; hence, a brief historical analysis of the conditions leading up to the system's creation will serve as a starting point of psychological reorientation. In this section, I describe how overpopulation, poverty, and the influence of the Catholic Church culminated in Colombia's National Adoption Policy.

The Fallacy of Irresponsible Parents

Colombia, during the 1960's, experienced overpopulation with subsequent increased poverty, resultant from previous political related civil war and mass displacement from rural to urban areas (Kawan-Hemler, 2022; Maestranzi, 2013). Colombian political leaders faced pressures both internally and externally, from Western countries, including the US, to address the overpopulation problem (Kawan-Hemler, 2022). Family planning efforts were challenged by the Catholic Church, which, at the time, still held considerable sway within Colombian national politics (Kawan-Hemler, 2022; Maestranzi, 2013; Simmons & Cardona, 1974). In response, Colombian policy leaders developed a population control compromise based on the concept of "responsible parenthood" (Kawan-Hemler, 2022). Responsible parenthood was defined as families who could successfully financially parent and care for large numbers of children. A growing number of families, to include single mothers, who could not financially provide for their children were deemed "irresponsible" (Kawan-Hemler, 2022). Hence, the Colombian National Adoption Policy was initiated, creating a system of care, via the establishment of a national child welfare agency in 1968 to address the proliferation of children born to "irresponsible" or impoverished families, many of whom were single, young, mothers (Kawan-Hemler, 2022; Hoelgaard, 1998).

Institutional Oppression

Relatively few Colombian children were exported to westernized nations in the late 1960's; however, by the early 1970's Colombia became a major global sending country (Kawan-Hemler, 2022). The rapid rise of transnational adoption in Colombia is attributed to 1) the decrease of available White babies for adoption in Western nations, including the US, and 2) Colombian adoption brokers' assertions that Westernized parents were morally superior to Colombian families (Hoelgaard, 1998). Lighter-skinned

Colombian babies and young children were highly valued and in demand by prospective White identifying Western and European adoptive parents, congruent with the transnational adoption market colorist system which prized White adjacent, lighter-skinned children (Raleigh, 2018). However, it is important to note that Colombian adoptees identify as multiple racial backgrounds to include Native American, Black, and multiracial (Branco et al., 2023; Cloonan et al., 2023).

Internalized Oppression

Moane (2003) classified psychological patterns of internalized oppression as those "which undermine self-confidence and self-esteem and create problems in groups and communities" (p. 96). The then dominant internalized racism propelled the transnational Colombian marketplace for babies. Regrettably, for many Colombian international adoptees raised by White identifying parents in homogenized White communities, racism continued to impact their racial and ethnic identity process (Cloonan et al., 2023).

Plenary or Closed Adoptions

Hoelgaard (1998) described the closed Colombian adoption system as one factor that contributed to the ongoing redistribution of children for exportation. Colombian adoption law legitimized a system of secrecy where no birth or first family information could be offered to the adoptee or their adoptive families. The secrecy allowed for corrupt and illicit practices. During the era of the 1960's through 1990's the thriving Colombian transnational adoption market led to illicit practices fueled by financial gain. In 1981 the New York Times described a child trafficking scheme of over 600 Colombian and Peruvian children adopted abroad to European families (Hoge, 1981). In 1986 El Tiempo, a Bogotá based Colombian newspaper, confirmed that 800 children were trafficked and reported the indictment of the ringleader. The 800 children were not reunited with their first families. Later, a Vice news expose (Carreazo, 2016) described how adoption proceedings were enshrouded in illicit practices to include birthmother trafficking and/or coercion, falsified documentation to include fraudulent adoptee birth registrations, and an overall system of secrecy that denied adult adoptees opportunity to know their true origins and/or find their first families. In 2006, new laws allowed for adult and minor adoptees

(with adoptive parental consent) to access their preadoption records containing birth family information; however, as noted by the Vice expose, many adult adoptees learned their documentation did not exist or was falsified when they initiated their search. Ultimately, a Colombian news television special, El Séptimo Dia, in 2012 featuring illicit adoption practices led to the cessation of transnational adoption of children younger than six in 2013. Illicit Colombian transnational adoption practices were further confirmed by the Netherlands' yearlong investigation which found Colombia, one among five other countries, who demonstrated prolonged corrupt transnational adoption practices (CIIA, 2021). Further Colombian adoption problematic practices were confirmed in Norwegian governmental investigative reports (Commission of Inquiry into Intercountry Adoptions, 2025).

Recovering Historical Memory

Tate et al. (2013) define the Liberation Psychology principle of recovering historical memory as "the process in which the social scientist participates in the rediscovery of oppressed populations' shared history" (p. 376). According to Tate et al. (2013) much of history is shared through the lens of the oppressors, in this instance, through adoption officials and researchers who promoted Colombia as a "model" transnational adoption sending country. Historical memory is particularly relevant for transnational adoptees as it can serve as a crucial bridge to fill the void of missing information. Martín-Baró (as cited in Aron & Corne, 1994) described how the absence of historical memory, "makes it impossible to find the roots of one's own identity which is as much needed for interpreting one's sense of the present as for glimpsing possible alternatives that might exist" (p. 3).

As a researcher and a Colombian adoptee myself, I have been active in understanding the experiences of Colombian transnational adoptees. These efforts aimed to legitimize the years of collective narratives of diasporic community members to contribute to available information for the historical memory process. I will detail the evolving research agenda and highlight how the process has unfolded over time resulting in gathering rich and detailed narratives. I collaborated with another Colombian adoptee to showcase how Colombian and other Latinx/e adoptees were situated within the broader Latine community (Flores-Koulish & Alvarado, 2015). In our conceptual article, we identified

similarities and differences between Latine adoptees and non-adoptee Latine populations in the US. Shared experiences for both groups included: homeland displacement, limited dominant media portrayals, racism, microaggressions, and stereotyping, grouped into one pan Latine group, and grief/loss and or trauma experiences (Flores-Koulish & Alvarado, 2015). We described the unique circumstances for Latine adoptees, including Colombian, as follows: adoption identity concerns, majority English-speaking, less complicated immigration stories, and social capital privileges gained from their adoptive family.

Next, I initiated an IRB approved case study research methodology, interviewing four adult Colombian adoptees from the United States who were unsuccessful in finding factual preadoption information (Branco, 2021b). I applied a biomedical ethical model (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013) to frame the research questions guiding the study: 1) how do Colombian transnational adoptees discover their adoptions were facilitated under illicit circumstances? and 2) how do they subsequently seek accurate adoption records? (Branco, 2021b). I triangulated the findings with journalistic evidence, as described in the previous section, outlining illicit practices. Three themes emerged from the research: 1) Discrepancy discovery, illuminates how participants learned of inconsistencies in their adoption documents 2) Searching for answers, depicts participants efforts to locate information about their adoption histories, and 3) Social justice seeking, highlights participants recommendations for reparations to the harm incurred to them. All four participants shared year's long efforts to access factual adoption related documentation with minimal success. Ultimately, the Colombian adoptees in this study offered guidance and recommendations for transnational adoption reform. The findings were used as corroborating evidence in the previously mentioned Netherlands' investigation of problematic practices in transnational adoption (CIIA, 2021). More recently, the findings were cited in a Norwegian governmental investigative study on Colombian transnational adoption illicit practices (Commission of Inquiry into Intercountry Adoptions, 2025)

Building on this scholarship, a study on the search and reunion experiences of 17 adult Colombian transnationally adoptees was conducted by myself and a student research team. The aim of the IRB approved scholarship was to learn about the participants' lived experiences in the search and reunion process. The research questions aimed to describe their overall experiences during search and reunion (Branco et al., 2023) as well as how reunion impacted their understanding of family and identity (Branco et al., 2022). The research themes illuminated how Colombian adoptees navigated inclusion in their first Colombian families while also balancing their relationships with

their adoptive families (Branco et al., 2022). Further, the participants engaged in identity reclamation of their lost cultural and ancestral heritage throughout the process of search and reunion (Branco et al., 2023). Participants also shared how they decided to search, what methods they employed to find their first families, and offered how their initial contact with their Colombian first families took shape (Branco et al., 2023).

During our data analysis process, we learned many participants discovered illicit adoption practices embedded in their stories upon reunion with the Colombian first families. In response, myself, and a counselor educator, who identifies as a Colombian national, completed an IRB approved secondary analysis to ask, "What discrepancies exist in Colombian transnational adoption narratives" (Branco & Cloonan, 2022, p. 1). We utilized directed qualitative content analysis and applied Brown and Roby's (2016) definitions of illicit transnational adoption practices to classify the problematic practices found in the original 17 Colombian adoptee sample. The main categories of illicit practices, according to Brown and Roby (2016) were sale of children, birth mother trafficking, and abuse of process. Under abuse of process there existed two subcategories: adoptive parent withholding of adoption documentations from the adoptee and microfictions, when adoption providers shared false, typically milder or more pleasant narratives, with adoptees or their adoptive families to cover up factual information (Baden, 2016). The secondary analysis revealed that nearly half of the original sample discovered instances of abuse of process (e.g., falsified documents, falsified preadoption stories, or adoptive parents withholding their adoption documents) and/or human trafficking (i.e., birth mother and/or child).

Problematization

Problematization is the culmination of the historical memory recovery and deideologization processes to identify the issues experienced by the marginalized group (Tate et al., 2013). A critical aspect of problematization is that the identified concerns and issues are viewed through the lens of the marginalized population. In the case of Colombian adult transnational adoptees, scholarship revealed several socioemotional and mental health challenges faced by some of its members because of their displacement via transnational adoption. Cloonan et al.'s (2023) narrative, qualitative study aimed to learn how adult Colombian adoptee raised in the United States "construct their racial and ethnic identity" (p. 3). They found the Colombian adoptee participants experienced identity

challenges as follows: 1) ongoing racial and ethnic identity process as they were not exposed to racial and ethnic mirrors during childhood, 2) "brown on the outside, White on the inside" (p. 5) to describe being raised by White people yet not resembling them, 3) "a chameleon with Imposter Syndrome" (p. 5) to highlight the adaptation process yet not fully belonging in any group, and 4) "adoption as a loss" (p. 5) where their adoption identity encompasses cumulative adoption related trauma and loss. Our research (2022, 2023) on Colombian adoptee search and reunion revealed similar ethnic and racial identity challenges as well as an array of emotional experiences during the search and reunion process to include grief, loss, shame, guilt, rejection, shock and overwhelm.

Deideologizing Everyday Experience

Martin-Baró described ideology as the dominant messages created by institutions and structures holding power (e.g., church, government, schools, etc.) that predominately serve elite classes and create narrative realities about marginalized and oppressed populations (Chavez et al., 2016). The deideologization process requires a thorough exploration of the dominant messages through the lived experiences of the marginalized to effectively create a "socially just and mentally healthy context" (Tate et al., 2013, p. 376). Torres Rivera (2020) described deideologization as a process by which "oppressed people can construct their reality by critically questioning the imposed reality and by reflecting on the answers or lack of answers" (p. 44). As more evidence of illicit Colombian transnational adoption practices came to light in the past two decades, Colombian adoptee deideologization efforts have proliferated. Adoptee created artistic projects, memoirs, documentaries, podcasts, and search and reunion organizations spread both in the US and globally to disseminate messages about their lived realities and collectively make sense of their adoption contexts. Notably, the deideologization efforts questioned and challenged the dominant narrative that Colombian transnational adoption served the best interest of the child and was the only viable option of care for Colombian children. Table 1 features a sampling of Colombian adoptee creative deideologizing efforts. Denaturalization, a sub concept within deideologization, is the denormalization process which deconstructs messages and concepts previously held as truth (Torres Rivera, 2020). Through the process of deideologization and denaturalization, the next phase of problematization emerges.

Table 1

Colombian Adoptee Deideologization Efforts

Colombian Adoptee	Content Type	Content Theme
Colombian Reparations Collective	Collaborative activism among adult adoptees and legal scholars	Investigative and legal advocacy
Federico Frum "MasPaz"	Multidisciplinary artist	Earth and indigenous people's preservation
Alliance of Colombian Adoptees ([ACÁ] 2024)	Non-profit organization for the Colombian adoptee diaspora	Colombian adoptee information and resources
Marcella Moslow & Amy Wilkerson * (2022)	*Adoptees Dish,* Podcast	Adoptee experience and healing
Jacob Taylor-Mosquera (2022)	*I Met Myself in October: A Memoir of Belonging*, Memoir	Afro-Colombian Racial Identity, Belonginess, Search and Reunion
Abby Forero-Hilty (2017)	*Decoding Our Origins: The Lived Experiences of Colombian Adoptees*, Anthology	Adoption grief and loss, birth family search, racial and ethnic identity, adoption trauma
Leslie Whitaker & Craig Askinazi (2021)	*The Magical Realism of Colombian Adoptees*, Blogpost and Conference Presentation	Adoption trauma, identity development, community collectivism
Mariela Anderson (2020)	*Home Sweet Casa: A Journey to the Universal Heart:* Memoir	Birth family search and reunion, ethnic and racial identity
Elena Serrato (2019)	*Healing Puentes,* Search and Reunion support, Colombian adoptee and birth mother support groups	Birth family search and reunion, grief and loss, adoption trauma
Marissa Bruno (2014)	*Adoption in Colombia: A Documentary*, Documentary film	Colombian adoption houses and adoption system
Plan Angel (2008)	Non-Profit human rights agency for Colombian adoptees and their first families	Search and reunion, birth family mental health support, DNA testing, human rights advocacy
Maria Quiroga* (2006)	*Las Hijas*, Documentary Biography of four transnational Colombian adoptee women	Birth family search and reunion, grief and loss, ethnic and racial identity

* Amy Wilkerson identifies as a transnational adoptee from Chile
**It is unknown if the producer identifies as a Colombian adoptee

Virtues of The People

Martin-Baró challenged a pathological view of the oppressed by illuminating the strengths, resilience, and collective strategies used to navigate oppressive structures of marginalized groups (Aron & Corne, 1994). The Colombian adoptee diaspora deideologization efforts featured in Table 1 highlights how adoptees used creative strategies to develop shared meaning based on their historical recovered memories. Cloonan and I (2025) describe the resilience of Colombian adoptee participants in our research who navigate their racial and ethnic identity. The findings of the study introduce how the Colombian adoptee racial and ethnic process capitalizes on participants' quest to reclaim their lost culture, overcome racism, and ultimately embrace their adoptive and Colombian identities. Further, despite facing structural barriers, experiencing stigma, discrimination, and adoption related trauma many have prevailed in finding their first Colombian families (CCCTCN, 2022). Moane (2003) points out that internalized oppression also can give rise to "courage, ingenuity, and solidarity that develop from resisting oppression and from creating community and culture" (p. 97). This assertion holds true for Colombian adoptees as ultimately; it is their voices that offer counternarratives to decades long prevailing beliefs about transnational adoption as a happy ever after story. Further, their collective action paves the way for reparation possibilities to address the systemic damages.

Conscientization

The conscientization or critical consciousness process immobilizes all that was learned from the reclamation of historical memory, the deideologization of dominant messaging via counter stories, and through a comprehensive understanding of the marginalized group strengths (Torres Rivera, 2020; Torres Rivera & Torres Fernandez, 2024). Chavez et al. (2016) identify conscientization as a political process whereby individuals and groups identify their rights within the societal structure. To this end, many transnational Colombian adoptees are claiming their human right to identity as consistent with the1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child which issued a right that asserts children transnationally adopted have the right to know their familial origins and national identity (Branco, 2024). Martin-Baró emphasized that consciousness goes beyond a cognitive shift and is actualized by identity transformation (Tate et al., 2013).

Especially poignant for Colombian adoptees is Martin-Baró's assertion that the conscientization process, "allows them to discover not only the roots of what are but also the horizon, what they can become" (Aron & Corne,1994, p. 40).

Praxis

According to Chavez et al. (2016) "praxis is the confluence of theory transformed into action" (p. 169). Likewise, Torres Rivera (2020) suggests that praxis inextricably links theory and application. Praxis encapsulates the Liberation Psychology principles amidst ongoing reflection to center marginalized populations in the here and now. Action for the Colombian adoptee diaspora is an emergent process showcasing various approaches. For example, Taylor-Mosquera (Personal Communication, February 10, 2023) organized a community dialogue with Colombian consulate staff members and representatives from the Colombian child welfare agency to share information about dual citizenship procedures and birth family search rights. This was in response to the growing demand by Colombian transnational adoptees to access their human right to identity. Other activism efforts include members of Plan Angel, a Colombian and Netherlands based nonprofit adoptee rights group, who partnered with the ¿Te Busco a Ti? (I'm looking for you?) movement (2022) to distribute posters of transnational adoptees searching for their Colombian first families in a multi-city Colombian awareness campaign. The Colombian adoptee non-profit, Alianza of Colombian adoptees, offers ongoing community based virtual webinars to support adoptee citizenship and language reclamation among other topic areas. Such work is gaining visibility as evidenced in Tufano's recent Op Ed in the Colombian newspaper El Tiempo, *"¿Que paso con la niñez exportada (What happened to the exported children)?"* (2025). Ultimately, praxis has no end point as evidenced by ongoing Colombian transnational activism seeking reclamation of broader reparations to repair the injustices and harm incurred (Branco, 2024).

Personal Reflections

Through the crafting of this article, I recognize my active pursuit of both an individual and collective historical memory recovery for the past 35 years as my awareness of adoption systems grew. I investigated and documented details and facts about the Colombian transnational adoption history that were seldom, if ever, mentioned in the feel-good adoption narratives that permeated my youth, adolescence, and emergent

adulthood. In so doing, the secrecy and silence surrounding illicit and problematic adoption practices began to dissipate as my personal and our collective narratives publicly emerged. As our awareness grows as a diasporic community, my own "courage" to research, present, and publish on the topic and the collective "ingenuity" of artistic and community engagement (Moane, 2003, p. 97) has thrived from the sustenance of our solidarity.

Implications for Mental Health Providers

Problematization in Liberation Psychology reveals how the oppressive transnational adoption related practices impact the mental health of adopted persons. Research on this population describes the grief, loss, trauma, and depression symptoms experienced by some adult adoptees as they work to develop their racial and ethnic identity (Cloonan et al., 2023) and as they embark on the journey to find factual adoption related information (Branco, 2021). In addition, adult adoptees also expressed a wide array of emotional experiences during the search and reunion process to include grief and loss, rejection, shame, guilt, shock, and overwhelm (Branco et al., 2023).

Psychologists and other mental health providers who collaborate and work with adult transnational adoptees need to be prepared to provide adoption-informed services. The absence of adoption-informed practice increases the risk of harm and distrust in mental health providers; therefore, it is crucial providers pursue the recommended strategies. These include the following:

- Assess practitioner bias about adoption in general and about Colombian transnational adoption specifically (Baden et al., 2015). For example, practitioners can or ask themselves, "What connections do I have to adoption (adoptees themselves, adoptive parents, birthparents, or know persons with these identities)"? And, "How does this connection influence my perspective about adoption practices?"
- Acquire more knowledge about the socio-political context Colombian transnational adoptees (Baden et al., 2015). Open access resources that are particularly helpful include Kawan-Hemler's (2022) and Maestranzi's (2012) theses on Colombian adoption policy and history.
- Pursue adoption-informed continuing education to develop knowledge around common adoption-related mental health concerns (Maxon & Roszia, 2019).

Resources include Intercountry Adoptee Voices (https://intercountryadopteevoices.com), the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (https://adoptionsupport.org/case-training-institute/nti/access/), and the Adoptee Consciousness Model (https://adopteeconsciousness.com/).

- Provide trauma-informed mental healthcare to navigate adoption related trauma symptoms (Branco et al., 2023) to include the principles of trauma-informed care: 1) safety, 2) transparency, 3) peer support, 4) collaboration and mutuality, 5) empowerment, voice, and choice, and 6) cultural, historical, and gender issues (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, 2014).
- Connect adult Colombian transnational adoptees with one another for support and solidarity (Branco et al., 2023) through groups like Plan Angel (planangel.com) and Alianza of Colombian Adoptees ([ACA] https://alianzaca.com/).
- Advocate for reparations and justice for Colombian transnational adoptees impacted by displacement and corrupt adoption practices by connecting with local, national, and international legislative bodies. Adoptee Rights Law Center (https://adopteerightslaw.com) is a US based legal non-profit organization that supports domestic and internationally adult adoptees.

Psychologists and mental health providers can utilize adoption-informed preparedness to validate and normalize the lived experiences of transnational adult Colombian adoptees to support their healing and growth.

Conclusion

In this article I demonstrate how a Liberation Psychology framework offers a critical and strengths-based reconceptualization of Colombian transnational adoptees. The work frames adoptee experiences within sociopolitical structures, historical memory, and ongoing systems of oppression, to highlight how adoptees' resilience, meaning-making, and deideologization efforts are not solely individual processes but also collective acts of liberation. The analysis extends existing adoption scholarship by emphasizing the ethical and clinical necessity of addressing illicit adoption practices, structural violence, and historical erasure in healing work with adult transnational adoptees. For psychologists and mental health providers, this framework calls for praxis

that moves beyond cultural responsiveness and toward critical consciousness, accountability, and advocacy. In an era punctuated by renewed global accountability to international adoption related human rights violations, migration, and state-sanctioned family separation, Liberation Psychology offers a valuable lens for a renewed understanding of Colombian transnational adoptee experiences. Future scholarship is needed to examine how liberation-oriented frameworks may disrupt dominant adoption related discourses across cultural, sociopolitical, and clinical contexts.

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