

Personal Reflection: Finding a World of 'Us' Through Chronic Pain and Fear. Emma Anderson and Sarah Grace Black

Anthropological approaches to chronic pain can be used to bridge the fear immigrants face with the fear others have of immigrants. By understanding that individuals, populations and the entire human race have the capacity to fear, we can hope to overcome it in times of distress. Although people fear for different reasons, they all experience it vividly.

Anthropology contextualizes people's imaginations, their dreams and their reality. Fear, like chronic pain, can be a product of embodied cultural, political and social dimensions in which the body, inclusive of the mind, is situated. Anthropological approaches can not only uncover where moments of fear stem from and why people feel the way they do, they can also highlight the very foundations of fear. Chronic pain, like fear, can be shaped by social, political and historical events in which the body bears witness.

Interestingly, in a study conducted by the Pew Research Center (Gramlich 2016), the majority of those identified as 'Trump supporters' were in favour of building a wall. However, when asked if undocumented immigrants are honest and hardworking individuals and if immigrants fill the jobs Americans *do not* want to do, half of Trump supporters agreed with these statements. Why then, if half of Trump supporters believe that immigrants are 'honest,' 'hard-working' and are taking the undesirable jobs, do they still want to build a wall? Where is this fear coming from?

Equally, fear is experienced by immigrants. It is also a fear of the unknown. Since the November 8<sup>th</sup> election in the US, clinicians serving undocumented immigrants have seen a rise in the number of children experiencing anxiety over a fear that their undocumented parents will be deported. Marielena Hincapié, of the National Immigration Law Center, states, 'People worry their families will be broken up, that parents will be deported and children will end up in foster care, on a scale that we've never seen before. The feeling out there is one of great fear' (Gumbel 2016). Similarly, 'dreamers,' or young people who were brought to the US illegally by their parents, have grown up in the US and have obtained temporary citizenship or 'conditional status' in order to go to university or join the military, are frightened (Flores 2016).

Fear, like chronic pain, is created and influenced by a web of cultural, political and social factors that manifest themselves within the bodies and minds of individuals. Whether they are an immigrant or a supporter, they imagine their futures, they imagine what their future could be like, and they imagine what they are afraid of. This imagination is their

reality. Rohde (this volume) explains that the anthropological perspective, “aims to investigate how objective and subjective reality inform each other to create what we call lived experience.” When we begin to uncover another person’s lived experience, we take the first steps toward empathy, the first steps toward a more unified and understanding world. It is not a world of ‘us’ and ‘them’; it is a world simply of ‘us’.

### *References*

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