

A NARRATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY OF MIGRANT FARM WORKERS:

A MULTI CASE STUDY OF FOUR EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVERS

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

The memory of my mother Consuelo M. Gonzales who always encouraged me to stay in school, taught me the meaning to help others in need, believe in God but most of all gave me her unconditional love.

The memory of my father Emiliano C. Gonzales who taught me the principles of hard work, value of taking care of my brothers and sisters, to be true to myself and to be proud of whom I am.

My wife Yulia whom I will love until the end of time and beyond. Thank you for being my partner in life and the precious gifts of our children we share. Thank you for accepting me for who I am and what I have become.

To my children Julia Louise, Joseph Michael, Emilio Andrew, Benjamin Blu, Jennifer Marie (stepdaughter), Patricia Ann, Christian Adam, Ylissa Isabella and Karyna Adell who are very special to me and thankful to God for the precious gift he has given me.

The memory of my youngest brother Shadrack E. Gonzales who is missed and the wonderful times we had together growing up. To my oldest sister Yolanda E. Moody who is so dear to me and always gave kind words of inspiration and support. You are special in every way. To my brothers Emilio, Salvador, Fermin and of course my youngest sister Veronica Downer with whom I shared so many special moments growing up.

And finally to God for giving me life and the wisdom to appreciate what it brings.

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We all have our journeys in life that take us to places new and old. As I traveled each day in my quest to find the meaning of truth I have met new people, new horizons and the unknown that challenged me to become a better person. We each have our stories to tell and this dissertation is just a glimpse of those days gone by, but is ever so close to my heart and mind. I was not alone in writing this dissertation because it took many individuals who believed in me and encouraged me to stay the course to breathe life into it.

First and foremost I want and need to give thanks to my dear wife Yulia who taught me the meaning of patience, love of life and most of all who believed in me that I could make my dream a reality in reaching my goal in education. I am blessed to have her by my side and to share all those wonderful days good and bad. You are my life partner now and forever. A big thank you to my children Julia Louise, Joseph Michael, Emilio Andrew, Benjamin Blu, Jennifer Marie (stepdaughter), Patricia Ann, Christian Adam, Ylissa Isabella and Karyna Adell who allowed me to be their father and teacher and proud to be called dad. Each of you is special to me in every way.

Thank you to my brothers Emilio, Salvador, Fermin and my youngest brother Shadrack who is no longer with us and my sisters Yolanda and Veronica. As brothers and sisters we all shared special moments growing up and learned the value of taking care of each other through the good times and hard times.

Many blessing to my parents Emilano and Consuelo Gonzales who gave me the gift of life, and taught me the many valuable lessons of life as a young boy that molded me to become the man that I am today. Though you are no longer with me your presence is always there as I live my life from day to day.

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A big thank you for the participants who were a part of this dissertation who allowed me the opportunity to share their stories with others. It was amazing to hear their stories of long ago, of times and places they experienced as children working in the fields.

Not last but least, to all my friends and family members and even strangers who crossed my path in life and made those experiences special that gave me purpose to live my life to the fullest.

The Zacate Grows Wild

Walking ever so gently through freshly cut zacate
In a distant field someway in time and space
Brings fond memories of my childhood gone by
Of misty morning dew and fragrant smell of fresh cut hay

The end of summertime is fast approaching
And the lingering days of August yesteryear of fun
Look and smell the zacate my siblings let out a shout
Stacks upon stacks of bales under the sweltering sun

The late evening sky looks down upon us
Sitting 'round the campfire and sharing stories of long ago
Mis abuelos speak in their native tongue
Of days when the zacate and youth grew in los llanos

I collapse in a deep primitive sleep on a dusty colchon
Awaken to the smell of fresh boiling coffee
And the sound of laughter from young and old
Wake up someone shouts and feel the summer breeze

Those long ago days seem on the wayside
Yet something stirs deep inside me
Reminding me the zacate grows ever so strong
Like the new planted seed I too need to be free

Joe Michael Gonzales
April 2, 2015

ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of Latino migrant youth who were later able to achieve high levels of academic success. Through the use of narrative case studies, I examined which factors allowed these individuals to overcome substantial barriers to education to attain high levels of academic achievement. I was able to find that these students had an abnormally high level of internal drive coupled with a strong family push. There were consistent elements of “college is the only means of escape” from their difficult lives. This push came from both within and from family. I have concluded with a number of recommendations for how this demographic can be encouraged and supported in their academic careers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transformation action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (Freire, 1970).

“Ya es tiempo Coché” (It is time, Coché). It is about five in the morning and these words are not new to me as my father wakes my siblings and me to another day in the fields. It seems like yesterday I heard those familiar words and can still remember those long hot days as I stared at row after row of cotton or some other field to be picked and wondered, “Is there no end to this type of work and when does it ever change?”

Growing up as a migrant farmworker, I witnessed oppression, hardship, and experienced the challenges of achieving an education in a system not designed for me. Freire (1970, p. 128) recognized that individuals need to challenge themselves to become positive change agents in order to break out of this cycle and change the system.

These thoughts are not new to me and this was not the first field my parents, siblings and I had seen. Across the United States we traveled, going from one crop after another just to make a meager living, and we were not alone as there were vast numbers of other families doing the same.

There are hundreds of thousands of families who wake up every morning in the U.S. to find themselves in a lifestyle that many in our society do not understand simply because they do not empathize with the ills and consequences of being a migrant worker. In our present-day American society, these workers are labeled as farm workers, agricultural workers, seasonal workers or field laborers. The bottom line is they regularly experience being uprooted from their native homes in order to work and in this process

have historically suffered the ill effects of countless injustices such as poor living conditions, sub-standard housing, no health care, unfair wages and most critically, inadequate education. As a young boy, I did not understand these social injustices or how the political machine worked. What I did know is that this had been the lifestyle I had known since I was a child.

For some families, going on a vacation to a new place can be an adventure where they meet new people, experience new cultures, see new scenic routes and enjoy genuine fun together. However, for my family our migration was not a fun vacation, but was an endless journey to another place somewhere in the United States. While originally from San Antonio, Texas, I have been to many states during our migration such as California, Louisiana, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma, Illinois, and Texas. What these states all had in common as seen through the lens of an eight or nine-year-old boy was just another crop to pick. This was not a vacation.

One of the major negative consequences of being the son of a migrant worker was the negative effect it had in my early education where I attended eleven elementary schools. I can remember my father enrolling me in one new school after another and telling me, “You’re going to like this school Coché. Listen to your teachers.” This was far from the truth because I now recall how many of the teachers looked down at me and considered me to be inferior, a slow learner; difficult to teach, lacking fluency in English, and ethnically different from other students in the classroom. What they failed to understand was that due to my constant moving, I lacked the formal educational skills critical to successfully transition to a higher academic level of learning.

During early school years, migrant students can find themselves attending several schools during the academic year and finding themselves having to adapt to new classrooms, teachers, curricula, and school policies while making new friends and adjusting to unfamiliar neighborhoods and school surroundings. This type of “mobility has been found to cause negative impact on academic achievement, academic progress, test scores, grades, and graduation from high school and behavior, and non-academic outcomes such as increases in community involvement and accessing of local resources” (Reynolds, et al., p. 82, 2009; Rumberger, 2011). After traveling from state to state my family and I returned back to my birthplace of San Antonio, where we continued picking crops as seasonal workers. During this early period in my life, my family continued moving from one house to another, and I continued attending at least seven different elementary schools in San Antonio, which had adverse effects on my educational growth.

Researchers have found that mobility can incur non-academic outcomes such as decreases in community involvement and accessing local resources (Rumberger, 2011; Reynolds, et al., 2009). For many migrant children, it can take four to six months for them to recover academically from changing schools (Walls, 2003). Simply put, it is clear that high mobility amongst migrant children during a school year can be far-reaching as compared to students who have a stable school environment.

Living in a migrant family means never settling down long enough to establish your hierarchy of needs, much less focus on educational achievement. When you are struggling to survive, other aspects of your life have to be deferred. Even if a migrant worker child chooses to make education a priority, the resources and long-term educational relationships needed to succeed are simply not going to be present.

Tomas Rivera, in his autobiographical novel, *Y No Se Lo Trago La Tierra/And The Earth Did Not Part* (1977) describes the migrant experience as one where the individual is consumed with arriving, but in actuality is never really arriving. The migrant is trying to reach a destination of permanence and comfort but rarely achieves this. Even though this life experience is behind me now, I've come to realize it never left me, primarily because it is still ingrained in the core of my presence and my desire for academic success.

The history of the Latino migrant movement has been told repeatedly through various research studies, movies, books, and through word of mouth and there is plenty we know about this group. Despite this, a gap still remains when trying to identify the population of migrant children who face challenges in over-coming oppressive obstacles in their lives and the need to succeed in education. In fact, most of the related literature seems to indicate that migrant students with the classification of "high achieving" (Trueba, 2004, p.33) are at risk of dropping out or flunking out of school.

As a family, we all experienced the life of migrant workers; A life with uncertainties, heartache, deprivation, discrimination, and social injustices. Therefore, I will use these lived experiences, long ago conversations, and personal and social interactions in defining the gap in educational achievement among migrants between ideologies of the past and contemporary thinking. What needs to be clear about this gap is its relationship to the human state of mind, a lack of conscious awareness, liberation of self, and a newfound revolution of understanding regarding the ills of oppression. According to Paulo Freire (1970) a person "must realize that they are fighting not merely for freedom from hunger, but for ...freedom to create and to construct, to wonder and to

venture. Such freedom requires that the individual be active and responsible, not a slave or a well-fed cog in the machine...It is not enough that men are not slaves; if social conditions further the existence of automations, the result will not be love of life, but love of death” (p. 50).

It was the intent of this project to examine how being a child migrant worker influences the development of one’s self-identity, self-improvement, self-efficacy, and self-enhancement as they transition during specific stages in their life. The children of migrant farm workers are among the most educationally disadvantaged children in the United States. Their migratory lifestyles often expose them to negative social conditions, cultural isolation, strenuous work outside of school and culminate in poor health, and extreme poverty, which have imposed multiple obstacles to educational success (Trevino, 2004). A driving force behind this dissertation was to examine the aspect of migrant life for Latino/Latina adults and related challenges they faced that helped them achieve positive and healthy outcomes during different stages in their intrapersonal development.

One important assumption has been that migrant parents do not actively get involved in their children’s education, but this is far from the truth. According to R.E. Trevino (2004) migrant parents want to get involved in their children’s education and see education as a path to a better life, but are lacking literacy skills to help their children. In a related case study Trevino (2004) examined the positive consequences of parent involvement for successful student outcomes. Parents who envisioned that their children were readily able to accomplish superior achievement and believed that they (the parents) were the first teachers had more successful children. These parents also taught their children that graduating from high school and college was not negotiable, thereby

changing the expectations in their kid's minds. Other important elements in this case study identified parent expectations, school role, sibling mentoring, parental involvement with school activities, and parental educational achievement as keys to the success of their children.

While the academic achievement level of parents does correlate to the academic success of their children, Henderson (2007) found that even without this, parental involvement was a key component to academic success across all demographics. Even though these parents did not or could not help their children with their homework, parents of high achievers did spend more time communicating with their children, as well as, encouraging them to do well in school. On the other hand, parents of low achievers reported these two components were lacking (Henderson, 2007).

Across the nation there seems to exist a major disparity between migrant students who have failed in the classroom as compared to a small population who have continued their formal education after high school and transitioned to college, according to my own observations. But what are the intrinsic and extrinsic forces that have been the catalyst for this small population who have succeeded in school and in their careers? In order to answer this question it is important to first begin with the holistic parameters of the person so as to pinpoint the constructs and situational periods in their lives that made a difference. As noted earlier, it is apparent that in order to address this question, it is necessary for me to address the oppressive forces that migrant families have encountered historically, culturally, socio-economically, and lastly, politically, as opposed to those students who had positive self-transformation growth.

According to Pals (2006), "identity in adulthood takes the shape of a coherent

narrative or life story that integrates interpretations of the past with the present self and provides life with meaning and purpose, and living in accordance with this narrative identity over time are central to personality functioning, development, and well-being” (p. 84). An important finding in the context of this study is that individuals who have experienced difficult life events are tied to memories of emotionally significant experiences and that meaning comprises the life story as a whole (McAdams, 2001; Pillemer, 2001; Singer & Blagov, 2004; Singer & Salovey, 1993).

The importance of identity is the basis in structuring social and personal identifications, goals, and lastly, priorities that are necessary to guide behavior (Baumeister, 1986; Erikson, 1964). This is one of the components that I addressed in this study. The significance in this attribute is that identity building is also linked to personality and positive mental health patterns that begins in adolescence and continues into adulthood. Ambition is also an associated factor that leads a person to explore options and commit to them, and in retrospect individuals missing or lacking ambition made it difficult to establish and act on clear priorities (Helson, Stewart, & Ostrove, 1995; Mailory, 1989). Ambition in the context of this study refers to whether or not an individual indicated some internal drive towards becoming academically successful. It is not meant to impart any form of judgment as to whether or not ambition is a positive or negative attribute.

Therefore, the underlying theme of this project was to use lived experiences of former migrant worker adults to shed a ray of light in examining and analyzing the components of deficit thinking, reflective learning, and critical race theory as applied to

the experiences of the “voices of the past” calling out for social justice and educational equality.

Problem Statement and Purpose of Study

The primary problem that this study examined was how migrant students became successful in higher education, particularly in obtaining graduate degrees. There is significant literature in existence on the nature of the problem, but few positive examples for others to follow. One of the key components to academic achievement for any group, especially migrant students, is a successful role model to be followed. This paper examined the narrative, lived experiences of migrant students who have successfully completed or are in the process of completing graduate school. The goal was to not only examine the challenges they faced, but to learn about how they were able to overcome these challenges and find success. Furthermore, I explored how they were able to use these barriers as catapults in transitioning to higher learning environments.

Research Questions

The narrative case-study method was used to address the primary research question of how the lived experiences of migrant students lead to their success in primary and secondary education. Using the “case story” study approach in this research enabled me to provide descriptive knowledge from the participants to understand and appreciate the context of their stories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Stake, 1988). The work discovered historical periods in the participants’ lives, myths, which were “central to development of social and personal identity (culture and self)” (Hopkins, 1994, p.127). The relevance of this narrative methodology is that it assisted in collecting necessary data to describe their lives and give voice to those long-ago life course experiences. The end results were that

this approach enabled participants to begin to restory and reconstruct their personal experiences. Some initial themes used to examine in the analysis of these data were:

1. What are the reasons why so few migrant farm workers graduated from high school as opposed to those who achieved success in graduate studies?
2. What role did family, personal life experience, school involvement and momentous events play in motivating students for self-identity, self-improvement, self-awareness for successful educational transition stages?
3. How can the selected life stories tell researchers and educators about the influences in early migrant lives that predict further success in graduate studies?
4. What is the role of connective influencers (individuals, social interaction, momentous events, environmental factors, psychological factors, and school systems) that are related to stages of development between adolescents and adulthood?

The specific method that was used was to meet with and interview participants who were selected based upon the criteria for this study. These four participants were from a convenience sample of former migrant workers who are currently enrolled in or have completed graduate school programs. With this in mind, I explored how these educational achievers were able to transition to higher learning by means of narrative research approach, which should yield qualitative data conducive to this study.

The justification of this study is the lack of prior research on an important topic. Latinos are an under represented group in higher education today. Latino migrant workers in particular face difficult cultural and practical barriers to educational success. Education is an important component to reducing generational dependence upon migrant

labor as the sole source of family income. This study tried to find the theoretical reasons why the pattern has been difficult to break and should find practical solutions that can be implemented by community leaders.

Researcher's Background

Throughout my life, I have had many experiences in education as a former migrant turned academic that have molded me into the person I have become. I can say that the sequence of those long ago historical events have influenced my current behavior and interaction with others. It only seems appropriate that those combined experiences have mediated the social fabric of who I was as a child of migrant parents and the present role I take as a professional in the educational system.

Since 2003, I have been a member of the Cesar Chavez Legacy and Educational Foundation in San Antonio, Texas. As its Executive Education Director, I work with several coalition members to establish an array of support service programs for our community members from health care, voter registration, legal aid services, educational needs, housing assistance, immigration assistance, counseling services and an array of other services. The most rewarding part of my job is working with migrant families who need special attention due to the many challenges they face. Because I was a migrant worker, I am better equipped to pinpoint what services are critical for them. Listening to them tell their stories of the many challenges and hardships they face, reminds me of how it was for my family and me. One of my major goals is to make sure that they receive the best possible service from the foundation and myself.

I am also currently employed as an adjunct faculty member at a community college in San Antonio, Texas and teach in the field of sociology. As an educator I have

learned many new and innovative ideas in how I teach so as to ensure that each student is successful in understanding the information and that it helps build their confidence, improve their learning skills and strengthen their communication skills when interacting with others. It became apparent to me that the teaching methodology and strategies used actually improved students' performance levels during class discussions, quizzes, and improved retention levels, built self-efficacy and lastly, students became much more self-directed in their learning. I now get to teach a number of migrant students and am able to observe firsthand many of the unique challenges and oppressive barriers that they face in obtaining academic success. One of my primary concerns for the students is that I keep the material fresh by ways of infusing technology into the curriculum, connecting readings to the outside world, and introducing more effective classroom student interactions with the materials and other students as well.

Researcher Bias

The primary bias to watch for in this study was my own experience as a former migrant worker currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program. I have a number of personal and cultural experiences which I feel shaped my own journey to academic success. The challenge I faced in this study was to make sure that I was not leading the participants to answers that mirror my own. To combat this, I used semi-structured interviews and utilized fundamental questions that are open-ended and not targeted to any specific response. The audio tapes showed that I followed up on any themes presented by my participants and allowed them to tell their own stories.

Coding and analysis also followed this theme and objective observers should be able to easily determine if I let any of my own biases guide my analysis of the findings.

For the sake of minimizing bias among my coders, I referred to myself under an assumed name, Diego. I wanted to make sure that those coding and assisting with the data processing would be unaware that I was referring to myself. It is impossible to fully separate myself from this story though. It is my story as much as it is the story of others. I wanted to compare my experiences with the experiences of others who went through a similar background in order to see what commonalities arose.

Theoretical Perspective

There are two foundational concepts, which I have drawn from to create the theoretical framework for this study: Social Capital and Critical Race Theory (CRT).

My theoretical framework was influenced by theories of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988a; Lin, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 2004) and more specifically an examination of the potential role that socialization and institutional and empowerment agents contribute to advanced degree completion and how empowerment agents contribute to these successes. Social capital is fundamentally defined in terms of resources or forms of institutional support accessible by ego (e.g., the student him/herself) through their direct or indirect social ties to other actors who assume the role of institutional agents (e.g., a school counselor) (Stanton-Salazar, 2004). The importance and utility of this idea is that people are able to accomplish meaningful goals through their access to resources (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Foremost is the recognition that, for students to successfully meet both developmental challenges and academic demands of the school, they require “*resource-full*” relationships and activities organized within a network of socialization agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1069).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was an important theory to discuss in this study, as I am primarily examining the experiences of Hispanic migrants in one specific geographical location. The participants mentioned repeatedly in the interviews that their race was a factor not only in how they were perceived by others, but also how they perceived themselves. I also examined the role that race played in their upbringing and educational histories. There are five fundamental themes in Critical Race Theory that are most applicable to this study: 1. The centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination; 2. The challenges made to the dominant ideology; 3. The centrality of experiential knowledge; 4. An interdisciplinary perspective; and 5. A commitment to social justice (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2004).

The secondary part of CRT being introduced here was the concept of counternarratives and counter-storytelling. “Critical race methodology offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color. As they describe how they compose counter-stories, the authors discuss how the stories can be used as theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tools to challenge racism, sexism, and classism and work toward social justice” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23).

2. LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, I examined the fundamental concepts that applied to migrant student education in the United States. I examined the unique aspects of life in migrant families in the Texas Rio Grande Valley. I also broke down the unique cultural strengths and barriers to academic success that exists in these families. I took a look at general factors for determining success and failure for college students and show how the typical migrant student fits into this role. The goal of this project was to look at the success stories and to examine the migrant students who have gone on to succeed in the American educational system. By looking at the success stories we can try to find out why they were successful and how others can follow in their path.

We need to begin this by examining the typical child migrant worker who enters the United States. Unlike their adult counterparts, they typically did not come here by choice and they are still in the early years of determining their identity (Noguera, 2006). As they continue through their formative years, their definition of self will constantly evolve based upon their own experiences and the experiences of those around them. Due to the constantly changing environment, these youth will be much more influenced by their families than others their age. This close sense of family will go on to influence their future successes in education.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was the predominant aspect of my theoretical framework that I expanded upon the most, as I was primarily examining the experiences of Hispanic migrants in one specific geographical location. The participants mentioned

repeatedly in the interviews that their race was a factor not only in how they were perceived by others, but also how they perceived themselves. I also examined the role that race played in their upbringing and educational histories. There are five fundamental themes in Critical Race Theory that are most applicable to this study: 1. The centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination; 2. The challenges made to the dominant ideology; 3. The centrality of experiential knowledge; 4. An interdisciplinary perspective; and 5. A commitment to social justice (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2004).

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I am using the term race as a concept here because it is relevant to how I am viewing this study. We cannot separate ourselves from our own experiences when conducting research on a topic that we are intimately familiar with. In this case, I also used the concept of race for my participants since they will all be telling their stories from the perspective of a similar race. According to Lopez (1997), “race should be used as a lens through which to view Latinos/as in order to focus our attention on the experiences of racial oppression” (p. 375). In addition to oppression felt by Hispanic migrants in the Texas Rio Grande Valley (TXRGV), I also need to use race as a lens to help others see

the long-term effects of racial oppression on the day-to-day lives of Latinos in these communities (Lopez, 1997).

Race alone is not the critical component to CRT however. The true aspect of race that is an influencer here is the role it plays in power dynamics. In particular, it is important to examine the interplay of power authority and how it affects migration among this population (Montoya, 1994). It is also important to further recognize the concept of intersectionality. This is the concept that no one really only belongs to one culture group. There are many different social identities that we belong to which intersect each other (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzaon & Yosso, 2001). This is an important concept for this particular study because I examined which combinations of factors lead certain migrant students to academic success while others are failing to find this success. If a pattern can be recognized between certain intersecting cultural influences, an answer to this question could be reached.

The next important CRT concept that was studied in this project was the idea of the roles of the dominant and minority population and what expectations exist for each group to stay within their assigned roles. When the minority group in particular steps out of this assumed role, it is known as a challenge to the dominant ideology, according to researchers (Austin, 2000; Montoya, 1994).

Storytelling is also a form of experiential learning. Storytelling relies on the centrality of experiential knowledge and the stories that have resided on the margins of history (Green, 1993). Counternarratives are a valuable tool for this in that they are more than just a method. They provide a way for marginalized peoples to “ground the real-life experience of marginalized peoples within educational theory, policy, and praxis”

(Green, 1993, p. 625). An additional value of using storytelling is that many migrants vividly recall that their parents storytelling of educational aspirations were a strong motivator for their own successes. In other studies, participants have stated that interpreting their parent's stories about their own educational experiences were actually a course of inspiration for the students (Ceja, 2004). We find the value of storytelling to be a strong cultural norm within Hispanic culture. Gandara (2005) also found that this tradition of using storytelling to teach youth about their aspirations was crucial in helping inspire youth to pursue careers in education.

The storytelling element of CRT also helps through telling a counternarrative to the norm. History is typically written by the victors or the majority. It is important that people hear directly from the minority groups in order for others to fully understand this struggle. This study was primarily directed towards potential migrant students, their families, and communities. As such, it was important for people reading it to recognize the voices and for it to sound authentic. The story needed to be told from the perspective of those who have lived the experience. They did not need to be lectured by an academic, but to be told a story from the insiders. Huerta (2015) gave a brilliant example of Latino counternarrative story telling in his experience of choosing college over gang life. His vivid description of his rough early life and his belief that education was his only chance at survival captured the experience in a manner that no third party researcher would have been able to. Milner (2007) bluntly points out that teachers in minority districts repeatedly fail to properly teach their students because of their own negative racial perceptions of their students. Ultimately, the significance of CRT to this study is that Latino students have a very weak voice in a subject of importance to them, their own

education. Yosso (2005) discusses how white administrators are usually the only ones making policy decisions that impact Latino migrant students as they progress through education. Administrators are routinely ignoring what these students are saying about their own needs and wants. While there is a racial component to this, it is not necessarily racist in intent. Lawrence (1987) discussed how many university administrators simply believe that they are doing the right thing for their students by shaping these programs for them rather than asking them how they need them to be shaped. Delpit (1988) echoed this as well when she discussed the silenced dialogue, the students not being listened to when education policy is being shaped.

One final note on CRT and Latino student voice: “In 1991, social activist and education critic Jonathan Kozol delineated the great inequities that exist between the schooling experiences of white middle-class students and those of poor African-American and Latino students. And, while Kozol’s graphic descriptions may prompt some to question how it is possible that we allow these ‘savage inequalities,’ this article suggests that these inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 47). We must have the conversation about how race shapes institutional and educational policies in this country. The conversation needs to come from those most impacted by it.

Migrant Workers in the United States and their Educational Achievement

The exact number of migrant workers in the United States is difficult to obtain since many agricultural employers do not report their workers. The U.S. Department of Labor has conducted an annual survey since 1999 (Department of Labor, National

Agricultural Worker’s Survey, March 27, 2004) to sample the population and work out basic demographics of crop workers in the United States. The findings show that 75% of U.S. migrant workers are born in Mexico as of 2009. Less than half of these workers are authorized to work in the United States although this percentage has been declining in recent years (see figure 1).

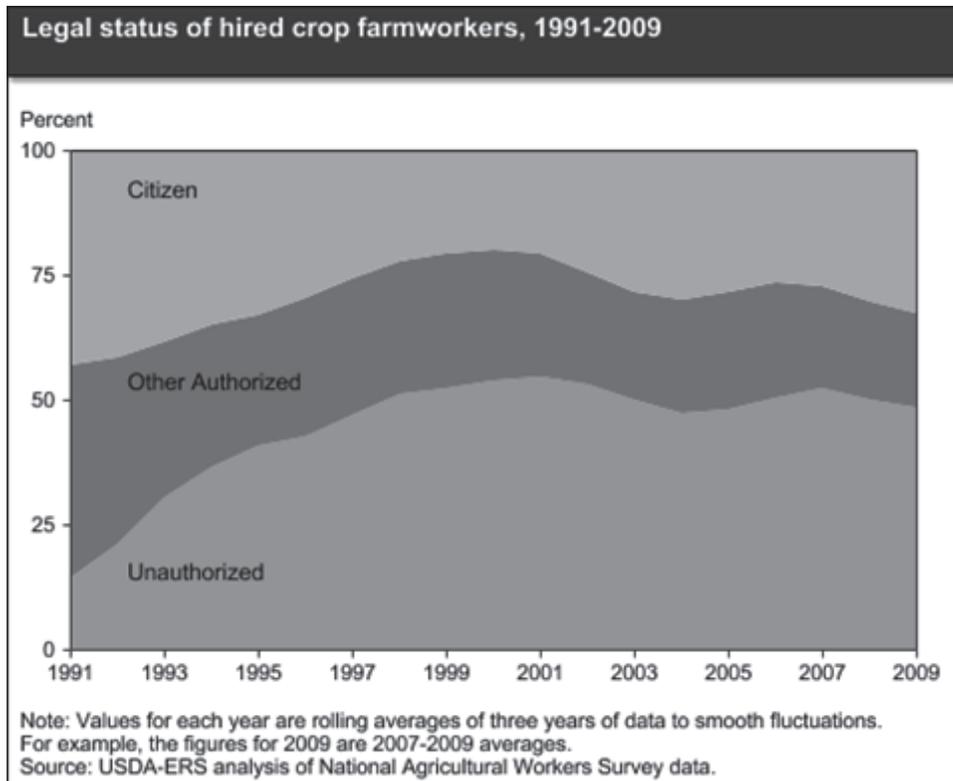


Figure 1: Legal Status of Hired Crop Farmworkers

The definition of a migrant worker varies per government agency and there is no universally agreed-upon standard. According to the Department of Labor National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) findings (March 27, 2004), their survey instrument defined a migrant worker as someone who travels as least 75 miles during a 12-month period in order to obtain a farm job. Furthermore, these statistics only apply to farmworkers who specifically work on gathering crops in the field. Overall, migrants

comprised 42 percent of crop workers in 2001-2002. This number varies considerably from year-to-year. This particular group, while significant, is in decline. Migration patterns of crop farmworkers is actually transitioning to a more settled pattern (see figure 2).

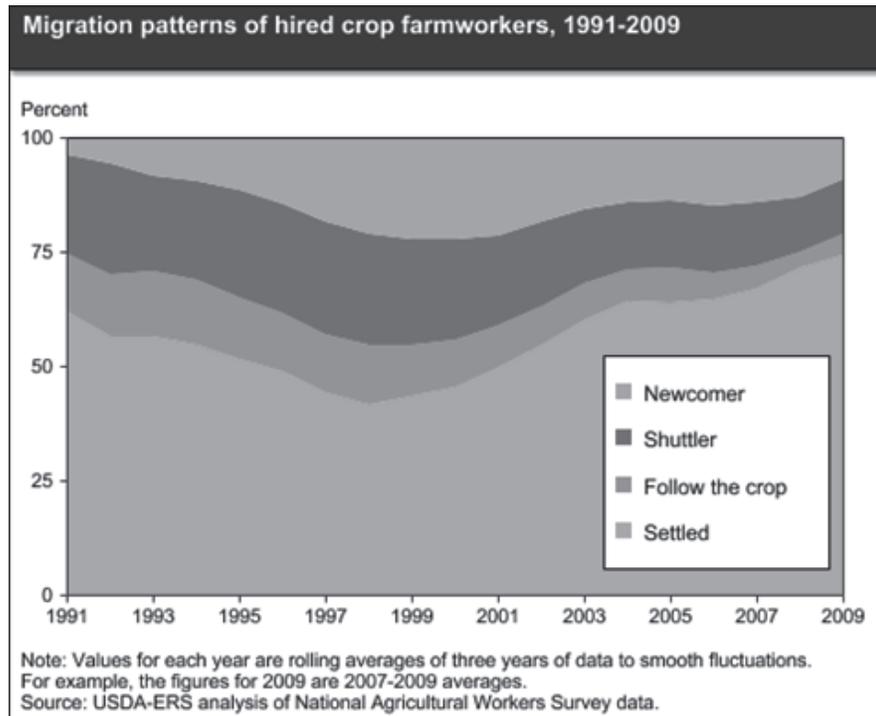


Figure 2: Migration Patterns of Hired Crop Workers

What this means for my study is that there is now a greater opportunity to pursue academic careers for migrant and settled agricultural immigrant families.

According to the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics, an estimated 11.4 million unauthorized immigrants were residing in the United States as of January 2012. Even with migrant laborers representing a small portion of the total population, this is still a substantial number of families. Texas also accounts for approximately 13 percent of these unauthorized residents. (Zong, J. & Batalova, Migration Policy Institute, February 25, 2015).

The Department of Education does not keep track of educational achievement in the United States per migrant student status. They do, however, keep other statistics that allow us to extrapolate. According to their 2010 study *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups* (Aud, S., Fox, M.A., & KewalRamani, A), there are 29,189,300 people residing in the United States of Mexican origin. Forty and one half percent of these residents were born outside the United States and 28.6% of these residents had children living in poverty (p.16). In total, the study found that in the United States there were 15.3 million children of Mexican descent, with 29 percent living in poverty (p.19).

The educational achievement level of the parents of these children is also significant. Parents of Asian children were most likely to have a mother with at least a Bachelor's degree (51 percent). White children were 36 percent likely to have a mother with at least a Bachelor's degree and Hispanic children were only 11 percent likely (p. 20). Additionally, 39 percent of Hispanic children in the United States had a mother whose highest level of education was less than a high school diploma (compared with 5 percent for White children) (p. 20). Hispanic children also have the highest rates of high school dropouts among all demographics (21 percent in 2007). This rate was substantially higher than black, white or Asian students. (p.95). Hispanic adults have the fewest college degrees per capita of any racial demographic in the United States (11 percent of Hispanic adults over the age of 25 had at least a Bachelor's degree compared with more than 50 percent of white adults). (p.140).

If we accept the findings of other studies discussed in Chapter 3, we can see that a large percentage of migrant students in the United States are born with a huge learning

disadvantage. In addition to battling itinerancy and legal residency issues, these children are born to parents with very low levels of educational achievement.

There are a number of attempts made by universities to improve success rates of Latino males in higher education. Sáenz & Ponjuan (2011) and Sáenz, Ponjuan, & Figueroa (2016) examined these efforts though and only discovered minimal success rates. Most of the focus of these programs appear to be decisions by administrators rather than actually getting information from the Latino students themselves about what it would take for them to be successful.

Migrant Families in the Texas Rio Grande Valley

This study examined the successes of high achieving Latino migrant students from the Texas Rio Grande Valley (TXRGV). The relevance of this focus was that the majority of the migrant families in the region of Texas came from this specific region. Migrant workers in California face separate issues than those in Texas yet most of the other literature focused primarily on the California migrants due to significant differences in California and Texas politics. As our participants were chosen as a convenience sample from the TXRGV population, the results will likely be skewed towards this particular demographic. This will also open the possibility that future researchers will be able to study other demographics of migrant families and compare their findings to those who originated in the TXRGV. The rationale for this study is that the overwhelming bulk of literature on the subject does not associate this demographic group with high-achieving status (Trueba, 2004, p. 33). This is significant because without positive role models to follow, the goal of higher education achievement may seem like just an out of reach dream for migrant children. By examining those who have been highly successful (as

defined by graduate degree completion), we can not only provide a role model, but also provide a path for those migrants dreaming of a better future.

The National Agricultural Worker Survey (NAWS) (Carroll, et al. 2005) estimated that there are over three million migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States. These migrants have a median educational level of seventh grade. Migrant farmworkers typically live in housing that is overcrowded, lacking adequate sanitation and working appliances and structurally defective. Housing often consists of rundown farmhouses, field barracks, or small shacks (Housing Assistance Council, 2006). The health needs of farmworkers have been compared to most of the Third World countries (National Center for Farmworker Health [NCFH] 2011).

The federal government has recognized the plight of the migrant farmworker and in particular, the need to educate the children of these workers. A series of laws have been passed over the decades in an attempt to do something to improve educational access for these individuals. In 1966, the Migrant Education Program (MEP) was established to improve primary and secondary education. This Act was most recently renewed through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The MEP provides supplemental instructional and support services to migrant students during the regular school year and the summer term. These services include: “academic instruction; career services; special guidance; counseling and testing services; and preschool services.” (US Department of Education’s Office of Migrant Education website, 2011).

While these programs do show that the federal government is making an active attempt to address the primary and secondary educational needs of these students, there is limited support for their post-secondary needs.

Before progressing farther into this study, it is important to examine the typical migrant family in the Texas Rio Grande Valley (TXRGV). Despite considerable negativity towards migrant workers, we do see evidence that just like anyone else; they have a strong desire and many strong success stories of high academic achievement (McHatton et al., 2006).

As is stated with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), the need for basic safety and security trumps higher order needs such as school. This is significant for this study because young people in migrant families have to work for their survival. A study by the National Agricultural Workers Survey estimated that 24% of field workers are between the ages of six and 13 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). When children are forced to work at such a young age it becomes difficult for them to achieve the success necessary in primary and secondary school to prepare them adequately for higher educational success.

Migrant Youth Situation and Socioeconomic Barriers

There are additional barriers that must be overcome before examining the educational barriers. An important barrier is that of low expectations that others have for these youth. The public image of Hispanic youth in America is that of someone who is a failure (Hayes-Bautista, 2004). This is an image that is frequently found in television, film, and print media. Based on my experience, it is quite pervasive and has a real impact on Hispanic youth. Furthermore, immigration debates frequently paint immigrants as criminals who do not belong. This has a noticeable impact on the self-worth of immigrant children as well as their desire (or lack thereof) to stay in the country and participate fully in the educational system (Gonzales, 2009; Hanson 2006). To further

complicate this problem, it is also becoming common for youth to migrate to the US by themselves, including a wave of children from Central America (Rumbaut, 2004). This magnifies the previously discussed problems and makes it much more likely that the youth will not be able to support their education while working full-time.

The secondary problem that migrant youth face is the lack of a structured family. Due to economic and practical realities of immigration and migrant work, it is not unusual for families to fail to migrate together (Groody, 2002). This lack of a complete family result in two significant factors related to this study: 1. A partial family frequently means that the children have to work harder to contribute to the family; and 2. The parent most supportive of a child's education may not be present.

Migrant Student Education & Access Barriers

The barriers to migrant students succeeding in higher education are intense. Before they can complete the K-12 program itself, they face the issues of not being in a steady location long-term, racial and economic discrimination, and a lack of strong educational resources and role models (Nunez, 2009; Romanowski, 2003; and Cranston-Gingras & Paul, 2008). Furthermore, migrant students, more so than their white classmates, face issues regarding a lack of English proficiency, and cultural and social isolation when attending predominantly white schools; more importantly, they lack positive role models in education (Garza, Reyes, & Trueba, 2004; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Zalaquett, McHatton, & Cranston-Gingras, 2007).

An additional barrier that migrant students face is simply the pride aspect of asking for help. For families that do not understand how the higher educational application system works, they will need to ask for assistance. For families used to

surviving in harsh conditions without assistance, this can actually form a formidable barrier (Vocke, 2007).

Cultural barriers refer to two separate educational barriers: first, it refers to barriers related to migrant students' and parents' cultural capital (as understood by Bourdieu), especially challenges involving language and communication (students' and parents' ability to read and speak in English). Second, the term 'cultural barriers' also refers to migrant families' parenting approach with regards to education, which bears the characteristics of "the accomplishment of natural growth" parenting approach (Lareau, 2002 & 2003), especially students' and parents' level of knowledge about the school system, their attitudes towards teachers and education, and their level and kind of involvement in the school system.

An additional barrier to migrant student's educational success is the amount of school they must miss. Trotter (1992) discovered that migrant students frequently have to miss two to three weeks of school each time that students move. These students frequently move three or more times in a year (Bell et al. 1994) resulting in the loss of six to nine weeks of school each year on average. There is some hope for the future of this problem however. Between 1974 and 1994, school dropout rates among migrant students dropped from 90% to 50% (Aviles, et al 1999; & Bell et al., 1994) By comparison, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2000), the normal dropout rate for all student populations was 11.4%. Dropout rates for Hispanics in general were 29.1% in 2000.

Systemic and cultural bias problems are also widespread. Nunez and Gildersleeve (2014) found that migrant students regularly had to deal with anti-bilingual, anti-

affirmative action, and anti-immigrant policies which actively interfered with their higher education aspirations.

There is strong longitudinal evidence of these systemic problems as well. Cardenas and Cardenas (1977), found incompatibility between minority and poor students and schools because of poverty, culture, language, mobility and the school's perceptions of students. Previous research on migrant students (Bejarano & Valverde, 2012; Cobb-Clark et al., 2012; Collins, 2012; Embrey et al., 2001; Green, 2003; Holmes, 2013; Johnson, 1987) have all found evidence of similar issues of poverty in migrant populations resulted in lower academic performance , learning and educational success in general. Free et al. (2014) determined that extensive policy shifts were needed in the near future to avoid committing migrant students to permanent poverty status (p. 197).

Higher Education Attainment and Barriers

College life and success can be extraordinarily difficult for students of all walks of life. Learning to be independent, focusing on the new world they suddenly find themselves in, and focusing the bulk of their efforts on academics can stress even the most well-prepared student (Bryde & Milburn, 1990). Parental educational achievement can help reduce these barriers in families with high levels of academic success. In related studies, (Eccles & Wignfield, 1985; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Hanson, 2006; and Heymann, 2000) all found that parents were one of the primary predictors of academic success. Parents with high levels of academic success produce children with high levels of success. Heymann (2000) also noted that this disparity was one of the greatest challenges that students from poor backgrounds faced. Parents need to be able to spend significant time with their children each week in order to ensure their academic success.

Martinez (1997) noted the magnitude of this problem with migrant families when he discussed the lack of home time that migrant parents have to interact with their children. When migrant worker parents do make it home, “sometimes you are so tired that you get home in a bad mood and...take it out on your children” (p.75).

It is worth noting that, while the value of a formal education may seem obvious to those of us with one, it can still be worthwhile to explore the rationale for its pursuit. Much of the other sections of this lit review (especially the CRT are already addressing the issue of higher education attainment, so it would be a bit redundant to repeat it all here as well).

Achievement Guilt

Achievement guilt is a common side effect of first generation college students in general and first generation graduate students in particular. It is defined by Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) as guilt that affects students in regards to receiving something that their parents never had the opportunity to receive. First generation students, particularly from working class backgrounds often feel that they do not deserve this special opportunity and feel guilty about. Covarrubias & Fryberg built this theory upon the seminal work of Piorkowski (1983) who termed it survivor guilt. Survivor guilt is defined as feeling guilty because you survived something that others around you had not. In this context, it is in reference to improving a student’s socioeconomic status despite other family members remaining at the same level.

Faculty Perceptions and Assistance

A common theme present in many of the studies examined was the idea that the way faculty perceived students affected student success rates. Morales (2014) and Wirt

and Jaegar (2014) explored this concept in depth. All three researchers found repeated positive and statistically significant correlations between student success and faculty support of students. Morales (2014) found that this is cause for concern because faculty were generally not trained in how best to assist any students, much less migrant students.

The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)

The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) is one program aimed at helping to tear down the primary barriers that migrant students face (cost and access). The program helps students to get through their first year of an undergraduate program at a university. An example of this program is at St. Edward's University. Since 1972, St. Edward's has participated in the CAMP program. In addition to providing a welcome environment with other successful students, the program lowers the total cost of attendance at the normally-expensive, private Liberal Arts school to \$2,000 per year (www.stedwards.edu/admission/camp). The university brings in 35 migrant agricultural students per year and provides additional support options, which can also cover the student's \$2,000 annual expenses. While programs like this need to be limited in scope for financial reasons, their impact on inspiration is immeasurable. One of St. Edward's CAMP students was just offered admission to the Ph.D. program in APCE at Texas State University.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (April 24, 2009), the purpose of programs like these is to provide a familiar, family like environment for these students as they transition into higher education. By bringing in a cohort of students with similar backgrounds and keeping them together as much as possible, this helps break down the cultural barriers as they transition to higher education life. Watching other cohorts ahead

of them succeed and move on to greater levels of academic achievement also help break down the barriers of access and a lack of role models. Given the high cost of these programs, (\$15 million per year) (U.S. Department of Education, April 24, 2009), it is not going to be cost effective for this to be the only solution to the problem.

Strategies and Conflicts

Over the course of researching case studies and existing literature, I found two inherent conflicts that will need to be addressed when planning programs to solve these problems. Padgett, Johnson and Pascarella (2012) found that first-generation college students performed much better and had higher academic success rates when working collaboratively on most projects. Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson and Covarrubias (2012) however found that most first-generation students preferred an independent learning approach to academia. This leads to the inherent conflict in that what works best for many of these students is not what they prefer. Many of these first-generation migrant students in particular make reference to the idea that it was independent hard work that led them to college and graduate school to begin with, yet their greatest challenge was a lack of knowledge about how to access university resources. This seems like something that could have been resolved with a more collaborative approach, and hence the conflict.

Summary

Migrant students pursuing a graduate education face a number of separate challenges. Each of these individual challenges (cultural bias, first-generation student status, socioeconomic status, lack of preparation etc.) have been studied comprehensively. There have also been some studies done on migrant students in undergraduate programs and individual college programs like CAMP have been formed

to assist these students. There is no evidence that would suggest that anyone has even considered the possibility of studying how these students might be successful in graduate education. My own perception is that this exclusion is evidence of research bias; something I hope to correct with this study.

3. METHOD

“[Narratives] flexibility allows a gifted storyteller to adapt a given narrative to make sense of a confusing situation” (Cruikshank, 2002, p.7).

The problem addressed in this study was to determine how migrant students were able to overcome educational and cultural barriers in order to become successful in post-secondary graduate-level education. This study was conducted in the form of a personal narrative case study. The importance of using a qualitative research methodology is that it is exploratory in nature and is particularly useful when the topic is new or the topic has never been addressed with a certain sample. This type of method is useful in situations where existing theories do not apply to the particular sample or group under study (Morse, 1991). There simply has not been enough research done on why certain groups of former migrant workers are able to succeed in graduate education. When little research has been done, then the study merits a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, when little research has been done on migrant or former seasonal farmworker students as related to the strategies used to overcome academic barriers, there is a demonstrated need for the research to be completed. Furthermore, the use of personal narratives fits within the cultural norms for the group. As was established in Chapter 2, storytelling is one of the factors identified as being influential in a child’s later choices in regards to education. Therefore, we can justify the need for a narrative approach for two reasons: 1. This is a common technique that the participants were already familiar and comfortable with; and 2. When educators and policy makers use the results of this study, it was easier to use personal narratives to influence academic success among future former migrant workers.

Chapter 2 discussed two important concepts that further justify this method. As discussed, storytelling is a common means of communicating the importance of education in migrant families. Therefore this is an effective way to gather data from the participants of the study. It will also be an effective means of distributing findings to those who are working with migrant youth in an educational setting. This fulfills both the theoretical and practical needs of the Ph.D. dissertation. The secondary area of consideration is that, according to Critical Race Theory (CRT), counternarratives allows a minority group to tell their stories in a way that challenges the dominant theories of how their group is expected to behave. This gives the minority group a strong voice to oppose the assumptions about them. (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2001)

Research Design

This study used personal narrative life history design to explore school environments, parental involvement, and community influences on migrant students for the purpose of understanding educational achievement.

The research design used a semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, allowing participants to share their life histories, college experiences, and strategies used to be successful in graduate education. Further discussions focused on cultural experiences and how their stories differ from the life stories of others they knew who chose not to continue their education. The participants were allowed the time and freedom to talk about their experiences and guide the discussion to areas they felt were most relevant. There was a common structure to the questions but participants were allowed free reign and steering the conversation to areas relevant to the study. This method allowed me to build a positive rapport with participants during the interview stages. Semi-structured

interview methods “are well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of participants regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers (Barriball & While, 1994).

Diaz (2010) validated a semi-structured survey instrument for use on undergraduate migrant students in California college. The instrument was modified to include questions on graduate education and Texas-specific issues relevant to this study. The study was qualitative and open-ended, so while my instrument was not specifically validated, it is not necessary as I was relying upon triangulation of qualitative data and thematic coding as the basis for my conclusions.

Analysis of the data for this project followed standard protocols. The first step was to transcribe the recordings from all interview sessions. The transcriptions were then coded to identify key words or concepts that the participant referred to in response to specific prompts. The key words and concepts were then compared across all participants to identify themes. These themes are addressed in the findings along with their implied significance. A relationship tree was constructed to identify key shared components identified by each participant and how the stories relate across all participants. Finally, a picture of the key influential experiences of each participant was drawn out that illustrates how the various life factors of each participant shaped their success in graduate education.

Personal Narrative

Personal narratives are powerful tools that can be used to add balance to and emphasize the importance of a certain topic. They can be used to supplement existing quantitative data or to stand alone on their own merits. Quantitative research is a

powerful tool to see the full extent of a conversation. Qualitative research however, allows us to fully understand the magnitude of the problem. Personal narratives in specific allow us to see specifically how a problem affects real people. It allows us to tell a story and show where the problem lies. This is an important tool because we tend to look at the world through our own lens and often need to see from the participant's perspective, how the world can actually look to them. Alvermann (2000) noted that narrative research consists of a "variety of research practices, ranging from those who tell a story of how individuals understand their actions through oral and written accounts of historical episodes to those that explore certain methodological aspects of storytelling" (p. 2). According to Adalberto (2005) "The use of narrative inquiry enables researchers and writers to show that social reality is a layered phenomenon that requires subjectivity based on personal experiences and intuitiveness as interpretive guides for its study" (p.150). It is also worth noting that narrative inquiry is not without flaw. Narrative inquiry is biased and the findings cannot be easily quantified. By its nature, the researcher is choosing a side without telling all other aspects (Adalberto, 2005 & Bochner, 2001). This is an important delimitation to note, however in justifying this approach we must look back at the two major types of research and our explanation for the value of both. There is an abundance of statistics available to illustrate the severity of the problem that I am examining here (the quantitative element). There are also case studies, focus groups, and other research studies done to show us where the problems exist and to what magnitude they exist. What is lacking however, is the specific stories of those who have experienced the problems first hand and overcome them. Those stories are the ones which transcend quantitative means to show us the problem in real life, with real life solutions.

Examining several migrant students who excelled in higher education allowed me to examine the complex intricacies of human life in order to find the keys to success in this system. It gives a voice to those who are normally voiceless and inspires others to follow in their precise footsteps in order to accomplish their own educational dreams. This information cannot be gathered or distributed through any other means more effectively.

Instrument

For the sake of consistency, I based my questions on an instrument developed by Viridiana Diaz (2010) at California State University, Sacramento. Diaz examined California migrant workers and sought to identify traits and markers that led to a broadly defined concept of success. My study differs from that of Diaz in that I am primarily examining Texas migrant families and am focusing on a narrower topic. Rather than success in general, I am examining academic success as measured by current enrollment in or successful completion of graduate degree programs. As such, it was necessary to add a section to the end of her instrument that added questions geared more towards educational attitudes and factors that influenced their educational success. Diaz's study was tested and validated and offered valuable theoretical ideas for success among immigrant populations. My study went beyond this to develop theory and practice in the areas of how to improve academic success rates among America's most academically unsuccessful demographic.

Participants

The four participants were chosen from a convenience sample of Latino former migrant workers who have completed or are currently enrolled in graduate school in central Texas (San Antonio and San Marcos). All participants' names and locations were

changed to ensure confidentiality and IRB compliance. Participants were given an informed-consent form with the details of the study and types of questions being asked. Criteria for the selection included the following: a) the participant spent the majority of their school age experience (elementary to high school) with their parents who followed the migrant stream in search of agricultural work, b) experienced periods of school interruption during regular school years due to transitory lifestyle, c) were U.S. born or eventually became U.S. residents while in school, d) were part of the migrant education programs during their transitory migrant period; and e) had brother or sister who also worked in the fields (to determine if the siblings have same levels of success).

The justification for this criteria was as follows: For “a”, it is important to make certain that the participants spent most of their youth as migrant workers. For “b”, it is important to measure students whose education was interrupted as this has been previously reported as a significant factor in many students never returning to school. For “c”, it is important to make certain that citizenship issues did not interfere with the participant’s ability to finish school. For “d”, it is important to consider the effectiveness of various programs aimed at improving former migrant worker education. For “e”, the selection of those with siblings from similar backgrounds will help determine the influence of families on the educational outcomes of the participants by determining whether or not all members of the family had equal educational successes.

Analysis

While this narrative study is predominantly qualitative in nature, I utilized semi-structured questionnaires as the basis instrument for my interviews. I also compared these

findings with other findings from the literature and ample statistics provided by various governmental and non-governmental agencies to fully triangulate my findings.

Grounded theory (Corbin, & Strauss, 2008), was used to analyze the narrative data obtained in the interviews. The steps in the process are as follows:

1. Interview participants were interviewed a minimum of two times. The first interview was primarily from the questionnaire. I encouraged the participants to fully tell their stories and follow up on anything that seems relevant. The length of the interviews was between 45 minutes to one hour each. The interviews were arranged to be at the best convenience of the interviewee. I selected the best environment that had no interruptions and did not interfere with their work or personal time so that they would feel free to speak at length without outside pressure or influence.
2. During the interviews I took notes and immediately after each I listened to the transcript and wrote down any notes, observations, and questions that come to mind initially.
3. After all initial interviews were conducted; I compared notes to identify initial common themes and any obvious gaps or omissions from the first round of interviews.
4. I then conducted secondary interviews to ask about these common themes and seek deeper elaboration on the concepts that seemed most important to each participant. At the end of these interviews, I asked their opinion regarding common themes arising from the interview, being especially careful not to lead them to any pre-determined conclusions.
5. After all interviews were conducted, I recruited two independent coders to transcribe and code the major themes and concepts that arise in the interviews to ensure objectivity. This is important as other researchers such as Diaz (2010) have noted that the

transcribing and coding can vary per coder and that researcher bias can creep in to even this seemingly simple process.

6. The two results were then compared to each other for consistent themes. At this point, I also compared these themes with my own notes from the interview process. The coders assessed the initial codes as the starting point. Additional codes were created by myself as themes began to emerge from the data.

7. After carefully writing up my analysis of the common themes and lessons learned, I then began to compare these findings with the literature and official statistics to create my theories and suggest areas of practice that can be improved.

4. FINDINGS

Introduction

A college education is rare for migrant students but a graduate education is even rarer. The purpose of this study was to look at four individuals who found success in graduate education and find out what it was that drove them to be a success. As Latino migrant students continue to be fully accepted in US Society, there is a need for institutions to be more responsive for the needs of this demographic (Fry, 2008). Diversity is a worthwhile goal in and of itself in a world that has become more culturally independent. What needs to be kept in mind is that we have become a smaller world and must learn to work with those of different cultural backgrounds. We equally need to ensure that American academia is not only represented by the dominant cultural group but represents the whole body of the American culture. (Banks, 2004; Friedman, 2005).

This chapter reported on the findings of qualitative interviews conducted with four participants that provided a better understanding of what barriers these students faced and how they overcame them. It will also help us better understand what universities can do to better accommodate these students.

Most of the literature on migrant and seasonal farmworker students has not associated this population with the term high achieving (Trueba, 2002). In fact, compared to other student populations, little has been written about migrant students in higher education, particularly the strategies used by this population to overcome significant academic and personal barriers to graduate from college. Unfortunately, a lot has been written on disadvantaged, deficit, or at-risk theories of academic failure (Trueba, 2002). Consequently, much has been said about the negative effects of

Mexican-origin culture, the lack of adoption of American values, and the supposed lack of high aspirations (Green, 2003). But despite the dismal statistics and in the face of significant challenges, many students from migrant farm worker backgrounds persevere towards academic success and ultimately attain a college degree (McHatton et al., 2009).

The participants in this study were asked to share their experiences from early childhood through completion of graduate school. Under the category “college experience,” participants were asked to describe their overall experience and how their perceptions changed from their freshmen year to their senior year. Under the category “success strategies,” participants were asked to describe what it took for them to graduate and to describe times they felt very accomplished or discouraged as college students. Under the third category “institutional recommendations,” participants were asked to list the various campus resources utilized through college and to suggest any changes they would make to the campus to ensure future generations of Latino migrant students are successful.

Explanation of Tables

Table 1 below is a breakdown of the demographics of the participants. Of all of the participants available, the following four were selected because they represented the greatest demographic variety available. I felt that it was important to see if consistencies existed across demographic lines. As previously discussed, this was a bit of a convenience sample. I reached out to as many people as I could find who represented former migrant workers who had succeeded in academia. I was only able to find one female respondent, but this is not surprising. All respondents indicated that it was much harder for a woman to make it out of migrant work into academia. They appear to be the

least likely group to receive a formal education. One participant selected (Ignacio) seemed to be relevant because he was openly gay. I wanted to see if this fact, in a heavily Catholic cultural environment, would influence his need to flee his community and his family support levels. I selected myself (Diego) of course because this began as my personal story and I wanted to compare my results to those of others. Finally, I selected Alberto because his story was similar to mine and I wanted to compare at least two people of similar demographics to see what consistencies (or lack thereof) would exist. The specific information came from the beginning of each interview where I specifically asked them about basic demographic information. This was not included in the instrument but I felt it was helpful to have for comparison.

Table 2 illustrates the coding families identified by Bogdan & Biklen (2003). These families have been used in a range of studies and helped guide the general analysis of comments received by the participants. They were used as a starting point for developing themes and sub-themes. Bogdan & Biklen (2003) actually created dozens of different codes, but the eight selected here were the only ones that I actually found when I went over the narratives. When coders first transcribed and coded, we then sat down to see which of the codes would fit under all the possible coding families. We (myself and the volunteer coders) found that the eight general coding families here were most common and relevant.

Table 4 is a listing of the major themes discovered from the participants (family & inspiration, motivation, the college experience, socialization & social capital, and challenges into opportunities). I also synthesized the major concepts from participants that I used to create these themes. The significance of this table is that it represented the

next major step in the coding process. Once I had the list of coding families, I set out myself to review the transcripts and find specific mentions that were most common in each code family. I then looked at these as a whole and started breaking them down into the fewest broad families possible to see what the largest themes would be. In this case, I was able to find that nearly everything I heard from the participants could essentially be built up into five different categories.

I know I am going a bit out of order here, but I feel that it fits in this case. Table 3 is a listing of specific words or phrases that I heard from participants that I then put into the major themes categories in Table 4. Essentially, I am trying to show my work here, by referring to specifics that came from the participants themselves that influenced my decision-making.

Table 5 builds upon this idea by directly citing which participants indicated through their interviews items that were later compiled under the major themes. Most were consistent across all major themes, but only Diego mentioned items encompassed the full range of themes. This shows that while there were some consistencies, there were also some important differences. Alberto and I (Diego) seemed to be the only ones that experienced each of the major themes and subthemes. My analysis of this is that it is simply by chance. Sarah had less of a parental push and was more self-motivated. This is likely due to being female and her indication that women were not expected to leave home and pursue an education. Ignacio felt more at home at college, particularly in the library. He therefore did not feel as many problems with accessing resources and overcoming challenges. His challenges were more at home and less pronounced at school.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	First-Gen	ESL	Level of Ed
Diego	M	66	Y	N	PhD
Sara	F	43	Y	Y	MA
Alberto	M	52	Y	Y	PhD
Ignacio	M	38	Y	Y	MLS

Table 2

Findings by Coding Family (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

1. Setting/ Context Code – General statements on the setting and environment of the universities.

- *University as a different environment* – an environment that is completely unfamiliar to participants with few people like themselves there.
- *Confusing environment* – unable to figure out how to navigate and use the services that are available.

2. Situation Code – Descriptions of the way participants perceive themselves in relationship to their collegiate experience.

- *Learning to be a college/ graduate student* – not feeling academically or emotionally prepared for college.
- *Internal motivators*- all participants felt that a desperation for a better life and internal motivators were their keys to success

3. Perspectives Held by Participants Code – A shared way of thinking that captured a

common understanding of the graduate school experience.

- *Discrimination/ assumptions about migrant students* - participants felt that faculty and students assumed that migrant students were not intellectually and emotionally capable of advanced academic work.
- *Fear and guilt of leaving family* – participants were concerned about leaving their families and not supporting their families and felt guilt about the academic lifestyle.

4. Participants Ways of Thinking about People and Objects Code – An understanding of the outside perceptions of migrant students and the characteristics of the unique college experience of this population.

- *College as the “only” option* – college is not an option but rather the only way to break the cycle of poverty.
- *Migrant students as “hard working”* – the exposure to a labor intensive lifestyle convinced these students that they were capable of the hard work required to be successful.

5. Strategy code - tactics, methods, techniques, maneuvers, and/ or ploys used to succeed.

- *Reinventing” yourself”* – college as an ideal time to change for the best.
- *Developing career interests* – gaining work experience that is compatible with abilities, interests and major increases motivation to graduate.
- *Turning challenges into motivators* – a conscious choice to see challenges as opportunities and a greater reason to complete a college degree.

6. Conflicting Values Code – experiences, events, and activities that reflect conflicting values between the participant’s world at home with family and that of college life.

- *Breaking the chain* – being the first to go to college requires going against the norm, breaking the rules and at some level going against parents’ will.
- *Negotiating between two worlds* – a struggle to negotiate between two opposite and conflicting worlds, that of a student and that of a member of the family and community.
- *Unrealistic cultural expectations* – the tradition of family obligations can get in the way of academics.
- *Survivor guilt* – guilt for having the opportunities a college education offers while their parents or other family members did not.
- *The Imposter Phenomenon* – feelings of “*phoniness*” and the belief on behalf of the participants of having fooled others into believing they are college worthy, when in their reality, they are not.

7. Institutional Agent Code – individuals that facilitated access to social capital and the utilization of valuable resources.

- *Extent of accessing social capital* – methods of negotiating their way through the institutional culture even if this meant going against cultural beliefs.
- *Access of resources* – finding ways to access library, computer, and study resources with limited institutional support.
- *Building a strategic network* – building a circle of influential individuals that can meet various individual needs.
- *Identifying “caring” institutional agents* – identifying individuals who promote

trust, honesty, patience, respect, mentorship, teaching and learning, legitimacy, reliance and commitment to the participant's future.

- *Identifying empowerment agents* – in addition to identifying institutional agents, identification of individuals who empower and promote changing the system to make it easier for future generations.

8. Narrative Codes – elements of the participant's story that might reveal something about their true beliefs.

- *Family* – family is constantly mentioned as a major influencer, both as a drive for valuing education and guilt for letting down family or leaving family.
- *Internal drive* – all participants had a powerful internal drive that motivated them to keep going.
- *Sacrifice* - all participants made considerable personal and professional sacrifices to pursue their education, and graduate education in particular.
- *Escape* – was constantly mentioned as their rationale, to “escape their current situation in search of a better life”.

Table 3

Major Themes

Family & Inspiration	Motivation	The College Experience	Socialization & Social Capital	Challenges into Opportunity
* Parental Push * Meal ticket * Only option for success	* Always wanted it * Make parents happy. * Hope for others * Prove people wrong.	* Lost * Confused * Exciting – Opportunity to break the family chain. * Met new friends.	* Only one like me. * Others encouraging me to quit. * A few positive encouragers	* History of working hard. * Can adapt to anything. * Show my kids that they can do it too.

Table 4

Themes and Sub-Themes

Family & Inspiration	Motivation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental Push: Repeated themes that parents were the driving force. “Listen mijo/mija, education is your meal ticket”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inner desire Wanting to please parents. Often feel pushed to the point of not feeling they have any other choice.

- Only option for success. Seeing parents struggling and wanting to break out of cycle of poverty.
- Seeing no other options for success.
- Wanting to provide hope and role models for next generation.
- Desire to not live down to the expectation of those who think they will fail.

The College Experience	Socialization & Social Capital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult but rewarding • Not knowing where to turn for help and resources. • Having to fit in with other students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few like me. • Unique experience with hard work made me stronger. • Building self-esteem that “ I can do it”

- Challenges into Opportunities**
- Worked hard their entire lives and therefore they knew they could succeed.
 - Constant moving in their youth made change easy to deal with and easy to adapt to changes and unfamiliar environments.
 - Working independently in the fields conditioned them to adjust to college life.

Table 5

Themes by Participants

	Diego	Sara	Alberto	Ignacio
Family & Inspiration	X	X	X	X
Motivation	X	X	X	X
The College Experience	X	X	X	X
Socialization and Social Capital	X	X	X	X
Challenges into Opportunities	X		X	

Table 6

Sub-Themes by Participants

	Diego	Sarah	Alberto	Ignacio
Parental push	X		X	X
Breaking poverty	X	X	X	X
Only option	X	X	X	X

Inner drive				
Pleasing parents				
Role models				
Cultural expectations				

	Diego	Sarah	Alberto	Ignacio
Difficulty				
Access to resources				
Few like me				
History of hard work				
Itinerant (traveling) youth				

Profile of Participants

Diego

Diego is a doctoral candidate in the Adult Education PhD program at Texas State University. He is a 66-year-old community college professor and activist. Diego predominantly credits his parents as his primary motivator to go to college and graduate school. His mother constantly whispered in his ear growing up that education was his meal ticket; his way out of this life.

Diego has had a long career path from being a Marine in Vietnam, to a small business owner, and on to being a professor. He started his life though in the Texas Rio Grande Valley, constantly moving from school to school. While he experimented with a lot of different career paths and started a large family, his parent's words about the keys to success always stayed with him.

This was the driving motivation to why he kept going back to school, despite many setbacks. Like a lot of the other participants, he was discouraged by the lack of others like him in college and the lack of faculty role models. Many actively discouraged him from higher education pursuits and expected him to quit. His internal drive and family push kept him going, which were key factors to his educational success.

He was able to find some university resources and mentors to help him through the difficult periods in graduate school. Despite this, he still frequently felt like the odd man out. The plus factor was that he was able to use the available resources.

Being a migrant, his primary and secondary schools did not prepare him well. Attending a large number of schools, he was unable to build up long-term connections and was constantly catching up on where he needed to be. With family with limited

formal education and no higher education, he had no real family members who could tell him what college was like or help him prepare for it.

Diego was able to learn on his own through experiential learning and through being sociable and making friends in his programs to help him work through the challenges.

Sarah

Sara is a 43-year-old social worker. Like Diego, her family had no prior experience with higher education. Also like Diego, she knew that her family was counting on her to be successful. She was terrified of failure early on but afraid to ask for help. As an undergraduate, her experience became easier once she figured out how to use university services, particularly the equal opportunity programs.

She felt that some of the value of going away to college presented her with a conflict because her family did not believe that she should leave home, which troubled her. Education was valued by her parents but none of them had any knowledge that would help support her during her educational career.

Like Diego, Sarah worked full-time while attending college and graduate school. Through extra hours of tutoring and using every resource available, she felt “caught up” by the time she completed her undergraduate years and was ready to move on to graduate school. She applied for the highest ranked graduate program in her field and was accepted.

This was however, her first time truly living far from home, which took some time to adjust to. As an undergraduate, Sara found that having a Latino counselor made a huge difference. “He never let me down, especially when I was thinking about quitting”.

Like Diego as well, Sarah often found that Latino professors were not terribly helpful and at times a bit dismissive and discouraging of them. Eventually, Sara completed a Master's in Social Work.

Sarah and Diego both got their start in community colleges as well. In Sarah's case she attended for four years. Sarah was single the entire time she was in college and graduate school and had no children.

Like the other participants, Sara did not feel that she was well-prepared and felt that there is a strong bias against migrant students. Many told her that a vocational road was a better career track for herself and others in similar situations. She feels that the greatest barriers for herself and similar students is that parents of migrant students do not know how to properly support their children in college, and especially graduate school.

She felt that the tutoring services were most useful. She also found that minority student groups helped the most social issues. It also included a strong mentoring component with positive older Latino student role models. Sarah also mentioned having a strong counselor that inspired her.

In addition to her parents, Sara found that her grandmother, as an independent and successful strong woman inspired her. Watching her father struggle was also the key to inspire her to find a different way of life.

Alberto

Alberto is a 52-year-old schoolteacher from the Texas Rio Grande Valley. He is not a native English speaker and at first struggled in college. He initially dropped out but went back to take remedial lessons. As time went on, Alberto met a lot of friends who helped him with finding resources and techniques to succeed. Graduate school was when

he felt he had the greatest support. Alberto found that the cohort strategy of his Ph.D. program made it much easier to find the support he needed to be successful.

Alberto found that there were some professors along the way who believed in him but he had a strong internal drive and self-confidence that he would be successful. A key factor to his educational success was having a wife and kids that are supportive.

His parents were fine with an educational career and provided emotional support to encourage him to continue. He credits them and his sister as being the primary inspirational influences in pursuing an educational career. His older siblings were able to complete their undergraduate degrees and insisted that he join them. Alberto and Ignacio both felt that their internal drive and internal push for something better was their main key to success.

Alberto believes that migrant farm workers are at a disadvantage from not having the academic preparation. He also believes that professors and other students believe that they are not capable of the capacity for academic success. He felt that this was a constant barrier for him, particularly early on in his academic career.

Some institutional advantages were minor things like computer labs. These allowed him to work in peace and quiet and not be distracted as he was at home. He found that the library and librarians were his strongest resource that helped him out. He does wish that there were more opportunities for learning how to use these services. He also noted that he wanted to see more tutoring in how to use these facilities.

Alberto emphasized that he thinks more migrant students would be more successful if they knew about and were better able to utilize the services such as libraries and computer labs. He did not feel that the information was well presented to him.

Like the others, Alberto was always taught that education was critical in finding a good job and escaping the migrant, blue-collar lifestyle. Education was the key to being on a level playing field to compete in the world and having the things and life that you want. Also, like the majority of the participants, Alberto sees it as his mission to give back and inspire other migrant youth to follow his lead. He completed his PhD in Education.

Ignacio

Ignacio is a 38-year-old librarian. He has a Master's degree from the University of Texas and is originally from the Texas Rio Grande Valley. Ignacio had additional challenges in that he is openly gay. This has been a challenge for him both with his family and throughout college in Texas. He felt that due to his ethnicity his sexual preference was poorly received by others.

This has also led to greater feelings of isolation, even compared with the other participants in this study. Ignacio had a relatively stable background growing up. His parents were migrant workers but they had family in each location that they worked and geographically they were more limited, rarely leaving the Texas Rio Grande Valley. Ignacio spent much of his teen years in one location and left for college immediately after graduating from high school. Of all the participants, Ignacio felt more removed from the group. Despite family tensions, he still considers family to be a strong motivator.

Like a lot of the other participants, Ignacio felt compelled to go to college as a means of escaping the environment he grew up in. While his family was more stable and financially secure than the other three participants, he felt that his lifestyle would be far less tolerated in his home community. This was a primary driver for why he wanted to

leave. Unlike the other three, Ignacio does not feel quite as strong of a need to serve as an inspiration to others. He still has a close relationship with his family but still holds a bit of resentment for his siblings which he feels have been treated different by his parents than him. He feels that others have had an easier life and he does not want to make life easier for others. He is highly sociable though and encouraging to his friends.

From an institutional perspective, Ignacio agreed with Alberto that the computer labs were useful places for him to escape and work in privacy. Beyond that, Ignacio advanced Alberto's idea that libraries were an ideal place to escape to and work. Ignacio liked the library experience so much that he decided to make it his main career field. His highest degree is a Master of Library Science but has intentions to apply to a PhD program in the future.

Themes from Coding Families

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used as the method of data analysis. In this study, the process of data analysis began by identifying segments in the data set that were responsive to the research questions. The data were divided into general codes and later more specific themes related to the literature and theoretical frameworks are implied. This study used the coding family introduced by Bogdan and Biklen, (2003), as a starting point. For the purpose of this study, two additional codes were created by the researcher to better attest to the research questions. These codes include a code to categorize conflicting values and one to categorize the utilization of institutional agents. A total of eight codes (Table 2), followed by themes and subthemes, are presented in this section of Chapter 4.

1. Setting/Context Code

This code allowed the researcher to categorize data that placed the study into a larger context. General participant statements describing the setting and environment fit under this code. This includes descriptions of the campus, experiences in the classroom and encounters with faculty/staff among other statements. Overall, participants indicated that they were not prepared when they got to college initially, but felt a bit more prepared by the time they reached graduate school. They still felt a bit out of place initially, largely because of their ethnicity and the fact that they were migrant workers.

University as a different environment.

Scholars have identified “the privilege of whiteness” and “possessive investment of whiteness” in various social settings, education being one of them (Kivel, 1996; Lipsitz, 1998; McIntosh, 2001). Due to the influential differences that exist between themselves and members of the dominant society, creating a sense of belonging in the college community is especially important for students from migrant backgrounds. Institutions of higher learning that help students create a climate where they can retain their cultural identity, while they develop a sense of belonging, will improve the students’ chances of persisting in such institutions (Hurtado et al., 1997).

Unlike other studies on migrant students, none of my participants really indicated that they ever felt a true sense of belonging or community on campus. They all indicated specific people who helped, but they felt that even Latino faculty looked down on them for their migrant backgrounds.

The first time I spotted a Latino professor in graduate school, I thought he would understand me. Even in graduate school, there was still discrimination. He didn’t seem to think I belonged there and tried to get me to quit. – Diego

There were no Latino female professors during my time in college. Being in the Midwest magnified this. The Latino male professors seemed to completely dismiss me. I never really felt at home or that I belonged there. – Sara

Not being a native English speaker, I struggled quite a bit at first and originally dropped out. After taking some remedial classes, I was able to fit in. I felt better supported in graduate school when I found other students like me. I was never able to find faculty like me but I was lucky to have a few to encourage me along the way. – Alberto

I knew from the beginning that there would not be any other Latino gays out there in college. I decided early on that it would be entirely up to me to bear down and get through it. Not expecting any support or like-mindedness, I wasn't let down. I knew that this was the only way for me forward though since academics tend to be a bit more tolerant. –Ignacio

Confusing environment.

All participants said that the environment was very confusing and out of place for them. They were not prepared initially for college and were only marginally prepared for graduate school. When switching schools and regions for graduate school, they did not know where to turn to for resources. A lack of family success in academia led to this confusion. Their parents never really knew how to prepare them for this new life transition.

I had no background in college and no one in my family had a background in college. I didn't know what to expect and I was really lost at first. Nothing in my background prepared me for this. Even moving on to graduate school, the challenges were new and the campus was new. I felt lost. – *Diego*

No woman in my family had ever left. Most of my friends were just getting pregnant and married before graduating. I had no friends who had previously made it out of the neighborhood and on to college. Because of this, I had no one to ask about what to expect or how to prepare myself. – *Sarah*

Being stuck in remedial classes in particular, I felt like I really wasn't in the right place. I felt like I didn't belong. I didn't know where to turn to for help and I assumed that everyone else must be smarter than me. I thought that I was dumber or something because everyone else seemed to know what they were doing. I'm not sure in hindsight if this was because everyone was better at hiding their

confusion, or if people told them what to expect. I just know that I felt like the odd outsider. – *Alberto*

I had friends who had gone off to college and I didn't go that far from home. I was alone at school and it did feel like no one else really was like me. I struggled initially with finding resources but that got better as time moved on. I felt more confident by the time I made it into my Master's program. –*Ignacio*

2. *Situational Code*

This code assisted me in categorizing statements that described the way participants see themselves in relation to their collegiate experience. This is an expansion upon the basic idea in the first code. While the participants initially felt confused and out of place due to setting, they also experience something similar with their situation.

Learning to be a college/ graduate student.

The accounts from the study participants described college as an introduction to lifelong learning. They strongly felt that college had not only given them a degree, but it also encouraged their desire for ongoing personal growth and development. The participants in this study were first-generation college students and transitioning to college life was a new and unfamiliar experience. For most, they were able to move on to graduate education in similar environments. Some participants, such as Sarah moved on to a graduate environment thousands of miles from home, introducing all new problems. In addition, in most cases, most came from small rural high schools of 200 – 500 students. The university was itself a city in comparison to some of their hometowns. Collectively, their accounts described how their minds opened up and their world became larger once they stepped on campus.

I did not feel prepared for college at all. In addition to the language barrier, I did not know how to study. I was used to memorizing for high school or copying straight from the textbook. Here I had to think, explain things in my own words,

connect ideas and connect them to the real life. I did not learn that at all in high school. When I come to think about it, high school did not prepare me to transition to college. - *Diego*

My undergraduate years were difficult but I was able to find some support from other students and some faculty members and settled in. By grad school however, I moved to Iowa. The environment was so different that I felt like I was truly in a different environment for the very first time. – *Sarah*

The first essay I received back from my English remediation class was bad. I was proud of my work and honestly it was the first long essay I had ever written in the U.S. In high school, we answer questions from something we read in the book and basically everybody just copied each other. Here in college, it was critical thinking, analyzing the ideas, different points of views; I had never even heard this vocabulary before. - *Alberto*

I had to learn to study. In high school, I studied with the television on or sat in the kitchen table while my family was in the living room talking. Now, I needed to retain. I had to learn to study for the purpose of learning not just to finish an assignment. – *Ignacio*

Internal motivators.

Internal motivators were a consistent theme throughout this study. The participants referred to them in passing quite a bit but could not really get into much depth. They did not seem to fully understand where the internal drive was coming from. They all felt it and made reference to it without fully discussing what inspired it.

3. Perspectives Held by Participants Code.

This code focused on commonalities experienced by the participants at various points in their educational experience, but predominantly during graduate school. There were two main themes that came up in the research: 1. The students battled discrimination and assumptions from faculty and fellow students as to why they were there and whether or not they really belonged there. 2. The participants also battled with internal demons about their fear and guilt at leaving their family.

Discrimination/ assumptions about migrant students.

The participants expected there to be some discrimination in their collegiate careers. They were more disturbed by the discrimination from faculty however, particularly from Latino faculty members.

One thing that I really struggled with through my school years was the reaction of Latino faculty members. The first time I saw one, I thought, “wow, OK, finally someone who will help me”. I was shocked when he was dismissive of me and said that I didn’t really belong. When I was in my doctoral program, I ran into the same thing again. I’m not sure why so many Latino professors do not seem to support Latino students. I think that they have the same biases against migrant students that others have. They think that we are lazy and dumb. This really made me angry and contributed a lot to my desire to prove them all wrong.

– *Diego*

I spent time with a number of migrant students during my undergrad years, but none at all during grad school. I rarely saw other female migrant students. I think that this gave many two chances to make assumptions. Those who thought poorly of migrant students in general, thought even less of me because I was a woman. Those who looked down on me as a women, looked even further down on me for being a Latina/ migrant worker. - *Sarah*

When people on campus hear migrant they immediately think deficient in English and Math but not in a bad way . . . more like, they are deficient but will work hard. They will do whatever it takes to remediate and graduate because they are hardworking – *Alberto*

I think faculty sees migrant students as high maintenance. Hard working but very high maintenance because we are the first ones in our family to go to college and everything is foreign to us. - *Ignacio*

Fear and guilt of leaving family.

All of the participants in this study expressed some feeling of guilt at leaving the family behind to pursue the unknown. Most of the participants seemed to feel that this was inevitable and it affected some more than others. Ignacio was not quite as close to the family and knew that he would never have a normal life in the valley. Sarah felt the most guilt as her family thought that a woman should not leave home. Alberto and Diego

indicated some feelings of guilt, but not overwhelmingly so. Both of them had parents that were pushing them to leave for the sake of a better life. Fear of the unknown was mitigated by feelings of confidence that they would push through the fear.

4. Participants way of Thinking about People and Objects Code

This section builds upon the prior section in that it is also discussing outside perceptions. This section addresses issues that allowed the participants to respond to those outside influences in a positive manner that led to their success.

College as the “only” option.

The educational attainment of farmworkers is low in comparison to the general population. A National Agricultural Workers Survey of 6,472 crop farmworkers revealed that, on average, the highest grade completed by crop workers was seventh grade (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). Additionally, migrant workers often earn wages below the minimum wage. According to a 2005 report from the U.S. Department of Labor, the median income for farmworker households was between \$15,000 and \$17,000. Therefore, the opportunities an education offers in terms of better paying jobs is the most significant reason migrant and seasonal farmworker students attend college. For this population, attending college is not an option of exploring courses for self-discovery, but rather, the only way to break the cycle of poverty in their families. Collectively, participants described how even under the most difficult circumstances, they always knew that dropping out of college was not an option for them, as their very survival depended on graduating. The following excerpts from participants represent two different subthemes. The first two establish the reason a college degree provides a choice between

working with your “*head versus your hands,*” and the third, with a degree you gain the privilege of working “*indoors versus outdoors.*”

My mother always said, I want you to go to college, I do not want you to have to work in the fields like I do. One time she took me to work in the fields and said, “either you work with your hands or with your head, choose.” The answer was easy. After working in the fields, college, no matter how hard it could get, was nowhere near as hard as working in the fields. This is why I never complained, never. I just didn’t learn to appreciate the value of working but more so the value of what a good education could bring. - *Diego*

My parents were always telling me that college was my only way out of farm work. I had no other choice but to finish my college degree. When I went back home on the weekends, I helped my mother clean houses so I knew. I wanted a job that was not so labor intensive. - *Alberto*

I remember taking my Mom to the bank one day and she said to me, “it would be nice if you could work in a bank. All the girls are pretty, it is air conditioned and you do not have to worry about being outside in the sun all day.” Basically, I knew I needed an education to have a job that did not require me to work as hard as my parents. I guess you could say this was an awakening for me. - *Sarah*

Migrant students as “hard working”

Many migrant students come from a two-parent household, have extended family members, and witness their parents work extremely difficult jobs that are labor intensive. They are often reminded of their parents’ experience of coming to this country, leaving family and loved ones behind. Additionally, students are often forced to see their parents struggle with language, which limited their job options and seriously hindered them from demonstrating and exercising their true capabilities, so parents work hard to establish a better life for their children. This level of exposure to a challenging life provides migrant students with a foundation that stresses the importance of establishing a strong work ethic in college. While true of many, it is not the experience of all migrant students and therefore does not always translate in the same manner. Overall, participant’s responses

about how they were perceived on campus were positive and included comments such as “I think the university sees us as students who are here to take advantage of an opportunity and make the best of it,” and “they know we are here to get a degree and have no time to waste, so everyone is very helpful.” Nonetheless, the most common held perception from participants was the assumption on behalf of campus faculty that migrant students are “*hard working.*” The following excerpts from participants represent three different subthemes. The first establishes the perceived “*positive perception of migrant students*” on campus. The second and third discloses the general assumption that, while migrant students may be perceived as hard working, they are also traditionally “*deficient in English,*” and “*high maintenance.*”

Those who are unfamiliar with migrant students automatically assume we are deficient in our academics and in remediation classes but we are willing to work hard no matter how long it takes. That’s why when there is a student who doesn’t try it is so shocking to people. If the student is not hard working it does not fit the stereotype of a first generation migrant student. - *Diego*

I think faculty sees migrant students as high maintenance. Hard working but very high maintenance because we are the first ones in our family to go to college and everything is foreign to us. - *Ignacio*

5. *Strategy Code.*

This code focuses on ways that students use methods and techniques to find success in graduate school. These focus on conscience choices that they make to improve their situations.

Reinventing yourself.

College symbolically and physically removes every student from their past. For some, this departure from high school life provides a personal opportunity for a fresh start by reinventing themselves. The participants in this study found college as an ideal

time to change for the better. Since few people knew them, they no longer had to be “the shy one,” “the one who sat [in] the back of the class and never asked questions,” or “the trouble maker.” As indicated below, college provided the participants in this study a second chance to start over, break old habits and become a better version of themselves. The following excerpts from participants represent three different subthemes. The first two reinforce the importance of “*trying new things,*” as a pre-requisite in reinventing oneself. The third highlights that access to “*new resources provide new opportunities,*” in college and facilitates the process of reinvention.

Coming from a small town, my vision was very narrow. When I arrived at college I realized that nobody knew me in high school and I could reinvent myself. In high school, all I did was play soccer; I never got involved in student government or clubs. In college, I pushed myself to do things I normally would not do. I joined programs, organizations, I traveled, I joined the student government. In graduate school I got to repeat that process all over again as well.
- Sarah

In high school, I only studied and did homework at school. At home, I never had a place to study, we lived in a two-bedroom apartment and we were six, plus my parents. I slept in the living room and had to wait for everyone to go to bed to do homework. In college, I lived in the library. - Ignacio

In high school, I did not care about missing class and I never talked to my buddies about school. In college and grad school, my strategy was to never miss class and to discuss with my buddies informally what I had learned. You could say I felt isolated in this new environment and it took some time to adjust. - Diego

Developing career interests.

There are two components to this theme. The first is how to develop career interests. The importance in this first step is that it has to take into consideration the participant’s own personal characteristics such as learned skills and interest, strengths and weakness, with relationship to past and present life experiences. The second is using graduate school to avoid developing career interests (or to refine their interests).

Retention research suggests that student commitment to educational and career goals is perhaps the strongest factor associated with persistence to degree completion (Wyckoff, 1999). Given the increasing trend of new students to report that their number-one goal for attending college is “preparing for an occupation” (Astin, Parrot, Korn, & Sax, 1997, p. 156), it becomes understandable that being able to see themselves in their field of study or connecting their major to a particular job can be a strategy that helps migrant students succeed in college. Furthermore, if students begin to gain work experience that is compatible with their abilities, interests and values, then their overall level of satisfaction with college increases. As indicated below, the participants in this study attribute their success to developing career interests early on. Many of them participated in internships as early as their freshmen year of college. Doing internships gave participants a sense of purpose, a preview of what life after college might be like and a network of professionals outside the university who were also invested in their success. In other words it gave the participants direction and purpose in their life. The following excerpts from participants represent two different subthemes. The first three establish the utilization of internships to learn about a career field, establish relationships in that particular field and to get established in the profession. Basically, participants used “*internships to build career opportunities*” early on in their education. The last excerpt introduces the “*job offer,*” as a subtheme that establishes employment after completion of an internship as a potential outcome.

After the Marine Corps, I really wanted to run my own business. I started up a security company and many others over the years. That was always my interest, But I always found myself wanting to serve others and be a role model for others. That is what ended up drawing me towards an education career. The desire to help others in the community was a strong driving force. - *Diego*

It was through internships, and work-study that my career found me. I think if students get exposed to their career they would have more of an idea of what they want to major in, because it is hard to commit your life to something you do n't know. It is like a relationship, you date before you commit. Students have to date their career before their major. - *Sarah*

I had an opportunity to complete an internship directly related to my field of study. By doing this, I was able to see myself after graduation. It helped me stay focused and motivated to actually graduate. I remember going to an etiquette dinner and learning a lot about networking and how to eat properly in public settings. That was also helpful. - *Alberto*

I saw so many students waste their time working at the mall or at Jamba Juice instead of gaining experience and contacts in their field. Then they wondered why they cannot find a job after graduation. - *Ignacio*

Part of the reason for going into graduate school is the fear of going into the real world. Trying to figure out how to apply your education to a real career was difficult for many. While they had all heard that education was the key, it was still difficult to figure out how to apply this education to find a good job. Graduate school offered a bit of a respite from having to make this decision. It also allowed them to refine their interests and improve their resumes.

The participants in this study shared a common fear of being asked, "so what are you going to do after college?" because most did not have a definite plan. Some participants began to realize that the real world did not match their expectations and abilities and suddenly graduation became terrifying to them. As shared by participants below, this finding is particularly important as it highlights the need to provide additional support to help students deal with the self-doubt and anxiety that sometimes comes with the anticipation of graduating from college.

What really concerned me is that there weren't many opportunities available for me after I graduated from community college, so I took another major to see if it could make me more marketable. But I soon found out that continuing my education in a university level would be the key. - *Diego*

Most students are terrified to go into the real world. Once senior year comes many avoid it by getting another degree, or another minor, or just getting a Master's Degree even if they have no experience in the field whatsoever just to avoid moving on - *Sarah*

The most dreaded question to get is, "so what are you doing after college?" People don't realize how stressful that question can be but it is the first thing people ask when you say you are graduating. - *Alberto*

Turning challenges into motivators.

Like many students, the participants in this study experienced many challenges throughout their collegiate experience. Regardless of the hardships they faced, all made a conscious choice to see challenges as opportunities and a greater reason to stay in college and "keep the fight going." Participants in this study demonstrated a high level of optimism, self-confidence, openness and adventurous spirit even under the worst circumstances. So, what made these students continue, rather than allowing the challenges break their spirits or jeopardize their determination to succeed? Garza et al. (2004) attribute this endurance and determination to resiliency. Resiliency is defined as the ability to confront and resolve problems and the capacity to utilize personal or social resources to enhance limited possibilities (Cochran, 1992; Rutter, 1987).

The participants in this study presented high levels of resiliency throughout their undergraduate experience. They were tough, determined and proud to survive under the worst circumstances. The following excerpts represent four distinct motivators used by participants to overcome challenges. The first introduces "*family*," as the motivator and reasons participants kept going during hard times. The second introduces "*limited job opportunities*," as the motivator to prevent, under any circumstances, dropping out of college. Basically, the concept of working in labor-intensive jobs made the process of

obtaining a bachelor's degree a much easier one to overcome than the alternative. The third introduces the subtheme of "*English proficiency*," used as a motivator to continue a higher education to ultimately develop fluency and confidence in the English language. The fourth characterizes "*loss*," as a motivator to continue college. The subtheme of "loss," is used to refer to any level of finality including the end of meaningful relationships or the permanent loss of a loved one due to death.

The first essay I received back from my English remediation class was bad. I was proud of my work and honestly it was the first long essay I had ever written. In high school, we answer questions from something we read in the book and basically everybody just copied each other. Here in college, it was critical thinking, analyzing the ideas, different points of views; I had never even heard this vocabulary before. My perception about college changed significantly. I realized how little I knew and how small my world was as a high school student. I had stepped into a whole new world of learning and understanding myself and my limits. - *Diego*

I had to learn to study. In high school, I studied with the television on or sat in the kitchen table while my family was in the living room talking. Now, I needed to retain. I had to learn to study for the purpose of learning not just to finish an assignment. - *Sarah*

In college, I was going through a lot of personal problems. My parents were divorcing, I was drinking, going out more, I moved 7 times my freshmen year. There was a point I thought about quitting school but realized my backup plan was moving back to my hometown and work in agriculture. Quitting was in a way not an option—at least not a better option. I kept going and decided to make the last two years of college the best ever. - *Ignacio*

In my English class, a multicultural course, the professor would make comments that were very discouraging and at the same time motivating. He would say to the whole class, that is a typical error of ESL students, or it's because you are ESL." He would remind us every minute of the class that we were ESL. Then, to students who were not ESL and made mistakes he would say, "and you are not even ESL, what is your excuse?" I did not take it personal and instead used it as a motivator. I learned a lot from the instructor. I had to distinguish what learning was and being criticized. - *Alberto*

While remedial and languages courses are not uncommon requirements for first time college students, the participants that had to participate in them stated that it made them feel like they did not belong. Their accounts describe how this experience made them feel inadequate as college students and not “like real college students.” This was a very discouraging experience when considering the various academic, social and cultural barriers migrant students must overcome to be the first in their families to go to college.

While the focus on our interviews was graduate school, things that haunted them from their initial undergraduate years stayed with them and caused them doubts as graduate students. Therefore, these initial experiences played a large role in their decisions to move on to graduate school. They also theorized that this may have been discouraging for others in similar situations to move on to graduate education.

An engineering program was recruiting students to attend a professional conference. To be considered you had to be taking major courses. I signed up and was told I couldn't participate because I was still taking remedial English even though I had completed all of my math courses. It was like I had a stamp on my forehead that said, I'm ESL and I'm taking remediation courses. I guess by passing remediation, you gained membership to the institution, before that, you were not really a college student. In fact all my first semester courses were remedial classes and I didn't feel that I really learned much from them. In reality I felt I was back in high school all over again. - *Diego*

Being in remediation courses my freshmen year was very discouraging. “When most students were worried about passing physics and calculus I was hoping to pass my remediation courses ... when I would hear these conversations I would realize how behind I was in comparison to other students and felt like I was not a true college student. It reminded me of the fact that I was not born here; English was not my first language. I felt like I was taking ESL classes in college. - *Alberto*

I was an honor student in high school who took geometry, algebra I & II, and trigonometry, I also took all of the science courses like chemistry and physics and yet I struggled. When I came to college I could not pass the placement test and needed a year of remediation courses. It was very discouraging. I now realize there was no alignment between what I learned in high school with what I had to

know for college, the standards were clearly different. I thought to myself what the heck? - *Sarah*

6. Conflicting Values Code.

This code assisted in categorizing experiences, events and activities that reflected conflicting values between the student's world at home and that of college life, such as learning to negotiate between two conflicting and at times contradicting worlds while managing the feeling of guilt and pretention that comes from being the first in their families to go to college.

The established social character of upper and middle-class White-America has been profoundly shaped by the ideology of individualism, people's life condition, social status, and material wealth, not as a consequence of macro-social structural processes, but as a consequence of individual natural talents, choices, and actions (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Consequently, key structural advantages exist for students raised in this environment because their schooling experiences are built under the individualist tradition philosophy (Stanton-Salazar, 2004). On the contrary, migrant students are, in many cases, raised with communal values in which the welfare of the family supersedes the individual (Green, 2003). As a result, Latino migrant students must learn to decode the system in order to take advantage of the opportunities available to advance in life and in particular to graduate from college. As expressed by the participants in this study, in many instances, decoding the system did not always align with familial values and led to a conflict of values:

I think education is grounded in American culture which tells you to be individualistic, to pull yourself up by your boot straps while at home is all about family first, not the individual; you are nobody unless your family is doing well so you have to be there to help them. When you go home to see your family, you

must check your education at the door. You do not go to see family feeling all big and mighty. Where, if I was a white person, it would be expected of me to talk about my knowledge and how it is helping me move up in life. Even as a student, when I came home after finals, nobody ever asked me how did your finals go?

– *Sarah*

To me my parents looked at getting a good education was key and even though they themselves were somewhat illiterate they motivated me to stay in college. When I think back I can still remember my father always patting me on the back and bragging to friends and family that I was in college. My mother on the other hand was a very humble person and would in her way say a little prayer for me and to stay in college. The underlying problem was that even though I was trying to make a better life for myself; it really bothered me to see my parents and brothers and sisters still struggling in making a living -*Diego*

Breaking the chain.

For the participants in this study, being the first in their families to go to college required them to go against the norm, break the rules and in some levels go against their parent's will. When a student is attending college as the first in their family, their whole family is also attending college for the first time. Family does not have any reference points of the chain of events that are about to take place, by having made this one life-altering decision—sending their son/daughter to college. For example, in the U.S., going to college is associated with becoming independent, while in most Latino migrant families independence is acquired through marriage. Also, in the Latino culture, being quiet and non-opinionated is a form of respect towards others, especially the elderly. College teaches critical thinking and provides students with an opinion about the world around them. Lastly, in the Latino migrant culture, the role one plays in the community also dictates certain expectations in behavior. For example, a mother may be expected to raise their child rather than go to college. As described below, the participants in this study made difficult decisions that went against their values to be successful in college.

The following excerpts discuss ways in which the participants were able to break the chains of their communities and the price they paid for it.

When I first moved out, I knew that there would be no going back. I didn't want to return a failure. It was all or nothing and there was no turning back. - *Diego*

In my culture, being a woman is being someone who does not complain. In college, I was finding my own voice and as a result, had a lot to say. So when I went back home and had an opinion for everything, according to family I was being disrespectful and not lady like. Supposedly, college was ruining me. – *Sarah*

When I became a teacher my mother said to me look Alberto, your family needs you, you cannot continue to go to school...you already have your teaching credential why do you need more?' I replied to her in a very respectful way, 'the fact that I continue my education is not simply to fulfill my personal goals it is also for my family because I know that in the future a master's degree is going to give me a better paying job and they will benefit from it.' – *Alberto*

Negotiating between two worlds.

Students' competence in moving between settings has tremendous implications for the quality of their lives and their chances of using the educational system as a stepping stone to further education, productive work experiences, and a meaningful life (Phelan et al., 1993). The participants in this study, as introduced in Student's Multiple World Study (Phelan et al., 1993), described their struggle to negotiate between two opposite worlds, that of a student and that of a member of their families and communities. The experience was particularly difficult because it involved feelings of disloyalty, self-doubt and despair.

At times I felt like I was living two lives. I had to be a certain way at school and [another] at home. In English class I had to pretend to understand Shakespeare and Hamlet when in reality, how many literature books have I ever read? None. In communication class we were expected to debate. Well, I had never taken a class to prepare me for this. Now, this was an introductory course but I needed an introductory course for the introductory course. If we were debating a controversial topic like immigration I had to be political[ly] correct and speak in a

certain way that I don't speak like at home. At home with my parents and sisters I felt normal but as soon as I was back at school it was really hard for me to be who I was and felt often like I was pretending. – *Alberto*

I carried a sense of disloyalty with me all through college. I knew I was doing the right thing but by doing the right thing I was also disappointing my parents on a daily basis, because I could not be the son they wanted me to be. Our culture is challenging in the sense that our families want us to have a better life but they don't realize that to do that you will need to behave differently from the norm. I felt like I had two lives: I lived my student life from Monday through Friday and on the weekends I had my family life—and I had to behave completely differently in each world. – *Ignacio*

Parents do not understand the expectations of college. I sometimes went back home because my parents expected me to be there, even though I needed to work on a paper or study for an exam. My Dad didn't believe that I was at the library until midnight so I had to lie about being in the library too. He had to take a lot of criticism from his family for letting his daughter move away. I had to lie to do the right thing and felt like I was living a double life at times. – *Sarah*

In all honesty college life to me was like make believe in that I had to pretend I was another person so I could be accepted by my teachers and other students in the class. But when I was at home I was the same person my parents and brothers and sisters knew. Deep down, I could sense that my brothers and sisters were distancing themselves from me. Maybe it was because I was either acting different or talking different. I kind of felt like an outsider looking in. – *Diego*

Unrealistic cultural expectations.

Parents of Latino migrant and seasonal farmworkers want what is best for their children and certainly want them to graduate from college. Nonetheless, often parents do not know how to be supportive of their college going children. The tradition of family obligations sometimes gets in the way as parents do not understand that placing too many demands on their children takes them away, from studying and other potential life altering opportunities like internships. In addition, due to their lack of familiarity with the U.S. higher education system, parents do not understand the difference among careers in college. College life requires student initiation, independence, and self-monitoring that

can be challenging and stressful for students who feel pressure by family obligations. In this study, the participants faced the dilemma of having academic demands, yet feeling obligated by cultural assumptions and unrealistic expectations. The following excerpts from participants introduce subthemes, all associated to the lack of college knowledge in families and the toll it can take in the lives of participants.

All my life as a young boy I was conditioned to work, help support the family, respect your parents, and as the oldest of the boys, set the example for your brothers and sisters. But when I decided to go to college it felt a little strange, because this was not part of my family's culture. I felt that my role as a member of the family was to stay close to home and help support the family. To me this was one of the key factors I struggled with initially in going to college. The bottom line was that college was an escape for me to make something of myself, make my parents proud and of course encourage my brothers and sister to go to college as well. – *Diego*

I was frustrated because I struggled at first and had a hard time justifying why I was doing this instead of working. If I wasn't going to be a success, then I should't be in college. This feeling initially went away as I graduated and moved on to grad school. I had to ask myself, am I really doing this for my career or am I just postponing the inevitable return to my old life? – *Sarah*

Being poor creates the illusion that one will make a lot of money after graduating from college. My parents would say, 'if you are going to go through the hassle of going to college, then make sure you make a lot of money.' Money was not as important to me as giving back. When I became a social worker my parents were disappointed to know how much I was making. Today, they still say, "huh, and you went to college?" – *Alberto*

There was always this assumption out there that the only thing you needed in this world to be successful was a college degree. There just seems to be this belief in the valley that once you have that degree, the whole world will suddenly just open up for you. By the time I got to the end of my undergraduate years, I realized that I still didn't really have an idea how I was going to turn this degree into a career. I think I really just went to grad school for the sake of fear. Fear of what might be if I couldn't find a job. They don't really prepare you for that, particularly in the Liberal Arts; the whole, what do I actually do with this after I graduate thing? – *Ignacio*

Survivor guilt.

It is also quite common for first-generation students to feel guilty about having the opportunity to attend college when their parents or other family members did not. “Survivor guilt” refers to the negative feelings that can arise from having succeeded and escaped adverse conditions when close others (e.g., parents, siblings) have not (Wray-Lake, 2010). These feelings can lead to adverse academic and psychological consequences for some students. The participants in this study experienced survivor guilt all throughout college. The following excerpts from participants introduce three different subthemes all associated with the feelings of guilt that came with pursuing a college degree. The first two explain the subtheme of “*family sacrifice.*” For study participants, knowing that family members had sacrificed themselves to ensure that they had an opportunity to go to college led to feelings of guilt for experiencing opportunities for personal growth their families back home did not. The second introduces the subtheme of “*access to resources.*” As participants began to enjoy experiences that appeared luxuries to them, in comparison to their living conditions back home, such as having their own room and being in an air-conditioned building all day, feelings of guilt erupted. The third introduces the guilt experienced by participants from their “*lack of financial contribution,*” to their family during college, as they were focusing on school and consequently unable to earn a substantial salary to contribute to the family.

My two younger brothers were expected to work right out of high school to help the family. Because I was the oldest one, this expectation was not there. I was allowed to go to college and do something I enjoyed. I guess my brothers sacrificed for me and I was the lucky one. – *Diego*

Even as a male, I was expected to go home every weekend. I personally felt it was my responsibility and the least I could do after everything I was gaining. I remember telling my mom one time that I needed to stay for finals and she said,

“Oh, but I made you enchiladas.” I couldn’t take the guilt. I immediately got in my car and drove home. – *Ignacio*

I felt guilty for having my own room, I felt guilty for changing and becoming so different in my thinking than my family. – *Sarah*

I so felt like I should be helping my parents. When I moved we had only been in the U.S. for three years so my parents were settling in. But then logic would kick in and I would remind myself that I was doing something for myself.
– *Alberto*

The imposter phenomenon.

A student *habitus*, though subject to some change due to the college environment, will likely still have a substantial influence on student decision making, especially during the first years. For example, students with relatively high levels of traditionally-valued social capital are more likely to see college attendance and degree attainment as the norm, and are likely to feel an “entitlement” to higher education, which students with relatively low levels of traditional-valued social capital may have. Students with relatively high levels of social capital may see not only college attendance as an entitlement, but persistence and degree attainment as well (Berger, 2000). In contrast, Latino migrant students, having overcome major adversities to become the first in their families to go to college, can feel like a phony that has fooled others into believing they are college worthy, when in reality, they are not. The feeling of “faking it” is most common among first generation college students and is referred to by scholars as “the imposter phenomenon” (Clance & Imes as cited by Ewing, Richardson, James-Meyers, & Russell, 1996). Suffering from the imposter phenomenon is more serious than the typical vague feeling of not fitting in that many students experience in the beginning of their

college education. It can include very destructive habits of mind, such as believing one got into the university by luck or mistake.

My confidence level was very low as a freshman. I arrived to the U.S. at the age of 15 and was still learning English. I felt very insecure with my English. I was worried someone would discover how little English I knew and would kick me out of the university. – *Alberto*

In high school, I took honor courses in math and English. Yet, when I arrived at school and took the English reading and writing tests, I scored incredibly low on both. It really affected my self-esteem. I felt like I did not belong here and like I was here by mistake. I felt like an impostor. I had something but I couldn't own it. I worried that at any moment I would be discovered, they were going to realize that I should not be here and that I was admitted by error. So my first year was very scary. – *Diego*

Even after I graduated from college I had nightmares that my degree was fake that someone reviewed my transcript and realized I had really not finished and my degree was not real. It took years before I stopped worrying about it. – *Sarah*

7. Institutional Agent Code.

This code was used to sort out data that referred to participants' contact with individuals who facilitated access to social capital and the utilization of valuable resources throughout their undergraduate experience. The excerpts reinforce the participants' willingness to access social capital to build a strategic network by identifying caring institutional and empowerment agents.

Students from higher social-economic statuses are socialized at a very early age to participate in higher education. This capital is communicated subtly through behaviors, knowledge and beliefs, which they inherit from their parents and communities (McDonough, 1997; Tierney, 1999; Walpole, 2007). While in college, these students further develop their social capital by reaching out and connecting to individual and social networks that serve as resources to important opportunities. Consequently, holders

of this capital have a higher likelihood of connecting with the right people than those who came from lower economic statuses because they have a predisposition to the knowledge required to successfully navigate the system (Fong, 2003; Ianni, 1989; Lareau, 2003; Zhou & Kim, 2006). The participants in this study attributed their success to the many individuals who inspired, mentored and guided them throughout college. They would not be where they are, if they had not met people who saw potential in them and facilitated access to valuable social capital. Participants in this study were able to go outside their comfort zone to access social capital, build a strategic network of caring institutional agents, and further identify empowerment agents.

Extent of accessing social capital.

Underserved students, due to the fact that their own various sources of social capital are dissimilar to those of the institution—but valuable in other ways—must negotiate their way through college by overcoming social, cultural and ideological forces that are often contradictory in nature (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Students who possess social capital that does not align with the institution must negotiate their way through college in a much more difficult way (Gee, 1989; Phelan et al., 1998). This challenge is particularly experienced by students who come from migrant and seasonal farmworking backgrounds and who are often first-generation, low-income and English learners. As a result, the experience of underserved students trying to accrue social capital could be so challenging it may evoke behaviors that would ultimately deny them of this much needed help (e.g., avoiding asking questions, seeking help or reaching out to others) (Lucas, 1999). In order to persist, the participants in this study found ways to negotiate through the institutional culture even if this meant going outside their comfort zone to access the

necessary social capital to succeed in college. The first excerpt introduces the subtheme of “*conflicting help-seeking,*” and the second “*conflicting learning styles.*” Under both circumstances, participants went against prior beliefs and practices to be academically successful.

It was difficult at first because I didn’t know where to turn for help. I didn’t know who to ask and I wasn’t prepared for anything. There was never really any help in identifying how to find resources that were needed. It was just such a foreign environment. - *Diego*

This was also difficult for me because in our culture we should not bother people or ask for help. If you do, you become a burden. Then you come to college and we are told to do the complete opposite that we should ask for help, go see faculty during their office hours, etc. In high school one of my qualities according to a teacher who wrote a letter of recommendation was that I was quiet and well behaved. That was the definition of a good student then. – *Alberto*

We have been taught not to ask for help. In college, I had to learn to socialize with people. For example, I like working by myself and here, I had to do work projects which require that I meet with people after class. This was not easy. It wasn’t until much later that I realized that there were others out there I could have turned to for help with the transition. – *Ignacio*

Access of resources.

Participants shared that they felt uncomfortable to seek help and instead tried to find answers by researching through peers and reading the catalog. This finding is important as it calls for state and federal policy as well as faculty, staff and the institution as a whole to look at their practices and subconscious behaviors that may be sending this message to continuing students.

There seems to be this assumption that if you made it to graduate school that you must have figured it out. Some of us just felt like we were able to survive our way to graduate school and had nothing figured out. I also assumed that it was just me and everyone else must have had it all figured out. We were embarrassed to admit that we didn’t know where to go for resources and we still needed help. I guess you can say that due to my early years working in the fields taught me to be independent and not rely on others outside the family structure for help. - *Diego*

The library was my refuge from it all. It was a quiet place for me to study. Even in graduate school though, I still didn't know how to get the resources that were available to me. This was magnified by attending graduate school at a different institution than the one that I graduated from. - *Ignacio*

The truth is you don't even know what questions will come up each year, you are learning as you go . . . yet there is not as much help anymore. - *Alberto*

I felt a little embarrassed to ask for help. I was afraid that it would make me look like I didn't belong there. I felt out of place.- *Sarah*

Building a strategic network.

Stanton-Salazar's (2010) network-analytical approach to social inequality in society takes as its starting point what Wellman (1983) refers to as the social distribution of possibilities, a term that refers to the unequal distribution of opportunities for entering into different social and institutional contexts and for forming relationships with agents who exert various degrees of control over institutional resources, such as bureaucratic influences, career-related information, and opportunities for specialized training or mentorship (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 21). The process of network construction, negotiation, and help-seeking are known to be quite different across social classes for it requires commanding, negotiating, and managing many diverse (and sometimes conflicting) social relationships and personalities, and which usually entails skillfully negotiating—not always familiar skills to migrant students and other minority youth. The participants in this study established strategic networks of institutional agents that would give them access to the resources necessary to succeed in college. The following are excerpts from the participants that illustrate strategies used to establish these networks:

I never did anything on my own; I always asked one, two or three people and they would all give me different perspectives that would help me. I always went to see faculty during office hours, I asked peers if I did not know how to do an assignment, I never gave up. The friends that started with me and did not graduate were those who felt they could do it all on their own. I had multiple people to go to. – *Diego*

It took me a while, but I finally started finding people and resources in my field that helped guide me to what I needed to be successful. Also, making friends within my major and social community helped ease the stress quite a bit – *Sarah*

Once I came to the conclusion that none of us really knew what we were doing, that helped the most. Once I got to that point, I didn't feel embarrassed asking for help anymore. After that, it almost became easy. – *Alberto*

The library was always my personal salvation. The staff and faculty that I met there guided me to the resources I needed and gave me a sense of home away from home. That would later go on to shape my career. - *Ignacio*

Identifying “caring” institutional agents

Institutional agent as defined by Stanton-Salazar (2011) refers to an individual who occupies one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority. This individual manifests the role of an institutional agent when, on behalf of the student, he or she acts to directly transmit, or negotiate the transmission of, highly valued resources (p. 112). Institutional agents serve as facilitators and gatekeepers for student success, for they have the potential to facilitate access to greater institutional resources. Overall, institutional agents provide connections to resources that help decode the educational system bound in the cultural values of the dominant culture. Stanton-Salazar (2010) also describes “*confianza en confianza*” (bonds of trust) as a site of trust, respect, mentorship, teaching and learning, legitimacy, reliance and commitments necessary for transformative agency (p. 133). For Latino migrant students, relationships of genuine trust are difficult to establish until two things occur: (1) the students must feel assured

that close and open interactions with institutional agents are securely grounded in the agent's genuine commitment to their welfare, and (2) feelings of marginalization in society in higher education must be validated, publically recognized, and openly discussed (Montero-Sieburth & Villarruel, 2000). As stated below, the participants in this study sought institutional agents that presented the qualities embedded in "*confianza en confianza*." The following excerpts separate the two types of caring institutional agents identified by participants by the following two subthemes: "*staff*," and "*faculty*."

I think I had a lot of mentors, because I was very active in student groups. I reached out to faculty, staff and administrators, in particular Latinas, who I felt believed in me and encouraged me. The quality that attracted me to these individuals was that they cared about me. They understood me, they wanted to see me succeed and they always offered their time to me, even when they were very busy. – *Diego*

As [a] freshman, I was intimidated to go talk to my professors especially those who were Caucasians and I didn't feel understood me—which was the majority of them. As a result, I did not do too well in their classes. But if they understood me and cared, I would automatically do well in their classes. Professors that were understanding and caring I visit during office hours. For example, I failed biology the first time I took it and then I took it with a professor who was very understanding and caring and I passed. Not because the class was easier but because I felt more inclined to talk to the professor and ask for help when I needed it. – *Sarah*

Identifying empowerment agents.

For disadvantaged youth whose parents may not have attended college, institutional agents provide a second opportunity to develop appropriate motivational dispositions necessary to pursue college. In addition to institutional agents, Stanton-Salazar (2010) introduces empowerment agents as part of his socialization model. Empowerment agents, in addition to the contributions of the institutional agent, also alter the destinies of Latino migrant students. Empowerment agents promote their vision of a

more just, humanistic, and democratic society and empower individuals to succeed and work towards changing the system for future generations. The participants in this study found more than institutional agents on campus; they found empowerment agents in the individuals they met throughout their undergraduate education. The following excerpts discuss more about finding individuals who helped them adjust to academic life.

I remember hearing in one of my classes that Latino parents did not value education—or that the research showed that. And I recall my father always telling me to go to college. It would make me mad. I remember telling the instructor, could you teach someone to speak Italian, and he said no, I don't speak Italian. "Well, you cannot expect my father to teach me about college. He earns 16,000 dollars a year to feed a family of six, his preoccupations is more feeding us than sending me to college, but it doesn't mean he does not value education." This is why I'm in education, because there is so much ignorance we need to do something about it. This is what I learned from my mentors...to do something about it. – *Diego*

In one of my classes, the professor asked students to say what came to mind when they heard the word "undocumented immigrant." What I heard was mostly negative, "illegals, taking American jobs, not paying taxes, etc." I remember going up to the professor after class and telling him I was very angry to hear that and he said to me, "What are you going to do about it?" "Are you going to stay angry or do something?" – *Alberto*

In high school, I was viewed as just another Mexican student who was learning English and who would eventually end up as a gardener. If lucky, I would end up going to a technical school like ITT Tech—not that there is anything wrong with going to those schools, but it is a stereotype. And most students do end up there, not because they did not have the potential to go to college but because nobody guided them through the process early on. The white students are going to go to college because their parents are making sure they are on the right path; we know nothing about what it takes to go to college. Someone in high school would need to adopt us and guide us through the right path. By the time I got to grad school, I felt respected. I felt people saw us as hard working students because they know college is not easy for us. Our parents are not giving us money so we are working really hard to be here. After I graduated, I was touched by all my mentors and what they had done for me, I wanted to give back and make it easier for those coming after me. – *Ignacio*

8. Narrative Code.

This code was focused on finding the most common themes that emerged from all participants. The primary goal of this project was to capture the lived experiences of those who have made it from the fields into graduate school. Their stories were the key to this project and therefore narrative codes are the key to understanding those themes.

Family

All participants mentioned family throughout their interviews. Diego emphasized family and his mother in particular as his primary driving factor. Sarah had a conflict with her family (they did not think she should leave) but that she still felt the push “They were counting on me to make it”. Alberto discussed how his family was always providing emotional support and encouragement. Even Ignacio, who felt most removed from his family, continued to feel a drive from family who wanted him to be happy and successful. Family motivation was cited by all as a strong factor in their success.

Internal drive

While family was important to all, the concept of an internal drive seemed to be just as strong if not stronger. The participants in this study were quick to credit friends and family and others who provided support. Humbleness and humility were witnessed in the telling of their stories. That said, I constantly heard terms regarding internal drive coming from them throughout. All participants seemed to have a motive that kept them going. They got frustrated but just never quit. Most of them knew at some level that they were strong enough to pull it off. They believed in themselves. Most could not quite define where the internal drive came from but they all recognized that it was there.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice was big for all but bigger for some. Anyone who makes it through graduate school knows that there are sacrifices to be made for success. Diego had a sizeable family to support throughout. Sarah and Ignacio were on their own throughout most of their graduate experiences. They all took chances and were hoping for better options, particularly at the graduate school level.

Escape

Escape was the final omnipresent term that all four mentioned. They all saw how impoverished their lives were in childhood. They all saw how much their families struggled and they all mentioned that this was at least part of the internal drive mentioned earlier. Combined with family motivation, this desire to escape their difficult lives was a huge driving factor pushing them constantly forward.

Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 4 analyzed the data collected from a study with the purpose of better understanding the themes that developed from the interviews. There were commonalities throughout despite the differences in their backgrounds. The four participants all began life similarly but their lives took very different paths. They were chosen because of all coming from the same path and all taking their lives in similar directions. Despite the similar bookends to their lives, the middle parts were dramatically different. This is why I feel that the findings from these four are significant. The commonalities that they shared in their experience can likely be extrapolated to a much wider audience. Hopefully, the lessons learned can then inspire the next generation and improve university services for this demographic of students.

Family and Inspiration

One commonality among all participants were the intertwined concepts of family and inspiration. They all mentioned seeing family members struggle and their parents looking to them to lead a better life. All of their parents supported their education, even if some did not want to see them leave home to do it. All of their families were poorly educated and did not know how to help prepare their children for undergraduate work, much less graduate work.

Motivation

Motivation was illustrated by a powerful internal drive that all participants exhibited. This was actually one of the most striking things noted from this group. Most other studies reviewed in Chapter 2 mentioned a wide range of reasons for going to college and graduate school. Most had to do with obligation and not knowing what else to do. The four participants in this study however, spoke constantly of having an overwhelming drive to complete an education. It appeared to be their primary (or one of their primary) motivations in life. It was all that they wanted and it was seen as their only means of survival. Once they left home, they knew that an education would be their only key to success.

This will be further addressed in Chapter 5, but it does seem to be the primary predictor of success. One thing that this study does not fully address, and should be addressed in future research, is whether or not this internal drive was necessary for a student from this background to succeed? In other words, are these four participants successful because they were driven or were they all driven, and only those with some outside factor led to success? Answering this question would involve interviewing those

from similar backgrounds who were not successful in their academic careers. Either way, it does appear that drive can overcome most barriers.

The College Experience

All of the participants experienced a rough start to their collegiate experiences which continuously improved as they advanced towards a graduate education. The primary reason for this rough start seems to be a lack of adequate preparation. Their parents, their schools, and their communities had no experience with higher education and simply had no means of adequately preparing them for what they would eventually face.

While this is not uncommon among first-generation college students, the experience was made worse by discrimination. Furthermore, the discrimination was experienced from a few unexpected places. The participants expected discrimination from white students and some white faculty but they were not expecting it from Latino faculty and students as well. In addition to racial discrimination, the bulk of the discrimination they felt was directly tied to their status as migrant workers. Even within Latino populations, this subpopulation was seen as inferior and incapable of high-level academic work.

Socialization and Social Capital

Despite these challenges, the participants were able to get socially invested in their collegiate worlds, especially by the time they reached graduate school. They found like-minded people and learned to work with peers and faculty. They eventually were able to use these relationships to find the resources that they needed to become

successful. These new relationships also helped them realize that they were not alone in struggling to adapt.

Challenges Into Opportunities

This all came together with learning to turn challenges into opportunities. While all participants felt frustrated and tempted to quit, only two of them actually did. Those two eventually returned because their drive for an academic career was too strong to pass up. They learned to use the hard work ethic developed as a child to persist. They learned to turn to others for assistance with learning how to adapt. Most found that their cultural backgrounds gave them a unique perspective that was valued by many. In the end, they were all able to eventually find the tools they needed to be successful.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of the Study

This study sought to explore four primary questions:

1. What are the reasons why so few migrant farm workers graduated from high school as opposed to those who achieved success in graduate studies?
2. What role did family, personal life experience, school involvement and momentous events play in motivating students for self-identity, self-improvement, self-awareness for successful educational transition stages?
3. How can the selected life stories tell researchers and educators about the influences in early migrant lives that predict further success in graduate studies?
4. What is the role of connective influencers (individuals, social interaction, momentous events, environmental factors, psychological factors, and school systems) that are related to stages of development between adolescents and adulthood?

The primary conclusion reached by this study was that the largest predictor of success for migrant students in graduate education is internal drive. While on the surface this may seem discouraging but this internal drive did not just come out of thin air. In most cases, it was a result of cultural norms and family expectations that were taught from the very beginning. Internal drive was constantly mentioned by all four participants. They were unable to entirely establish exactly where it originated, but they all felt it, all the time. It was one of the most persistent things in their lives. None of them could picture themselves not making it, because they knew that this drive would never let them be satisfied with anything less than success. Some of this drive came from family

pushing. Many remembered from very early on being told by parents, that an education was the key to success.

Another common theme was the idea of desperation for something better in life. This was also very heavily family-dependent. While many parents were whispering in the ear of young migrant students the value of education, they were also telling them that this was their way out for a better life and of course a better future. There was a history of suggestions that you are not stuck in this lifestyle and there is something better for you out there if you worked hard enough and develop this internal drive to succeed in education.

This family support was also the key. Only one participant (Sarah) did not feel that her family was really supportive of her leaving for school. When the decision was made however, they still supported her. They still provided a calm sense of family when she did call them up and when she did revisit home. None of the participants mentioned that they did not feel loved and supported by their families, even when their families did not always agree with the choices they were making.

The ultimate question that arises from these two conclusions is whether or not it is now possible to implement what was learned into educational practice. Before moving on to the primary takeaways from this project, I want to first discuss the four guiding questions.

1. What are the reasons why so few migrant farm workers graduated from high school as opposed to those who achieved academic success in graduate studies?

From analyzing all of the narratives, certain underlying themes permeated throughout. The first was the underlying theme of personal drive. All four participants

indicated repeatedly that they had a powerful drive to escape their lives in the valley. This drive to escape was paramount among them. The problem with drive is that drive alone is not sufficient. Drawing from my own experience and what I heard from the other three participants, I can think of two likely scenarios for why us four were able to succeed while others failed to. First is the idea of family support where all four of us had families who supported us, which was one of the primary success factors. They may not have all wanted us to leave (particularly in Sarah's case) but once the decision was made they backed us. This helped overcome other obstacles. In Diego's case, his parents wanted him to leave. They wanted their sacrifice to mean something through my success. Not every parent in migrant communities wants that though. Most families understandably want their children close to home. They want their families to find good work and start families of their own. Most families simply do not instill that drive and offer support for an educational career. In retrospect this seems one of the main contributing reasons why so few of these children either graduated from high school but more so complete a graduate degree.

The second theme is that of simply knowing how to escape. Most people I know in the migrant communities would like to escape, but most do not know how. As a result, they tend to give up on their dreams. There has to be an avenue but an academic career seems far-fetched for most. In the case of the four of us, we took the chance largely because we felt we had no other real choice. We did not feel like we could stay, therefore leaving and taking the chance was the only option. When you only feel that you have one choice, and that you must succeed, you simply do it. In other words the options for participants and myself were few to say the least.

2. What role did family, personal life experience, school involvement and momentous events play in motivating students for self-identity, self-improvement, and self-awareness for successful educational transition stages?

This one is a bit more of a complicated question, so I will take it in stages. I have already discussed in the prior section the role of family. It was integral to all four participants. Personal life experience was also mentioned by all, but particularly by Diego and Alberto. All four participants saw how difficult life was in the migrant communities. Rather than simply accept that, it was transformative. We did self-identify as migrant workers, but not in a negative way which seems to be the norm. I observed a number of faculty assume that being a migrant worker meant that I was a lesser person. All four participants saw this in some form, even from those who were from identical backgrounds. I suspect that this becomes the norm; a self-fulfilling prophecy if you will. If you are told it enough, you tend to believe it. By seeking out education as a form of self-improvement, we were able to improve our self-awareness as well. By believing that we either could or simply had to be successful, we were able to seek out the tools necessary to move on to each successive stage in our academic careers.

3. How can the selected life stories tell researchers and educators about the life influences in early migrant lives that predict further successes in graduate studies?

This is actually one of the most positive of the potential outcomes of this study. Two things came together to make all four participants successful: Family motivation and access to academic resources. All it takes is for families to want it and for students to figure out how to make it work. This is also the basis for my two recommendations for this study: 1. That community programs need to be fleshed out to show families that there

can be a way for their children to have the better lives they want for them; and 2. That if universities design programs to reach out to these communities of students, they can help them find the tools and peer support they need to be successful.

All four of these life stories illustrate this concept well. These four participants were chosen because they represent a full cross section of migrant workers. I wanted to make sure I had full diversity so that universalities could potentially be generalized. The universal elements of these stories support my assertions about these two key elements of my suggestions. To fully answer this question, the early lives were significant because that is when the seeds were planted. Personally, the earliest memories of my own life are of my mother pushing me to get my education and escape. That was ingrained at a very early age. All four participants interviewed stated that they cannot ever remember a time when they were not feeling the drive to escape. It must be ingrained early.

4. What is the role of connective influencers (individuals, social interaction, momentous events, environmental factors, psychological factors, and school systems) that are related to stages of development between adolescents and adulthood? I suspect that most of this question has been answered by the previous three. While family was the driver, all individuals involved were connective influencers. Most participants interviewed had negative experiences from their pre-college academic experiences. They had poor psychological effects on the participants because of the hopelessness that was persistent. From an environmental perspective, the community and necessity of constantly moving made things worse. When a student cannot settle, he cannot really progress. The school system and migrant nature of life harmed all four participants during

their early life. This is also likely a significant factor in why so many others struggle to find success from these communities.

The Significance of the Narrative Interviews

Narrative interviews were chosen for this study because I felt that it was the best way for me to fully understand the problem. Over the years, plenty of people have asked me what universities could be doing better to serve the Latino/ migrant student populations. The problem is that it is very difficult to put my finger on specific recommendations. That is the value of this approach to the project. By forcing myself and other participants to dig in and think about our lives; by forcing us to relive the experience from childhood to present, we were able to talk about what influenced us at each step in the process.

This storytelling process enabled us to just talk about our experience without the pressure of trying to analyze and come up with something helpful. Even with my own experience, it was not until it was all out there that I finally was able to break it down to the raw components. It was only when I started seeing similar themes emerge from the stories of others that I began to realize the key moments. This was for instance when I realize that the problem is far more cultural than it is institutional. There are specific things that universities can and should do to improve access for all minority groups, including Latino migrant students. The majority of the changes however need to occur within the community.

One limitation with this type of study is that I could only interview those who have been successful in higher education. There is no way to compare that with those who might have been successful if only something had been different in their lives. By

examining the stories of those who have made it, I have tried to identify those key components of success so that hopefully it can be extrapolated to the entire community. The Latino community and migrant communities in general have a great tradition of oral story telling. When you do not have fixed roots, you have no choice. The only way your stories can be preserved is through passing along oral traditions. This seemed to be a highly fitting approach to solving the problem which I think was effective.

Educational Theory

My educational theory is that the reasons why so many Latino migrant students fail to succeed in graduate education are fundamental. It begins with cultural barriers at home and then expands to university barriers for those who do make it off to college. Specifically, my theory is that as of right now, the migrant students who succeed in graduate school are mostly successful because:

1. Their family (parents in particular) ingrained in them the value of education from a very early age.
2. Their family emphasized that there was a better world out there and that education was the golden ticket to access that world.
3. Their own experiences motivated them to find a better road and they were willing to make tremendous sacrifices in order to find these successes.
4. They were able to push through the guilt of leaving their family behind and not contributing to the family for the sake of long-term success. This largely would not have been possible without the push of family.

As a result of this, the primary determining factor in the success of these students was a strong personal drive that derived from life-long pushes from family towards education.

Educational Policy and Practice

One of the primary goals of this project was to find areas where university practice could be improved in order to improve success rates for migrant students in graduate education. After examining the responses of my subjects, I came to a number of conclusions. With culture and family influence being the largest factor in determining success in graduate education, it is hard to know how universities can implement practices that will help these students. The participants had a number of suggestions which I will now synthesize into recommendations:

Migrant Cultural Practices

The first element of any real meaningful change is going to have to come from within the migrant community itself. The best people for this will be those of us who have succeeded in academia. We have a duty to fight back and serve as role models. Family influence is seen as a one of the key factors of academic success in this community, which is the logical starting point.

My proposal is a voluntary program involving locating as many former migrant students as possible who have been successful in academia. I would then propose putting together a comprehensive publicity campaign to show the total benefits that can be achieved by encouraging migrant students to pursue academic careers. This would be through websites and social media, school and community visits, focus groups, one on one meetings with potential students and parents and through other means. By making

these stories common place in the communities, it will serve two purposes: 1. It will show that yes, academia can be a viable career for those who come from these communities; look at all these examples of those who made it; and 2. It will show that yes, there is justification for the push for the families who already believe in it. In other words, it is not just a story. There are real financial and career benefits to this career and they do outweigh the short-term losses from having a child in school instead of in the fields.

The second part of this program also intermixes with the next section on university practices. Those that have found success from these communities need to form a peer network and offer up training to local schools and communities. The training needs to focus on what to expect and how to find the resources that they need to be successful. This would help with two of the barriers identified in this project: feeling like you are on your own and struggling to find the resources needed to succeed.

Texas Public School System Improvements

The Texas public school system is failing this population predominantly for assuming that they were not going to college (and especially graduate school) and therefore not properly preparing them for the possibility. There seems to be an assumption that the group is neither capable of nor interested in academic careers.

The same solutions being proposed for the community and universities should also be applied to the Texas K-12 system. While preparing for vocational careers is important, there should be an assumption that all students will move on to college. Adequate preparation for this should be the same for high schools in the Rio Grande Valley as they would be in the upper class suburbs of Dallas.

The community education clinics should also be introduced into the schools. They should also be attended by faculty and administrators so that they can learn how to implement these ideas into their own classrooms and schools. Educational preparation and inspiration are important to be fully integrated. The migrant students need to see it at both the family level and at the school level.

University Administration Improvements

Universities could also be doing much more to serve this population. Helping gather and coordinate the alumni from university programs would supply both the personnel and management to the proposals in the previous section. Organizing students into peer networks would also aid incoming students. Education programs in particular could use service-learning activities to form outreach clinics in border communities. These clinics could serve as community education centers to better prepare migrant students for collegiate life. It could also serve to help parents learn to better prepare their students for college, which in retrospect is one of the key factors.

Furthermore, access to resources needs to be better explained, particularly to students who are coming from communities with poor academic preparation. Early orientation activities should focus much more on helping migrant students navigate logistical challenges, while also introducing them to people within their peer networks.

While the bulk of these recommendations are focused at the general college and undergraduate crowds, there are similar changes needed within graduate programs. Many of the participants began their careers at much smaller, regional schools. Stepping up to graduate work at a large university was almost as alien to them as when they first started college. It should never be assumed that because someone is academically qualified for

graduate school that they automatically know how to find resources, peers, and the ability to adapt to their new world. Peer programs and resource orientations should also take place in graduate programs, particularly identifying those students who are transitioning from a very different academic environment.

The final aspect of practical improvement is in regards to discrimination training. All participants indicated that they were exposed to discrimination not only because of their race but because of their migrant worker status. This was also prevalent among Latino/a faculty. Universities have a duty to make sure that all students, regardless of background are given equal opportunities. They need to make sure that their discrimination programs are also addressing migration status as an area to watch for. In the rapidly-changing world following the 2016 elections, this is more important now than ever before.

Personal Reflection and Conclusions

Since I began this study, a lot of things have changed. The 2016 election cycle has introduced even more hate and discrimination against both the Latino/a population in general and the migrant population in specific. This only embraces the need for this reform. Anytime a group of students do not feel welcome on campus, it is a problem. All people on this planet have a right to pursue a full education as far as their desire and intellect can take them.

The numbers of migrant workers in this country are steadily declining and have been for years. The catch though is that they represent really any of the forgotten minority classes in the United States. It is not a class that many care about and are therefore often left behind or dismissed. The way that we see the lesser of us represents

the way we see all people. If we let one group fail, then we are all failing. Unlike many problems in this country, this is one that can be fixed cheaply and easily. The lessons learned can then be applied to other minority groups struggling for full access to education. Therefore, migrant workers fulfill a need to the community and business sector for the labor they offer. But the bottom line is if their children are faced with hopelessness due to lack of a formal education and a burning desire for a better life it can and will affect the future generation of families to come.

APPENDIX SECTION

College Experience:

1. How would you describe your total college experience (undergraduate and graduate)?

When you think back to your first year of college, how did your perceptions change from your freshman year to your senior year and on to graduate school?

2. Were there particular individuals that facilitated your success? Were there individuals that helped you overcome any barriers? Were there individuals that made it difficult for you to succeed?

Success Strategies:

3. How would you describe yourself as a student? To what extent did you feel prepared for college? What did it take for you to graduate from college?

4. Can you tell me about a time when you felt very accomplished as a college student (other than graduation)? What about a time you felt discouraged?

5. Did you ever feel some of the values necessary to succeed in college contradicted your own values? What are the myths and facts of being a Latino migrant/seasonal farmworker college student?

Institutional Recommendations:

6. Among the many resources available on campus, which did you actually utilize throughout your student experience? What are some student needs you think were not addressed by those resources? Were there services available on campus that you were unaware of and as a result did not utilize?

7. Did you use campus personnel (e.g., staff, faculty, tutors) as a source of emotional, personal and informational support throughout college?

8. If you were in charge of making decisions at your alma matter, what changes would you make to ensure Latino migrant and seasonal farmworker students are successful? Do you feel your university(s) prepared you to enter the professional world?

Family Background:

9. How would you describe your family's opinion of the value of education? What did they tell you about education early on in life?

10. What is your family's educational background (parents/ grandparents/ siblings etc...)?

11. Who and what were the biggest influences in your life that led you to a collegiate career? What did they teach you about the value of education?

12. Why did you decide to go to college and graduate school?

13. Do you have any regrets about pursuing a graduate education? What do you know now that you wished you knew when you were first getting started?

14. Is there anything else that you want to say that I have not asked you about yet?

APPENDIX B

Interview Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Joe Michael Gonzales, a candidate for the Ph.D. in Adult, Professional, and Community Education at Texas State University. Based on an extensive review of the literature, there was relatively little information on the experience of migrant students in higher education from the perceptions of those who have successfully graduated. The available research focused on student decision-making when entering college, support systems for student success, and self-perceptions after first year college enrollment from the perspective of currently enrolled students.

By allowing me to understand your college experience, we can begin to attain a more complete view on the experiences of Hispanic migrant students in higher education. The aim of this study is to understand the graduate experience of migrant students, specifically how do these students insure their academic prosperity in higher education. The purpose of this study is to determine which characteristics or cultural foundations in the early lives of migrant students can be determined to lead to later academic success.

All interviews will be individually conducted at the time and location that is most convenient and comfortable for you. Each interview will be no longer than 40 minutes to an hour in length. Please note that the interview will be audio & videotaped and later transcribed. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, a pseudonym will be provided to protect your identity unless you consent to have your name known. Your responses will be known by number only—your actual name will never be associated with a number. All interview materials will be destroyed 6 months after completion of this project and data will be securely managed so that your real name cannot be matched to the response.

Some of the interview questions may seem personal, but you do not have to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your honesty and openness are appreciated, but you have the final say in how much you reveal to us, and what questions you feel comfortable answering. If at any time you do not wish to continue participation in this study, you are free to do so.

By participating in this research, you may gain additional insight into the attitudes and perspectives of your own college experiences as a Hispanic migrant undergraduate. Findings from this study will add to the body of literature on the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of Hispanic migrant college students. With your permission, I would like to contact you if additional clarification is required after conducting the interview. I will contact you by email/phone. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the interviews.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Joe Michael Gonzales at joegm@tapsa.org (210) 550-6793 or Dissertation Chair, Dr. Steven Furney at sf02@txstate.edu (512) 245-2939 .

I also agree to have this interview audio and video recorded _____ YES _____ NO

I do / do not (circle one) want to have my actual name used in the publication of this study. I may change my choice on this at any time in the future by notifying the researcher.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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