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# "We will always be in the shadows" - a qualitative descriptive study of undocumented Latino immigrants surviving in the United States

Elizabeth C. Mendez-Shannon  
*University of Iowa*

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"WE WILL ALWAYS BE IN THE SHADOWS" - A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE  
STUDY OF UNDOCUMENTED LATINO IMMIGRANTS SURVIVING IN THE  
UNITED STATES

by

Elizabeth C. Mendez-Shannon

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in Social Work  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2010

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Susan A. Murty

## ABSTRACT

Research studies have pointed to specific challenges for undocumented Latino immigrants including exploitation in the workplace (Stoddard, 1976), denial of health care (Angel, Frias & Hill, 2005; Passel, 2005) and lack of access to higher education (Seif, 2004). In addition, fear is never far from their consciousness. Fear of being identified as illegal and faced with possible arrest and deportation are realities for undocumented Latino immigrants. Both work and home are unsafe, particularly because of immigration raids by federal agents. In addition they are stigmatized by mainstream society (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Even the word “undocumented” has been used interchangeably with words like “illegal” and “alien” suggesting criminal behavior. These hardships make it difficult for these immigrants to become part of mainstream society and create barriers to opportunities.

All of these factors should logically discourage Latin Americans from immigrating to the United States. However, both the documented and undocumented Latino populations in the United States continue to increase. Although the situation of new Latino immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, seems extremely difficult, there is something unexplained occurring that has not been accounted for in current research that allows them to survive these hardships. In addition, there is a gap in information about the immigration process gathered from immigrants themselves. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to learn from undocumented immigrants about their experiences when they first came to the United States and how they negotiate their situation while living in the United States.

The major findings of this study offer an inside look into the world of undocumented Latino immigrants. The obstacles these immigrants face were language barriers, limited education and unfair wages at work. On the other hand, they also identify facilitators that were helpful during their initial transition into the U.S such as getting help in finding a job, knowing someone in the United States before immigrating, being connected to support networks, and receiving support from others who shared their struggles. However, these findings do not reflect the whole story.

Even though most of these Latino immigrants underwent stress and adversity as new undocumented immigrants, the study shows how they transformed their suffering using their personal strengths and drawing on support from a close-knit community. At the same time they maintained their cultural identity both in their immigrant community and within the larger community where they resided. An additional factor which contributed to their survival was that this particular community is unique in preserving the different cultures of ethnic groups rather than fusing them into a “melting pot.”

Recommendations for practice include using a strengths perspective with clients and community; recommendations for teaching include using interdisciplinary educational strategies and involving students in experiential learning experiences with immigrants. Additional recommendation for policy and research are made.

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Date

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph. D. thesis of  
Elizabeth C. Mendez-Shannon

has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in Social Work at the May 2010 graduation.

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Steve Hitlin

To Maya and Julia, if you believe in your dream, then it will follow



Moving forward to the next chapter in my life, I do so with the clarity that I am authoring my story, and I can write it as I choose. My desire for all who have been marginalized by dominant narratives is a similar awareness of agency and authorship

Dr. Salome Raheim  
Women of Color on the Rise

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Lastly, I would like to thank the University of Iowa Graduate College Fellowship and the School of Social Work for helping to fund the work of this dissertation.

## ABSTRACT

Research studies have pointed to specific challenges for undocumented Latino immigrants including exploitation in the workplace (Stoddard, 1976), denial of health care (Angel, Frias & Hill, 2005; Passel, 2005) and lack of access to higher education (Seif, 2004). In addition, fear is never far from their consciousness. Fear of being identified as illegal and faced with possible arrest and deportation are realities for undocumented Latino immigrants. Both work and home are unsafe, particularly because of immigration raids by federal agents. In addition they are stigmatized by mainstream society (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Even the word “undocumented” has been used interchangeably with words like “illegal” and “alien” suggesting criminal behavior. These hardships make it difficult for these immigrants to become part of mainstream society and create barriers to opportunities.

All of these factors should logically discourage Latin Americans from immigrating to the United States. However, both the documented and undocumented Latino populations in the United States continue to increase. Although the situation of new Latino immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, seems extremely difficult, there is something unexplained occurring that has not been accounted for in current research that allows them to survive these hardships. In addition, there is a gap in information about the immigration process gathered from immigrants themselves. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to learn from undocumented immigrants about their experiences when they first came to the United States and how they negotiate their situation while living in the United States.

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Even though most of these Latino immigrants underwent stress and adversity as new undocumented immigrants, the study shows how they transformed their suffering using their personal strengths and drawing on support from a close-knit community. At the same time they maintained their cultural identity both in their immigrant community and within the larger community where they resided. An additional factor that contributed to their survival was that this particular community is unique in preserving the different cultures of ethnic groups rather than fusing them into a “melting pot.”

Recommendations for practice include using a strengths perspective with clients and community; recommendations for teaching include using interdisciplinary educational strategies and involving students in experiential learning experiences with immigrants. Additional recommendation for policy and research are made.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

Recent new immigrants arriving in the United States tend to be Latinos, Asian and Pacific Islanders (Delgado, Jones and Rohani, 2005). They are from less developed countries and often immigrate to reunite with kin (Jensen, 1989). Latino immigrants who entered the United States between 1990 and 2000 were the largest population of newly arrived immigrants. They were from Mexico (49%) or South America (47%) (Ramirez, 2004). In addition, the 2005 American Community Survey suggests that between 2000 and 2005, immigrants from Latin America constituted the majority (57.3 %) of the 7.9 million new immigrants who arrived in the United States. Presently, a report from the Pew Hispanic Research Center, (2009) indicates that Mexico is still the leading country of origin for U.S immigrants, accounting for a third (32%) of all foreign-born residents and two-thirds (66%) of Latino immigrants. According to this report, statistics show that the “United States is the destination for nearly all people who leave Mexico, and about one-in-ten people born there currently lives in the U.S” (Passel & Cohn, 2009, p. I).

In addition to representing the majority of the total new immigrants coming to the United States since the 1990's, Latinos in general and Mexicans in particular are also a growing population. The U.S Census 2000 recorded that there are 35.2 million Latinos making up 12.5% of the total population. Among Latinos, the Mexican subgroup is by far the largest at 20.9 million, which is 59% of the total Latino population (Ramirez, 2004). A special census report projects that the Latino population will grow from 12.5% of the total population to 15.5% in 2010 and to 24.4% in 2050 (Paral, 2006). Although Latinos in general and new Latino immigrants in particular are included in these

statistics, it is unclear what percentage, if any, includes those who are undocumented. Statistics about undocumented Latino immigrants are uncertain due to the fear of deportation and arrest. Despite this discrepancy, the Pew Hispanic Center has attempted to include statistics specifically about undocumented individuals and state that undocumented immigrants are mostly from Latin America with Mexicans making up 57% of the total undocumented immigrants (Passel, 2005). In summary, Latinos from Latin America, documented and undocumented are the largest immigrant group migrating to the United States. They are also a growing population. Therefore, whether or not they incorporate into the dominant society in the United States is important particularly because they are predicted to make up a quarter of the total population in the future of the United States.

New Latino immigrants have experienced many hardships in the United States and the potential for hardships to continue is high. New Latino immigrants have a high risk of experiencing economic hardships and health related risks. For example, Latinos are over-represented among people living in poverty (De La Rosa, 2000; Passel, 2005; Ramirez, 2004) with 22.6% of Latinos in poverty compared with 12.4% of the total population (Ramirez, 2004). In addition to a higher likelihood of poverty, health issues are also prevalent. Obesity and diabetes are two main illnesses that are prevalent among Latinos in poverty (De La Rosa, 2000; Larsen, Harissa, Ward & Popkin, 2003). Although limited information is known about diabetes and how it correlates with being Latino, poorer Latinos seem to have higher rates of diabetes than the rest of the population. It is also one of the leading causes of death among Latinos (De La Rosa, 2000). Moreover, more is known about obesity than diabetes among Latinos. Larsen et

al (2003) state that particularly for Puerto Ricans and Cubans, being a U.S resident is associated with an increase chance of being overweight. As new immigrants acculturate, there is a higher likelihood of adopting obesity related behaviors and there is a striking increase in obesity for second and future generation Latinos.

While new Latino immigrants tackle hardships related to poverty and health concerns, undocumented new Latino immigrants face even more adversity. Research studies have pointed to specific challenges for undocumented Latino immigrants such as employment exploitation (Stoddard, 1976), denial of health care (Angel, Frias & Hill, 2005; Passel, 2005) and lack of access to higher education (Seif, 2004). For example, documented Latinos are able to obtain health insurance depending on their employment and their ability to qualify for public or private insurance programs (Cornelius, 2000; Flippen, 2004). However those who are undocumented, will not be entitled to employment benefits such as health care. Financial factors and immigration status can pose a significant barrier to health care for Latinos.

As mentioned earlier, Latinos in general are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as are non-Latinos (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). However, undocumented individuals and their families face even more extreme economic challenges. Their average income is more than 40% below the average income of documented families – including both Latinos and non-Latinos (Passel, 2005). Therefore undocumented families are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as documented families (Passel, 2005).

Economic factors are not the only hardships that undocumented Latino immigrants tackle living in the United States. Fear is never far from their consciousness.

Fear of being identified as illegal and faced with possible arrest and deportation are realities for undocumented Latino immigrants. These risks are more likely at work or when applying for services such as health care (Berk, Schur, Chavez & Frankel, 2000; Rehm, 2003). According to Menjivar (2006) who studied undocumented Salvadorans, legal status shapes identity. Immigrants are not recognized for pursuing a better life through hard work, commitment and diligence, often taking life risks in migrating; instead they report they feel invisible and unaccepted. This is especially true in the work place. Although undocumented workers participate in the work place, usually working long hours under harsh conditions (Stoddard, 1976), they are not given the same treatment as their co-workers when it comes to appropriate health care and equal pay. Moreover, as evidenced during recent immigration raids in nearly 40 locations throughout the United States, resulting in over a thousand arrests (Frieden, & Ahlers, 2006), a strong message is sent to undocumented immigrants that arrest and deportation can occur at anytime – no place is safe, not even work.

Economic hardships coupled with the fear of arrests and deportations have a direct effect on undocumented Latino immigrants becoming part of mainstream society. Pitt & Marsiglia (2000) termed it “floating like oil in water without a chance of participating fully in society” (p. 23) which captures the compromised position of undocumented Latino immigrants. Even the word “undocumented” has been used interchangeably with words like “illegal”, “alien” and “wetback” suggesting “criminal” behavior. To be stigmatized further marginalizes undocumented Latino immigrants (Padilla & Perez, 2003) creating more barriers to opportunities while reinforcing a sense of being rejected from society in general.



All of these factors affecting documented and undocumented new Latino immigrants-- economic issues such as poverty and employment exploitation; and for the undocumented limited or no access to health care and higher education; constant fear due to legal status; and the stigma that accompanies being undocumented-- should logically discourage Latin Americans from immigrating to the United States. Not only are both work and home unsafe, particularly because of immigration raids by federal agents; social acceptance is also compromised both for undocumented and documented immigrants. However, the Latino population in the United States continues to increase; 35.7 million residents were foreign-born in 2004, with

Mexican-Latinos in the United States projected to increase from 10.6 million in 2004 to more than 22 million in 2050 (Passel, 2005, p. 40). As to the undocumented, it is estimated that from 1992 through 2000, undocumented immigrants in the United States increased from 3.9 million in 1992 (Delgado et al, 2005) and to 10.3 million in 2004 (Passel, 2005). These statistics are surprising considering all of the hardships new Latino immigrants experience relative to poverty, health concerns and uncertain documentation status.

In summary, whether undocumented or documented, new Latino immigrants are highly likely to experience poverty that in turn affects other areas of living such as employment and health. However, despite these obvious hardships, the Latino population of new immigrants continues to increase. These hardships seem to be handled in a way that doesn't impede immigration. Although the situation of new Latino immigrants and especially for those who are undocumented, seems extremely difficult,

there is something unexplained occurring that has not been accounted for in current research. The following section will describe the reasons for this study.

***Reason for Research Study: Suffering versus Strength***

As mentioned earlier, new Latino immigrants particularly those who are undocumented, are at high risk of poverty, inadequate health care; poor working conditions; stigma and a constant fear of being arrested or deported. However, many survive these challenges and seemingly overcome them. Within the literature, the experience of being a new Latino immigrant, particularly if undocumented is always portrayed as suffering. This dominating tone overlooks the strength that presents itself in times of suffering. To present only the suffering is to miss an extraordinary opportunity to understand those aspects of culture that not only allow people to survive the challenges that confront them daily but to succeed in attaining their collective goals. In summary, in this study I am interested in alternate views, differing from the literature thus far and rooted in the perspectives of new Latino immigrants, those who are undocumented in particular. It is based on the experience of being new Latino immigrants and impacted by economic, social and political factors.

**Research Focus**

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the experience of being new Latino immigrants in the United States. The experience of being a new Latino immigrant includes economical, social and political impacts. Therefore this experience is defined as the *situation* of new Latino immigrants regardless of documentation status. I will begin to describe the situation of new Latino immigrants by asking about what it was like when they first came to the United States; if they found barriers or facilitators that helped or

hindered them; and how they dealt or managed when they were faced with the experience of being a new immigrant. The literature review does not provide data about Latinos in this situation because researchers have never heard from the immigrants themselves.

Therefore this study will begin to address this gap because it will be based on the perspective of the new Latino immigrants. The research questions are:

R1: How do undocumented Latino immigrants describe the experience they had when they first came to the United States?

R2: How do these Latino immigrants negotiate their situation while living in the United States?

### **Research Design: Qualitative Descriptive Study**

I used a qualitative descriptive approach for my study. This method uses low-inference interpretation by analytically “staying with the surface of the words and events” (Sandelowski, 2000) eliciting descriptions about the experience by those in the experience (Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova & Harper, 2005). This knowledge representing the facts of the phenomenon is presented using everyday language. This information will be used to inform practice and policy level interventions (Sandelowski, 2000; Sullivan-Bolyai et al, 2005). Therefore by using a qualitative descriptive approach I learned more about the experience of being new Latino immigrants in the United States from the Latinos themselves. This information will help inform current social work practice and policy about new Latino immigrants in particular and about immigrant communities in general. I sampled from a community where the new Latino immigrant population is growing. Using snowball sampling, I interviewed 17 participants to elicit rich

descriptions about how they describe their situation, supplemented by a community profile using observations and informal interviews.

### **Importance of the Study to Knowledge Development**

This study may influence theoretical assumptions about the ways new immigrants of color are incorporated into the society of their new country of residence. First, the traditional process of assimilation and acculturation is being challenged by the concept of transnationalism, the latter suggesting a global identity rather than a localized one. And second, whether Latino immigrants use culture to either adapt within the dominant society or separate by merging with other Latinos, aspects of the culture seems to be influential in cultivating resilience during hardships.

#### ***Conceptual Contributions***

##### ***Assimilation and Transnationalism***

As Latino immigrant families migrate to the United States, they settle in a new country. The traditional immigration literature describes settling into a new country as *assimilation* (Gordon, 1964). This term implies that immigrants adapt to the dominant culture by adopting its norms, values and culture (Falk, 1973). The assumption that assimilation is necessary and inevitable for all immigrants goes along with the idea that the loss of culture and identity is inevitable among new immigrants. Recent Latino immigrants have not always integrated into Anglo communities as expected by those proposing assimilation during immigration (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Menjivar, 2006; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Rumbaut, 1997). Some researchers have begun to refer to recent Latino immigrants as *transnational* (Haller & Landolt, 2005), honoring their experience of identity as a citizen of two countries. New Latino immigrants maintain the

identity they bring as citizens of their country of origin while at the same time taking on a new identity as a resident of their new country. Therefore, traditional ways of viewing assimilation by immigrants are being challenged. This idea of transnationalism is a concept that needs to be better understood based on the perspectives of those experiencing it.

### Resilience

The literature identifies resilience as the capacity to bring about positive outcomes under adverse conditions. Resilience can be conceptualized as originating within the individual or as a collective characteristic of family and/or community. Although there is limited research about resilience among immigrants, the continued growth of the new Latino immigrant population suggests that it meets adversity with resilience. This study aims to address this gap and shed some light on the possible resilient nature of new Latino immigrants transforming adverse conditions into positive outcomes during their residence in the United States. In addition, because resilience cannot be translated into Spanish, this concept was reevaluated during data gathering and analysis. Therefore, the meaning of resilience is also a central concept to be explored in this research study.

In summary, the capacity of new immigrants to assimilate or identify as transnational; and resilience, are concepts central to this research about new Latino immigrants. This research enriches what we know about the immigrant communities especially concerning strengths that have been overlooked in prior research. This deeper understanding may inspire other researchers to focus on the importance of community culture. In addition, inquiring about challenging and changing adverse conditions may deepen our understanding of factors that may be perceived and described as resilience among

immigrant Latinos. Hence, these possible new insights deepen the theoretical concepts of incorporation, transnationalism and resilience.

### **Importance of the Study to Social Work Practice**

The knowledge gained from this study may be used to influence the practice of social work on two levels specific to immigrant communities; collectivism in community building; and the strengths perspective.

Learning how immigrant communities adapt in times of distress can help social workers learn to build on the positive resources among these communities. For example, social workers can partner with communities to challenge barriers and create opportunities collectively that in turn may help others to cope and succeed despite challenges.

Moreover, since this study identified a diversity of informal supports available in Latino communities, then social workers can use them rather than relying on formal or institutionalized methods. Ultimately, this study helps fill a gap when learning about how these communities cultivate strength thus leading social work into new areas of community capacity building; illuminating a path towards communities working together.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

This first chapter presented information about new Latino immigrants in a way that highlights the hardships that they experience being new immigrants in the United States. In this chapter I have addressed the issue of why it is valuable to explore and understand this situation. In the second chapter I will present the research on immigration and resilience and relate it to what we know about the

ways new Latino immigrants deal with adversity. The literature review will also include studies that used concepts such as transnational identity and collectivism.

I will apply these theoretical concepts to the ways new Latino immigrants negotiate their place in the dominant society. Finally at the end of chapter 2, I will summarize the literature and relate it to my research questions. I will also include my personal perspective.

In the third chapter I will present the methodology of my study. I will describe how a qualitative descriptive design is integral to this study's purpose. This study is committed to understanding the situation of Latino immigrants based on the viewpoint of their experiences. I will describe the procedures for data collection such as with interviews, observations and a community outline. In addition, data analysis will be discussed including the strategies for low-inference interpretation and the iterative process as well as methods I used to manage my personal perspective. Next I will review the procedures I followed to protect the confidentiality of the participants and the reasons for this protocol. In this section I will review the importance of rigor and the steps towards achieving it. Finally, I will discuss how I would like to honor the community for allowing me to conduct this study. I plan to facilitate a community workshop that would offer information about immigration that can benefit them as a community whose members are eager to learn more about the current immigration debate. This workshop is tentatively scheduled for March 2010.

In the fourth chapter I will present the major findings of this study. This section will include discoveries in the community as well as in the narratives from the sixteen participants.

In the fifth chapter I will revisit two main concepts outlined in the literature review, resilience and transnationalism and discuss how the knowledge learned from this study can enrich their definitions. I will also briefly refer to the third concept of collectivity and argue how a new concept, natural collective support, adds to the collectivity found in community. Limitations and strengths to the research study will also be discussed.

In the sixth and final chapter, I will recommend implications for future research, social work profession, social work education and policy based on the major findings of this study.



## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focused on exploring and describing the situation of new Latino immigrants while in the United States. This section will focus on the current literature about immigration and resilience relative to what is known about new Latino immigrants. I am using the word incorporation to describe the processes by which people assimilate, acculturate or relate to transnationalism while in the United States.

### **New Immigrants coming to the United States**

#### *Brief Review of Previous Research*

Economists and sociologists carried out early research on immigration. They were mostly interested in the reasons for migration (Baker, 2004; Cornelius & Rosenblum, 2005) often termed as the “push/pull factors” (Portes & Borocz, 1989). More specifically, push factors include economic, social and political hardships that encourage immigrants to leave their country. Pull factors tend to apply more to immigrants from more advanced nation-states who migrate for potential economic gain (Portes & Borocz, 1989, p. 607). Previous research on incorporation has used mostly quantitative methods and Census data (Bean, Browning & Frisbie, 1984) and large population surveys, for example (Brown, 2006).

#### *Assimilation Theory*

Although the bulk of the research on why immigrants migrate seems to be driven by an economic perspective, some researchers have focused on the social processes of immigration. The central focus has been on how well new immigrants integrate or assimilate into the dominant culture (Gordon, 1964) essentially measuring whether new immigrants abandon their traditions and culture to adopt the way of life of the dominant

society. Theoretically, Gordon (1964) pioneered assimilation theory, laying the foundation for much of the immigration research today. According to this theory, new immigrants will naturally succeed if they become more like mainstream society (Gordon, 1964). For example, early studies on assimilation examined how new European immigrants (1920's to 1950's) progressed with upward social mobility across generations due to their educational attainment, job skills, English proficiency and intermarriage (Zhou, 1997) and how well new immigrants integrated into society through the jobs they obtained and the places they lived (Portes & Borocz, 1989). Some scholars perceive that “assimilation is virtually synonymous to Americanization - a way of life incorporated into the personalities of a million new citizens” (Falk, 1973, p. 70).

#### Acculturation

Non-white immigrants challenged the assumption of assimilation theory that all immigrants could blend into the dominant society and succeed. Initially research focused on *how* to help new non-white immigrants assimilate rather than *why* they wouldn't or couldn't assimilate. First, researchers tried to explain how the challenges non-white immigrants encountered could be ameliorated using the concepts acculturation and cultural assimilation interchangeably with assimilation. For example, Pedraza (1999) used the term cultural assimilation when referring to ethnic immigrants becoming “like” those in the dominant culture in terms of language, behavior and values. More specifically, cultural assimilation was described as:

A gradual and unconscious process by which individuals come to share the expectations of another group and slowly acquire a new set of definitions and values. A process that takes two or three generations to succeed fully and bring about a final fusion of culture (Falk, 1973, p. 70)

The goal of assimilation (and acculturation or cultural assimilation) is to eventually erase the culture of origin from a family's first generation of immigrants. Second, Alba and Nee (1997) explain that assimilation theory also posits that new immigrants could build relationships to help them to assimilate. These relationships exist between minority and majority groups creating channels through which the rest of the assimilation process follows. This process is called structural assimilation (Alba and Nee, 1997, Brown, 2006). Overall the variety of concepts, such as acculturation, cultural assimilation and structural assimilation, seem to explain how immigrants of color (in this study specifically Latinos of color), can adapt to the demands of their new environment by adopting new customs into their culture. Eventually this process holds expectations of sameness; new immigrants of color will become the same as members of the majority culture. In the end, the success of assimilation is measured by economic, education and political mobility (Gans, 2007).

In summary, whichever form of assimilation was discussed, it was based on the assumption that as new non-white immigrants break ties with their country of origin, they increase their ability to succeed in the United States by being streamlined into the majority culture. As more new immigrants of color migrated to the United States, researchers sought to explore their integrative process but they still held to assimilation theory, highlighting the need to acculturate into the dominant culture in order to experience upward mobility with economic and educational success. The assumption was still that as long as new immigrants

acted like the mainstream population and obtained the skills and education to succeed, they had a guaranteed formula to thrive.

However, with an increase in migration from Asia and Latin America, scholars began exploring how the race, class and culture demographics of these new immigrants challenged assimilation theories. While Gordon (1964) explored the assimilation of these newcomers Jensen (1989) enriched the theory by including the diversity that newcomers brought who were racially and culturally different than the dominant culture. Whereas Gordon had discussed an economic assimilation of white new comers, Jensen moved assimilation theory towards examining the difficulties that non-white newcomers had in obtaining success or higher paid jobs. Research moved from just focusing on how to push new immigrants of color to become more like the dominant culture to exploring the challenges of *why* these immigrants did not assimilate.

Assimilation was not evident among recent new Latino immigrants (Rumbaut, 1997), an important premise for the purpose of this dissertation study. As a result, a new theoretical approach began to develop in contrast to assimilation theory. Research showed that as new Latino immigrants migrate to the United States, they experience prejudice and discrimination from mainstream society. For example, Portes & Borocz (1989) suggest that the flow of assimilation is impeded by a “social disequilibrium with a resolution dependent on cultural and social absorption” (p. 614). These authors propose that society identifies some minorities as “unassimilable” because society excludes them. Jensen (1989) states that this attitude of exclusiveness results from three factors: conditions of migration related to exit country (political condition); the class

origin of immigrants; and contexts of reception (p. 29). In addition, these social factors may cause these new immigrants to start from a disadvantaged economic position (Jensen, 1989). Similar to previous immigrant groups who experienced discrimination, new Latino immigrants making a new life in the United States with hopes for economic and educational success experience discrimination (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). The likelihood of experiencing hardship increases especially when being stigmatized because of skin color, language and ethnicity (Padilla, & Perez, 2003) and further marginalized by exclusionary legislation (Menjívar, 2006). Moreover, second generation immigrants experience the interaction of structural factors and socio-cultural factors differently than their first generation family in either upward or downward mobility (Zhou, 1997, p. 1000).

New Latino immigrants may not be welcomed, much less invited into joining the social and economical systems of the dominant culture. According to Gans (2007) conceptual analysis should “separate assimilation from mobility and explore the connections and disconnects between them” (p. 153). In order to fight the expectation of assimilation, new immigrants form ethnic communities to sustain and maintain their culture and language. There may be value for new Latino immigrants in not assimilating as they become stronger and perhaps more successful. In this study I will explore whether a new factor emerged among Latino immigrants helping them to cope with the stressors of migration and incorporation in the United States. For Latinos the old metaphor of assimilation

may not be sufficient, a new one among the literature has appeared called transnationalism and may add to understanding their experience.

*The Concept of Transnationalism*

A new approach to immigration theory focuses on international migration as a social process. It considers individual motivation, household strategies and community structures both in the country of origin and in the country of arrival (Massey, 1987, p. 1373). As mentioned in the previous section, Gordon (1964) and Falk (1973) examined the ability of newcomers to engage in society and take on a different identity. Assimilation theory focused on a one directional flow of new immigrants into society resulting in an American identity. Haller & Landolt (2005) introduced a new approach to studying the process of immigration. They highlight the multidirectional experience of identity formation during immigration. New immigrants may not only adapt to their new environment, but the new environment is also changed by the new immigrants (Pedraza, 1999). Haller & Landolt (2005) state that new Latino immigrants experience a multi-dimensional identity called transnationalism because they maintain the identity they bring with them while taking on the new identity that is forced upon them. This concept represents a radical change in immigration theory mainly because it supports maintaining the identity rather than abandoning it. Transnationalism is a concept that encompasses the identity of immigrant Latinos well because it nurtures the sustenance of culture of the country of origin along with the new culture. Ultimately, the global nature of transnationalism makes “obsolete conventional understanding of identity formation and its process” (Haller and Landolt, 2005, p.118). In support of dual identities, Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt (1999) define transnationalism as an experience of persons who live

dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders. Hence, the culture of new Latino immigrants seems nurtured rather than forgotten.

The concept of transnationalism applies well to Latino immigrants, particularly undocumented Latino immigrants. (Haller & Landolt, 2005; Lutz, 2004; Orellana, Thorne, Chee & Lam, 2001). The communicative and social contexts of transnationals are called trans-national social fields. These trans-national social fields allow undocumented Latinos to nurture a sense of family via a trans-national community. Undocumented Mexican-Latinos are more likely to cross the border if they can reunite with family members in the United States. In addition, once support systems are in place, more Latinos migrate to meet their needs (Cornelius & Rosenblum, 2005; Massey, 1987). When relationships are maintained across borders the term transnational village is used (Delgado, 2007) to refer to the expanded social network levels of care and care-giving (Cravey, 2005). The transnational village “captures the degree and quality of interactions between newcomers to the U.S and their social network in the country of origin” (Delgado, 2007, p. 60) such as with “telephone calls and return visits” (p. 65). Home no longer refers to one physical place; instead it refers to a global sense of existence (Falicov, 2005). Ultimately, migration involves a large interconnected relationship system that strengthens this population.

In summary, by using the concept of transnationalism, immigration researchers are able to present positive aspects of immigration: such as that (1) meaning is given to the experience of migration; (2) social and cultural capital are

maintained; and (3) multidimensional cultural identities for new immigrants and their future generations are cultivated.

Qualitative studies of immigration have begun to focus on the way new immigrants deal with adversity. In this way, scholars are catching up with immigrant experiences and helping to identify factors that were overlooked in the previous quantitative studies on immigration. Chapter 2 up until now has covered the first group of concepts, assimilation and transnationalism; in the following section, a review of the literature on resilience will help ground the second main concept underlying this study.

### *Resilience*

Research about immigration in general helped explain why people migrated and what happened economically when they arrived. A few recent studies have also examined transnational social identity among immigrants. However, little is known about how new immigrants survive when they arrive, how they manage day to day, and why they would choose to remain in the United States despite facing extreme adversity. For example, Massey (1987) summarizes the migration process as four phases: departure, repetition, settlement and return. According to Massey, immigrants leave (departure); they enter and leave and return cycle (repetition); they permanently settle (settlement) or they return to their country of origin (return). This immigrant cycle clarifies the economic value of immigration not only to the individual migrant but also to both the exit and entry country. However, little is known about the experience of going through these phases from the immigrants' perspective. Research on immigration has revealed little regarding the daily journey of the new Latino immigrants particularly about the ways of



dealing with adversity especially among the undocumented. Through the literature on resilience I am able to conceptualize the ways in which new immigrants may deal with adversity in the United States. In this section, I will review how resiliency differs from coping, and how its conceptual meaning changes moving from the individual perspective to a more recent idea of resilience as the power of collectivism among networks such as family and community; a concept especially applicable to the culture of Latinos.

Initially, the concept of resilience was used interchangeably with the concept of coping. However, recent theory and research have conceptualized resilience more specifically as responding to circumstances that seem difficult to recover from. This is an important distinction because early social work literature on coping dealt with issues of substance abuse and marital dissatisfaction. It wasn't until the 1990's that resilience was applied to the way children rose above extreme family and environmental conditions of drug abuse, poverty and violence. Therefore, the concept of resilience is more than just coping or getting by or even surviving. Instead resilience is used to refer to transforming circumstances resulting in a more positive outcome when the chances of survival are low. According to Walsh (1998):

Resilience entails more than merely surviving, getting through or escaping a harrowing ordeal. Survivors are not necessarily resilient; some become trapped in a position as victims, nursing their wounds and blocked from growth by anger and blame. In contrast, the qualities of resilience enable people to heal from painful wounds, take charge of their lives, and go on to live fully and love well (p. 4).

Walsh's definition of resilience suggests that there is power in the ability to transform negative circumstances into positive ones. Resilience seems to be measured by achieving positive results under adverse conditions. This quality of

resilience of being able to change circumstances underlies three schools of thought that persistently stand out in the literature on resilience: (1) risk and protective factors (Early & GlenMaye, 2000; Rutter, 1985); (2) person-in-situation dynamics (Bachay & Cingel, 1999; Grothberg, 2005; Luthar et al, 2000; Waller, 2001); and (3) collective resilience emphasizing the power of networks among family (Walsh, 1998) and in community (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982). The different schools of thought also represent differences in definitions of resilience and in the context considered.

### *Individual Resilience*

Although researchers generally agree that resilience is represented by the capability of changing negative circumstances into positive outcomes, there is contextual confusion among the social disciplines. While psychology defines resilience as an “individual’s human capacity to deal with, overcome, learn from, or even be transformed by the inevitable adversity of life” (Grothberg, 2005, p.2), social sciences view resilience as an integrative experience involving more than just the individual. The core difference between these disciplines relates to whether resilience is seen as being based in the individual or within the dynamic process of the social environment.

Grothberg (2005) views resilience as “seen thru the eye of the beholder” (p. 2) suggesting a more focused and one view perspective. Grothberg represents the common view of psychology, grounding resilience in individual capacity, which serves as a buffer to negative conditions. In agreement, Rutter (1985) has contributed work on protective factors that can “modify, ameliorate, or alter a

person's response" to risks and producing outcomes that are more positive (p. 600). Building on the individual's perspective of resilience, Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) identify resilience as a "dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (p. 543). Their approach explores the underlying processes of the actual adaptation to risk resulting in positive outcomes. However their work still relies on the maintenance of a positive adaptation by the work of individuals alone.

### *Family Resilience*

The psychological perspective on resilience is used in the bulk of the research on resilience. Alternatively, recent research focuses on the collectivism of resilience. In the field of mental health, Walsh (1998) explains resilience as "forged through an openness to experiences and interdependence with others" (p. 4) thus representing a more collective perspective in defining and measuring resilience. Walsh's theory evolves from a deeper look at the influence of an intimate network, such as family, on resilience. Walsh believes that family resilience is derived from ecological and developmental perspectives. Walsh's (1998) family resilience framework uses a systemic view of resilience through which individuals, couples and families cope and adapt, forging through crisis and adversity. Underlying Walsh's work is the belief that all families have the potential for resilience (p. 24). The following are "keys to family resilience"

- Family belief systems: making meaning of adversity; having a positive outlook; using transcendence and spirituality;
- Organizational patterns: represent flexibility and connectedness with social and economic resources;

- Communication processes: clarity, open emotional expression, and collaborative problem-solving (p.24).

Because of the prevalence of poverty among Latinos, I believe it is important to include Vandsburger's & Biggerstaff's (2004) work. These researchers suggest that family resilience is central to the healthy functioning of the family unit because it moderates distress and decreases the negative effects associated with economic pressures. Vandsburger & Biggerstaff explain the process of the family resilience framework and economic pressure by illustrating how a family strives to maintain a balance between ongoing challenges and demands through family hardiness and with social support. Building on the intimate collectivism found in the family unit, Latinos seem to participate in community resilience sharing collectively among each other.

#### Collective Resilience

In Latino culture, collectivity arises from the cultural value of *familismo*. *Familismo* is family cohesion and cooperation (Coltrane, 2004, p. 179). Value is placed on the needs of the family rather than individual needs (Chian, Hunter & Yeh, 2004). Chian, Hunter & Yeh (2004) found in their study with college students that Latinos sought support from friends, parents and significant others and were significantly more likely to talk to their parents than were black students. Latinos found it natural to seek out those they had a relationship with for support, particularly their parents. Building on an earlier discussion of Walsh's theory about the connectedness among resilient families, *familismo* plays a role in how Latinos come together first as a family but also collectively among

their community during times of stress. This is of particular interest to me because although there is no direct translation for the term resilience in Spanish, this type of strength under adversity seems to exist in the ways Latino families and communities come together.

The coming together of individuals and families in communities to build strength during times of stress is called community resilience (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982; Doron, 2005). Community resilience involves and includes many levels of the environment. It evolves from a process of creating and strengthening personal, familial, social, organizational and economic systems, which serve to cope effectively in times of stress and crisis (Doron, 2005).

Community resilience is defined as

The community's inherent capacity, hope, and faith to withstand major trauma, overcome adversity, and to prevail, with increased resources, competence and connectedness. Community links act as a natural agent for change, relying on the family as the foundation of community (Landau, 2007, p. 352).

This definition identifies a sense of collectivity prevalent in dealing with stress and crisis and positions the value of family as its foundation. Sharing in a sense of collectivity means that change it is not up to the individual but up to the group together. Eventually, shared collectivity means a sharing of familiarity and trust. Therefore, facing adversity as a group is easier than facing it alone. Only a few studies have emphasized the concept of collectivity among ethnic and/or professional communities. For example, in times of crisis or large scale disaster, groups bind and build endurance together because of shared values and beliefs (Burton, 2004; Delgado, 1998) thereby building sources of sustenance, support,

endurance and meaning (Freedman, 2004; Popkin, 1999). Focusing on the connectedness found in collectivity, Latina immigrants work to build a sense of community by sharing with other Latinas a past of coping and transitioning to life in the United States (Bathum & Baumann, 2007). Collectivity is evident among Latinos from various parts of Latin America (Paterson & Marsiglia, 2000).

Building on collectivity as a source of community resilience, immigration research proposes that kinship ties influence the flow of immigration because of the support new immigrants will potentially receive making their immigration experience easier to manage. For example, there is an increase in immigration when new immigrants expect to be met by one or more friends or relatives in the United States, trusting in the support of those who receive them (Tienda, 1980). Also, with the help of family, social networks and faith, new Latino immigrants and undocumented Latino immigrants in particular obtain resources to ameliorate (for the survivors) adverse conditions of death and deportation, (Cravey, 2005).

In thinking critically about the collective characteristic of community resilience among Latinos, natural support systems come to the forefront of this discussion. Delgado (1998) defines natural support systems as a “collection of individuals who relate to you, although not necessarily to each other, on a familiar or even intimate basis” (p. 12). Natural support systems are larger than the family unit and involve significant community members. Unlike the northern European concept of the nuclear family, the extended family system is much larger. This extended system of support involves a new concept of who is included in the extended family member system (both related and nonrelated) such as neighbors,

friends, healers, institutions (including religious and other indigenous associations), local self-help groups, and community leaders (Delgado, 1998, p. 13). In a study of Puerto Rican families, 24 identified the neighborhood school as an important resource in the community with personnel and teachers as part of the natural support system because they did so much that went beyond their job description (Delgado, 1998). Among Mexican Americans' natural supports were relatives, neighbors and friends (Patterson & Marsiglia, 2000) similar to the Dine (Navajo American) community where helpers included teachers or mentors who strengthened their ability to cope with life stressors (Waller & Patterson, 2002). Evidently natural support systems are sources of strength during times of stress. Natural support systems are valuable because of the significance they hold for the individuals who depend on them and for the power they represent within communities. New immigrants depend on these sources of natural support systems for their self-protection and support (Portes & Stepick, 1985) and to buffer stress (Patterson & Marsiglia, 2000). These systems of support facilitate the coming together of individuals for resources such as for health benefits (Putnam, 2007). Therefore, natural support systems help mediate stresses in life (Bathum & Baumann, 2007; Waller & Patterson, 2002;).

### **Summary**

The review of literature in this chapter has clarified the current knowledge about immigrants and their incorporation experiences. First, the process of assimilation may not represent the incorporation theory for new Latino immigrants. In fact, the literature leans toward a more global identity particularly

among undocumented individuals suggesting that new Latino immigrants challenge the push for a local identity. In addition, there is limited research about the experience of being a new Latino immigrant from the Latinos themselves. The limited research available suggests that cultural factors such as *familism*, collectivity and natural support systems seem to cultivate resilience among Latinos who are experiencing adversity. Therefore, this study's purpose sought to learn about how Latinos describe the experience of being new Latino immigrants influenced by economic, social and political factors in the United States. In particular, the focus is on how they describe their situation, what situational barriers and/or facilitators they experience, and how they negotiate these factors. This study adds to the current theoretical knowledge about incorporation, transnationalism, resilience and collectivity.

### **Personal Perspective**

Chapters 1 and 2 have demonstrated what we know about the situation of new Latino immigrants. It is also important to present what I bring to the study as a researcher so that I can put any assumptions aside and let the situation speak for itself. First, I have worked as a community social worker for more than 15 years. Ten of these years included therapy, advocacy and crisis intervention mostly with families of new Latino immigrants. Secondly, I am a Latina as well as a first generation immigrant to the United States. Being a Latina influences me culturally because my family raised me with values based on being *Ecuadoriana* (Ecuadorian). Moreover, although I came to the United States when I was one year old, as I grew up I heard family stories about the hardships we encountered as a new immigrant family. Being Latino and an immigrant is



common in my extended family as well. Because my parents owned a business even though they didn't speak English, migrating relatives knew they had a place to work in addition to a place to live. Also, I spoke English and at the young age of five I became the family representative at public events both for my own family and my extended family. My experience being a social worker, Latina and an immigrant has led to the following assumptions:

- First, I believe that new immigrants migrating from Latin countries that are economically poorer than the United States come here to work toward getting a better life for themselves and their families. A better life means better work opportunities and education.
- Secondly, I also believe that new Latino immigrants particularly those who are undocumented are resilient and find ways to improve their situation resulting from the love they have for their family and because of the support they feel from people they trust. In this way, resilience is a positive characteristic that enables struggling immigrants to change their situation.
- Third, I relate to concepts, assimilation and transnationalism. I relate to the assimilation process because of the ways in which I have become a member of the dominant society having economic and education opportunities. I am also transnational in that even though I have lived in the United States for over 30 years, I am connected to Ecuador. I am able to position myself within the societies of both countries. Therefore I feel a strong connection with other immigrants with similar experiences.

- Fourth, to be able to listen to new Latino immigrants narrate their stories about immigration and about the adversities they encounter in the United States is not only a rare opportunity but also an honor. I believe that I have been privileged to have this experience in that I have witnessed how strength can come from the suffering that resulted from social, economic and political stress.
- Fifth, new Latino immigrants in general, and in particular those who are undocumented, have little available to them because of their unstable legal residence. Therefore to be able to bear witness to their strengths as well as their hardships allows me to the opportunity to give human service providers a unique learning experience.
- Sixth, I believe that practice and policy level interventions with this population are often based on misinformation. Therefore research has a responsibility to collect data from the people who are affected; the population, the communities and the service providers.

My identity, my past, and these assumptions nourish my passion and drive to conduct this study. However, it is important to acknowledge them and in the rigor section of the Methods Chapter 3, I will describe how I managed these assumptions as well as my passion to ensure that I could be open to what the participants told me about their situation.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### Design

Previous researchers utilized mostly quantitative methods that were based on economic viewpoints to understand immigration flows. They also helped explain how new Latino immigrants may or may not incorporate or assimilate into mainstream society. In addition, the majority of research studied Latino males of Mexican origin with little focus on undocumented Latinos (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). Much less research has studied women.

At the same time, resilience research studies included adults but have not addressed Latinos. Most studies examining resilience have focused more on children in general and the impact of substance abuse and poverty in their environment. Nonetheless, quantitative research has not been able to inform us about the experience of Latino immigrants from their own perspective. However, both resilience and immigration research are beginning to move towards the use of qualitative designs focusing on the social process of immigration with Latinos. Qualitative research is the appropriate methodology for learning about the experience of individuals and groups from their point of view and in their own words. Therefore, there is great value in choosing a qualitative approach to learn about immigrants and to fill the gaps in the current research. As a result, a qualitative method was used for this study to first, explore and describe the experience of new Latino immigrants; second, describe the situational barriers and/or facilitators they encounter living in the United States; and third, identify the ways they negotiate their situation as new Latino immigrants.

### **The Qualitative Descriptive Method**

A particular type of qualitative research, a qualitative descriptive study, was used in this study. This method is mostly used in Nursing but only rarely in Social Work research. While other qualitative methods such as ethnography, grounded theory and phenomenology are better known; qualitative descriptive studies are also powerful. Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova & Harper (2005) explain that the goal of qualitative description is “not thick description (ethnography), theory development (grounded theory) or interpretative meaning of an experience (phenomenology) but a rich description of the experience depicted in easily understood language” (p. 128). Therefore this qualitative method matches the goals of the research undertaken here.

A qualitative descriptive approach offers the opportunity to gather rich descriptions about the immigrant experiences which research up until now has learned little about. The researcher works hard to stay close to the “surface of the data and events” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 336), where the experience is described from the viewpoint of the participants (Sullivan-Bolyai et al, 2005, p. 128). The goal of the researcher is to search for a precise account of the “experiences, events and process that most people (researchers and participants) would agree are accurate” (Sullivan-Bolyai et al, 2005, p. 128). The focus is placed on direct communication with the research participants, eliciting rich description about the phenomenon. Gathering this data and using descriptions from those experiencing it themselves offers a valuable opportunity to acquire "inside" knowledge and learn about how they see their world.

Ultimately, the findings of qualitative description research can transform social work practice by developing effective and culturally sensitive interventions and to make

policy recommendations among those that are the focus of the research (Sullivan-Bolyai et al, 2005). For Latino immigrants who are impacted by social, economical and legal influences, knowledge obtained from research can be used to help to strengthen their resources while adding valuable knowledge to research. The following section describes why a qualitative descriptive research design was applied to this study breaking new ground among social work research methods.

Qualitative descriptive designs have been predominately used in nursing research to seek direct descriptions of phenomena (Sandelowski, 2000) and to design interventions that are culturally informed and geared to reduce health disparities (Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova & Harper, 2005). Two main elements consistent with qualitative descriptive studies in nursing research include: 1) learning from the participants and their descriptions; and 2) using this knowledge to influence interventions (Sullivan et al, 2005). Moreover, research studies typically utilize qualitative description methods when the topic is of special relevance to practitioners and policy makers (Sandelowski, 2000). Although this type of design has rarely been applied in social work research, it matches the goal of my study. Similar to nursing, social work is a helping profession. And in this case, it is of special relevance to learn more from immigrants of color in light of the current immigration debate and the national goal of recreating fair immigration reform. It seemed logical for me to use a qualitative descriptive approach to inform social work knowledge, practice, and policy.

In the following sections, I will describe how the sample, the location, and the setting were selected for my study.

## Sample

### *Community*

I chose to carry out this study within a location where the Latino population is growing. Through my relationships with key informants and my familial connections with new Latino immigrants, I identified an urban community located in one of the boroughs of New York City. This community is also a place that is a hub for new immigrants as it was for me growing up as a new immigrant in this community. This community was the natural setting for this study. In this community, I identified a variety of places where I could carry out observations such as churches, grocery stores, schools, shops, as well as social events.

### *Participants*

Initially, eligibility criteria were: (1) first generation immigrant; (2) adult eighteen years old or older; and (3) living in the United States for a period between 1 to 3 years. However, as I began interviewing participants for the study I realized that some of them indicated that they had arrived recently on their second or third trip to the United States. This created a lot of confusion. Since the study aimed at learning about the barriers and facilitators to living in the United States, I believed it made sense to include immigrants living in the U.S for one year or more instead of the limited one to three years. After consulting with Committee Chair Dr. Susan Murty and Method Mentor Dr. Lisa Skemp, I applied and received modification approval to change the eligibility criteria.

Thorne, Kirkham, and MacDonald-Emes (1997) explain that purposeful sampling in qualitative descriptive research seeks research participants whose stories have some elements that are shared to some degree by others. They also go on to state that the

researcher should also differentiate between the “eccentricities” and the “commonalities” of data expanding the description of the phenomenon (p. 174). I looked for both Latino immigrants who were documented and undocumented, representing various countries of origin. By using purposeful sampling, I honed in on the similarities and differences among this population. According to Sullivan-Bolyai et al (2005) a qualitative descriptive study of this kind should be conducted with 20 to 50 participants or until saturation is reached. Saturation is reached when the data from additional interviews does not add new information to the categories of data already gathered (Creswell, 1998). I felt I reached saturation when I had interviewed 13 to 15 participants and discussed this finding with my mentors. Because most of my participants were from one county, Mexico, I decided to purposefully seek additional participants from other countries. I succeeded in finding one representative each from two other countries: Ecuador and the Dominican Republic and interviewed them. After these two more interviews, I reached saturation again and decided to close the study to more participants. I interviewed a total of seventeen Latino immigrants. However, this study focused on the narratives of sixteen Latino immigrants who were undocumented.

### ***Recruitment & Building Trust in the Community***

This study pursued the description and the meaning of being an immigrant from participants interested in sharing their story. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling method in which one person refers another and that person refers another and so on. To cultivate a safe environment for sharing this experience, I contacted community residents and leaders I knew who would be supportive of my study. Earning their support was valuable. These community residents will be identified as "key informants." These

key informants referred community residents to participate in this study, and these residents then referred more participants.

A total of five key informants were instrumental in referring initial participants as well as communicating a trust in me and my study in the community. Three of these key informants are community leaders and also are my relatives. The other two key informants live in the community and serve the community in various activities such as with cultural celebrations and spiritual gatherings.

Two of the key informants are undocumented Latino immigrants. The other three who work intimately with undocumented Latino immigrants are also Latino immigrants and have legal documents. These key informants referred those residents, with whom they had regular contact, yielding a sample of 16 undocumented residents and one who had legal documents.

To begin the process of initial referrals, I gave the key informants a brief bilingual description about the purpose of the study (See APPENDIX C1) and the eligibility criteria. Once potential participants were referred and I received their phone numbers, I called them to follow up by giving them more information about my study and setting up an interview time. Upon meeting face-to-face with a potential participant, I provided a consent script (See APPENDICES C4 and C5) illustrating a clear description about the purpose of the study, its confidentiality measures and their voluntary participation. The participants kept the consent script, which had information on how to contact me. I then went through the oral consent process and when the person gave consent I immediately proceeded into the interview.



Nineteen participants were referred in total; two did not return my telephone call. Seventeen met with me and all of them gave consent to be interviewed. One was eliminated from the sample because she was not undocumented. A total of 16 participants' interviews were analyzed in this study. At the end of the interview, each participant was asked for permission to be contacted in the future for a follow up interview to determine the accuracy of the results. All participants agreed to be re-contacted. At this time, they were also asked to suggest other participants for the study. In one case, upon finishing his interview, the participants accompanied me to his neighbors and introduced me; this contact culminated into two other interviews.

### ***Follow-up Interviews***

A follow-up interview was completed with twelve of the seventeen participants and conducted in one to six months from the initial interview. At this interview, we reviewed what the participant said in the first interview and checked whether the findings accurately captured what they had meant to say. I explained each theme including how the use of descriptions in quotes could illustrate what each theme meant. I asked for confirmation and clarity. Even when some participants confirmed the meaning of the themes, I asked them to explain which further confirmed that the themes represented their perspective. In some cases the participants added additional information. However, follow up interviews and member checks were completed simultaneously. Member checks were conducted as part of establishing rigor in this study.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

In a qualitative descriptive approach, the researcher studies the meanings of language (Sandelowski, 2000). Towards this goal, I conducted formal interviews and as

the participants described their situation, I pursued the meanings they made of their experience. Pursuing the meaning meant focusing on the *Who, What, Where* and *Why* of the experience (Sandelowski, 2000; Sullivan-Bolyai et al, 2005). According to Fetterman (1998) interviews take the researcher into the “heart of the phenomenon classifying and organizing an individual’s perception of reality” (p. 40).

In addition, the environment of the participants is crucial to understanding their perspective. Therefore, I also gathered data for a community profile in order to be able to describe each participant’s context. To further capture meaning and perspective, I conducted informal interviews and observations. Informal interviews although casual and friendly in nature, were also focused and specific; in addition, such interviews establish rapport in the community and seek to understand what people really think (Fetterman, 1989). According to Fetterman (1989) informal interviews help understand how perceptions compare with one another (p. 38). They “help discover the categories of meaning in a culture“(p. 38). And through the use of observations, I expanded on what I learned from informal interviews by learning about the culture of the community. Observations are a “strategy for both listening to people and watching them in natural settings” (Spradley, 1979, p. 32). In a qualitative descriptive research approach, observation of targeted events provided a “broad range of information” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 338). The process included two main components: (1) one-on-one interviews; transcriptions and translations; use of Spanish and Consent Scripts; and (2) a community profile which included a community outline, observations and informal interviews. It is important to note that this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (See APPENDIX C10). The following subsections describe each collection method in detail.

1. ***One-on-one interviews:***

- a. *Formal interviews (APPENDICES C2 & C3):* All the interviews were conducted at the participant's home. After oral consent was granted, the formal interviews were conducted in Spanish, which was the participant's choice of language. The interviews followed a minimally-to-moderately structured and open-ended interview guide (Sullivan Bolyai et al, 2005). Open-ended and semi-structured questions were designed to find out how the participants describe their experiences from their point of view. Following Fetterman's advice, these interviews were digitally recorded, to allow for word-for-word data collection and to allow the researcher to fully participate in the interview rather than taking notes.
- i. *Use of Spanish by Researcher:* Because this study focused on Latino immigrants with Spanish as their first language, they felt more comfortable speaking Spanish and preferred that the interview be conducted in Spanish. I was born in Ecuador and am a native Spanish speaker with Spanish being my first language. The use of Spanish facilitated two goals: first, helped engage potential participants creating a safer and more comfortable atmosphere; and second, encouraged recruitment of participants who only speak Spanish.
- ii. *Transcription/Translation:* Interviews were conducted in Spanish. I followed Milne and Oberle's (2005) suggestion to transcribe the recordings of the formal interviews in order to be able to work with

them word-for-word as the participants provided them. The transcriptions were in Spanish. In addition, a few of the interviews were translated by me into English and then transcribed with back translation so that cross checking of data could be conducted by mentors who do not speak or understand Spanish. Back translation conveyed the ideas and descriptions from the participant however the actual tone and phrasing was difficult to capture on paper. One back translation took about 8 hours to complete. For both the transcriptions as well as the back translations, I checked and double-checked for accuracy of content with what was transcribed and what I heard played back on the digital recording. However, even though I am a native Spanish speaker and able to understand and convey most of the cultural nuances of the interviews from the diverse Latino participants, these translations and transcriptions were time consuming and sometimes difficult. For example, when participants used idioms or slang, I didn't always immediately understand what was meant. In one instance, I had to ask the participant to explain how he used a common phrase in his language that I initially thought meant something different. A misunderstanding resulted. . This is an example of the checks I consistently applied during the translations. Most of the checking was done during follow up interviews and member checking. Because the analysis was done in Spanish, the purpose of

conducting translations was to illustrate the content therefore it wasn't necessary to back translate them.

b. *Consent Process: Consent Script (See APPENDICES C4 & C5):* This study requested a waiver of documentation from potential participants so that they could give verbal agreement to participate rather than provide personal identification with a signed consent form. The consent process was approved by IRB at the University of Iowa (See APPENDIX C10) and included a bilingual consent script indicating the purpose and description of the project, length of interview time, voluntary participation, risks and resources, and permission for digital taping. The consent process also clearly stipulated the manner in which both the privacy and confidentiality of the subject was secured protecting their identity to assure that their responses would not be linked to their name. This type of consent process provided a safer and secure participation for the participants

2. **Community profile:** Raj & Silverman (2002) suggest that research incorporate culture as a way to interpret results and help frame this understanding in a socio-political and historical context. Therefore it is important to include a contextual description of this community so that more is understood about the culture of the community relative to immigrants and, to all of its residents as a whole and about how it lays the foundation for new community residents. The community's profile is particularly important because of the current political climate concerning the legality of immigrants in general. In this study, the culture of the

community is described in two parts through a community profile: (a) Community outline – with physical and social demographics; and (b) observations and informal interviews.

*a. Community Outline (See APPENDICES C6 and C7):* Information about the neighborhood was gathered systematically by following an outline created by Dr. Lisa Skemp (See APPENDIX C6), which was modified from Arensberg and Kimball (1972). This outline was further revised and tailored for the purposes of this study, focusing on the community factors that pertained and minimized those that didn't (See APPENDIX C7). Dr. Skemp is a member of the dissertation committee and a method mentor for this study. Using the outline as a guide, I began learning more about this community and connecting with it by spending time there and gathering information by walking, talking to people (informally) and taking pictures. Archival data were also collected. This included census data, other demographics of informal and formal institutions and associations visible in the community, neighborhood papers and information about the political community district. The use of pictures was useful to understand the physical changes in the neighborhood over time. These pictures are not included in the dissertation but were included among the data that were analyzed for the community profile.

*b. Observations (See APPENDIX C8) and Informal Interviews:*

*i. Observations:* Through my relationships with key informants, I had many opportunities for observation at social events at a Catholic

community center. For example, I had *access* to a *Rosario*, a religious gathering that took place at a community member's home on a Friday. I also attended *comidas*, occasional gatherings organized for raising funds for community activities. In addition, I made observations at busy public locations such as community parks and schools. By attending these activities and public events, I learned more about the context of the situation of the participants.

- ii. *Informal interviews:* These interviews were conducted with key informants, community leaders and community members, all of whom were integral to adding to understanding the context of the participants. They included community leaders<sup>1</sup> such as Ms. Supervisor, the Community District Manager; Mr. Police Officer; Mr. Monsignor; informal leaders such as Ms. Committee; and many other community representatives such as shop owners, store workers and local residents. They were informal though focused on learning more about the community and its residents.

By using a qualitative descriptive approach, I was able to present how Latino immigrants live with their situation, what factors they identify as barriers and/or facilitators and how they negotiate their situation within the context of a larger community. Through the use of interviews and a community profile, I felt invited and welcomed into this community, and experienced an insider perspective. I learned from

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<sup>1</sup> The following names are pseudonyms

the participants by listening to their words, by observing their situation and by gathering data about the context of their community.

### **Measures**

Because this study follows a qualitative design, the measures used are unlike those used in quantitative research. One data collection tool was used; an interview guide. A pilot test was used to ensure that the interview guide was appropriate. See the interview guide (APPENDICES C2 and C3).

#### ***Interview Guide***

Sandelowski (2006) recommended that researchers use a semi-structured and open-ended interview guide in order to avoid limiting the participants' responses and to encourage them to express themselves freely. In addition, as suggested by Astedt-Kurki & Heikkinen (1994) interviews can include themes relevant to the concern or main issue of the study, and in this case it involved learning about the complex situation of Latino immigrants. Having worked with immigrant populations in New York, I found it helpful to draw from this experience and integrate three phases to help build the trust during the one-on-one interview. I also used language that was clear, precise and helpful. The three phases were: *Preliminary questions* that were used to establish rapport and begin building a relationship, *Core questions* that could get to the heart of their experience by probing for their descriptions, and *Closing questions* expressing my gratitude for sharing their knowledge and setting the stage for future meetings and referrals. Following the recommendations by Astedt-Kurki & Heikkinen (1994), the main questions within each phase were based on the research questions of this study and focused on specific topics of



the immigrant experience such as reasons for coming to the U.S and what life is like living in the U.S. Towards the end of each interview, I also asked each participant for feedback about the interview so that I could make changes to the interview guide to make it more useful and effective. All of the participants stated that the interview guide was clear and used words that were easy to understand. However, there were slight changes initiated by me when I was probing after asking the participants core questions. For example, sometimes I used a different Spanish word to seek clarification about a topic. I followed all of the questions on the interview guide. It is important to note that the interview guide was approved by IRB. If the participants felt it needed to change then I would have followed the protocol to seek IRB approval for the proposed changes.

It is important to note that during interviews, the stance of the researcher is critical. The researcher should be focused yet respectful and courteous being more of a “listener rather than a speaker” (Creswell, 1998, p. 124). This aspect of the interview process was difficult though rewarding. Because I was able to listen attentively and actively to a story that was unfolding as the interview proceeded, I felt that by saying less meant I could offer the participant space to share their story their own way, in their own time.

Since the style of the interview guide was semi-structured and open-ended, it served as an initial step to the in-depth discussion of their immigrant story. It was important for me as the researcher to be open to other aspects of their story which may not have been previously included as part of the pre-designed interview guide. By listening to the participants and following their lead I learned more about what was real and meaningful for them. For example, a new topic that was not included as part of the

initial questions was “immigrants coming to the United States with a plan to return home within 1 to 2 years.” This topic emerged during the interviews; introduced by the participants. Eventually this topic evolved into one of the major themes discussed in the results section.

The interview guide was a valuable method for data collection in this qualitative descriptive study. I found that the design of the interview guide; open-ended and semi-structure with the different phases and focused content created space for bonding and building trust between me as the researcher, and the participant. Therefore I believe it was an effective interview guide.

#### ***Pilot-Test: Interview Guide***

In order to assess whether an interview guide is culturally appropriate and language friendly, Fowler (1995) suggests asking a focus group to evaluate the interview guide. At the time of the proposal, I was residing in Iowa and I connected with community members by telephone. First I sent the interview guide to two community members who are my relatives. They reviewed the interview guide and also consulted with Mexican, Puerto Rican and Ecuadorian residents of the community. The pilot study used the Spanish version of the interview guide. After they had completed this review over the telephone, I asked for feedback on four main points: (1) cognitive understanding; (2) emotional impact; (3) language clarity; and (4) confidentiality measures. The feedback provided included suggestions for a few word changes in order to target a more general Latino community instead of specific sub-groups.

In addition to completing the pilot study, I sought feedback from the actual participants after they completed the interview and made some revisions to the interview guide based on their suggestions.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Bolyai et al (2005) qualitative descriptive studies follow the six analytic strategies outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). In analyzing the data, I followed these same strategies and described my process for each more fully:

#### ***1. Code data collected from observations and interviews;***

- After conducting the formal interviews I transcribed them in Spanish so that words and phrases could maintain their meaning rather than being lost in translation. I worked on these transcriptions on a regular basis Monday through Thursday from 9 to 3pm. Each interview was approximately 1 to 2 hours. It took me 5 to 10 hours to transcribe each interview. After five months I finished transcribing the 16 interviews. Then I read these transcriptions three times before writing notes on the margins.
- I proceeded to code words or phrases that seemed to capture ideas that emerged among the data by using the exact words the participants said. For example, codes such as *costo medicinal* (medical cost), *estudio diferente* (different education) and *reglas de limpieza en los Estados Unidos* (the cleaning regulations in the U.S) illustrated the various ways participants identified differences between Mexico and the U.S. Moreover, as I was coding I noticed an analytic pattern of seeing categories that followed specific

questions during the interview. After repeating this process for each interview, I decided to reverse the coding process by coding the content regardless of questions that were asked. Using the same example about the differences between the two countries, I identified that the reverse coding highlighted that these some codes described positive aspects about living in the U.S while others described the negative aspects. The result of these two procedures led me to create codes that felt true of the data. I then created three tables<sup>2</sup> to reflect this process of coding. These tables were called Table 1 Data Analysis by Case Interview Excerpts; Table 2 List of Codes and Table 3 Matrix of Codes by Interviewee. This level of coding yielded 257 codes. This process was done in Spanish.

## ***2. Record insights and reflections on the data;***

- I kept a journal that was specifically used for reflections about the data. Many of the thoughts I wrote on the margins of the transcriptions were continued in this journal. This journal demonstrated how ideas stood out from participant to participant helping me realize when I felt I reached saturation. For example, when participants talked about the barriers to life in the U.S, topics of language and immigration status were most common. This journal also helped me dialogue about various concepts that evolved during this phase of the analysis

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<sup>2</sup> These tables yielded a final table called Table 9: Thematic Conceptual Matrix with Illustrative Quotes x Cases (See Table A-1).

such as suffering, strength and identity. These same concepts emerged as main themes towards the end of the analysis.

- I kept a second journal where I recorded personal experiences about the data. I refer to this journal again in the section on rigor. This journal served as an outlet for me to write about and reflect on personal memories and opinions. First, memories about my personal journey as a new immigrant arose throughout this part of the analysis. These memories as well as strong feelings came forth while I was transcribing the interviews. It was powerful for me to be the one to transcribe the interviews because as I listened to the voices of the participants over and over again and this process made the transcriptions come alive each time I read them during the analysis. Because of this experience I began to feel a closer connection with the participants and decided to journal about this part of the analysis. Secondly, this journal served as a safe place for me to write about my opinions. I could write about opinions that I felt would influence how I experienced that which evolved from the data. This type of journal writing provided me with an outlet that helped me maintain an open stance to the emerging themes.
- During this phase of the analysis, I wrote in Spanish and in English depending on the language of my thoughts and if I was quoting a participant.

**3. *Sort through the data to identify similar phrases, patterns, themes, sequences and other important features;***

- At first I sorted through large quantities of data and identified similar key words and phrases. For example, the participants to describe their country of

origin used key words such as “tranquil” and “beautiful”. These same words were also used to describe their current community of residence ultimately illustrating one main reason why many of the participants chose to remain in this community. An example of a key phrase that was similar throughout the narratives was “Aqui se sufre” that is “Here one suffers.” This phrase captured in just three words the numerous levels of stress and trauma pertinent to being new Latino immigrants. Therefore, I used specific phrases and key words that participants said to describe their situation to represent the themes of this study. The next step was placing these similarities in a matrix which further identified an important feature about how stress was managed differently depending on their length of time in the U.S. This step in the analysis was written in Spanish. This process created Table 4<sup>3</sup> Reverse Analysis List of Codes x Similar Patterns.

**4. *After sorting, extract commonalities and differences for further consideration and analysis;***

- By extracting the commonalities among the data, differences stood out. For example, while many of the participants identified specific positive strategies on how they combated difficult situations, one participant felt she gave up on the battle. Having differing viewpoints about an emerging theme regarding strength led me to think about other differences I may have overlooked in the

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<sup>3</sup> This table yielded a final table called Table 9: Thematic Conceptual Matrix with Illustrative Quotes x Cases (See Table A-1).

data. This awareness led me to identify a source of support that some participants described even though it wasn't regarded as important as the other positive strategies. I sorted through the data and identified this description as a similar pattern among some of the participants, an emerging commonality that needed further consideration and analysis. After further consideration and analysis, I could see how some commonalities and differences could be merged into larger categories and themes leading me to the next step of the analytic procedure. In this case, the source of support that seemed hidden and embedded within the narratives now stood out as three distinct sources of support among the participants. This step of the analysis was written in Spanish. This process yielded two Tables<sup>4</sup>: Table 5 Similar Patterns x Case Level Display for Immigration Story – Summary Table; and Table 6 Conceptually Clustered Matrix Before During and After Immigration.

**5. *Gradually decide on a small group of generalizations that hold true for the data;***

- I sorted through the numerous categories among the data and selected 2 to 5 quotes for each category and theme. At this stage of the analysis, I began to notice how some themes or categories could be sub-themes to main concepts or main themes. For example, the participants described that as new immigrants the “suffering” they experience is “difficult”. The analysis indicated that this “difficult suffering” could be explained with different

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<sup>4</sup> These tables yielded a final table called Table 9: Thematic Conceptual Matrix with Illustrative Quotes x Cases (See Table A-1).

categories. These categories included the feeling of being “like a fish out of water,” and “Upon awakening you said ‘where am I.’” These two categories reflect not only how different they felt being a new immigrant in the U.S but how much they also missed their home. I will discuss these categories or sub-themes further in the results section. This process was organized in two tables<sup>5</sup>: Table 7 Thematic Conceptual Matrix – Illustrative Quotes (The Situation of Latino Immigrants), Case and Time Sequence; and Table 8 Matrix of Thematic Conclusions and Time Sequence

- Fourteen main themes initially emerged from the data. After further analysis and by focusing on the purpose of this study to explore the situation of Latino immigrants from their perspective, three main themes consistently stood out to capture their immigrant story; a story that reflected experiences that evolved over time (See APPENDIX A TABLES). The themes demonstrate how suffering and strength are valuable for new Latino immigrants, and how their identity is based on where they feel rooted (See APPENDIX B FIGURES) for a conceptual diagram). These major findings illustrate what Sandelowski (2000) and Bolyai et al (2005) describe as “straight descriptions” of the data arranged in a way that “fits the data” (p. 128). These three main themes were chosen to capture their reality; a decision that was further verified by the

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<sup>5</sup> These tables yielded a final table called Table 9: Thematic Conceptual Matrix with Illustrative Quotes x Cases (See Table A-1).



participants through the member checks procedure. This step of the analysis was written in English with Spanish quotes.

**6. *Examine these generalizations in light of knowledge that is known.***

- I learned about the situation of the Latino immigrants from these participants. First, the sample population was undocumented so I changed the research question to reflect their specific situation. Secondly, in the results section I demonstrated how Latino immigrants viewed their suffering and how many strategies helped them break through their suffering. And once immigrants feel connected with the U.S, which tended to happen over time, their identity expanded to include the U.S as their home too. Third, in the discussion section I revisited the concepts of resilience, transnationalism and collectivity; and re-examined them in light of this new knowledge. This discussion will become clearer in the section on discussion and implications.

***Iterative Process***

Miles & Huberman (1994) suggest organizing data with tables or matrixes, maintaining a visual and a contextual interpretation. As explained throughout the analytic process, I organized data using tables and matrixes. I began with a table organizing the various codes; based on that, I developed another table capturing the similar patterns and negative cases. In a third step, I developed a table that highlighted the chronological order of similar patterns. The final tables were organized according to themes. However, while this process may appear linear, the analysis was rigorous following a circular movement sometimes beginning with one table then jumping to a later table, then back to the first table then proceeding to a final table and so on repeated

several times with additional analysis. This going back and forth reading the tables, completing the tables and further analyzing the tables and simultaneously keeping in mind the whole text demonstrates how the iterative process includes comparisons on all types of data (Ayres, Kavanaugh & Knafl, 2003). During this process I stayed with the data, followed the data as concepts emerged, and stayed open to what the data said staying close to how it was said. Although the data were organized, my process felt inductive keeping me with the world of the data following to where it would take me. Creswell (1998) calls this process "The Data Analysis Spiral." As illustrated in Figure B1, the levels of data management and analytic process follows a spiral movement which is circular moving back and forth from processes and up and down, all with the intention of getting a sense of the volumes of data and immersing yourself in the details (p. 143).

I felt that the iterative process became alive when I felt completely immersed in the details of the data. During this process, I would sit at a table and lay out all of these Tables, my notebook, my computer and I would go back and forth double-checking and cross-checking ideas and concepts. This iterative process of going back and forth meant, "these tables became alive" (L. Skemp, personal communication, October 15, 2009). As I sorted through the different themes I noticed the different meaning they had from table to table. Then I would go back to the quote to double check and a few times I noticed I missed information on a table and realized the quote had two meanings as opposed to just one creating a subtheme to the main theme. This example describes the inductive process for the main theme about *suffering*. For example, the iterative process helped discover two categories to the main theme of suffering which were making sense of their suffering and believing suffering has a purpose

In summary, the qualitative descriptive approach provided an in-depth conceptual description and understanding of being Latino immigrants in the United States. Miles and Huberman (1994) provided a framework to conduct data analysis; a process that revealed data that consistently stood out.

### **Procedure for the Protection of Human Subjects**

#### ***Reason for Protocol with Sampling and Data Storage***

Gaining access to Latino immigrants who are concerned about their legal status is difficult and involves ethical issues due to the fear and risk of deportation and other legal repercussions. Therefore, it was important to gain the trust of the participants. I could not have interviewed new Latino immigrants, especially those lacking legal residence papers, unless I was trusted. Specifically within this community social trust is crucial to the success of researcher access. It was best to use a sampling strategy that was purposive sampling design (Berg, 2004), such as the snowball strategy. Using this method, I was able to get connected to participants through referrals within the communicative networks of their community. By using a snowball strategy I was able to connect to individuals trusted by the initial participants and key informants.

There were risks to participants in the study but I minimized them. I took steps to protect the participants based on my awareness of some special issues of importance to Latino immigrants especially those who are undocumented. In order to protect and secure the participation of the research participants, I used pseudo names to protect the anonymity of the participants. I also followed strict storage procedures and kept any

paper information under lock and key and under a password for computer documents. In addition, throughout this document, I also used pseudo names of other persons in the community, specific businesses and streets to protect the identity of the participants.

However, despite my efforts to minimize risks to the participants, there still may have been some emotional impact. For instance, one of the premises of this study as stated in chapter 1, new Latino immigrants face significant hardships related to poverty and health. In addition, undocumented immigrants have additional economic and social barriers, and poverty is even more likely for them than for their documented counterparts. Talking about these issues may have caused emotional reactions, particularly if major life events, such as death, are discussed. However, based on my observation during the interview, the interview process appeared to contribute as a validating and supportive experience for these participants rather than distressing. Three participants shared that expressing freely how they felt during the interview felt uplifting and therapeutic. As an experienced social worker, I have personally witnessed the power of storytelling for clients who have felt discriminated against and these interviews seemed to have a similar impact on the participants. Because there was a potential for emotional reactions to the interview, either negative or positive, I provided each of the participants a Bilingual Resource List (See APPENDIX C9) which included a list of service providers who offer free counseling as well as information about local food pantries and shelters. These resources were offered to each participant after the interview. They each accepted them expressing verbal gratitude for these supports in the community.

### **Rigor**

To establish the credibility and veracity of this study, I would like to refer to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestion to use terms that correspond to naturalistic inquiries of qualitative methods. Terms such as "credibility," "transferability," "dependability," and "confirmability" relate to the issue of standards and credibility measures needed for researchers using a qualitative design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 2001). I used strategies to ensure that the significant findings of the study were credible, dependable and confirmed. These five strategies were; triangulation, member checking, reflexivity, bias management, and mentoring.

### ***1. Triangulation***

In a rigorous study, an important step in data collection is to gather different kinds of data from separate sources in order to be able to cross-check and compare and triangulate it (Fetterman, 1998; Creswell, 1998). This study used data gathered from interviews and a community profile and cross-checked data constantly comparing it to confirm that it was credible and dependable. For example, a consistent theme included community support. While participants specifically identified ethnic networks as initial guidance at the beginning of living in the U.S, they also described how they could connect with the community through various activities. The community profile supported this perspective and expanded the concept of community support to include how informal and formal groups paved the way for an inclusive community for new immigrants from many different countries. First, an analysis of the community specifically revealed a theme I call the DCC factor, that is, Diverse Cultures Coexisting. Data from the interviews indicated that the participants felt this community factor was supportive to them as immigrants making them feel less lonely and more connected,

especially during cultural celebrations and with members of the medical and educational institutions for their children. Second, these data were further confirmed by data collected in the informal interviews and the observations. For example, the DCC factor was confirmed by observations of specific events in the community such as cultural activities that were organized by local ethnic groups at a local community park. This park is a well-known location for cultural expressions within the community and provided data that confirmed how different ethnic groups could express their culture sharing with others who were alike and different.

## ***2. Member Checks***

After a review of the data and its evolving themes, member checks and follow up interviews were conducted at the same time. However in this section I will focus on the content about the member checks. The member checks were conducted to confirm the accuracy of the findings resulting from the analysis and their interpretation. Member checking involves reviewing the “data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusion” with some of the interviewees (Creswell, 1998, p. 202) so that they confirm it’s “accuracy and credibility” (p. 202). Member checking was conducted with 12 out of the 16 participants. Four participants have not been seen in the community for several months and were not available for member checks. One participant had moved out of Queens and did not have a current working contact number.

The member checks that were conducted confirmed the accuracy of the themes and therefore support the findings of this study credible to the reality of their situation. The process involved reviewing the different themes and various quotes that were selected to examine if they truly captured what was real for the participants. For

example, as soon as I said the quote that would illustrate their suffering, almost immediately some of the participants would respond with an affirming loud “Si, Si!” meaning “Yes, Yes!” The participants as representative of their story accepted the specific themes that were selected to illustrate their suffering, strength and identity. However, it became clear that one of the themes I had identified was more complex than I had realized. At first I misinterpreted a phrase representing a theme used to demonstrate the pressures and barriers of being undocumented immigrants. However, based on information from one participant and then confirming this with other participants, during member checking interviews, I corrected and changed this theme from “With your back against the wall” to mean “Between a rock and a hard place.” This meaning became clear as the participants expanded on its interpretation through the member checking process.

Having worked numerous hours with large quantities of data, it became apparent how important member checking is to the accuracy and credibility of the findings. After reviewing the findings of this study with the participants, I believe that these themes reflect their perspective about their situation being Latino immigrants in the United States.

### ***3. Reflexivity***

Berg (2004) refers to the process of “reflexivity” as a “shift in the way we understand data and their collection” (p. 154). The researcher makes “use of an internal dialogue that repeatedly examines what the researcher knows and how the researcher came to know this” (p. 154). For me, this internal dialogue pertained to my own experiences of immigration, both personally and professionally. While I have worked

with immigrant populations, and knew that every immigrant has their own story, what I discovered in this study was that seventeen stories became alive to tell one story. This process of reflexivity was ongoing and consistent throughout; during data gathering, data analysis and writing the dissertation. Maintaining a consistent internal dialogue and consistent journaling about my reflections helped ground me as the researcher to stand more openly to what was being revealed in the data.

For example, as a social worker, I knew about the various stressors new Latino immigrants face such as with language, housing issues, health care and lack of work. During the interview process I was aware that as I heard about how the participants talked about missing their culture and their family when they first came to the U.S, I felt surprised and saddened by their suffering but also because of their honesty. I came to realize a few things. I couldn't imagine what it would be like for a teenager for example to leave home and feel thrown into a "strange" and "weird" environment where I couldn't communicate what I wanted and how to get somewhere because of the language barrier and the fear. I felt compassion towards their sense of loss and loneliness. The image they painted showed me a young girl in situations that she would have to speak up for herself and make decisions that affected her life; decisions that usually a parent would make. It became clear to me how within this state of loss, desperation and ambivalent independence came the strong desire to make sense of this situation. For these immigrants, making sense meant that if they were away from their family, then they were going to make the best of their situation. All of a sudden, I understood more deeply how and why they made meaning out of their suffering for example. The concepts they described had become clearer to me. The heart of it is, for these participants feeling like



they are choosing to live in this situation kept them connected to their families ultimately expanding their identity. Moreover, I was also surprised because as a social worker, their sense of loss had never occurred to me. I was humbled by the honesty and raw emotion that came through in the interviews. And as I began to journal and further reflect, I became aware of my role as a researcher today versus a social worker in the past. However, although these emotions of surprise and humility arose in this process, I focused on them in my second journal that was geared specifically for my personal biases.

Furthermore, learning about how powerful the interview process can become for the researcher as well as the participant made me realize the value of the interview process. To listen with an active mind and an open heart to the words that participants used to paint a picture was powerful because it reflected their perspective and in this case, stories that were never told until now. Therefore, it was my responsibility as the researcher to hone in on how I felt about these topics as well as the process so that I could fully dedicate myself to listening with an active mind and an open heart.

As a result of this aspect of rigor, the process of reflexivity created the findings of the analysis to be more credible and dependable. Further validating these findings, even after the analysis, I constantly questioned what I was learning and what was being revealed to me. These internal questions arose from the awareness of feeling connected to the participants and their community and the commitment to representing them accurately. The following section offers a discussion about the bias that arose for me during data analysis further confirming the findings of the data based on the rigor of its process.

#### ***4. Managing Bias***

Managing my personal biases is an important part of the analytical process because as one of my mentors said, “writing creatively and being open to what is coming up in me is part of identifying and honing skills as a qualitative researcher; identifying where I am and not falsely putting in my perception and instead being open to theirs” (Dr. L. Skemp, personal communication, June 9, 2009). There were three courses of action I followed to account for this part of my process: journaling, working with mentors, and revisiting my commitment to reflecting the direct experience of the participants. By maintaining a coherent account of the process of data analysis and managing my bias, I enhanced the accuracy of this study. I maintained two journals, one to use for reflections about the data, and another one specifically for bias and other personal opinions regarding immigration. I maintained a regular schedule of data gathering and analysis, and consistent journaling of my insights. These two outlets helped ground me as a person who identified with four roles; a Latina immigrant, a new mother of twin girls, a social worker, and a research scientist. Listening to the recordings of the transcriptions about some of the injustices that the participants described made me aware of memories of what my own family experienced when they first migrated to the U.S. This part of the stories instilled in me passion that fueled strong reactions and opinions about immigration in general. During this time I journaled extensively and at points moved to discussing reactions of strong emotions with mentors Dr. Murty and Dr. Skemp. For example, one participant talked about leaving her one-year-old child in Mexico with extended family when she crossed the border to join her husband in the U.S so that they could both work and earn money to send to their family in Mexico.

Becoming a recent parent myself, I felt strong emotions upon hearing the participant recount her experience and the difficult decision she felt she had to make. I talked this through with my mentor Dr. Murty who by acknowledging my feelings helped create a space for me to see more clearly the difficulties many immigrant families go through when they feel they have to make a decision to separate from their children. I learned that by acknowledging my struggle rather than ignoring I could see how we (the participants and I) were similar as well as different. For example, I don't know how to cross the border but I know what it is like to be an immigrant. As a result, I gained a sense of their strength rather than feeling a sense of "awe" for their stories. Through this process I was able to "get grounded," managing my bias while still staying open to what the data were revealing to me by focusing on the method. Guiding me on the rigor of this part of my study, on occasion and as needed, I met with two method mentors, Dr. Murty and Dr. Skemp. These experiences, journaling and supervisory guidance, rooted me with my own perceptions and helped me stay open to focus on the participants' descriptions about their situation in the U.S rather than allow my own reactions and opinions to intrude or interfere with data collection or data analysis. I gained self-awareness on how I could acknowledge my connection with the participants' stories as well as how I was different and separate.

### ***5. Method Mentoring***

Two committee members, Dr. Skemp and Dr. Murty, were mentors during the process of data collection and analysis. First, during the data gathering and data analysis process, Dr. Murty visited New York and walked through the neighborhood with me noting some information I may have missed. Dr. Murty's visit was valuable because as

an outsider to the community, she served to help confirm some of my observations. For example, Dr. Murty noticed the wealth of diversity within this community within minutes of stepping foot into it. Together we validated how the presence of ethnic diversity influenced even those who like Dr. Murty, are only passing through the community. My observations about the community deepened and included; 1) the confirmation of the coexistence of many diverse ethnic groups, 2) the presence of various local papers including those in different languages, and 3) the fact that this community's strategic location between boroughs adds to its tremendous traffic congestion.

Secondly, Dr. Murty cross-checked some interviews transcribed in Spanish so that the meaning of the description would be maintained by staying with the original language of the participants. Moreover, a few interviews were translated into English and then transcribed with back translation for Dr. Skemp in order to cross-check data. This process was important because it offered me the opportunity to step back from the data and see how it was revealed to someone else. For example, during one interview, I felt that the participant shared a lot of intimate experiences and I began to feel that I was taking up too much of his time. Dr. Skemp noticed that this participant had felt comfortable and shared his life with me openly. It was clear to her that a concern about time was an issue that was bothering me but not him. In fact, as a new mom, I am aware of feeling how time is valuable. As a result of getting this feedback, I felt more grounded with my role and more comfortable with what the participants offered. Thirdly, regular telephone and/or virtual meetings were conducted with Dr. Murty and/or Dr. Skemp for ongoing method mentoring and communication. This type of support maintained consistency with two specific areas: (1) the quality of the interview, and (2)

the reflexivity process. This type of mentoring maintained the rigor of this study. I am grateful for the time and energy that was offered to me during this time. It felt safe to ask questions about method, analysis and biases. Having a mentored relationship not only rooted me in my study, it inspired me to finish.

All of these strategies; triangulation, member checking, reflexivity, bias management and method mentoring, enhanced the rigor of this study and ensured the trustworthiness of this study by confirming that the findings were accurate, credible and dependable.

### **Honoring the Community**

Conducting a qualitative descriptive study places me in a unique position. I established trust with the participants and integrated myself into the community by building relationships with community members. In order to recognize the community members' contribution and participation in the study, I am organizing an event that can contribute to the community and be reflective of its growing immigrant community. The participants have shared that there is a lack of knowledge regarding rights and information about being an immigrant and in particular, with undocumented immigrant status. I am planning a community workshop for March 2010 about immigration entitled "Tus Derechos" that is "Know Your Rights." My goal is to collaborate with other community supports such as local doctors, social workers and even community police officers so that attendees can have access to these potential sources of support.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This results section includes two components of analysis; community and participant narratives. First, the purpose of the community analysis is to provide a wider context about the environment of this study. It is called a community profile and has two parts: A) community outline; and B) analysis from observations and informal interviews within the community. Second, I will present the major findings that emerged from the thematic analysis, including a summary of how participants described Astoria.

#### Community Profile

*Queens is the most multi-ethnic county in the United States and immigrants are a significant part of this diversity. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 46% of our Borough's population is foreign-born. Our immigrant neighbors make major contributions to the social, economic, cultural and civic life of the Borough and beyond (Helen Marshall, Queens Borough President Website, 2009).*

Since Queens represents the most multi-ethnic county in the United States, it is no wonder my experience of Astoria was of a community rich in diversity and culture. To learn more about this community, I conducted a community profile. The community profile highlighted the importance of people in place that was central to the social work perspective. Arensberg & Kimball (1972) outlined a series of steps to be used to complete a community profile that revealed a community's culture by its characteristics. For the purposes of this study, I used this outline with modifications by Dr. Skemp. I followed this approach systematically, focusing on the community factors that were most pertinent to the community of Astoria for the community profile. The community profile

as a whole drew on a wealth of information, both existing data and observations made while walking and spending time in the community. By collecting a diversity of information about the community, the profile showed that different cultures lived side by side and shared space together. Historically, Astoria was always a hub for new immigrant groups and still reflects this diversity today. What was unique were how early settlers, such as the Greek and Italian communities, remained present even today. Because the leadership and people of the community invested in its wealth of diversity, it offered numerous supports for the new immigrants who called Astoria their home.

I will present the community profile in two parts. The first part looks at physical and social descriptions about the community. This part uses archival data, such as census reports. The second part is a deeper analysis drawing on direct observations of scenes in the community and informal interviews I conducted. This community profile presents the wider environmental context of the seventeen immigrants who participated in the study. Most of them state that Astoria was their first residence, marking their initial experience in the U.S., and a place they now call home. The first part of the community profile begins with the environment, and then considers the people, the social structure, and the social supports in the community.

### **Community Outline: Physical and Social Descriptions**

#### **Astoria as a Place in Time**

##### ***The Environment***

Astoria's physical characteristics show how its location served multiple purposes for residents and commuters from different parts of Queens.

### *Location*

#### Size

Astoria is considered a neighborhood and part of the borough of Queens. Queens is one of five boroughs that make up New York City. See Figure B2 for a diagram of the five boroughs. Neighborhoods like Astoria are clustered into what is termed as community boards, which enact zoning regulations for their area. Astoria is part of Community Board 1 (CB 1), a term used interchangeably with Community District 1 (CD1). From this point on, I will use the term CD1. Community District 1 (CD1) includes several sub-neighborhoods that are considered parts of Astoria: Astoria, Old Astoria, Ditmars, and Steinway. It also includes other neighborhoods outside of the area considered Astoria: Long Island City, Queensbridge, Ravenswood, Garden Bay, Woodside and Riker's Island. Within CD1, Astoria is nestled between two other neighborhoods, Long Island City and Woodside. It is surrounded by the East River. According to the New York City Department of City Planning (December 2008), Community District 1 is 3,939.5 acres and 6.2 square miles. The function of CD1 is discussed in the section about institutions below.

#### Boundaries

The geographic boundary of Astoria is unclear. It is recognized and perceived by the residents even though it is not officially recognized. There are some differences of opinion about where its boundaries are exactly. This is an important aspect of the community, its perceived location.

The post office doesn't recognize Astoria as a neighborhood by itself; instead it is considered part of the neighborhood Long Island City. However, mail addressed to



Astoria is delivered correctly and businesses as well as residences use Astoria as their city address. Government does not establish the boundaries of Astoria and people often do not agree on them. According to the Astoria Historical Society, the boundaries of Astoria are unclear due to historical territorial issues regarding land development in Long Island City. According to *Mr. History*<sup>6</sup> at the Historical Society, Astoria's boundaries are: on the south by Broadway, on the east by 51<sup>st</sup> Street and on the west and north by the East River, which separated Astoria from Manhattan (NYC) Island. However, he said that the boundary of Astoria continues to be unclear (Mr. History<sup>7</sup>, personal communication, September 2, 2009). For the purposes of this study, I used the boundaries listed by the Astoria Historical Society as the boundaries of Astoria<sup>8</sup>.

*Land Use – Houses, Institutions and Businesses*

Astoria is mostly comprised of residential, commercial and office buildings. According to statistics provided by the New York City Department of City Planning (2008), the non-residential buildings that are businesses made up 16.4% and 40.1% are used for residential purposes only, excluding the 4.4% that is both mixed residential and commercial buildings (See APPENDIX A TABLES for complete data). The typical residential buildings are 1-2 family homes (17.2%) and multi-family homes (22.9%). Examples of multi-family homes include the three housing projects; Astoria houses, Ravenswood houses and Queensbridge houses. Also, there are numerous buildings that

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>7</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>8</sup> Astoria's geographical boundaries are purposefully omitted in order to protect the exact location of the participants' residence

turned into co-op apartments and many new condominiums are being built, mostly in Astoria.

Riker's Island is considered part of CD 1 but is not perceived as part of Astoria. It is connected to Woodside, Queens by a bridge. It is mostly a penal colony housing offenders who could not post bail and are awaiting trial. There are numerous detention centers on this island, increasing the statistics on the number of institutions to 19.4%. Therefore, I will use statistics that were available to me during my time within the community. This includes commercial and office buildings (6.7%), industrial (9.7%), recreation (7.0%), transportation and utility (8.0%), parking facilities (2.6%), and vacant land (1.9%), for a total of 35.9% that is non-residential within the vicinity of what is considered to be Astoria (See APPENDIX A TABLES for complete data). Based on my observations walking throughout Astoria, I would say that these statistics match what could be seen from the street. The residential quality of Astoria is comfortable for families; an image that came to me when I walked around the neighborhood. At the same time, the 16.4% commercial and office buildings and 8% transportation and utilities (total 24.4%) that are non-residential and more business oriented suggest an active commercial life. There are many main streets, with an active commercial life and great bargains. These streets are populated everyday at all hours of the day and night. Nightlife includes activities such as spending time at Turkish cafes, having dessert at Italian espresso bars and salsa dancing at various clubs.

An important trend occurring in real estate today is the skyrocketing rents. Even though the economy is said to be in a recession, real estate in Astoria continues to boom.

According to Real<sup>9</sup> Realty, a one-bedroom apartment in the Ditmars Area (a sub-neighborhood of Astoria) rented for \$1350 a month (Mr. Realtor<sup>10</sup>, personal communication, October 20, 2009). Although these rates might seem high in other parts of the United States, it is affordable compared to the rent in Manhattan. For example according to real estate agent Ms. Realtor<sup>11</sup>, one can rent a studio one-room apartment in the Manhattan for \$1600.00 a month and for the same rent in Astoria one can get a one bedroom apartment with at least 3 rooms (Ms. Realtor<sup>12</sup>, personal communication, October 20, 2009). Therefore, for less than the rent of a studio apartment in the city, one could rent a much larger one bedroom apartment in Astoria, which was 20 minutes commute time to Manhattan. While Astoria has better prices for housing than Manhattan, it is more expensive than its neighbors such as Long Island City and Queensbridge. These other areas may be just a couple of blocks away from Astoria in distance, but they are different. Both Long Island City and Queensbridge have a lot more land being used for industrial and multi-family residential than Astoria, such as with its two housing projects as opposed to Astoria's one. Locals describe them as housing for lower income families.

Statistics about the community describe its physical structures and don't capture more intimate community stories such as those told by the colorful murals throughout the community. These murals represent various times in Astoria's history. For example,

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<sup>9</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>10</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>11</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>12</sup> Pseudonym

there is a mural near Ditmars Blvd that is dedicated to honoring lives lost during the 9/11 disaster at the World Trade Center.

Mapping out Astoria, its boundaries, and the multi-uses of its land, make it clear that it is an active community that is constantly changing and growing. I will describe its people more in detail in the sections about the community history and the demographic population. First, however, I will describe the avenues of transportation and communication within Astoria that highlighted the density of its growing community.

### Transportation

By discussing the transportation within Astoria, I paint a picture of its active quality and how connected it is to its local boroughs.

Astoria is in a prime location adjacent to Manhattan and Brooklyn. It offers numerous modes of transportation, making it convenient for commuters to and from other boroughs. It also connects boroughs and suburbs because it has two major highways, the Grand Central Parkway and Brooklyn Queens Expressway. These highways connect to Manhattan and Brooklyn and each highway connect to other highways that go out to all parts of New York State.

There are two bridges connecting Astoria to Manhattan: the Triboro Bridge (recently renamed the Robert F Kennedy Bridge) and the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge. Although both bridges have a walkway, only the one on the RFK Bridge is currently open. The 59<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge is undergoing renovations. According to the locals, this bridge has been “undergoing construction” for over twenty years. When a bridge in Astoria undergoes major construction, it increases the traffic congestion. All of the intersections

surrounding these pivot travel points at the bridges and highways are heavily trafficked, especially during rush hours, which are around 8am and 5pm weekdays.

The transit system is even more accessible than the highways and bridges. The BMT subway is elevated, and runs along 31<sup>st</sup> Street through Astoria ending at Ditmars Boulevard. This line connects with the IND and IRT at Queens Plaza in Long Island City. Based on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of New York State (2009) there are 11 buses that traveled through Astoria, connecting it to other parts of Queens and New York City (See APPENDIX A TABLES). Because of the many modes of transportation, Astoria is an excellent location for commuters who work in commercial areas of New York City and enjoy the residential close-to-everything quality of the Astoria community.

Astoria is a haven for its Manhattan residents but also welcomes out of state visitors. One of New York's main international airports, La Guardia, is located in Astoria. Only 17 miles away is a second international airport, John F. Kennedy Airport (JFK). Although JFK is close in distance, it can take over 1 hour to reach it because of the heavy traffic.

As stated earlier, there is heavy traffic congestion at points connecting Astoria with Manhattan and its major highways. This is also due to so many outsiders commuting to and from the other boroughs of New York City and toward other parts of Queens. In addition, the two airports close in proximity adds to the traffic congestion. The traffic is even more congested as commuters try to get around Astoria on their way to other destinations. Astoria is clearly a busy place with a growing community; this makes it an excellent location for the research carried out in this study.

### Communication

I observed communication on many levels, which was driven by the purpose of reaching a diverse ethnic community including its community members and those just passing through. There is a local community newspaper for sale, the *Astoria Times*, as well as various free neighborhood publications such as the *Queens Gazette*, the *Southeast Queens Press*, and the *Queens Chronicle*. These are also distributed at the two local libraries. The free community newspapers are typically found in laundromats and banks. In addition, flyers about concerts, grand openings and store coupons are widely distributed. There are also several newspapers in other languages, including Spanish, Asian and Pakistani; this reflects the various ethnicities within Astoria and its surrounding neighborhoods such as Woodside and Steinway. These newspapers cover larger geographical areas of Queens and New York City.

Marketing to the commuters, there are many billboards along the main streets of Astoria; one can observe these, for example, on highly populated streets. These include high-rise billboards with visible advertisements on the walls of small buildings. These billboards might advertise for local attorneys for civil cases, new businesses such as a large gym, real estate offices, or places to eat, or new beverages such as imported beer.

Spiritual institutions invest in advertisements as well. For example, Catholic churches print periodic newsletters and typically on the back of the last page is a list of businesses and logos of companies that financially support the newsletter. Some examples of these businesses include local realtors and funeral homes.

There are many forms of communication in Astoria because of the ways people chose to support their businesses and events. Having so many portals of communication

available in different languages and distributed in various ways at varying cost, encourage businesses to grow and connect with the different ethnic communities living in the community of Astoria.

The description of Astoria's environment reflects the many ways Astoria influences and is influenced by its surrounding communities, regular commuters, and visitors. It also captures how both the residential and commercial aspects of the community are thriving. Examining the history of Astoria, in the next section, will show how this little community developed and became so rich in diversity and culture.

### Community History

Unless otherwise indicated, the history of Astoria presented here came from two main sources; Halsall (1998), "Medieval Astoria," and the New York City government webpage.

The original inhabitants of Queens were the Native Americans - Algonquians, Matinecocks, Jamecos, Rockaways. According to a publication about the history of Queens provided by the Queens Public Library:

Prehistoric Astoria was part of the Rockaway "tribe" called the Maspeth Indians. All Queens and Long Island Indians spoke Algonquin, once the most widely distributed linguistic family in North America. As white settlers poured in, Indians moved back into the wilderness. Epidemics, especially smallpox, wars and whiskey had already reduced their numbers. By the time of the Revolutionary War few Indians were living anywhere on Queens and Long Island (Queens Borough Public Library, 1960).

In this quote, the reference to Long Island is included because it is connected to the geographic location of Astoria even though it is considered a separate county and not a borough.

As described in the above quote, “As white settlers poured in, Indians moved back into the wilderness” loosely marks Astoria’s beginning as a home to new immigrants. William Hallet of Domesday, England, immigrated to Queens in 1652, bought 1500 acres from Peter Stuyvesant, and contracted with the Indians, paying them “58 fathoms of wampum, seven coats, one blanket and four kettles.” He named this area Hallet's Cove. In 1839, Stephen Halsey developed Hallet’s Cove into a port for trading purposes. Halsey wanted to rename Hallet’s Cove to encourage the financial support of elder John Jacob Astor. Astor became wealthy in the fur trade and later made most of his money in real estate. He was considered the wealthiest man in America, even though he had come to the United States from Germany as a “pauper.” Some residents wanted to call the area *Sunswick*, an Indian name said to mean “stone house”; others preferred the name Astoria, and a third suggestion was to keep the name as it was, Hallet’s Cove. A petition was finally submitted to the state government in Albany to name the community Astoria. However, there was belief that this petition was falsified to make it appear that more residents had signed it before it reached Albany. As a result, the name Astoria was approved by the legislature and Astoria was incorporated on June 12, 1839. Unfortunately, Mr. Astor was not impressed and only donated \$500 to Astoria’s young ladies’ seminary.

A few of the original mansions erected during this early part of Astoria’s history still exists along A<sup>13</sup> Street between B<sup>14</sup> Avenue and C Avenue<sup>15</sup>. Unlike the other

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<sup>13</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>14</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>15</sup> Pseudonym



homes in the area, these mansions appear regal with their large structures and grand architecture with tall ceilings and many rooms. They also tend to be set back from the edge of the street and surrounded by a see through gate. Along these streets there are other residences, which are mansions and turned into multi-family units. Halsey's mansion became the Long Island City High School, a public high school located in the neighborhood next to Astoria.

Steinway, a sub neighborhood of Astoria, became home to many German immigrants in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. When the Steinway Piano Company opened for business in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the existing German community grew. In the 1870's William Steinway built Steinway Village for the factory workers and installed trolley cars for local transportation and to take his employees to and from work. Steinway Piano Company employed 1,200 people in 1881.

To cater to this growing German community, *Schuetzen Park* was established and families enjoyed picnicking and listening to brass bands there. It was interesting to note that a local German immigrant translated Schuetzen to mean, "to protect." Because this park had a German name and symbolized some of what it was to be German with food and music, the meaning "to protect" may have referred to protecting, maintaining, and sustaining the German heritage. Even early on, various immigrant groups settling into Astoria invested in the community.

More recently, new immigrants have arrived from other countries including Asia and Latin America. The current demographics will be discussed in the next section.

Two landmarks have also endured through the years, Astoria Pool (1936) and Kaufman Studios, a studio production site (1920); each has served the community for over 73 years. While they each underwent construction and changed according to the changes of the people and the economy, they still stand today. With a capacity of 6,200 people, the Astoria Park Pool is New York City's largest public pool (City Planning Commission Report, August 9, 2006). Kaufman Studios produced such shows as "The Wiz" and "The Cosby Show" and has been the location for major motion pictures, independent films, television shows and commercials. Stars such as Bill Cosby, Harrison Ford, Meryl Streep, Al Pacino, Mel Gibson, Demi Moore and the cast of Sesame Street have set foot on these stages (Kaufman Astoria Studios, n.d.). In the past, Astoria was home to actress Ethel Merman, singer Tony Bennett, and actor-comedian Eddie Bracken before they became famous (Kaufman Astoria Studios, n.d.).

Astoria has welcomed many ethnic groups in its history. New immigrant groups like the German population in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century were welcomed with jobs and trolley cars in their new community. If an immigrant group felt connected and grew in population, it tended to invest in its environment rather than just pass through. Such was the case with the Greek and Italian communities, which are the groups with the longest history in the area and still maintain a vibrant culture in Astoria.

## **Community as a Population**

### ***People***

Astoria's social characteristics are categorized by local population trends and its social systems.

#### ***Demographics***

There are changing population trends among ethnic groups and among the total population of CD 1, Queens and New York City. As noted, CD 1 included neighborhoods of Astoria, Old Astoria, Ditmars and Steinway, as well as neighborhoods in the larger geographic area of CD 1; Long Island City, Queensbridge, Ravenswood, Garden Bay, and Woodside. According to the New York City Department of City Planning a report based on the New York City Census FactFinder of Census 2000, the total population for Queens CD 1 is 211,220. When compared to larger geographic areas, CD 1 makes up about 11% of Queens' population and about 38% of the total population of New York City (See APPENDIX A TABLES). The Latino subpopulation constitutes 10% of Queens and 37% of New York City (See APPENDIX A TABLES). While Latinos make up a larger proportion of New York City than Queens, Latinos in Astoria and Queens make up the second largest population after Whites, surpassing Asians and African-Americans, in that order (See APPENDIX A TABLES). The change in ethnic populations over time is reflective of a growing and diverse immigrant population.

As illustrated by a ten year population analysis conducted by the Population division of the NYC Department of City Planning (October, 2001), CD 1 had a 12% increase in total population since 1990 (See APPENDIX A TABLES).

Queens and New York City reflect an increase in population as well. The two largest increases among population groups from 1990 to 2000 were among Asians and Pacific Islanders (69.4%) and in the category labeled “other race – non-Hispanic” which increased 215.6%. However, in CD 1, the population of Latinos is much greater than the population of Asians and Pacific Islanders and the “other race (Non –Hispanic)” Latinos grew in numbers by 18.2% from 1990 to 2000, a larger increase than among Black/African Americans (6.7%), and American Indian and Alaska Natives (8.7%). While there is an increase in population for ethnic groups, the trend for Whites is different. There is a decrease of -13% for the White population from 1990 to 2000 (see APPENDIX A TABLES) although it remains the largest population category. The decrease reflects Whites moving out of the community, although it is not clear where they are moving. This downward trend in the White population should also be a focus for future demographic research.

To focus on the growing population of Astoria more specifically, a sample of a few census tracts within this community reflects a growing population from 1990 to 2000 (See APPENDIX B FIGURES). These data confirms the upward trend of population previously discussed.

In November 2009, the NYC Department of City Planning conducted a three year American Community Survey for 2006-2008. Based on this current report, three main trends are clear. First, the biggest immigrant group that was foreign-born out of a sample of 82,551 was from Latin America (33,622), with Europeans (24,079) and Asians (20,212) closely behind. Second, from this sample, 42,262 said they were naturalized U.S citizens while 40, 289 said they were not U.S citizens. This specific statistic

suggested that this group may include those that were undocumented; however, it was not confirmed as it may also include those who were permanent residents or refugees, for example. Third, from a sample of 182,192, the two most prevalent groups by ancestry were Italians (19,294) and Greeks (15,660).

*Biological composition of the population (age and sex)*

In addition to local population trends, a focus on gender highlights almost equal distributions. The United States Census 2000 provided data for the CD 1 and shows almost equal representations of gender, with females at 48.1% and males at 51.9% (See APPENDIX A TABLES). Among these, the largest group is between the ages of 25 and 44 and the second largest group is between the ages of 45 and 64 (See APPENDIX A TABLES). Many immigrants, new and old, look for financial opportunities and are an age group likely to find work or become entrepreneurs. This age demographic is similar to the life stage among the seventeen participants of this study and therefore supports available to this core age group will most likely be available to the participants as well. Supports in the community will be discussed in the next section.

The Census data on people in the CD 1 area show a Latino population that grew consistently over the past ten years. The data also illustrates growing numbers among all the other ethnicities except for Whites. The steady increase of the ethnic population over time influences the multi-cultural character of the Astoria community and suggests that this trend is likely to continue to increase. In addition, it hones in on specific age categories that influence how productive economically Astoria can become as well as the community supports it needs to root its members.

## **Community as a Social System**

Thus far, I have offered a description of the physical environment and the population characteristics of Astoria. Now, I will explore its social systems by describing its social structure and social supports.

### ***Social Structure***

To begin this section, it is valuable to examine the formal leadership of Astoria. The Queensborough President is Helen Marshall. She designed a website about the Borough that represents Queens as a place where many cultures live together and celebrate their own heritages while accepting the differences of other ethnic groups (Queens Borough President, 2009). This is coexisting with mutual tolerance. On the immigration resources page of her website she said, “I am proud to co-sponsor an increasing number of special celebrations and observances with our immigrant communities. Under my administration, Queens Borough Hall has for the first time hosted Phagwah, Baisakhi, and Philippine Independence Day events, just to name a few.” Queens Borough Hall where the festivities were held was located within Long Island. Among the celebrations she mentioned, Phagwah was a Hindu festival, and Baisakhi was an Indian Holiday. Ms. Marshall is Anglo and her leadership style is inclusive of immigrants and their differences, setting the tone for the rest of the state.

As Borough President, she and her staff supervise community boards that are districts across Queens. Community Board 1 is a community affairs organization. It includes Astoria, Old Astoria, Long Island City, Queensbridge, Ditmars, Ravenswood, Steinway, Garden Bay, and Woodside. The leader of Community Board 1 is called the

District Manager; currently, Ms. Supervisor<sup>16</sup>, a longtime resident of Astoria who is also Anglo, held this position. The following is a summary extracted from the Queens Borough website summarizing its organizational responsibility:

The Community Board, its District Manager, and its office staff serve as advocates and service coordinators for the community and its residents. Community Boards have an important advisory role in dealing with land use and zoning matters. Input from each Community Board also contributes to the dialogue about the city budget, municipal service delivery and many other matters relating to their communities' welfare (Queens Borough President, 2009)

New York City's 59 Community Boards also have direct communication with the Community Affairs Unit (CAU), which serves as a liaison with the Mayor's Office.

It is also important to focus on the previous District Manager, Mr. Community<sup>17</sup>, who held office for 37 years. A recent Geographic Project conducted by The National Geographic Channel called "The Human Tree," aired August 30, 2009, and publicly at Astoria Park on August 24, 2009. Mr. Community<sup>18</sup> was one of the participants chosen to participate therefore I will use the information publicly known here in this part of the study to help illustrate the impact he has on the community of Astoria. The purpose of this project was to find a destination that represents "one of the most diverse corners of the world" and to demonstrate how "we all share common ancestors who embarked on different journeys. Regardless of race, nationality or religion, all of us can trace our

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<sup>16</sup> Pseudonym

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ancient origin back to the cradle of humanity, East Africa.” Mr. Community<sup>19</sup> was one of the residents chosen to participate in this project. His biography read:

Mr. Community<sup>20</sup> is a 63-year-old retired community district manager in Astoria, Queens. After 37 years on the job, he is like a mayor emeritus of the area. George was born in Greece and moved to the United States after World War II. An avid collector of ancient Greek artifacts, he traces his family back to Asia Minor. The results of his DNA test show that he belongs to haplogroup R1b, one of the most common European lineages. His ancestors were among the first modern humans to settle in Europe more than 30,000 years ago” (The National Geographic Channel, December 21, 2009).

This short biography highlights two features about Mr. Community<sup>21</sup>; 1) he is like the “mayor” of Astoria and 2) he is of the Greek culture, which is one of the strongest ethnic groups in Astoria today. These two features demonstrate Mr. Community’s<sup>22</sup> strong community leadership. Furthermore, having been the District Manager for 37 years in Astoria suggests that Mr. Community<sup>23</sup> helped shape how Astoria is today. It also demonstrates that someone in local leadership for 37 years could only have succeeded that long if relationships with other political leaders and community residents were positive. The fact that he was chosen to be part of the project for the National Geographic Channel speaks to his current popularity. It is also known that if

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<sup>19</sup> Pseudonym

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<sup>23</sup> Pseudonym



specific policies are to be accepted in the community, Mr. Community's<sup>24</sup> stamp of approval is helpful, even if he is no longer officially the District Manager.

A description about the political leadership in Astoria provided a platform for many of the dynamics in the community with its people. The next section about social supports is a deeper analysis about the community's support system, especially for immigrants who are struggling financially.

### *Social Supports*

A report from the New York City Department of City Planning (December, 2008) shows that CD 1 has many social supports such as with education, day care, and mental health, to name a few, embedded within its neighborhoods (See APPENDIX A TABLES). For example, as indicated in the previous section on demographics, the largest age group is those aged 25 to 44, who make up 39.4% of the total population. The second largest age group is those 45 to 64, who comprise 18.8% of the total population. Both age groups represent growing families that could benefit from the numerous local family supports such as day care, schools and libraries. For families struggling with financial needs, supports such as eleven drop-in centers and food pantries and one homeless shelter offer free food and shelter. Community supports for their children and times of financial crisis are necessary, if not vital, to survive.

Families in need of financial assistance living in CD1 can file for Income Support (APPENDIX A TABLES). Public Assistance, Supplemental Security and Medicaid characterize family Support. According to the NYC Department of City Planning (December 2008), enrollment almost doubled from 27,879 in 2000 to 50,287 in 2008.

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<sup>24</sup> Pseudonym

Fewer people were enrolled on public assistance in year 2008, with 3,321, than in year 2000, with 6,564. However, those on Medicaid only almost tripled, with 13,969 in the year 2000 compared to 40,723 in the year 2007. This statistic is relative to growing families qualifying for Medicaid with the birth of children. As a whole, income support almost doubled from 13.2 in the year 2000 to 23.8 in the year 2007. However, it is unclear if these statistics include those residents who are undocumented; this is a common problem with the census data. However, as stated earlier in the section about demographics, a selected sample of population indicated that out of 82,551 from the foreign-born total population 40,289 stated they were legal immigrants. Therefore, in reality, because of the growing number in people of color and the recent trend of increasing immigration in Astoria, it is likely that more than a quarter of this population was probably receiving some type of income support, especially if children were born in the United States during this time span. At the same time, because of the exclusionary legislation regarding public assistance and health care, immigrants who are undocumented adults may not be receiving any income support at all.

There are social groups such as social clubs prevalent throughout the community that is specifically geared to those within the foremost age categories of 25 to 44 and 45 to 64. However, even more informal supports are embedded within public community services such as Christian churches and community councils. For example, there are Christian ministries, fellowship groups, weekly musical groups and committees that organize cultural festivities that nourish social life for this age group. The seventeen Latino immigrants who participated in this study noted the strong support they felt from the community when they participated in these types of groups. Clearly, the numerous

community supports offer positive social experiences. In addition, the third largest age group, and those 65 years and over, represent 11.0% of the total population. They are able to receive community support at senior centers and other recreational programs. There are nine senior centers within Astoria and more are currently under construction.

Specific to older persons, two of the senior centers are located within the housing projects and one is geared specifically to Latino culture. It is called Raices Astoria Senior Center (Raices, n.d.) Similar to the Schuetzen Park for Germans in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, where Schuetzen was translated to mean “to protect” and the word "Raices" has cultural meaning too. "Raices" means “roots” and suggests grounding in culture for residents who are Latinos. The Raices Senior Center includes services such as a Nutritional Program, Case Assistance and Management, Advocacy, Translation Assistance and Immigration Issues Assistance. Pertinent to the seventeen Latino immigrants of this study, this senior center can serve as an important community support that is culturally aware and open to helping those with immigration issues.

Social supports are the fabric of a community where much of the dynamics between people occur. New immigrants, especially those that were undocumented, may require social supports within the community to survive. There are many resources, which are valuable to immigrants in Astoria. I distributed a list of community resources to the participants of my study that included some of these resources such as food pantries.

Raj & Silverman (2002) suggest that research should incorporate culture, and in this case, community culture, in order to better interpret the results and help frame them in a socio-political and historical context. The contextual description of the community

presented so far in this community profile has painted a picture of how Astoria developed as a diverse and multi-cultural community while sustaining separate cultural identities. It also demonstrates the complexities of being a home to constant waves of immigrant groups. The next section deepened and focused the community profile by drawing on direct observations of everyday life in Astoria.

### **Observations and Informal Interviews**

*Astoria is a community where traditions from around the world are cherished and celebrated (Local business<sup>25</sup>, n.d.).*

Over the summer months of 2009, I conducted observations in Astoria in order to gather data on the community and its people. Most of the observations were conducted in public places at various times of the day and night. They included parks, busy streets, museums, community centers, schools, libraries and spiritual institutions. Other observations took place in closed meetings such as in private homes or at private celebrations. These included social gatherings such as a rosary, which was a spiritual ritual, a gardening event, and cultural celebrations. These observations tell the story of a diverse and vibrant community where many cultures are found in close contact with each other, coexisting and with mutual tolerance.

My observations and informal interviews make clear three separate though related findings about the community. They are: 1) diverse cultures are found in close contact; that is, coexisting; 2) formal institutions lead the way to an inclusive community; and 3)

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<sup>25</sup> Pseudonym

informal social supports are dedicated to guiding and mentoring new immigrant groups into the community.

### **Diverse Cultures Coexisting – The DCC Factor**

An analysis of all the observations and informal interviews show that there is a multitude of cultures within the community of Astoria and that each culture gather and conduct its activities in a way that is impressive. For example, while in New York City Little Italy and Chinatown represent pockets of ethnic groups forming separate communities, it is different in Astoria. According to Ms. Supervisor<sup>26</sup>, Astoria's Community District Manager, "You can have lots of Pakistanis living on 39<sup>th</sup> Street though it will not be exclusive to Pakistanis You will also see Muslims and Mexicans living there too" (Ms. Supervisor<sup>27</sup>, personal communication, September 24, 2009). This notion of cultures coexisting and having mutual tolerance suggests respect for different cultures. I call this dynamic the DCC factor. The DCC, or "diverse cultures coexisting" factor is a phenomenon that deserved more attention.

The DCC factor was demonstrated in the way different cultures live together while maintaining their differences. As mentioned earlier, ethnic groups' cohabit in pockets within the community and are not the only cultures represented in that location. Exploring this myself through observations about 39<sup>th</sup> Street, I agree with Ms. Supervisor<sup>28</sup>. While I saw many Pakistanis in the neighborhood, both in private homes

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<sup>26</sup> Pseudonym

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and as business owners, I also saw other cultures as well. On one block, the businesses include a Hallal grocery, a Cuban restaurant, an Italian café and five Asian owned shops. These businesses were full of customers on the weekends. As I stood on one corner, I could smell all the scents from so many different types of shops. Smelling all the spices, the sauces, and the incense in the air made me want to run to every site just to get a taste. This reflects the authentic ethnicity in the community.

When a community represented by many cultures embraces their diversity with related local activities, then new immigrants feel welcomed. Their differences will be accepted along with all the other differences.

Again showing the DCC factor, cultural celebrations are plentiful in Astoria. Every year there are cultural festivals organized to celebrate the different cultures in Astoria. These are well attended by many of its residents, and include:

- Cultural musical nights in the summer in local Park such as a Salsa Festival, an event called “We are all Americans,” and another called “Dance around the World themes, organized by the Central Astoria Local Development Coalition.
- October 12, 2009. The Columbus Day Parade along Steinway Avenue organized by the Federation of Italian Americans.
- October 8. Flamenco Show from Spain sponsored by a local Greek restaurant.

These public cultural festivities demonstrated that ethnic groups feel comfortable celebrating and are proud of their own cultural heritage. In other words, Astoria is unique in that it cultivates the acceptance and sustenance of many cultural identities.

Honing in on a specific location revealed how ethnic groups enjoyed their cultures separately and attended each other’s cultural festivities as well. I conducted a series of

observations at a playground/community park where many adults and children are seen. It was located on a heavily congested corner of A<sup>29</sup> Rd and B<sup>30</sup> Avenue, known as a part of the “Greek section” of Astoria. This small park was connected to the local Public Elementary School<sup>31</sup>. This park was renovated by a community based group who worked towards designing it as a sunken court amphitheater for public performances and events, similar to an ancient Greek city planning scheme in 1996 (NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, n.d.). As in the example discussed above, even though many Greeks lived in this area, it was also populated with other cultures. It was always busy with many children at all times of the day. Observations of this playground consistently showed different ethnic groups socializing. There was a group of women with garments that covered their bodies and heads who seemed to follow Muslim traditions. They were socializing with each other with their babies. Nearby was a group of older white men who seemed to be of Italian descent playing checkers and smoking. In the middle of the park was a busy Latina vendor selling ices for \$1. The consumers lined up to buy an icy were all Latino and seemed to know each other as they were all in conversation. These types of interactions and playful activities were common, as noted at several different observations. At different times closer to the evening, I observed many children in this park playing running games while teens rolled by on their skateboards.

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<sup>29</sup> Pseudonym

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Although Local Park<sup>32</sup> is used for daily fun activities and cultural activities during the summer, it is also used for expressions of community activism at times. According to local residents:

On August 2006, a coalition of activist groups and Marxist political parties came together in Local Park<sup>33</sup> in Astoria, Queens, to protest the Israeli attack on Lebanon and occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. About 200 people marched from Local Park<sup>34</sup> through Astoria, then back to Local Park<sup>35</sup>, for a rally. This was a diverse group of people centered on Israeli aggression in the Middle East but encompassing a number of issues, including the American occupation of Iraq and the harassment of immigrant groups here in the United States. (Rogouski, August 27, 2006)

This example clearly illustrates how ethnic groups sometimes unite in Astoria to send out a political and legal message using a single voice.

A more recent example took place in September 2008; when an anti-hate rally and march took place at Local Park<sup>36</sup> to protest hate acts against gays and lesbians:

At a rally in Local Park<sup>37</sup> in Astoria last Sunday, neighborhood activists, teens and local elected officials gathered to show support for Carmen's Place, a shelter for transgender and gay youth in Astoria. The March Against Hate was organized in response to a violent July attack on residents of Carmen's Place by neighborhood teens, with rally participants brandishing signs and a bullhorn to denounce hate and violence. "That's how this community works. We don't put up with violence from

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<sup>32</sup> Pseudonym

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anywhere,” said Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. (D-Astoria) at the rally (Chivvis, 2008.)

As stated earlier in the section on community history, the immigrant groups with the longest history in Astoria seem to maintain their cultural heritage by investing in the community. Among the many ethnicities representing diverse cultures, I still felt the strength of the foundation established by Greeks and Italians when they first migrated to Astoria. Just as the Germans did in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Greeks and Italians currently represent. To repeat, the Greek ethnic group is a good example. They dedicated Local Park<sup>38</sup> to commemorate the Greek culture in the Astoria community with statues of Athena and Socrates, as well as a set of Ionic columns adorning the park. The mayor of Athens to the people of New York donated the statue of Athena late in 1998. This gift from the mayor of Athens symbolizes the connection between Greeks in the United States and Greeks in Athens, Greece. Such a gift elicits cultural pride and became a token of cultural permanence in the community. To further illustrate the connection to Greek culture and country to its U.S born children, the Greek ethnic group established Greek Schools, Greek synagogues, and Greek grocery stores in Astoria. The Greek culture invested in the community of Astoria, a sign of their relative prosperity as a well-established group in the community.

Another good example is the way the Italian culture organized socially and politically to have collective power while sustaining the diversity in their culture relative to the community’s growing ethnicity. The Federation of Italian

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<sup>38</sup> Pseudonym

Americans of Astoria was formed in 1971, as a non-profit organization encompassing 33 organizations in its membership. The main goal was and continues to be to unite social clubs into one cohesive group with political and social power. Similar to the theme so far, the Federation intends to accomplish this goal while maintaining the cultural traditions of their ancestral land. They also state “members hoped to share these traditions with other local communities and endeavored to learn more about other ethnic cultures living in our community” (FIAO, 2009). Their office in Astoria lists various community activities such as Italian language classes, Italian Culture Class and English as a Second Language Class. The Federation of Italian Americans of Astoria is a long-time leader, serving as overarching support for Italians living in Astoria. According to Ms. Director<sup>39</sup>, their organization changed over the years to include the needs of new immigrants from Italy as well as the changing needs of second generation Italians living in Astoria. She offered three recommendations for ethnic groups interested in maintaining their culture from generation to generation. These are: 1) gathering around specific traditions such as food; 2) differentiating from others, for example, through language; and 3) advocating with other systems such as in schools so that language such as Italian can be a language option for those wanting to study it (Ms. Director, personal communication, October 22, 2009).

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It is evident that the DCC factor was well and alive in the local activities of Astoria. The next section will focus on the public messages instilled by formal institutions.

### **Formal Institutions Lead the Way to an Inclusive Community**

As previously discussed in the section about social systems, the leadership of Queens encourages a community of coexistence and mutual tolerance among ethnic groups. District Manager Ms. Supervisor<sup>40</sup> communicated that she believes many new immigrants came to Astoria because of how diverse it is (she described it as a “melting pot” of people) and because it is “a safe and tranquil place to live.” She concluded, “discrimination in Astoria was not tolerated” (Ms. Supervisor<sup>41</sup>, personal communication, September 24, 2009).

Since the leadership of Astoria, represented here by Ms. Supervisor<sup>42</sup>, has an open and inviting attitude about diverse ethnic groups coming together, formal institutions follow. These formal institutions respond positively to the diversity of ethnic groups.

#### ***Spiritual Institutions***

Catholic churches in Astoria provide masses in many languages to respond to the diversity in their parishes. For example, Catholic Church<sup>43</sup>, located in the heart of

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<sup>40</sup> Pseudonym

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<sup>43</sup> Pseudonym

Astoria, offers mass in English, Spanish, Italian, Czech-Slovak, and Vietnamese. On the other end of Astoria is the Catholic Church 2<sup>44</sup> and it offers mass in Croatian, Italian, Filipino, and Brazilian. There are also spiritual institutions that offer services in only one language; for example, the Greek monasteries and Muslim mosques. To communicate with others, the web sites of these organizations use English.

### ***Formal Community Organizations***

Public expressions of culture occur throughout the year. Examples include the Greek Festivals and the Celebration of “La Virgen de Guadalupe” for Mexico. These celebrations are organized by formal community organizations such as the Federation of Italian Americans. Ms. Committee<sup>45</sup>, President of the Ethnic Committee<sup>46</sup> in Queens explained that the Mexican parade moved from Astoria to New York City in order to accommodate a larger Mexican community (Ms. Committee<sup>47</sup>, personal communication, October 5, 2009). Ms. Committee<sup>48</sup> shared that when she came from Mexico she struggled as a new immigrant and in time, with the support from the community, she rose as a community leader. She represents one of the newest community civic groups leading the way for Mexican immigrants finding cultural continuance through the

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expression of cultural activities (Ms. Committee, personal communication, October 5, 2009).

### *Educational Institutions*

The diversity of ethnic groups is also evident in the educational institutions for children and adolescents. Astoria Junior High School<sup>49</sup> is located in the heart of Astoria on Newtown Avenue. The school provides low-income students of color college preparatory education from grades 6 to 8 in an environment of hands-on learning.

Currently their school enrollment consists of:

Hispanic	46.53%
Asian/Pacific Islander	27.34%
Black	6.12%
White	20.0%

(Astoria J.H.S<sup>50</sup>, n.d)

According to District Manager Ms. Supervisor<sup>51</sup> (personal communication, September 24, 2009), a few of the community parochial schools have become charter schools. Charter schools are designed to help tackle the issue of overcrowding in public school classrooms and the shortage of qualified teachers. This school initiative was created and led by a local parents group. An example is the Astoria Charter School<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Pseudonym

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located on the borderline of Astoria and Long Island City, which serves grades Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Currently, the classrooms have a maximum class size of 25 children with a teacher/student ratio of 1 to 19. Due to the high demand, admission is based on a lottery system. This lottery system allows for children from all the sub neighborhoods of Astoria to apply. The ethnic breakdown of the student population is:

African American      18%

Hispanic                      36%

Caucasian                    34%

Asian                            12%

(Astoria Charter School<sup>53</sup>, n.d.).

As indicated on their school website and reiterated by Ms. Administrator<sup>54</sup> from Human Resources at this school, the curriculum infuses culture into the curriculum while maintaining state regulations (Ms. Administrator<sup>55</sup>, personal communication, September 24, 2009). Their goals include:

- Rigorous academic curriculum
- Spanish beginning in Kindergarten
- Integrated study of world culture
- Integrated study of history of ideas
- Arts & music integrated into the curriculum

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- Individualized learning plans
- Computers in all classrooms (Astoria Charter School<sup>56</sup>, n.d.).

As the second bullet point indicates, to accommodate its large number of Spanish speaking children, Spanish is taught beginning in Kindergarten. This strategy creates a welcoming and inclusive environment in particular for Latino children new to this country and still adjusting to their new surroundings. It also gives the other children the opportunity to learn and communicate in Spanish. A positive and accepting environment encourages children to learn and supports their ability to thrive academically and socially. Families connected by their children who attend the school can feel welcomed into the community. This is valuable especially for those immigrants who are concerned about their privacy because of immigration issues. These individuals can get connected into the community by way of their children. This is a fact that is further confirmed by some of the participants in this study and discussed in the next section about themes.

Diversity was also highlighted throughout this school in the ethnically diverse murals on the school walls as well as the montage of diverse children's faces painted outside on the walls of the school's playground. Multicultural Day is celebrated at the school on May 30<sup>th</sup> and a newsletter is sent to all the Astoria Charter School<sup>57</sup> families inviting them to participate. There are various displays of cultural artifacts, foods, and presentations by members of the school community. The most recent celebration also featured performances showcasing Argentinean and Irish dancing. Various foods were

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available for sale, including delicacies from places such as Tibet, Trinidad & Tobago, Poland, Korea, Ireland, and Iran.

### *Police*

Another formal institution pivotal to a community's culture is the role of a police precinct. As mentioned earlier, the Community Board District Manager, Ms. Supervisor<sup>58</sup>, commented on the fact that residents of Astoria felt it is a safe place to live. To investigate public safety further, I conducted an informal interview with Mr. Police Officer<sup>59</sup> from the local precinct 114 (Mr. Police Officer<sup>60</sup>, personal communication, October 22, 2009). Precinct 114 covers an area larger than Astoria, including Long Island City, Woodside and Jackson Heights.

Mr. Police Officer<sup>61</sup> seemed to have a positive stance regarding undocumented residents within the community. Some of the following sentiments show that the officers in his precinct interact positively with undocumented immigrants. For example, Mr. Police Officer<sup>62</sup> stated, "I am not an immigration officer, we are not here to do that job; we are here to protect people no matter their status." He shared that he was also "Hispanic" and realized the fear that came with being an "illegal alien" so when he saw someone in trouble he let them know that "he is not there to ask for their papers."

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<sup>61</sup> Pseudonym

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Statistics about the decrease of crime in the area supports the view that Astoria is a safe place to live. This assessment is supported by crime related statistics in Astoria. According to New York City's Police Department crime statistics called CompStat (2009), Precinct 114 and its jurisdiction show a steep decrease in criminal activity overall from 1990 to 2008 (-78.62%). New York Mayor Giuliani uses CompStat in his efforts to incorporate a Citywide Accountability Program. A Compstat approach to performance evaluation is described as an approach that focuses on accountability (for all levels of management) and regular meetings to report crimes and strategies designed and implemented to address them (New York City Government, n.d.).

For example; from 1990 until 2008, there were fewer murders (-86.7%); less rapes (-50.0%) and fewer felony assaults (-69.6%). In a place where there are so many diverse ethnic groups, it is notable that the rate of crimes against people kept decreasing while the population increased. Public safety supports the unique character of Astoria's diverse community in that diverse groups feel safe to express themselves in the community. In other words, racial attacks are not the norm. While the cause of the steep decreases in crimes over 18 years is presumed to have resulted from the accountability within in CompStat program, it was not confirmed however it makes the community a safe place to live. This finding also confirms the sense of safety that the seventeen immigrants reported when they described Astoria, as will become clear in the chapter discussing the themes in the participant interviews.

This section discussed how institutions supply the community with an inclusive attitude toward cultural differences. Ms. Supervisor<sup>63</sup> described Astoria as a melting

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<sup>63</sup> Pseudonym

pot, I disagree. I would paint a different picture- that of a potluck dinner made up of dishes brought by diverse people each representing a unique culture all coming together for a meal. This is a different way of conceptualizing multiculturalism than as a fusion of cultures. For the most part, cultures are not fusing in Astoria. Instead they live side by side, maintaining their cultural uniqueness and tolerating other groups. This dynamic illustrates the DCC factors with cultures coexisting. The next section focuses on the intimate systems of the community: informal social groups and how they manage diversity in Astoria.

### **Informal Social Support**

Informal social support help individuals cope with stress and represent community assistance for individuals. Astoria offers several kinds of informal social support to its residents. The first type of informal support prevalent in Astoria is ethnic community groups.

#### ***Ethnic Community Groups***

According to Ms. Supervisor<sup>64</sup>, District Manager of CB 1, community groups often organize to guide and mentor new immigrant groups into society (Ms. Supervisor<sup>65</sup>, personal communication, September 24, 2009). For example, the Greek Homeowners Association was developed to mentor new Greeks into Astoria and guide them as they became acclimated to their new environment.

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<sup>64</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>65</sup> Pseudonym

Supporting this view, Mr. Monsignor<sup>66</sup> (personal communication, March 27, 2009), leading the congregation at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, believes that immigrant groups who have had many years to plant roots in Astoria develop community organizations to mentor and support each other socially and economically. An example is informal social clubs. The Astoria Historical Society supports this idea by stating that the Astoria of today typifies an “ever-expanding melting pot;” the scope of these informal organizations has come to reflect the demographic changes of that community (Mr. History<sup>67</sup>, personal communication, September 2, 2009). The reference to a “melting pot” may not be accurate but was correct in suggesting that these community organizations responded to the increasing diversity. There are many differences between the activities of the different social clubs. I would like to highlight here how they assist members of ethnic groups with money. Mr. Monsignor<sup>68</sup> stated that the social clubs originated for the purposes of newcomer orientation and monetary assistance. Becoming a member of a specific ethnic social club takes commitment and in some cases a monetary investment. To become a member of a social club, they have to pay dues and fees, etc. This money in turn can be used for loans, and other forms of financial assistance depending on the organization of the club. Social clubs currently provide this type of support, though it seems more informal. Social clubs help organize immigrant groups while establishing a sense of connectedness and leadership within their ethnic group and the community. This resembles the example about the Federation of Italian

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<sup>66</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>67</sup> Pseudoname

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Americans in Astoria in the section about institutions. Organizing smaller groups, such as social clubs, to collectively represent themselves politically and culturally help sustain their cultural heritage.

### ***Cursillo Movement***

Other subgroups sponsored by formal institutions organize culturally to support their members. Specific to the Latino community, the *Cursillo* Movement is an example of a community based cultural group associated with the Catholic Church throughout Astoria, and across the country. The *Cursillo* Movement is member based and initiates its members with a weekend retreat in which attendees receive a “short course in Christian life, Christian values and Christian evangelization” (Catholic New Yorker, August 27, 2009, p. 18). After this retreat, attendees are connected to a large network of members living in New York State and throughout the United States. This movement originated in Spain in the 1940’s with the first weekend retreat in the United States held in 1957 in Waco, Texas. Governed by the Archdiocese of New York, the *Cursillo* movement in Astoria is active. There are two core organizational values permeating and inspiring this movement. These are: (1) to make Catholic Christian faith a vital part of their skills; and (2) to share that faith with others. Within this larger structure smaller ministries exist, such as those committed to working with teens. This example of informal social support was also identified by a few of the participants, which will be further illustrated in the themes section about their narratives.

### ***Cultural Groups***

Focusing even more on subgroups of formal institutions, families unite to create networks and practice culture such as *Quinceañeras*, the coming of age celebrations for Latina girls, typically celebrated at age 15 or 16. A *Quinceañera* is a ceremonial event often celebrated with a mass and a big party during which specific rituals are followed.

Networking in such community organizations encourage unity and connectedness among members of the ethnic group, though in some cases rather than being only a Mexican group, it is a Latino group including people from different parts of Latin America.

### ***Informal Community-wide Collaboration***

Local civic groups and community activists also demonstrate informal community-wide collaboration when they organize against discrimination.

For example, on August 5, 1987, the *Newsday* highlighted a community event when a Klu Klux Klan leader was living in Astoria. The issue wasn't necessarily his choice of residence. Rather, it was the discriminatory statements printed in the booklets and flyers he distributed and placed on the windshields of parked cars. Rapidly, the community organized to forcefully communicate two messages. First, discrimination was not accepted in Astoria; and second, if he wanted to maintain his way of life, he had to move elsewhere (Henican, August 5, 1987). The community wanted to make clear that his attempt to recruit members to his organization would only organize and unite different ethnic groups against him. This community protest against hate and discrimination is expressed among many informal social supports, similar to the protest

against hate crimes described in the section about diverse culture coexisting. Even more than just living side by side, these groups publicly voice their united stance against discrimination. This level of community wide rejection of prejudice and hate makes Astoria a safe place for new immigrants.

### **Access to Services: Specific to Undocumented Immigrants**

Thus far, the community profile demonstrates the plethora of services and supports available to its residents. In addition, it is clear that if residents walk into various centers and institutions, they are likely welcomed. However, while there are numerous specific cultural centers available to assist various immigrants from various ethnic groups in general throughout Queens, there are few located in Astoria. This presents a challenge because these cultural supports cannot be accessed easily on foot unless it is a resource that is well known among the specific networks.

While cultural centers, for example, are intended to help new immigrants, legal advocacy relating to immigration issues is not readily accessible unless it is a service well known within networks. There is only one non-profit organization located in Astoria offering immigration services to its diverse immigrant community. However, while the initial consultation is free, the services thereafter are not. In addition, this immigration center does not offer services to undocumented immigrants unless they had a legal situation that provided “relief.” That is, “relief” in that they can become citizens or legal residents because of being married to a citizen or petitioned by a sibling who is a citizen. A misconception exists about this immigration center, because it clearly claims to provide “Assistance with *all* Immigration Procedures.” Aside from having “relief,”

undocumented immigrants cannot get legal advice or immigration support from this immigration center (Mr. Immigration<sup>69</sup>, personal communication, December 16, 2009)

While it was extraordinary to engage with the community and its diversity on the surface, it became clear that specific needs such as immigration issues and public income support for undocumented residents had little to no public advocacy avenues. In addition, local and informal groups can be helpful but only if immigrants are connected to them by word of mouth or through referrals.

### **Conclusion**

This second section of the community profile confirms the findings of the first section. Both sections tell the story of a diverse community that embraces its diverse groups and their specific ethnicities and cultures. This analysis also reveals that while the community tolerated cultural differences, it unites to reject discrimination in the community. This culture of coexisting and mutual tolerance is reflected among the leadership within the community and the Borough -- its institutions, its informal groups, and its people. However, when specific advocacy and guidance with immigration issues was considered, the community level support was present but limited. This is the context of the community where the seventeen participants of this study reside. The next chapter will focus the analysis further on the themes that emerged from in-depth interviews with the Latino immigrants who participated in the study.

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<sup>69</sup> Pseudonym

## **Participants**

### **Sixteen Immigrants Share Their Stories**

This section reflects the themes that were most significant from the participants' narratives. Initial results reflected key obstacles and facilitators for participants while living in the U.S. However, further analysis revealed what these experiences meant to these Latino immigrants. This discussion will cover the themes, which were identified in the narratives concerning the concepts of suffering, strength and identity.

Initially the data showed that these participants dealt with obstacles and facilitators while living in the U.S (See APPENDIX C12 for Participant Profiles). The obstacles these immigrants faced were language barriers, limited education and unfair wages at work. On the other hand, they also identified facilitators that were helpful during their initial transition into the U.S such as getting help in finding a job, knowing someone in the United States before immigrating, being connected to support networks, and receiving support from others who shared their struggles. While new immigrants tended to face these factors when they immigrated to a different country, they did not reflect the whole story for these seventeen Latino immigrants.

Further analysis and cross checking of data revealed three main themes that reflected dimensions of suffering, components of strength and a changing identity. In other words, by exploring the meaning of the barriers and facilitators discussed by the participants, I learned about how they made sense of them. To summarize these themes, the first theme, suffering, made clear that they believe that suffering is expected for new immigrants and that it has value in itself. The second theme, strength, shows that the participants felt that suffering has made them strong. The third main theme consistently



showed that the participants felt that they had a dual identity since immigrating to the United States. Their new sense of a dual identity embodied their first home, their country of origin. However, their second identity identified them with the U.S, their current country of residence. Next, I will briefly offer background information about these participants, laying the foundation for the discussion of major themes.

### **Background Information**

(See APPENDIX C12 for the Participant Profiles)

All of the Latino immigrants who participated in the study were undocumented immigrants who had entered the United States without the legal permission to do so. All of the participants were living in the United States without legal documentation (See APPENDIX A TABLES for demographics). Knowing more about the experiences of crossing the border provides valuable background information about the conditions these Latino immigrants experience as they migrated to the United States. The experience of crossing the border is a component of the immigration experience that was both intimate and very difficult.

Most of the participants described the following four elements as part of “el cruce,” that is, crossing the border.

1. Contracting with the guide/coyote; the guide at the beginning of the journey may not be the same guide throughout the journey. Currently from Mexico’s border into the U.S, the typical cost for a guide is approximately \$3000 per person.
2. Leaving the family: Saying goodbye and if needed, planning for care for their children.

3. Crossing the border: Travelling on foot, which included climbing mountains, crossing rivers, and open fields. It is common to experience going without food or water, fainting from exhaustion, and even being robbed, raped, and abandoned. Some reported that they felt support on the journey; being carried and making friends while on the journey who become almost like family.
4. Reaching the destination: once in the United States, the goal is to find shelter, food and a job – these factors may or may not have been previously planned prior to taking the journey; in some cases the goal is to reunite with other family members. Thirteen participants knew someone in the United States facilitating their arrival because the goal was to live with them.

Family members who stayed in Mexico continue to communicate with all the participants so that the family member who crosses the border could have support on the other side. This was also true for the participant who emigrated from Ecuador.

This simple list of elements in the journey in no way captures the complexity of the experience of crossing the border. To represent this complexity, the following quotes illustrate the experience of crossing the border in the participants' own words. This section is called "Llegamos rallados con espinas" that is "We arrived pierced with thorns;" a phrase used by Flor while describing the difficulty of crossing the border.

**"Llegamos rallados con las espinas"**

**(We arrived pierced with thorns)**

There are ways to cross the Mexican border into the United States. Many of the participants crossed on foot and for these, the journey was life threatening. Lila told her

story: “Pasamos un río y llegaba a la cintura, y agarrándonos todos de las manos así todos pasamos.” To translate, “We passed a river and it reached our waist, and by everyone holding hands is how we crossed.” Those that crossed faced many dangers. For example, Dolores shared, “Ya no pude caminar, se me cayeron las uñas de los dedos grandes.” that is, “I could no longer walk; the nails of my big toes fell off.” Franco also explained, “Se le quedaron los zapatos... tuvimos que sacar los 5 las calcetas para que se las ponga encima para poder caminar y seguimos” that is "His shoes fell behind... we (the five of us) had to remove our socks for him to wear so that we could walk and continue on."

In addition, those crossing were vulnerable to the constant and growing crimes against undocumented immigrants. Dolores was afraid throughout the journey. She shared, “Nos registraron y con malas palabras y con pistolas” that is, “We were robbed with guns and curses.” In this incident, Dolores was robbed. She reported that sometimes immigrants get robbed and raped. When someone is robbed and raped there is no one to report it to and no one to protect you.

These quotes made clear how powerful their living situation must be to cause people to take this kind of risk. These quotes were from immigrants who lived to tell these stories. However, some of these traumatic situations lamentably take the life of immigrants. They crossed the border not knowing if they’ll make it alive. However, the journey seemed worth the risk when the other side of the border offered a better life for them and their family. Immigrants felt that making it to the United States alive felt like a tremendous achievement. But these immigrants told me that even though they made it, surviving in the United States is still a struggle and succeeding here is even more of a

triumph. Their stories disclosed that both suffering and strength were central to their experience as Latino immigrants.

The struggles to cross the border set the stage for this study and deserve recognition. This background information provides a deeper understanding of the struggle and the trauma these immigrants have survived already just to arrive in the United States. Once they crossed the border, they continued to confront barrier after barrier. However, by surviving the deadly crossing of the border, they felt as if now anything was possible. As Pedro said, “Aunque pase trabajo en el transcurso del camino que tengan en su mente que aquí todo se puede.” That is, “Even though the crossing was a lot of work, believing that here anything is possible gave me the strength to go on.” These participants experienced suffering in so many ways beginning with poor conditions they lived in Mexico, then crossing the border and finally as new immigrants in the United States. On the other hand there is an underlying element of strength that accompanies their suffering, the strength that revealed itself after knowing what suffering was. Moving on from the border crossing stories, I will now present the results of this study, reporting on what the participants told me about their experiences as immigrants in the United States.

### **Themes**

Suffering, strength and identity are three main themes that were identified consistently throughout the interviews (See APPENDIX C11: Tree of Latino Immigrant Situation). The first theme reflects the depth of the impact of suffering on their lives. The second theme is related to the ways in which inner strength transforms suffering into strength. The third theme captures the sense of a dual identity because they feel

connected both to their birth country and to their new country of residence, the United States. It is interesting to note that the participants often used the pronoun “you” or “one” rather than “I”. In part, this is Spanish language usage; nevertheless, it is significant that the speaker describes his or her personal experience as something another might have experienced also. In some cases, it is clear that in using the pronouns “you” and “one” the speaker is referring to her or himself. At other times, “you” and “one” refer to the speaker along with those in a similar situation. To illustrate the use of these pronouns throughout the quotes, I have inserted the appropriate pronoun in parentheses suggesting a communal rather than an individual experience.

**Theme 1: Aquí se Sufre  
(Here you Suffer)**

This section illustrates the dimensions of suffering; a word consistently used by the participants to relate the experiences of being in a different country with a different culture. Some participants described feeling strange and different -- for example, *like a fish out of water*. They described how deeply they missed home and how different they felt in the U.S. A few felt this so strongly that they would *wake up wondering*, “*Where am I?*” Those who were undocumented felt these powerful emotions even more strongly. Many participants with undocumented legal status talked constantly about being *between a rock and a hard place*. Dealing with abuse at work and not being able to demand justice created feelings of torment and frustration. The following subcategories illustrate these experiences.

*Como pez no en el agua*  
*(Like a fish out of water)*

Seven participants described the difficulty they experienced transitioning from being in a small town to living in a big city. For them, home had meant a place that is small, tranquil and humble. For three of these participants, home included the warmth of knowing everyone in their community. All seven participants had never visited a large city before. Seven of the participants Latino immigrants mentioned feeling strange in the urban environment. They noticed that the streets were paved and that all the homes had electricity. These two amenities were strikingly different from some of the rural areas back home, where streets were still gravel and dirt and electricity was provided only in the main towns. Another example of the strangeness of the new environment was that they couldn't buy the groceries they needed in stores. Juan reported, "No habia productos familiares," that is, "there weren't familiar products" in the supermarket. In this unfamiliar environment, even going to the supermarket was difficult because the food looked strange.

For these immigrants, more than anything else, it was the inability to communicate and understand others that made them feel like a fish out of water. This was the phrase that one of them used to describe feeling strange and in a new world totally different than what they knew or felt familiar with. Those new to a big city felt barriers to communication because they were unable to speak or write English, read public signs and communicate. These seven participants felt that language was a major factor that contributed to feeling different. Unable to find their way around a city, and feeling insecure about speaking to strangers were experiences that constantly created

extreme stress and anxiety. This was true for most of the immigrants; however, for two participants it was even more stressful and paralyzing. Flor described feeling a fear so strong it kept her in her home. She said “tenía miedo de salir a la calle, miedo de perderme, de comunicar” that is “I was afraid to go out, I was afraid of getting lost, of failing to communicate.” The language barrier meant more than just not speaking the language. It meant that not speaking it lessened their chances to survive. Feeling like a fish out of water was overwhelming to many participants -- they felt as if they could not breathe and survive in this world that was completely different and strange to them; a place where they couldn't even speak. Lila also said that the fear came from knowing that this place was not her country. The language barrier served as a reminder that they were not home.

Their lack of English fluency threatened their chances of survival and limited the opportunities they could access. Moreover, the jobs that might be available were limited. Isabel, for example, said that “si no hablan ingles entonces no hay oportunidades.” That is, “unless you speak English there are no opportunities.” She found it discouraging to know that other immigrants she knew had a profession in their country of birth but could not pursue it in the U.S. She said she met “un abogado lavando trastes” that is, “a lawyer washing dishes.” Not speaking English and not being able to work in their profession meant these immigrants lived with a constant reminder that they were different here, like a fish out of water.

In addition to the difficulties of being in a strange new country and struggling with a language barrier, these participants and three more highlighted that the intense insecurity of being undocumented added additional stress. A total of eleven participants

referred to living in constant fear because of being undocumented. While back home there was freedom, here they were always afraid. The freedom to walk anywhere and feel secure was completely lost when these immigrants set foot into the U.S with an undocumented legal status. They now felt trapped in this strange alien world. Juan shared, “Yo me he sentido pez no en el agua, no liberado, trabajar con las leyes de inmigración ahora más que nada, una persona se siente atrapado” meaning “I have felt like a fish out of water, not free, working with immigration law now more than anything else, you feel trapped.” The image of a fish trapped out of the water, unable to breath, and close to death, flopping around desperately seeking to return to the water again captured the tone of this theme.

The quote “like a fish out of water” captured the fear and desperation these immigrants who were living outside their world felt. Alex explained, “La gente que viene de una ciudad se adapta a una ciudad, pero cuando uno viene de una provincial, una zona rural es más difícil venir y encontrarse con una ciudad monstro, ciudad grandísima”. To translate, “people coming from a city adapt to another city, but when one comes from a provincial, rural zone then it is more difficult to come and find they are in a monster of a city, the biggest city.” For these immigrants living outside of their world meant so many new and strange things: experiencing and adjusting to a big city, a different country and culture, a different language, and being undocumented.

***“Cuando despertabas decías ‘Donde estoy?’”***

***(Upon awakening, I said, “Where am I?”)***

The stresses of being in a different country and living in a big city made many participants feel strange and alone. The more alone and different they felt, the more they



thought of home. The more difficult it became to be here, the stronger these emotions grew. Six participants described a strange disembodied feeling of disconnection as if they were still mentally back home in their country with their family, even though they were physically in the United States. Using part of Pablo's description to me in this section, he painted the picture, "Habían días en que a veces uno estaba durmiendo, se paraba uno pero como que te despertabas y pensaba uno que estaba todavía uno en México, en su casa. ¿Cuando despertabas decías, 'donde estoy?'" This translates to, "There were days when sometimes I was sleeping, and as I stood up I awoke and thought I was still in Mexico, at home. And upon awakening I said, 'Where am I?'" This strong emotion took hold of his thoughts and body as he remembered life back in his home country.

In the following quote, Alex shared how her traditions of family celebrations traveled constantly through her mind.

El primer año que uno pasa acá es el más difícil porque uno tiene nostalgia de su tradición que se hace en el pueblo en la ciudad desde uno viene. Porque uno recuerda todas las fechas- como allá en el pueblo uno festeja muchas cosas entonces al llegar acá uno está encerrado sin saber, no mas pensando que hoy están haciendo esto, hoy se festeja esto, hoy se hace esto, hoy es el cumpleaños del otro, y uno no puede hacer nada porque esta uno lejos.

This translates to:

The first year that you spend here is more difficult because of the nostalgia for traditions that take place in the town of the city from where you come from. Because you remember all the dates- In the town we celebrate many things but in coming here you are locked up not knowing, always thinking that today they are doing this, today is the day to celebrate this, do this, today is the birthday of another person, and you can't do any of this because of being so far away.

Remembering moments with family and family events was especially vivid when feeling estranged in a different country; it was almost like feeling you were there and here at the same time. There is a going back and forth in memory brought on by the intensity of feeling strange and alone.

Feeling as if being in two places at one time was especially heightened when there was little or no sense of belonging in the new country. Pablo said, “Eso era una cosa muy difícil; cuando tú abrías la puerta para salir a tu trabajo pero te encontrabas con una salida diferente, no era como en México cuando habrías tu puerta encontrabas lo tuyo allí.” This translates to, “That was a difficult thing; when you would open the door to go to work and you would find a different exit, not like in Mexico when you open your door you found your own there.” This phrase reflects the depth of what it felt like for these immigrants: opening the door to go to work and expecting to see a familiar route and familiar people and instead seeing that it was a totally different place representing a completely different life. The struggle to connect was so difficult it would transport these immigrants to the familiarity of home.

Thinking about the drastic change of their life from celebrating family traditions freely to feeling alienated in this country seemed more manageable when the plan of being here was temporary. Eight of the participants planned to stay in the U.S only temporarily, coming mostly to work for a while and send money back home to family. The initial goal was to “sobresalir” that is “rise out of”; and for most of these participants, the reason they were going through all this was to help their struggling family at home rise out of their situation.

For one participant, Franco, his goal was to work and save money so that he could return to Mexico and marry his sweetheart with enough money to care for their new family. Overall, the temporary plan for these eight participants was to stay in the United States anywhere between 6 months and 2 years. However, despite these temporary plans, the situation for these immigrants changed so drastically even within 6 months, their plans were extended. For example, three participants met their potential spouse within 6 months of being in the U.S; two others stayed to wait for the arrival of their family to come and join them and two participants felt that they would benefit from extending their plan. For instance, Franco's initial plan to work and save money took longer than he expected and when he finally returned his sweetheart had already married someone else. Since then he has traveled back and forth crossing the border 17 times.

***Entre La Espada y La Pared***  
***(Between a Rock and a Hard Place)***

The first two subthemes of the theme about suffering, "Like a fish out of water" and "Upon awakening I asked 'where am I?'" demonstrated the powerful ways in which life in the United States impacted these immigrants. In addition, these initial transitions laid the foundation for how these participants experienced their situation in the future. For most of these Latino immigrants the more they learned about their new environment, the more they felt trapped in situations they could not escape. One participant used a vivid phrase in Spanish to describe this feeling: "Entre la espada y la pared. Although this phrase can be translated with the English idiom "Between a rock and a hard place," the Spanish phrase is stronger making clear that the immigrants felt trapped up against a

wall by a person wielding a sword, who was threatening to attack them if they made a move and at the same time feeling it necessary to move away from danger.

Ten participants talked about feeling trapped in work conditions because of the language barrier or because of being undocumented. These participants found it difficult to speak up at work. Juan often felt limited with his Spanish. He said, “no hablar ingles es dificil, no sabe lo que dicen y defenderte” that is, “not speaking English is difficult, not knowing what they are saying and being able to defend yourself.” In this case Juan was referring to employers screaming at him, which he felt was abusive. He reported that not knowing English put him in a demeaning position where he was unable to defend himself. He continued, “uno solamente ve la cara de frustrada de la persona. Para una mala palabra la cara no es de una cara linda, uno se da cuenta.” That is, “I can see the frustration on the face of the person. If they curse at me, their face is not pretty, so I realize that they are angry.”

For Maria, the language barrier prevented her from finding out why she was fired. She said, “no entendía el idioma como cuando sin ningún justificación dijeron que ya no hay trabajo. Se siento mal y no pudo hablarle.” That is, “I couldn’t understand the language like when without any justification they told me there was no more work. I felt bad because I couldn’t speak to them.” Both Juan and Maria described situations that demeaned and insulted them as workers. Not being able to speak up at work made these participants feel as if they were between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, participants were aware of the demeaning and insulting situation at work against them and on the other hand, they felt they couldn’t speak up and defend themselves or seek justice or fair treatment; they were hesitant to speak up because they felt they could not

speaking well in English. They were left feeling silenced by the language barrier and because of their undocumented legal status

These immigrants trapped by a language barrier experienced a deeper sense of helpless fear because of their undocumented legal status. According to Marco, “Impacta mas cuando indocumentado. Tiene miedo porque no tiene papeles, lleva uno eso en la mente, aunque paguen \$10 la hora-a mi me dan \$5.” This translates to “But when you’re illegal it strikes harder. You’re afraid because you don’t have papers, it’s always on your mind, even if the pay is \$10 an hour-they’ll only give us \$5.” In other words, Marco worked just as hard as the next person but got paid half as much.

Similarly, Juan explained more about the fear of being an undocumented worker: “El miedo es diferente, no hablamos el idioma, y no tenemos papeles de poder trabajar, es estar en contra de hacer esas cosas libremente” meaning “The fear is different, we do not speak the language, and we do not have papers to be able to work, it is the opposite of doing those things freely.” For Juan the use of the word "freely" meant, "legally allowed." Juan described his experience of abuse at work:

Uno no se acostumbra el cual a que uno llegue aquí a este país cualquiera le quiera a uno gritar. Yo creo que esa es la razón más difícil de pasar. Que cuando uno llega a un empleo solamente le avisen y le digan “Mira, tú vas hacer ese trabajo, vas hacer lo otro.” Y cuando ya uno está trabajando apareciera que ellos son los que como que no tienen sentimiento de la persona, lo mandan y le gritan como si fuera uno un animal y tratarlo mal.

Translated to:

One does not expect that upon arriving in this country someone wants to yell at you. I think that's the reason it is more difficult to understand. That when you get a job they only tell you ‘look, do this, do that, do the other thing!’ And when you are working it appears as if they are the ones who

have no feeling for a person; they order you around and yell at you as if you were an animal, they really treat you badly.

I remembered Jose's facial expressions during this interview, his piercing eyes, his frown and sunken posture. He spoke with a tone of disbelief. He felt that he was being treated unfairly and he could not believe that people would treat other people this way.

These Latino immigrants felt the injustices of being undocumented and not having the right to speak up and walk out. They were certain that some employers knew that they were desperate enough to endure mistreatment on the job because they needed the money. They suspected that they were being treated this way not because they are new in this country and still learning how things work. Rather, it was due to their undocumented status. As Juan said, "nos infaman" that is "they defame us." The conditions described by these participants can be expressed by Juan's word of "defame" capturing the verbal and behavioral attacks on the character of these participants. They reported long work hours, at jobs that were often hazardous, and with constant verbal abuse from supervisors.

These participants found themselves "between a rock and a hard place" because they had to find work but were not paid fairly. Even when they had work they were mistreated and they couldn't speak up because they felt they didn't have a legal right to do so. They felt that they couldn't demand fair work conditions because of being undocumented. The fear of losing their job or, even worse, being deported caused these participants to feel helpless and stuck. Despite these difficulties and harsh work conditions, the immigrants continued to work and endure these conditions. Lila explained that the need to work was so great it overpowered the unjust work conditions.

She said, “Se necesita dinero y hace cualquier cosa para trabajar” that is “we need money and we do whatever it takes to work.” They felt trapped into having to endure poor work conditions because the only alternative was worse.

These participants said they felt "caught between a rock and a hard place" with conditions at work. Two participants expressed a sense of rejection that came across during these difficult times. For example, Lila believed that “Se sufre mucho al principio- los ponen a un lado por el idioma y no tener social. That is “We suffer a lot at first, put aside, feeling lost because of language and not having a social security number.” She said that being put aside related to being rejected for who they were and what they contributed. According to Isabel, this sense of rejection continued as long as they were undocumented. She explained “No importa cuántos años estemos aquí, siempre seremos una sombra” meaning “No matter how long we are here, we will always be a shadow.” Isabel’s words described the situation of not being acknowledged or accepted as contributors but instead only being seen as “shadows” that is not really present. This experience of marginalization and rejection had consequences. It affected these immigrants’ minds and hearts as illustrated by their words and in their descriptions. Discrimination and rejection drew these immigrants into a whirlpool of emotions, including a sense of despair that they will never be able to escape their situation.

**Theme 2, Part A: El Valor de Sufrir**  
**(The Value of Suffering)**

*Cuando tu sufres, todo valoras*  
*(When you suffer, you value everything)*

Building on the discussion about the subthemes of theme 1: “*Here you suffer,*” these immigrants went on to comment about how suffering has value. Three participants reported that suffering had an impact on them. Having to face many difficulties on a day-to-day basis brought out in them a tenderness about the things they didn’t really pay attention to before coming to the United States. For example, Juan explained that he valued family because of the suffering he felt when he was trying to adapt to a new world. He said,

Se sufre acá, por los cambios de vida. Cuando el país que estábamos era más lento y estamos ya adaptado a ese tipo de vida entonces al venir acá cambia de mente. Uno sufre y valora a la familia, más que todo cuando estas lejos de ellos. Ya sientes que te falta. Se siente diferente el valor de familia.

Translated to:

You suffer here because of the way your life changes. When the country you were in is slower and you’re already adapted to that kind of life; then coming here results in a mental shift. You suffer and value family more than anything when you are far from them. You feel that you miss them; you value family differently.

Juan realized he used to take his family and way of life for granted. He valued them more because he missed them when he was undergoing difficult trials in his new home. Paying closer attention to Juan’s words, it illustrated how he valued his family



more now that he felt alone because he was not with them. Suffering alone made him value what life was like back home.

Two of these participants also described suffering as a lonely experience; fending for themselves in a world full of unknowns. Alex explained, “Yo me vine sin saber a dónde llegar, sin saber cómo llegar, sin saber cómo era la ciudad.” This translates to, “I came without knowing where to stay, where to go or what it was like in a city.” Alex immigrated without knowing anyone in the United State and he figured out how to find food and shelter. Alex continued, “sufrir uno siente la necesidad.” That is, “by suffering you feel what is missing.” Alex didn’t realize what he had until it was gone. Alex began to value the life he had in Mexico when compared to the suffering he was experiencing in New York. Back home he had family, friends and a community; a sense of familiarity surrounded him. Now he was trying to find a place to sleep and food to eat. Building on the idea of feeling alone, Flor echoed a similar experience and shared, “Yo me di cuenta dije estoy sola, por primera vez en mi vida me sentí yo totalmente sola. Aquí nadie iba hablar por mí, que nadie iba decidir por mí, que era yo la que tenía que decidir.” This translates to, “I realized I was alone, for the first time in my life I felt totally alone. Nobody would speak for me; no one would decide for me, it was I who had to decide.” Like Alex, Flor felt painfully alone having to make decisions about how to live during a difficult time.

Flor’s experience was different from Alex’s. She was fifteen years old when she immigrated to the United States. She said that by growing up in this situation she quickly became a woman learning to value her self-worth. Flor’s description about her situation begins at fifteen years old when she immigrated to the United States. She said that she

experienced being alone both as abandonment and as independence; she was forced to grow up quickly because her life depended on her own decisions. Although Flor stayed with a distant cousin in Astoria, she said she was frightened by having to negotiate the difficulties of a different country with a foreign language and different types of people. Flor described how suffering at fifteen deepened her sense of self and of becoming a woman. For example, she said, “Todas esas cosas que me pasaron en aquel tiempo que fueron tan negativas aprende uno a valorarse, a valorarse como un ser humano, como persona, como mujer. This translates into “All those things that happened to me at that time were so negative; you learn to value yourself, to value yourself as a human being, as a person, as a woman.” Flor referred not knowing the language, not being able to take the train and feeling the threats of sexual exploitation. Both Alex and Flor described how suffering influenced what they valued and in Flor’s case, she found her self-worth in a time of lonely desperation. Juan, Alex and Flor described how suffering influenced the way they perceived their family, their community and themselves, thus making them stronger. These immigrants reported that suffering had value for them in that it made them stronger and gave their life more meaning.

***Dios tiene un propósito en mi vida***

***(God has a purpose for my life)***

Along with Juan and Flor, three more participants believed that their life goals and their journey are part of something larger than themselves. They believed that God has a plan for them and that somehow what they were going through made sense because it came from God. Isabel describes how God was the guiding force in her migration. Her description was used to name this section; “No es porque yo quise venir a este país yo

estoy aquí, es porque dios tiene un propósito en mi vida; dios tiene un plan entonces es unas de las cosas como yo he podido sobrellevar todas estas dificultades.” To translate, “I am not here because I wanted to come to this country; I am here because God has a purpose for my life, God has a plan, and it is one of the ways I could endure all these difficulties.” Isabel believed that God’s plan continued to unfold throughout her life giving her ability to *sobrellevar*, which is to “move things forward” instead of allowing the stress to bring her down. For example, Flor believed that it was God who gave her the strength and the capacity to cross the border a second time when she brought her three siblings from Mexico to the United States. She reported that right after her mother died, they were left parentless and hungry, fending for themselves. The oldest was 8 years old. This is the only time she returned to Mexico. She felt it was the will of God and therefore her destiny to go back to Mexico and bring her three siblings to the United States.

Isabel believed that faith in God’s mission meant that nothing was impossible. “Estamos más consiente de realmente lo que es nuestra misión en esta vida, se puede decir para Dios nada es imposible. Gracias a él es que pude hacer todas estas cosas.” That is, “We are more aware of our mission in life, you could say that to God nothing is impossible. Thanks to him I was able to do all these things.” Isabel referred to her role in the Catholic Church where she was a community liaison for Latino adolescents who felt lost and confused. She offered counseling and support and found that sharing her undocumented status and immigration story helped guide these teens. She said that, “en la vida se puedo todo si tiene gana; lo único lo que se necesita en la vida es Dios, él da el resto. Con esto uno puede romper barreras. Soy testimonio para otros porque yo estoy en esta situación y lo puedo ser.” Translated to, “In life you can do anything if you have

the will, the only thing you need in life is God, and he will provide you with the rest. With this you can break barriers. I serve as testimony to others because I'm in this situation and I can do it.” To Isabel, an example of breaking barriers was attending college despite her status of being undocumented. She said that she worked and paid out of her own pocket to attend college. She changed her major from architecture to education because it would take less time to complete and therefore less money to fund her education. Even though it was her desire to become an architect, her most important dream was to finish her education. Isabel was breaking through the barriers put up against the undocumented youth by obtaining a higher education in the U.S. For Isabel, it was possible to gain a higher education. And getting this education opened many more doors to opportunities.

As previously discussed, learning English opened doors as well. Similarly, Isabel quickly learned that speaking English could and did change her situation by giving her different work opportunities and better pay. As soon as she learned English, she was offered a job as a restaurant manager instead of cleaning the tables. Her new role was based on her ability to successfully speak English and communicate to restaurant patrons and workers. In addition, by completing her education and having a career, she believed she could succeed in becoming an educated and skilled Latina regardless of her undocumented legal residence status.

Isabel and the other four participants lived their life with a belief that as they took their next step, it was as if the will of God was ultimately revealing a path for them to walk. Therefore, this path was not only possible but meant to be. This theme presented the immigration experience of these five immigrants as a spiritual journey. To them, God

provided a foundation from which they cultivated the capacity to endure extreme suffering.

Related for Isabel, her life was a testament to God's will, serving to inspire others and encouraging her to reach out to others who need help. This aspect of support was a strength that will be further discussed in the section "*Being Strong*."

### ***Sobresalir***

#### ***(Succeed)***

Twelve participants viewed success in the U.S mostly as achieving a better economic situation than the one they had experienced in their country of birth. Six of these participants related that success is the ability to make enough money to survive in the U.S and to send money to their family of origin. While making enough money to live here and also send some home may have defined financial success for the participants, the focus in this section was on the comments they made regarding the sacrifices made in order to succeed. For them, success was inseparable from suffering and struggle. At this point I would also like to highlight that there were three specific words in Spanish that the participants mostly used to describe this process of surviving (*sobrevivir* and *sobrellevar*) and succeeding (*sobresalir*). In the Discussion Chapter, I will explain how these concepts connect to the theory of resilience. However, next I will illustrate how the participants described their experiences in trying to succeed.

For example, making enough money to live on and also to send to family was a difficult challenge. Alex explained that what he earned was more for his family than for himself. For example, he said, "Gano \$300, mando \$200 y \$100 para sobrevivir." That is, "I earn \$300, I send \$200 and I survive on \$100." In other words, he kept about 1/3 of

his earnings, living frugally, and managed to send money to help his family in Mexico survive as well. Success involved not just personal survival, but also helping the family.

Lila explained that succeeding was difficult because she constantly faced unexpected challenges. For example, “Uno viene para salir adelante si no es una cosa es otra.” That is “You try to get ahead and if it is not one thing it is another.” Lila referred to her desire to go to trade school and learn to be a hairdresser. Despite her numerous attempts to enroll in trade school; her applications were consistently rejected due to her undocumented status. She felt held back and constantly questioned why her status continued to shut the door on opportunities for her. In Lila’s case, she immigrated with her mother and no longer had immediate family in Mexico.

Success was more achievable when there was support. Susana came to the United States at the age of three with her mother by crossing the border between Mexico and the U.S. While education was considered of high value in her family, she could not attend college because she could not afford to pay the tuition. The barrier she confronted was that while financial aid was available to other students who could not afford to pay, she was excluded because of her undocumented resident status. Therefore, in order for her to attend she must pay for it herself. However, Susana was also a key member in helping support her family financially. She said, “trabajo y la mitad doy para ayudar a mis papas para pagar la renta y lo demás guardo para estudiar.” That is, “I work and half of it goes to help my parents pay rent and I save the rest to pay for school.” As was true for Alex, the first example in this section, these participants worked and shared their salary with their families to help them survive. On the one hand, both Alex and Susana were first generation immigrants aware of the needs of their family and took their responsibility

towards family seriously. On the other hand, Alex was independent and sent money home to his family while Susana grew up in the U.S, lived with her family, and shared her income with them. Despite the differences in their geographic location, they still decided to pool their resources in support of getting their family ahead, that is, to *sobresalir*. The family succeeding took precedence over success for the individual.

While most of these participants had family in the U.S to help them upon arriving, Dolores did not. Dolores described her struggle to get ahead as “tratando de vivir, de vivir, de sobrevivir más adelante.” That is, “Trying to live, just to live, and to survive later. Dolores shared that she waited for her husband to send money to her and her three sons when he immigrated to the U.S. Unfortunately, he did not follow through on this goal and so the family fell deeper into poverty. She lived every day not knowing how to feed her children and what to say to them when there was no food. With tears in her eyes and her head softly lowered she shared that she had to find ways to live, live with hunger and mixed feelings of desperation and hope that the next day would bring more opportunities for them. Eventually, her eldest son immigrated to the U.S to help his family and due to his commitment and work opportunities in the U.S; they were lifted from poverty in Mexico. In Dolores’ case, she eventually immigrated to the U.S and has not reconciled with her estranged husband. All of her three sons were also in the U.S. Dolores’ struggles continued today even though she was now living in the U.S. She said she was no longer fighting. For her, living everyday was about surviving economically as well as medically. She was suffering from kidney failure and received dialysis regularly.

The struggle to succeed begins to change after immigrants have spent more time in the U.S. The more time they spend in the U.S, the more they put down family roots. Eight of these participants specifically described success as having opportunities in the U.S that were different than those in their country of origin. Over time, participants connected to resources that benefited them and their families in the United States. For example, health care and education were not as accessible in Mexico to families in poverty as they were in the U.S. For two participants in particular, health care was a growing need even more important than education.

For instance, Carla and her family struggled financially and did not have enough to eat while in Mexico. However, this situation worsened when someone in the family became ill. Carla explained that “Se paga hasta una pastilla.” That is, “You pay for even one pill.” She explained that families who were poor couldn’t afford to pay the fees for medical care in Mexico, even if they were in a life and death situation. Carla experienced how not having medical care for her family became a life and death issue. She described an incident in which her newborn child died because she was not aware of her medical needs. She said, “La primera niña nació en la casa con alguien que me ayudo, nunca supimos que era prematura. Entonces nunca le dimos ósea el cuidado que se, que tenía que tener ella, y ella se murió en menos de un mes, mi bebe.” That is, “Our first daughter was born at home with someone who helped me. We never knew that she was premature and so we never gave her the proper medical care she needed. And so she died in less than one month, my baby.” She had a different experience in the U.S when she registered her second daughter in school. She said, “Ellos tienen que tener todo en regla” that is “They have to have everything in order.” In other words, schools were



organized institutions and would only enroll incoming students if they were vaccinated. Since her daughter wasn't vaccinated they referred her to a free community clinic. Carla believed that this type of governmental support preserved life and so leaving the U.S meant placing her children in an environment that was dangerous. She said, "Por eso mismo uno no quiere regresar a su país, porque solo de pensar, de que en los hijos los vamos a exponer, no es porque no se quiera ir uno no puede uno, porque uno ya tiene familia y piensa en la familia, en los hijos." Translated to, "That is why you don't want to go home, because just to think about what we expose children to, it is not because we do not want to leave, it is because we already have family and we think about our family, about our children."

Similar to Carla's perspective on health care, Juan felt that part of his struggle to succeed was helping his U. S family meet their daily needs. He said "Estoy sacando a mi familia adelante, quizás no como rico pero tampoco como pobre, una vida normal." That is, "I'm moving my family forward, maybe not as rich but not as poor either, a normal life." To Juan, providing for his children meant surviving enough day to day so that they could continue living in the U.S. In other words, Juan bears the difficult and often "defaming" pressures of being undocumented legally in the U.S so that his documented children can stay to live a better life in the U.S.

Similar to Juan with his focus on the benefits of living in the U.S. for his children, Alicia was influenced by the opportunities for work. She said that "La oportunidad de salir adelante aquí es que se tiene un trabajo y un sueldo en cambio allá no." That is "The opportunity to get ahead here is that there is work and a salary which is not the case back there." Alicia believed that success depended on opportunities to succeed in work. She

offered the example that “El sueldo es poquito en México – aquí \$7 y algo a la hora en cambio de las 8 horas que trabaja puede ser \$7 en México.” That is “The salary is very little en Mexico – here \$7 and something an hour as opposed to the 8 hours that you work can add up to \$7 total for the whole day in Mexico.” So while in the U.S she earned \$7 an hour, in Mexico she earned \$7 a day. The motivation for immigrating to the U.S was the earning power that seemed impossible in Mexico.

**Theme 2 part B: Ponerse Fuerte  
(Becoming Strong)**

These Latino immigrants talked about more than suffering. They also talked about their sources of strength in times of suffering. This next section of sub themes illustrates how participants found and used *la fuerza* (strength) in their daily struggles. First, these Latino immigrants described how they used their strength to confront barriers. Second, they also described how when they focused on achieving their dream, they used inner strength such as endurance and will power to develop the strength they needed to confront barriers.

***La fuerza*  
(Find strength)**

Eight participants overcame barriers while living in the U.S by finding strength. New Latino immigrants faced obstacle after obstacle with limited economic and social opportunities due to barriers such as language, for example. This problem was worse for undocumented immigrants who encountered even more social and legislative obstacles. These eight participants talked about finding strength by choosing ways they could

respond to the situation. For example, Juan says he managed unfair work conditions by “ponerse fuerte en la situación.” That is, “Becoming strong when I am in the situation.” Juan’s words were used to name this section to clearly illustrate the importance placed on strength. Even though it became difficult to confront barriers at work for fear of deportation and termination, for example, Juan said these obstacles should not be enough to break someone down. Instead, he said his priority was becoming strong. The way that Juan defined strength, in this case, was by endurance. Juan described three main things that helped him find strength to endure this situation. They are “Ser persona buena,” “me ha matado trabajando”, y “pido a Dios que no pase cosas.” That is, “Being a good person, working himself to death and asking God to not have things happen.” To clarify, being a good person meant being a good person regardless of how they treated him; for Juan, this meant winning them over with his good behavior. And asking God to not have things happen reflects a never-ending hope that negative things won’t happen to him and his family. Negative things for Juan meant him being deported and his family becoming separated. The three things that Juan presented reflected using his inner strength to prevent his situation from overpowering and controlling him.

Similarly, will power was vital to gaining and maintaining strength. As Isabel shared her beliefs about strength, she maintained direct eye contact and a firm tone saying, “la fuerza de voluntad es lo mas importante en la vida, el no rendirse jamás.” That is, “never surrendering, using your will power that is the most important thing in life.” Isabel wholeheartedly believed that strength of mind helped her find ways to face barriers. She explained, “decir yo puedo hacer esto” that is “to tell yourself, 'I can do this.’” For Isabel, it was important to frame possibilities in a positive way with “Yes, I

can.” Isabel referred to her role in the church as community liaison to local Latino adolescents. She succeeded in obtaining a higher education despite her undocumented legal status and she used this as living proof that a person can succeed despite all the barriers stacked up against her. Isabel found the strength to transform her situation from failure to success. Even though she depended on her spiritual faith to help her endure difficulties she identified as working hard to pay for school, it was by using her will power that she overcame barriers, and ultimately changed her situation. She said that by living her life this way, she felt inspired to reach out to others who needed help. Both Juan and Isabel believed that in the face of suffering, will power helped them win in their situation as opposed to losing and *surrendering* to it.

One participant found the strength to change her situation by facing her own personal fears. Flor described how she changed herself from being unskilled and fearful to skilled and employable. At first, Flor did not believe she could find work. She was a teenager with no work skills and feared becoming lost. After a few months, she found a job as a live-in housekeeper. A few months later, she decided that she was tired of being closed in at work and felt ready to do something else. Despite her fears, she got on a train and when a crowd of people all exited off at the Main<sup>70</sup> Street Station in Elmhurst, Queens, she followed them. The stream of people entered a building where from the bottom of the entrance, she could hear sounds of sewing machines on the third floor. She had little sewing experience but a lot of determination to get a job. The supervisor noticed her standing at the door entrance and asked her who she was and why she was standing there. Flor simply said in Spanish she wanted a job. Flor didn't know much

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<sup>70</sup> Pseudonym

about the transit system; she didn't know the language; and she was not even 21 years old yet. In spite of all this, she was given a chance. She was told she could receive job training and if she could handle the work, she would get a job. Flor disclosed to me that she didn't have enough to eat and also pay the fare for the train during her first week of work. This did not stop her, however. She developed a plan. If she walked home instead of paying for the train, she would have just enough money to feed herself from time to time during the week. Despite the fact that she didn't have enough to eat and was tired, she was extremely excited about her new job and what it could mean for her and her future. Instead of surrendering to her fear and doubt, she used her will power to break through the barriers she confronted. She didn't give up when she found herself in a difficult situation; she changed it.

Thus far, I have reported that these participants described strength as coming from within them. Adding depth to this meaning of inner strength, Isabel introduced the importance of perception. Isabel believed that the ability to change a situation involving suffering comes from the way suffering is perceived. Isabel expanded on this concept of inner strength and shared, "A que tú llamas sufrimiento? Sufrimientos son situaciones que nos ayuda crecer – deber valorarlo como experiencias positivas." Translated to, "What do you call suffering? Suffering is a situation that helps us grow - it should be valued as a positive experience." Isabel described how strength can come from the way suffering is interpreted. She believed that perceiving suffering as positive helped her live differently. From this perspective, suffering served as a stepping-stone to personal growth. Instead of perceiving suffering as tragic, it is interpreted as valuable. She continued "Es una decisión de ver con los ojos de fe y amor o con los ojos de desilusión y

sin esperanza; eso es lo que nos mantiene vivo, los ojos de fe y amor.” Translated to “It is a decision to see with the eyes of faith and love or with the eyes of disappointment and hopelessness; that's what keeps us alive - the eyes that see with faith and love.” By purposefully viewing her suffering with eyes of faith and love, Isabel felt positive about her experience. This approach changed her suffering from a possibly negative experience to a positive one, and allowed her to meet the challenges of her daily life.

The more examples participants used to describe difficult times, the more it became clear that those who suffered deeply reached a place from where they could only rise. They made a conscious choice to counteract suffering with mental strength and willpower and to interpret suffering it as something positive. This choice reflected the unyielding inner strength of most of these participants.

To this point, I have reported that these participants described strength as coming from within them. The strength that these participants focused on during their narratives evolved internally rather than externally or from outer networks. However, there were some participants who also described the strength that came from the support from within their close-knit or peer networks as well as from their external environment.

Two participants described how their motivation to become strong came from the support of their peers. For example, Pablo explained, “Cuando te sientas ahora si a tomar lunch, comienzan a platicar las historias, de cómo uno viene y todo eso, si, entonces lo que uno a veces aprende es de motivarte” that is “When you sit to have lunch you all start talking about your stories, of how you came and all that, yes, and then you learn to self-motivate.” Pablo had this experience when he worked for a dry cleaner and many of his co-workers were from Mexico and undocumented. Sharing with each other provided a

unique type of support because they each were going through a similar journey. To illustrate this point, Pablo specifically said, “Cuando uno se sientan a comer, usted sabes que, a veces uno comenta su historias y todo y este, dicen ‘no pues no, si está bien así’ y ya entre amigos algunas veces se apoyan, ‘pues dale duro,’ ‘si tu vienes por un año, pues dale ganas, dales gana y aprovecha”” that is “When we sit to eat, you know, sometimes one talks about their story and all that and they say, “all is well,” and among friends sometimes they support each other with “do it harder”; and “if you know you will be here just one year, then get motivated, get motivated and make good use of the opportunity.” Pablo described the specific words that his peers said and how they helped him, such as “all is well” and “do it harder, get motivated.” Pablo received this support during his initial immigration experience in the U.S because it was the time when he left his father in Mexico after his mother's death just 3 months prior. Pablo described how his suffering included a constant worrying and thinking about his father whom he left in Mexico, grieving the death of his mother. This togetherness that Pablo described motivated him to “do it harder;” that is, to “stay focused and become strong.”

Similarly, Alex crossed the border with about ten men who became like family after that journey. At the time he arrived in the U.S., Alex didn't know anyone and he received support from a few who crossed with him who gave him a place to live and food to eat since he didn't have anywhere to go. Thereafter, he continued to have peer and close-knit support from a friend of his father's who heard he was in the U.S from folks back home. His father's friend offered him food, a place to live and other items he needed so that he could focus on finding work. Once he worked, then he could share in the household expenses such as food, electricity and rent. This kind of close-knit and

peer support offered Alex the opportunity to feel secure about his basic needs, thereby making him strong and motivated to pursue his goal of finding work.

While it was not identified as a valuable support, four more participants described a similar experience with distanced family members responsible for securing food, shelter, and clothing for them as soon as they arrived in New York. And as new immigrants spent time in the U.S. and had their own families, they became more willing to find resources from external supports through their children. This was true for three more participants who described their close relationship with their children's school and doctors. These relationships have lasted for years. These peer, close-knit, and external supports gave the participants something to rely on, and thus gave them a stronger beginning. Becoming strong was mostly described as an inner capacity from participants. However, some participants also described a less prioritized support from peers and external supports such as those related to their children's needs. While it was evident that participants focused on finding strength from their will power, it was also clear how important it was for new immigrants to receive material support upon arriving in a new country. This was particularly valuable if they were undocumented and arriving in the U.S by crossing the border with only what they were wearing.

***Lograr tu sueño***

***(Achieve your dream)***

Of those participants who used personal strength to change their situation, five believed that this change was possible because they were pursuing a dream and never giving up on it. All of these participants used the word "dream" when describing this type of strength. Pedro shared the way he believed dreams can come true. "De mi nació



si uno viene con una meta, con un sueño de llegar a este país y aprender muchas cosas, este que no caigan en que digan que no, porque siempre tiene que estar positive y decir si, si se puede.” To translate, “I believe that if you come with a goal, with a dream of reaching this country and learning many things, then don’t give in to saying no, because you always have to be positive and say 'yes, yes it can be done.’” Pedro referred to the focus that helped him during the difficult border crossing he made. Pedro was abandoned by the coyote (the guide), his family hired to help him cross the border. Pedro was 16 years old at the time. Although he was young and faced a difficult journey, his focus and strong desire to see his brother gave him the strength to carry on. He said, “Con muchas ganas de llegar a donde estaba mi hermano era lo que me ayudaba a que yo no callera a regresarme. Yo siempre decía que tenía que llegar a donde estaba mi hermano.” That is, “It was with much eagerness to get to where by brother was, that was what helped me to not fall and turn back. I always kept saying that I must reach my brother.” Pedro felt he “must” reach his brother and saw no other alternative. He continued pursuing this goal and finally after five weeks of struggling to cross the border he achieved his dream. It is important to mention that Pedro and his brother have a strong bond. As soon as his brother saw him, they hugged and he said to him, “No veía las horas en que yo te viera estar aquí!” That is, "I was counting the hours until I would see you here"! According to Pedro, he believed it was possible to achieve his dream because many previous immigrants had made the journey. To further illustrate this point, Pedro shared, “Hay mucha gente que ha venido hacer su sueño una realidad.” This translates to, “There are many people who have already come and made their dreams come true.” While achieving the dream of immigrating to the U.S was the first step for

new immigrants, it also served as a final stage in a dream fulfilled. He recommended keeping one's focus on those immigrants who had successfully made the journey, rather than on the possibility of failure. This focus would make achieving the dream of a new life in the US seems more possible.

Working towards achieving a dream required focus and positive determination. However, two participants explained that staying grounded, particularly with culture and identity, during this process was vital. The following statement from Isabel illustrated the importance of maintaining a Latino identity while achieving the dream.

Decir yo puedo hacer esto...si estoy en un país que habla inglés, pues tengo que aprender inglés. Si estoy en un país que tiene una cultura distinta, respetar la cultura de esa país. Pero jamás perder la identidad como Latinos también al mismo tiempo

Translated to:

To say I can do this...If I am in a country that speaks English then I have to learn English. If I am in a country that has a distinct culture, then respect the culture of that country. But at the same time never lose your identity as Latinos.

While achieving her dream meant learning and adopting new skills in the new environment, it did not mean losing her identity as well. Maintaining her cultural identity as a Latina was described as strength because it solidified her identity while in the midst of many different environments, such as at school and in her community.

It took strength to maintain her cultural identity. For example, Isabel's dream was to finish her education. While she learned a different language and a different culture to achieve her dream, she maintained her cultural identity as a Latina. For Isabel, maintaining her cultural identity involved two factors: maintaining her language and family values. First, Isabel learned English. This skill empowered her to secure better

paying employment as well as succeed academically at school. However, she said she did not give up her Spanish. Second, she embraced her role as a young woman, following the Latino cultural expectation to live at home until marriage. The second factor made her different from her classmates because most of them left home once they were 18 years old. Their goal was to become independent of their parents. For Isabel, staying connected with her family was more important. Isabel adopted what she needed from her new environment, which helped her solidify her cultural identity in her new situation.

Building on the theme of maintaining identity, Flor shared her beliefs. “Hay dos tipos de soñar, soñar con los pies bien puesto en la tierra; el otro tipo de soñar es soñar y ser este engreído. Ese sueño no me gustaría porque en vez de sobresalir, te dañas.” That is, “There are two types of dreaming; to dream with feet firmly placed on the ground; the other type is to dream, to dream and be cocky. I don’t like this latter type of dreaming because instead of succeeding, it damages you.” Flor was referring to finding herself instead of losing herself in this process; staying grounded mentally. She continued:

Creemos que el mundo lo tenemos aquí en la mano, y ese es el sueño más tonto que podemos tener. Es bueno soñar, si, pero con los pies bien puesto en la tierra y estar consiente quienes somos. Un sueño que no te haga cambiar, un sueño positivo, porque como te digo, hay mucha forma de soñar, un sueño positivo si vale la pena, seguir ese sueño.

Translated to:

We believe that we have the world here in our hand, and that's the dumbest dream we can have. It's good to dream but with your feet placed on the ground and being aware of who we are. A dream that doesn't change you, a positive dream, because as I said, there are many ways to dream; a positive dream is worth it, follow that dream.

Flor said that she immigrated to the United States with a short-term plan. According to Flor, when immigrants come to the U.S., they mostly plan to work for a few years and send money back home. However, as time goes by, the plan for these participants changed. She said that in her community, the dream develops to eventually own property. For Flor, that meant owning a home in the U.S. This dream evolved after growing up as a new immigrant and eventually creating her own family in the United States. Her situation prompted her to learn more about herself rather than changing her identity. According to Flor, going thru all of the negative experiences showed her what she was capable of enduring. It taught her how to become successful rather than feeling that her identity is a product of circumstances. Even though Flor's undocumented legal status did not permit her to buy property in the U.S, she hoped that one day soon, that situation would change.

The third major theme is prevalent among those participants who immigrated to the U.S as teenagers and revealed the struggle of living two lives, one in their birth country and the other in the U.S. The next section will focus on the ways participants describe this situation.

**Theme 3: Dos Vidas: Donde Nací y Donde Vivo Ahora**  
**(Two Lives: Where I was born, and Where I Now Live)**

*Mi corazón está dividido*

*(My heart is divided)*

Ten of the 16 participants immigrated to the United States as teenagers between the ages of 15 and 17. They had lived in the United States from a minimum of 8 years

and to a maximum of 22 years. At the time of the interview, three were between the ages of 23 and 26 and six between the ages of 30 and 39. Seven of these participants were married; six of the participants who are married also had children. However, of the 16 participants, 7 had returned to their country at least once and one made the journey 17 times.

Five a total of eight participants' their initial goal was to work in the U.S for a few years and send money back home, and then return to their home country. The short stay that was planned ranged from 6 months to two years. However, the longer these participants remained, the harder it became to leave. For example, Julia left her home and family when she was 16 years old. Originally, she planned to stay in the U.S for 6 months. But, as soon as she met the man who would later become her husband, her plan changed. At the time of the interview, she had lived nine years in the U.S and she was a wife and mother with her own family. Changing her plan meant that she would have a life in the U.S. Although her initial goal was to support her parents in Mexico, this goal became secondary to providing for her own family in the U.S. This decision meant seeing her family in Mexico less often, possibly even never, because of her undocumented status. Nevertheless, yearning to be home in Mexico while living with her children in the U.S remained a constant struggle for Julia.

Cuando nacieron mis dos niños, a pesar que estaba “Marco”, yo estaba sin mis papas, y sin nada. Pues por un parte era bonito no porque ya estaba, ya había tenido a un niño y después al año, a los dos años y medio tuve al otro niño que ahora tiene año y medio; pues creo que eso es. Eso es algo que no se puede comparar; su recompensa.

Translated to:

When my two children were born, even though Marco was here, my parents weren't and we didn't have anything. On the one hand, it was beautiful not just because I had one child, I did have another child and after a year, at two and a half years I had another child who is now one year and a half; so I believe that that is it. That it is beyond compare; my reward.

Living in the U.S. meant that Julia missed her family in Mexico, but even so she found it rewarding to have her children in the U.S. Her life evolved from the original plan for a few short years to a life she hadn't imagined for herself before immigrating to the U.S.

Living two lives meant belonging to two countries. For example, Flor related that her identity was founded on family roots. She said, "Mi corazón está dividido -allá están mis ancestros, esta mi mama sepultada, están mis raíces pero aquí están mis hijos, y por mis hijos esta es mi patria también." That is, "My heart is divided - my ancestors are over there, it is where my mother is buried, my roots are there, but here are my children and because of my children this is my country too." Flor's cultural identity corresponds to both Mexico and the U.S. Flor's words, "Mi Corazon esta dividido," that is, "My heart is divided," is used for this theme because they reflect the struggle with separation from family. Flor identified with her roots and family in Mexico and simultaneously identified with her role as a mother of children who are citizens of the U.S. These five immigrants, including Julia and Flor, struggled with the separation of home and country. They felt pulled in two directions, connected to two separate homes in two different countries, and thus experienced an inner battle, as if their hearts were divided.

While it seemed clear to both Julia and Flor, who as mothers had two places they called home, it is evident that if they could have traveled freely across the border, it would have been somewhat easier for them because they could have gone home to visit

their families in their home country. On the one hand, they felt that as mothers they embraced life in the United States as their country where they lived with their children. On the other hand, they still kept their hearts open to the possibility of amnesty, which might mean a chance of seeing their parents again. Alicia added, “Mis papas están allá y yo pues la verdad quisiera tenerlos conmigo o si ellos como decir están allá yo poder viajar más seguido y poder ir a visitarlos.” This translates to, “My parents are there and truthfully I want them with me; or if it is that they are there, that I could be able to travel there more often and visit.” Although seeing their parents was a goal, the limitations on traveling to and from made the sense of a dual identity stronger. Celeste shared, “Yo me fuera pero para venir es duro. Yo no quiero dejar mis hijos porque sé que están en un país que tienen una vida mejor.” This translates to, “I would go but it's tough to return to the U.S. I do not want to leave my children because I know they are in a country that offers them a better life.” So while Celeste would go back to Mexico by crossing the border, she won't because of how difficult it was to cross again. At the same time, she thought about her children and what it would be like for them without her. Or if she decided to bring them to Mexico they would miss out on the opportunities in the U.S. Because they were undocumented, these Latino immigrants struggled because they were unable to travel back and forth legally. And even though these immigrants longed for a day when amnesty would allow them to make their hearts whole, in the sense that contact with family and home would unite rather than separate, they still identified with two countries, there and here.

For all these participants, identity meant more than their country of birth; it included their new country where they grew up as teenagers and adults. On the one hand,

these participants described their home as one they knew as a child. On the other hand, they also described the U.S as their home, the place where they became adults and initiated their own families. These two phases of life reflected belonging to two countries, which can be described as a *dual identity*. However, since most of these participants were undocumented, they struggled with this dual identity even more because of the legal limitations it posed. This theme, “My heart is divided,” captures the struggle of a dual identity for these immigrants.

All sixteen Latino immigrants openly shared their stories of being Latino immigrants in the United States. The themes that emerged from the analysis of their narratives provided powerful insights into their transitions as new immigrants and the suffering they endured, and also how they perceived that strength helped them survive and fulfill their dreams. In addition, some of the participants revealed a sense of dual identity; one that represented belonging to their country of birth as well as to their current country of residence. The findings of the community profile suggested that an atmosphere accepting of diverse cultures and identities was cultivated in the community of Astoria. However, recent immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, may not readily trust outsiders to their ethnic community and experience suffering when they arrive in Astoria. While at first they depend on their internal strength to transform their suffering into a positive experience, it is clear that with time they became connected first to their Latino network and then to external resources such as the children’s school and medical doctors. And corresponding to the Astoria community profile, these external resources were described as formal institutions and informal supports, each providing an inclusive support system for community residents.



### **Participants Speak About Astoria**

Fifteen of the participants were living in Astoria when they participated in this study. One participant had moved to a neighboring community after having scheduled an interview. In general most of the participants knew someone in Astoria, which became a deciding factor to living in Astoria. This section will offer another perspective about Astoria which is congruent to the findings of the community profile. I will provide a brief summary of the key points laid out by the participants when they first described Astoria (See APPENDIX A TABLES).

Participants mostly described Astoria as a “beautiful” place where participants enjoyed the “close proximity of everything” such as schools, medical centers, shops and parks. It was also a place that felt “safe” and diverse where different Latinos congregate. And by becoming part of other Latino groups who were described as “friendly” and basically “good people,” participants felt connected. In addition, two participants specifically said that they felt there was no discrimination in Astoria.

This description about Astoria supports a main finding in the community profile. Similar to the participants, the community profile suggests that Astoria is (a) a diverse community and (b) a safe place to live. These two factors are important especially for new immigrants because their culture is supported rather than denied in the community.

As noted earlier, arriving as new immigrants with a different culture and little or no communication skills was a common experience for these participants. Therefore, a community where diversity is accepted or at least condoned creates a more welcoming experience. Astoria is unique with its diversity as compared to other locations where Latino immigrants tend to be the only diverse group. In Astoria however, they are only

one of many diverse groups. It is also possible for these participants to maintain their cultural identity because of the various cultural supports available to celebrate them. And as indicated in the community profile, there is a Mexican community civic group that engages and mentors new immigrants from Mexico.

Many participants reported that their connection with local churches facilitated a sense of belonging. These spiritual connections facilitated developing informal networks to other Latinos from different Latin countries. Some of the spiritual institutions, made legal counsel readily available for their members, an important resource for new immigrants experiencing immigration issues. These informal social supports not only connected the participants with networks, both informal and formal, they became avenues of communication and possible legal support for them and their ethnic community.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study focused on the narratives of new Latino immigrants who remained in the United States; describing their situation while living in the United States. The major themes that revealed themselves throughout the narratives were: 1. *Aqui se sufre* (here you suffer); 2a. *El valor de sufrir* (The value of suffering); 2b. *Ponerse fuerte* (Becoming strong); and 3. *Dos vidas, donde naci y donde vivo ahora* (Two lives, where I was born and where I live now) (See APPENDIX C11 for conceptual image). Suffering and strength were concepts that seemed interrelated. Learning about the community of these participants deepened what emerged from their narratives. The two major findings from the community profile demonstrated that:

- 1) Astoria had been a home for new immigrants since its inception in the 1800's; and
- 2) Astoria reflects a community where diverse cultures coexisted without becoming fused.

Even so, it was also evident that services offered to its community residents might not be readily accessible and visible to immigrants who had recently arrived to this community.

Three main concepts emerged from the results of this study, which make a contribution to the literature. First, these participants demonstrated how their strength overcame their suffering. While the concept of resilience helps explain some of the processes of becoming strong for these participants, I propose that it needs to be reconceptualized. The concept of resilience will be the first concept of discussion. Secondly, these participants experienced two lives, being born in one country and growing up in another. This experience of feeling connected to two countries I termed as

dual identity. Relative to a similar process called transnationalism, I propose to expand the definition of transnationalism, which is the second main concept in this discussion. Third, learning about how these participants experienced community can enhance the literature about Latinos in general. Community is the third concept discussed in this section.

### **Resilience: Expanding the Concept**

While these immigrants described their suffering honestly and intimately, suffering was not their whole story. Throughout immigration research, suffering tends to dominate; in this study however, suffering did not overshadow the strength that that was revealed throughout their narratives. While the strength of these participants seemed similar to the concept of resilience, the current concept of resilience only offers a beginning understanding. I recommend that the concept of resilience be expanded to include the specific techniques of “becoming strong” reported in this study.

Walsh (1998) defined resilience as the ability to transform negative circumstances into positive ones, and described it as being “forged through openness to experiences and interdependence with others” (p. 4). On the contrary, Rutter (1985) and Grothberg (2005) depicted resilience as based on the individual’s perspective and capacity. The resilient individual has the power to use protective buffers to cope with stress. So while Walsh focused on the interdependent quality of resilience, Rutter and Grothberg focused on it as an individual capacity.

I recommend new insights into the concept of resilience. These insights include: 1) will power; 2) visionary strategies; and 3) reframing. These three concepts deal with the individual’s internal perspective rather an external perspective on the community. As

illustrated in the Results chapter under the section about “Find Strength” many participants described how their internal perspective was supported by the collectivity they felt during peer support and among external supports found in the residential community. They described peer support as a beginning step for survival and as a gateway to their initial settlement in the U.S. The fourth concept I would like to introduce is a concept of collective resilience as it is experienced with the realities of immigration factors prevalent to new immigrants of color.

These participants seemed to believe that people must depend on their individual capacity to transform before relying on others. This belief suggests that the way these participants view their ability to change situations was internal and personal rather than being dependent on a system of external factors such as their environment or social networks. Participants demonstrated how their ability to change their suffering situation meant taking responsibility for it through will power, visionary strategies and reframing. An example of this process was how participants connected with their internal strength, realigned their focus and used will power, and became strong enough to change their situation or view it differently. This process was powerful for these participants. Many used key words consistently to describe this process such as *sobrevivir*, *sobrellevar* and *sobresalir* (See Results Chapter in the “Become Strong” section). The next section will focus on the meaning of these key words.

These participants did not use the word resilience to describe the process of becoming strong; rather they used a set of other words that were reflective of the process and had similar meanings. Participants described a dynamic process using concepts such as surviving (*sobrevivir* and *sobrellevar*) and succeeding (*sobresalir*). *Sobrevivir* literally

means "to live out," which was used to mean "surviving." *Sobrellevar* literally means "to endure," which can be used to mean "to cope." A few participants explained that *sobrevivir* and *sobrellevar* were similar but that *sovrellevar* has a slightly different meaning. While both relate to surviving, *sobrellevar* connotes a slightly more positive experience. *Sobrellevar* means surviving in a positive direction; for two participants this meant not resorting to physical fights and instead finding a calm and peaceful solution to their or problems. The third term, "*sobresalir*," means, "to come out ahead" and conveys the idea of succeeding or excelling. For these participants, *sobresalir* meant moving out of the situation they were in; for example, overcoming poverty. Placing these terms within their context as the participants told about suffering and strength further illustrated how the concept of resilience needs to be expanded to include the ways these immigrants survived.

To understand the incredible strength these Latino immigrants exhibited day after day involves an account of their immigration issues. The resilience of a community of Latino immigrants cannot completely reflect their ability to transform if a vital component about who they are is left out. Therefore, in order to fully discuss the resilience and powerful strength that these immigrants exhibit, I refer to them as "leaders of strength." To explain this usage, it is necessary to take into account their immigrant context.

According to Rutter (1985) resilience is relative to how well individuals adapted to their environment despite risk factors. Although these leaders of strength embodied a view that served to buffer them from further pain and helped them to settle into the community, it did not buffer them from further risk. While it might appear that these

leaders of strength were well buffered from extreme stress, the reported abuse and discrimination they faced have been worsening over time, particularly with current legal limitations and governmental barriers for immigrants who are undocumented. Within the immigration context of legal, social and legislative limitations, protective buffers can only explain a part of the strength they exhibited. These leaders of strength have been able to sustain themselves thus far despite the extreme difficulties they face. They need support which can be provided by social workers and policy makers as they continue their work; this aspect of service that will be further discussed in the implications section.

My recommendations about the concept of resilience inform what we currently know about resilience and illustrate how it must be expanded to include the ways Latinos have transformed the adversity of their situations. In a world where adversity has made their contributions dim or invisible, these undocumented Latino immigrants (leaders of strength) have found a way to make their light shine and to share this light with others in similar situations.

### **Natural Collective Support**

There are two main concepts in the literature that relate to the collectivity that these undocumented Latino immigrants experience, community resilience and a natural support system. First, community resilience represents how individuals and families unite to build strength in times of stress (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982; Doron, 2005). Unity pertains to an interdependent process involving systems such as family, community and organizations (Doron, 2005). This level of resilience within the community evolves from the way all these systems come together, which is an aspect representative of the way supports collectively came together for these participants.

Second, natural support systems are a “collection of individuals who relate to you, although not necessarily to each other, on a familiar or even intimate basis” (Delgado, 1998, p. 12). Natural support systems are larger than the family unit and involve significant community members. Similarly, natural support systems did represent some of the ways through which participants described support. While community resilience offers a wider lens of possibilities including the community, natural support systems focus on the individuals and their relationships.

While these concepts capture the collective strength that carried these Latino immigrants throughout their immigration journey, they do not explain the beginning of this path. Learning about their strengths and the ways they manage their situation must include the beginning, their initial steps in the U.S. Therefore, I argue that the concept of community resilience be expand to include what I call Natural Collective Support. This new concept illustrates the complex support that was put in place collectively for these Latino immigrants prior to their arrival in the U.S. Families from their birth country organized with those relatives, neighbors, or friends of friends who were living in the U.S to receive and sustain them during the beginning phase of their immigration journey, even if they had never met them before. While community resilience is a support system that is created once the new immigrants are in the U.S, my new concept, natural collective support, begins even before they arrive and continues thereafter. In addition, a clear distinction from community resilience is that these supports were put in place with people the new immigrant had never met. Even for those who did not have collective support in place, their natural connections with peers (not relatives), offered them similar



support. This type of collective support seemed to be natural for them and was a key factor in helping them survive their initial phase of life in the U.S.

### **Transnationalism**

A dominant view within immigration research suggests that new immigrants settle into a new country through *assimilation* adapting to the dominant culture by adopting its norms, values and culture (Gordon, 1964, Falk, 1973). However, Latinos of color do not fit this traditional expectation for assimilation and instead report retaining a transnational identity. Transnationalism focuses on the ability of new immigrants to maintain their identity rather than forgoing it in order to become part of dominant society. The participants in this study identified with a dual identity that connected them to their birth country as well as to their current country of residence. This dual identity evolved over time in response to how their immigration status changed.

Specific to identity formation and immigration, Haller & Landolt (2005) highlight the “multidirectional” experience of identity formation during immigration and call it transnationalism. Furthermore, they state that Latino immigrants experience transnationalism because they maintain the identity they bring with them while taking on a new identity in their new country. Transnationalism explains the dual aspect of identity for the participants in this study. For these Latino immigrants, for example, the identity or label of being undocumented was forced upon them. However, these immigrants remained in the U.S despite all the barriers related to being undocumented, such as not having access to a good job with benefits or not being able to obtain a higher education. They pursued their goals despite being labeled as undocumented. They took on tasks related to their new identity, such as learning a language and job skills to enter into the

environment while maintaining privacy about their identity. They also maintained their ethnic networks because they found it imperative to nurture their cultural identity and also remain connected to their birth country. The definition of dual identity was brought to life with real stories from the participants of this study.

The work by Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt (1999) used the concept transnationalism to reflect the experience of persons living dual lives; for example, speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders. I believe that transnationalism does explain the realities of new Latino immigrants when they find they are building two lives. I believe that it incorporates the way these participants made meaning of their dual identity. This study demonstrates how a dual identity means more than just living two lives; it means being connected to two countries and the two different worlds of culture, language and family which they bridge. It includes the way they see their role in both families. I found that Latino immigrants describe living lives because they feel connected to both countries and continue to have a purpose in each. Even though legislation against undocumented immigrants makes traveling between the countries much more difficult, their connections remain vivid. Therefore, Latino immigrants' dual identity nurtured their bi-country connections and reflected how much they value culture and family. Although the concept of transnationalism has been discussed in theory, this understanding about the immigrant experience further enriches what we know about how it is lived out by the participants of this study.

## Community

Research by Bathum & Baumann (2007) shows how Latina immigrants built a sense of community by sharing with other Latinas how they coped and transitioned to life in the United States. Building on the ways Latinos build community, I would like to suggest that these Latinos engage in three types of community:

1. Close-knit or Peer support network
2. Latino support group
3. Community of residence

As illustrated in the Results Chapter, these were the three types of support that participants described as part of the immigrant experience (See APPENDIX B FIGURES for a conceptual image). At first, these Latino immigrants counted on the close-knit networks and on peers for mentoring and guidance as they settled into the U.S. Over time, they began to engage formal and informal supports within the larger Latino community and met other Latinos from different Latin countries who were “good people” and like “family.” Finally, living in Astoria brought a unique quality of external supports for these participants from outside the Latino community. Astoria was unique in that it proved welcoming of diversity by fostering the maintenance of diverse cultural identities. This third support felt by their community of residence is illustrated in the section called Participants Speak About Astoria.

As presented in the second part of the community profile analysis, as a community or residence, Astoria reflects what I refer to as the DCC factor, that is, Diverse Communities Coexisting. Diverse ethnic groups live side by side and celebrate

their cultural heritage throughout the year. In addition, long time residents from an ethnic group come together to help new immigrants from the same group in the community.

This type of community dynamic is accepting of a wide range of people and is led by its community leaders and driven by its residents. This community can be a model for other communities who experience the arrival of diverse groups. It shows how a community can value the beauty of being different. Specifically this model can show: 1) how diverse cultural groups cultivate their identity among a plethora of other cultures; and 2) how specific local community groups exist to mentor new immigrants into the community.

The DCC factor describes the ways Astoria was tolerant of difference and open to having cultural celebrations and specific ethnic businesses intended to help new immigrants.

The value of this unique community comes from the ways it promotes diversity.

All three levels of community are important to new immigrants. The close knit support network anchors undocumented Latino immigrants new to their community of residence, especially when they first arrive in the U.S. This type of support strengthens their ability to settle into and negotiate their new environment. This strong foundation is made possible by their natural collective support put in place prior to their arrival. As undocumented Latino immigrants open themselves to other social experiences, they connect with Latino support groups established by Latinos from other Latin countries. Depending on their community of residence, undocumented Latino immigrants can connect with other immigrants from their country of birth and strengthen their cultural identity by connecting with them and the local ethnic groups designed to support them.

### **Limitations**

I have identified five limitations to the study.

First, As a Social Worker who has been practicing for over fifteen years, I had a personal social work dilemma. I felt that gaining access to these participants opened a door for valuable stories as well as opportunities for a social worker to assist and support families that were vulnerable. While being a Researcher elicited valuable knowledge to enhance future social work services to this population, it felt like a missed opportunity.

Secondly, some participant answers may be limited by memory problems. According to Fowler (1995) “the more recent the event, the greater the impact or current salience of the event, and the more consistent an event was with the way the respondent thinks about things, the more likely it is to be recalled” (p.22). Following Fowler’s recommendations to help participants to remember, I sensitively probed for the date and/or year of events recounted. Also, I repeated the questions and asked multiple questions in order to improve the probability of the event being recalled. Lastly, I asked questions that helped stimulate cognitive, emotional and intellectual networks operating within memory to get to the topic at hand such as “What is it like for Latino immigrants to live in the U.S” and “What did you expect when you came here?” This technique was successful and the descriptions became clearer even if dates or some other specific facts were forgotten.

Third, particular individuals in the sample being mostly from Mexico and still living in the United States may affect results. Fifteen of the 16 participants were from Mexico. Among the Latino population, there are diverse cultures and therefore findings

cannot be generalized to the total Latino population. At the same time, all of the participants were undocumented and were interviewed in the United States. This study pursued the experiences of these immigrants and pointed out specific concepts such as strength to describe their situation. However, this study did not interview those immigrants that returned home permanently and could not present their perspective. In addition, the initial participants referred to this researcher may have been those immigrants who were open and willing to share their story resulting in the findings of this study reflecting a primarily positive perspective. Future research can elicit responses from both perspectives by seeking immigrants who decided to return to live in their country of origin after living in the U.S. This additional research would enrich what we now know about the immigrant experience related to these concepts of strength, resilience and transnationalism.

The fourth limitation is the time span used to collect the interviews and conduct (field) observations. The data gathered represent new Latino immigrants in a specific place and time. Future research may focus on a similar community longitudinally and compare and contrast short term with long term analysis including the number of times they travel to and from the United States as well as how and if their perspective and community supports change over time. Longitudinal research would be valuable because these factors emerged from the data as key components to understanding the immigrant situation in their community.

The fifth limitation includes my connections with the Catholic Church. Although this connection was valuable, it may have limited my connections with other aspects of the Latino community in Astoria. Astoria has many religious and spiritual

affiliations as evidenced throughout the community analysis and they reflect the diversity of their community members. By using snowball sampling, I accessed a community of undocumented immigrants, who may have had a common denominator of connection to the Catholic Church. This connection may have limited me from accessing participants who did not have a spiritual alliance or did not find religion as a support or others who were affiliated with Protestant or other churches. Other participants might have offered a different perspective further enriching the findings. Future research could use other sampling methods to access participants from different groups within the same community by purposefully sampling from support groups and recreational programs such as parks, for example.

### **Strengths**

Bathum & Baumann's (2007) identified a limitation in their study with Latina immigrants that they did not include Latinas on their primary research team. They report that this limitation may have resulted in a biased perspective in participant observations and in their data analysis. The following are strengths that may result from my being a Latina, speaking Spanish, and identifying as an immigrant familiar with the population of interest.

Because I am a Latina immigrant who is a first generation immigrant to the United States, I have firsthand knowledge of the stressors and resilience that can arise for some people during the immigration journey. My ability to conduct fieldwork at home as an "insider" rather than an "outsider" (Ginkel, 1998), was also advantageous. It was advantageous because of the general similarities that may be evident such as a "good understanding of macro-society and its daily routines, symbols and value systems; no

culture shock; feelings of empathy; and easy access to the intellectual, emotive, and sensory dimensions of behavior” (Ginkel, 1998, p. 256). Furthermore, similar to the community of interest, I speak Spanish facilitating entry “into the community, establishing rapport, and getting to know the individuals, families and agencies that make up the community” (Serrano, 1974, p. 4). However, even though there was a shared immigration history with similar ethnicity, I was conscious that each immigrant had a unique story to share. Moreover, this awareness was a source of strength because it helped minimize my bias that had come up from being a first generation immigrant as well as being a Latina. Lastly, as explained in the section on rigor, I used several methods to manage any biases emerging from the analysis of the study.

Another strength of the study is the qualitative nature of the method. Large population surveys may not accurately report the demographics of participants especially due to the efforts of undocumented new Latino immigrants to protect their identity. Therefore the direct contact this study had with participants in a qualitative design offered me an opportunity to gather diverse data that would otherwise be inaccessible. In addition, the use of a qualitative descriptive approach directly influences current practice. Learning about the ways that these Latino immigrants used their strength in times of extreme adversity can influence social workers to follow a strength based perspective rather than one that is oriented toward being need-based and deficient.

A final strength of the study is the deep understanding I gained as both the researcher and transcriber. While it is was a tremendous amount of work to personally transcribe 16 formal interviews, it felt more rewarding to be able to listen to their voices



while documenting their words. I captured the unique ways in which they used their voices with intonations and expressions that sometimes can get lost during transcriptions.

## CHAPTER 6

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

*Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed, by Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The goal of the study was to learn more about the situation of new Latino immigrants from their perspectives and by focusing on their own words. The major findings of this study offered an inside look into their world. On the one hand, most of these Latino immigrants undergo extreme stress and adversity being new immigrants who are undocumented and dealing with political, economic and social complexities. On the other hand, the study showed how their extreme suffering could be transformed by their personal strengths as well as by a natural collective community and at the same time their cultural identity could be maintained both in their immigrant community and within their larger community of residence. In addition, in this study their community of residence is one that preserves the different cultures of ethnic groups rather than fusing them into one. Therefore the implications will build on these findings towards a larger goal of social inclusion, social change and social justice. Inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his quote above, it will be a struggle and not an easy journey to improve the situation for immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants. These recommendations are for future research, the social work profession, social work education, and policy.

#### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In order to learn more about immigrants and their situation, knowledge and experiences about them must come from them. As stated throughout this study, there has

been little research about the social processes that new immigrants experience in general and about new immigrants of color in particular and even less about immigrants who are undocumented. There has been even less qualitative research that elicited experiences from immigrants themselves in their own words. This study serves as a beginning step to fill this gap. I offer four recommendations for future research. They are:

1. Conduct more qualitative research to:

- (a) Explore the relationships of core concepts; resilience and natural collective support, and then relate these findings to the use of language such as the words *sobrevivir*, *sobrellevar* and *sobresalir*; and
- (b) Evaluate how the concept of Diverse Cultures Coexisting (DCC) can support communities that are struggling with an influx of new immigrant population.

2. Compare immigration experiences from different geographic locations:

- (a) Conduct research with a sample including Latinos from different Latin countries as well as those being documented and undocumented. This study used snowball sampling with 15 being from Mexico. Learning about how diverse ethnic groups with different immigration status experience their immigration journey could shed light on how they compare to those who are undocumented for example.
- (b) Compare this community with a different community in the Mid-West to see if and how the recent change in migration destination differs. Concepts to consider are the ways immigrants seem to connect with

their community and if they create and benefit from close-knit networks for example.

3. Conduct evaluation research to determine how well social work is meeting the needs of the immigrant community in light of their political, economic and social complexities.
4. Use research to influence policy so that the voices of these “invisible” Latino immigrants can be heard and be used as the basis of advocacy concerning immigration policy.

Research can shed light on the misconceptions about immigrants. The more knowledge that becomes available the more it can impact change. Furthermore, as evidenced by the participants of this study, there is much to learn about how will power finds ways to survive.

### **Recommendations for the Social Work Profession**

One of the contributions of conducting a study using a qualitative descriptive approach is that the findings can be used to influence practice. As a social worker who now deepened her practice perspective with research wisdom from this study, I recommend a guiding principle when working with Latino immigrants who are undocumented. It is difficult to bear witness to the extreme suffering these immigrants undergo resulting from economic and social barriers. This level of need presents at the surface and may overshadow the strengths embedded within their individual, family and community systems. Therefore, I recommend a guiding principle of using a strength perspective (Saleebey, 2002). This process entails the social worker to dive deeper into the relationship with their client and both validate and cultivate the strengths that she/he

have used thus far to live in the U.S. For example, an assessment question can move from, “how can I help you” to “let’s start with talking about how you have you been managing so far- we can build from there.” Another way to say this is to move away from a deficiency orientation to a focus on the strengths of individuals and their community (McKnight & Kretzman, 1996). In addition, in order to enter the community of Latino immigrants the use of “community guides” can better help establish how social workers can connect with this community of people (Ungar, Manuel, Mealey, Thomas & Campbell, 2004).

Empowered with the knowledge I have learned so far from these immigrants, I recommend two specific direct practice techniques.

1. A proposed frame for the therapeutic alliance is the bio-psycho-social-spiritual model (Graybeal, 2001). This model is an ecological approach with developmental, social and spiritual perspectives (See APPENDIX B FIGURES). In this way, clients who are immigrants are assessed along various dimensions offering a deeper meaning in the therapeutic process. In the work of engaging and developing a therapeutic relationship, it is valuable to include the multi-dimension aspect of their situation.
2. The use of a narrative approach and strength based is valuable in building resilience among undocumented Latino immigrants because it is a path of reclaiming and healing (Early & GlenMaye, 2000). The narrative approach views risk and resilience factors in a more “fluid, process-oriented manner” as client narratives bring to light larger issues and intersections of many factors such as culture, personal experience and community (Levy & Wall, 2000, p. 409). The

narrative approach has power in the way they retell their story. In the case of undocumented Latino immigrants, the narrative about how they immigrated to the U.S such as crossing the border for example is powerful towards healing because of feeling heard. Such as one participant shared, he felt as if something inside was “lifted” by sharing his experience. And corresponding to living in the U.S, narratives about their personal experiences at work for example are also powerful towards affirming their identity and building strength.

Knowing how to work with this community is one aspect of the work another is to engage and maintain the therapeutic alliance. This is possible with social services that begin with trust and include an interrelated system with culturally sensitive services and immigration advocacy.

First, trust is an important aspect to consider when working with new immigrants particularly if they are undocumented. Often times, the social worker must elicit the support from other community members such as community guides to provide access and build trust with an immigrant community. I recommend the use of community guides especially if the community represents one that is a close-knit network. Community guides are those trusted key members who live in the community and who can offer a bridge to support such as with social workers. They can move people from positions of exclusion to inclusion in their community, taking on roles addressing the marginalization and oppression of their disadvantaged neighbors (Ungar et al, 2004, p.552).

Second, it is crucial to cultivate therapeutic goals that help clients feel whole rather than divided because their needs are from two countries, their birth country as well

as their country of residence. Social workers working towards an interrelated systems approach forms relationships with other professionals by literally crossing borders to communicate and unite supports thus reflecting the dual identities of new immigrants. For example, when a social worker conducts a bio-psycho-social-spiritual history including the reality of experiences from both countries for the immigrant it will offer a better view of the whole picture. In addition, connecting immigrants within the community places them in a powerful position helping facilitate support to one another as well as the potential of building alliances across ethnicities.

Third, immigrants new to the country and seeking support will more likely become engaged if they feel welcomed. By offering services that engage new immigrants in culturally sensitive ways which positively engage them such as by using bilingual staff, bilingual forms, activities geared towards cultural celebrations, and promoting the acceptance of diversity and new immigrants with signs and pictures in the waiting room and offices where services. In addition, a handbook with a community map visually illustrating formal and informal institutions geared to connecting new immigrants can help connect them into their new community. Along these lines, community interventions such as promoting English learning classes and immigrant workshops can benefit immigrant communities with skill building and legal knowledge.

Fourth and lastly, social workers at their places of employment should represent, openly, an agenda towards advocating for humane immigration reform and possibilities for amnesty for undocumented immigrants. In addition, their professional power and privilege create powerful bridges of communication for these immigrants with information that can alter their resident status and their life. This type of advocacy that is

committed towards improving the conditions of these vulnerable communities is a step towards social justice.

This qualitative descriptive study revealed how many Latino immigrants break through barriers changing their situation to being more positive. With this new knowledge, Social workers can see the issues through their clients' eyes, understanding deeply what they value, as well as how events have influenced them, while giving testimony to events that may have otherwise been ignored. Through these efforts, social workers can help immigrants of color in general, and Latino immigrants in particular, to have a better chance of thriving in the U.S.

### **Recommendation for Social Work Education**

The experience of this study has led me to believe that skilled and knowledgeable social workers have an incredible opportunity to shower this community with tremendous support. Further research and practice experiences enhance the ways new social workers become better prepared and more knowledgeable with their role and commitment to service. As students become social workers, it is important that they feel capable of addressing and sometimes bearing witness to the traumatic stress experienced by immigrants who may be their potential clients. At the same time, this community of immigrants demonstrates unyielding strengths in the face of extreme stress. New social workers who proceed with a strength perspective can acknowledge the numerous ways their potential clients have dealt with their situation. Students who are mentored by their educators both in the classroom and in their field experience are in a better position to understand this aspect of their role. Mentoring is an important aspect of teaching. The



educators and field supervisor who learn about immigration and immigrants and encourage their students to do the same become better equipped.

In addition, educators and field supervisors who cultivate a setting where the student practices how to critically think about aspects of their role in the service they provide to individuals, their families and the communities, for example, fosters an advanced level of consciousness. In order for students to have these richer experiences these exchanges can also result from alliances between university and community and not just with their professors and field supervisors. The more diversity of practice experiences offered to the student, the more open their world becomes as long as they are supported with supervision.

I also believe that the curriculum of schools can include courses encouraging students to learn about the history of immigration and the social aspects of immigrant communities such as what is portrayed in the media about undocumented immigrant communities. And a re-assessment of these courses in the curriculum for those schools that are directly impacted by immigrants moving into and changing the face of their community at their school location can reflect this change. And because the U.S is known as a country of immigrants, it makes sense for the curriculum to reflect the identity of this nation. Some activities for classes can parallel the situation of immigrants in the real world such as with case examples, this study for example, and role-plays where immigration is a main actor. Also, courses such as skills lab and case management can utilize what they learn about immigration to assess families, engage and develop goals with them. A case example for skills lab would include how social workers who

are not bilingual can work through a language barrier or the ways that a discussion about immigration status can develop.

Interdisciplinary teaching is another teaching tool that prepares students for the multi-layered situation of their clients. Interdisciplinary teaching in social work reflects how our clients can benefit from different perspectives and integrated approaches similar to those used by collaborative teams with other professionals and family members of clients in the “real world.” Educational institutions can prepare their students by mirroring this process in the classroom. Examples would be inviting law students, nursing students and media students during an analysis of case examples and illustrating the value of perspectives and how together solutions to difficult problems can be found. Again, case examples can use immigration issues such as working with an undocumented client and advocating for mixed-immigration status families. Moreover, speakers can be invited who are in the health profession such as doctors and nurse, and who can speak about the unique issues that parallel their immigrant patients.

Equally important, social workers can use advocacy in their work. Students have field experiences that help them understand the many hats they wear when they serve clients. The role of advocacy becomes most alive in the field and by following these three goals students can feel better prepared with their role:

1. Training regarding the most current legislation about immigration;
2. Learning how to change policy in the U.S; and
3. Incorporating this legislative and political advocacy on behalf and with their clients while still continuing to attend to their other individual and family needs.

Given the right tools, students are capable of becoming social workers competent towards helping immigrants and their families.

### **Recommendation for Policy**

This study described how an immigrant community with so many barriers stacked up against them has found ways to transform their situation. In addition, these immigrants have lived in the U.S for many years and have come to love this country and call it their home. I hope that by knowing more about their contributions this knowledge could be influential on policy.

Social work can be most effective responding nationally with collective efforts across the country and perhaps internationally across the globe. According to the National Association of Social Work (NASW):

NASW will actively promote sound policy that provides for fair and humane U.S immigration laws, the development of domestic and foreign policies that help alleviate the economic and political conditions that force people to flee their homes, and a plan to ensure that victims of human conflict in the poorest, least strategically important countries of the world do not continue to be ignored. Opposition must be mounted to federal and state legislative initiatives and actions that discriminate against both legal residents and undocumented individuals (Mizrahi & Clark, 2003, p. 206).

Legal immigration status is associated with how much freedom and rights one has living in the U.S. Those with citizenship have power and those that don't have it feel powerless. Social work can help change this condition by empowering these communities to have a voice by communicating on their own behalf. As both immigrant communities and social workers collectively unite across the globe, mobilizing citizens and non citizens alike to vote or protest, they have a better chance of impacting policy.

The results of this study show that there are many aspects of immigrants' life experience that need to be better understood. Social work could advocate with policy makers towards this goal.

There is an ongoing debate about immigration across this nation. This study offers new knowledge about Latino immigrants, which can contribute to understanding their world. It may be a small but meaningful step towards humane immigration reform.

## APPENDIX A TABLES

Table A1 Thematic Conceptual Matrix with Illustrative Quotes x Cases

THEME	QUOTES in Spanish and translated to English	CASES <i>hidden to protect confidentiality</i>
<b>Aquí se Sufre (Here you suffer)</b>	<p><b>“Aquí se sufre</b>, a veces sufre uno muchas cosas pero siempre tiene uno este su recompensa, y creo que de todas las cosas buenas que me he pasado, eso es, pues son los dos niños”- <b>“Here you suffer, sometimes you suffer many things but you have your reward and I think that of all the things that have happened to me, that’s it, it was for my two children”</b></p> <p><b>- Sufrir tiene propósito (Suffering has a purpose):</b>  “Dos caminos que vienen haciendo te superes o te pierdes” - <b>“there are two paths I could take, one where you succeed or one where you get lost”</b></p> <p><i>“Negative Case:</i>  “Yo viví con mi esposo, estuve allí, pero él no se hacía responsable con mi hijo. No se izo responsable de nosotros.</p>	
<b>Cuando tu sufres, todo valoras (When you suffer you value everything)</b>	<p>“Mi punto es <u>cuando tu sufres, todo valoras</u>. Cuando te lo ponen así como decimos en charola de plata, no lo sabes valorar”- <b>“My point is that when you suffer, you value everything. When they serve it on a platter, you don’t value it.”</b></p> <p><i>Negative case:</i>  “Yo siempre echaba la culpa a este país. Yo siempre decía que este país era malo. Cuando yo me salía a la calle yo salía de mi casa llorando y andaba en la calle llorando porque yo quería regresar a México porque tenía muchos problemas. Y precisamente le digo yo regreso a México quizá en este país no encontré una paz que yo necesitaba”</p>	
<b>Entre la espada y la pared (Between a rock and a hard place)</b>	<p>“Lo manejaba más o menos <u>entre la espada y la pared</u>---entre la espalda y la pared es cuando por ejemplo tú Tienes (show hand up to wall) un muro a muro, y tu estas aquí, y aquí te están empujando para cruzar este muro, entonces el muro era de que, del pensamiento de que tenía yo – <b>“I handled it like between a rock and a hard place ..it is like you are here .....and you have to cross that is what I thought”</b></p>	

Table A1 – continued

<b>Cuando despertabas decías donde estoy (Upon awakening I said, “where am I”)</b>	“Si, hay días, en ese tiempo habían días, en que a veces uno estaba durmiendo se paraba uno pero como que te despertabas pero pensaba uno que estaba todavía estaba uno en México en su casa, si, pero <u>cuando despertaba decías donde estoy</u> --- eso era un cosa muy difícil”- <i>“There are days, and in those times there were days that sometimes you wee sleeping and then you stood but like you would awake thinking that you were still in Mexico, in your home but upon awakening you said, “where am I” that was very difficult”</i>	
<b>Ponerse Fuerte (Become strong)</b>	“Yo pienso que si uno no <u>se pone fuerte</u> en la situación esta, Muchas veces a muchas personas le ha pasado que se llegan, que llega a un estado de suicidio de pensar las cosas como están a la mente”- <i>“I believe that if you don’t become strong in the situation, many times to many people that has happened that when they arrive, they get suicidal from the way they think in their mind”</i>	
<b>Tu sueño (Your dream)</b>	“Esa fuerza porque en mi mente siempre es, he tenido eso que algún día poder de realiza mi <u>sueño</u> de poder estar en este país legalmente, poder regresar a ver a mi familia que ha quedado atrás en México”- <i>“I have always had mental strength. I have believed that one day I would realice my dream of being in this country legally, able to return and see my family whom I have left behind in Mexico.”</i>	
<b>Pez en el agua “Fish in wáter”</b>	Es como <u>ser Pez en el agua</u> , uno está libre – <i>“It is like a fish in wáter, free”</i>	
<b>Sobrevivir &amp; Sobresalir (Survive &amp; succeed)</b>	<p>“A veces al pesar que estamos en este país de las posibilidades vamos solamente al día, al día porque no tenemos dinero para decirnos estamos en este país y nos damos una gran vida. No porque es como ir <u>sobreviviendo</u>” – <i>“To think that we are in this country of possibilities we are only living for the today. For the day because we don’t have money to say we are here to have a grand life”</i></p> <p><i>Negative case:</i>  “Ya no puedo luchar se me acabaron las fuerzas entonces me dicen hasta mis hijos no mama tienes que seguir adelante”</p> <p><i>Sobresalir:</i>“Para nosotros los inmigrantes latinos es estar aquí y aprovechar, si por ejemplo, si uno no aproveche en este país que ya está uno lejos de nuestras país y lejos de nuestras familias, entonces uno tiene que aprovechar”- <i>“For us Latino immigrants it is to be here and benefit from opportunities. For example, To take these opportunities because of being far from your country and family”</i></p>	
<b>Dios tiene un Proposito en mi vida (God has a purpose for my life)</b>	“No es que porque yo quise venir a este país yo estoy aquí, es porque <u>dios tiene un propósito en mi vida</u> ; dios tiene un plan entonces es unas de las cosas como yo he podrido sobrellevar todas estas dificultades”- <i>“I am not here because I wanted to come to this country, it is because God has a purpose for my life; God has a plan and it is one of the ways I have been able to manage these difficulties”</i>	

Table A1 – continued

<b>Mi Corazon esta dividido (My heart is divided)</b>	“Mi corazón está dividido. Allá están mis ancestros, esta mi mama sepultada, están mis raíces pero aquí están mis hijos, y por mis hijos esta es mi patria también” – <i>“My heart is divided. Overthere are my ancestors, my mom is buried and my roots- but here are my children and for my children this is my country too”</i>	
<b>Al regesar sentí como una extraña alla (Upon returning I felt like a stranger)</b>	Al regresar sentí como una extraña allá, <i>pueblo cambio</i> – <i>“Upon returning I felt like a stranger, the town changed”</i>  “Segunda vez que ya vine con otra mentalidad”- <i>“The second time I came with a different mentality”</i>	
<b>Esta es mi patria también (This is my country too)</b>	“Mi corazón está dividido. Allá están mis ancestros, allá esta mi mama sepultada, están mis raíces pero aquí están mis hijos, y por mis hijos <u>esta es mi patria también</u> . Por ellos yo tengo que luchar, me tienen que adoptar aunque no le gusten”- <i>“My heart is divided. Over there are my ancestors, my mom is buried and my roots- but here are my children and for my children this is my country too. And for them I have to fight, They have to adopt me even if they don’t like it”</i>	
<b>Sin papeles tiene uno menos oportunidades (Being undocumente d you have less opportunities)</b>	“Sin papeles tiene uno menos oportunidades como trabajo con beneficios” – <i>“being undocumented you have less opportunities, like work without benefits”</i>  “De saber los derechos, a veces, uno no lo busca por medio porque uno es indocumentado entonces uno cree que no tiene derecho a tal cosas” – <i>“About knowing you rights-sometimes you don’t look for them because you are afraid, you are undocumented so you believe that you don’t rights to certain things”</i>	
<b>Conocí personas que me han ayudado (I met people who helped)</b>	“Bueno ahora y hasta desde antes y ahora pues para mí lo mejor fue que tuve a mis hijos, de allí <u>conocí personas que me han ayudado</u> , con cuando ellos crecieron, yo conocí otras personas que me ayudaron inclusive tengo el ayuda de los doctores de ellos, ella habla bien el español” – <i>“Now and even before the best thing for me were my children, because of them I met people who helped with their growth. I met other people who helped including their doctors; they spoke Spanish well”</i>  <b>Entre amigos e apoyan (we support eachother):</b> “habían otras personas que sean del mismo país de uno pero a veces cuando te sientas ahora si a tomar lunch comienzan a platicar las historias de cómo uno viene y todo eso. Si, entonces lo que uno a veces aprende es de motivarte. Y ya <u>entre amigos algunas veces se apoyan</u> pues dale duro, si tu vienes por un ano pues dale ganas, dales gana y aprovecha”	

**Table A2 Land Use**

	<b>Lots</b>	<b>Sq. Ft. (000)</b>	<b>%</b>
1 – 2 family homes	8,591	19,941.7	17.2
Multi-family homes	6,377	26,574.8	22.9
Mixed Resid./Commercial	1,483	5,115.3	4.4
Commercial/Office	751	7,744.5	6.7
Industrial	856	11,278.6	9.7
Transportation/Utility	282	9,237.2	8.0
Institutions	195	22,485.4	19.4
Open Space/Recreation	43	8,106.0	7.0
Parking Facilities	461	3,034.3	2.6
Vacant Land	408	2,217.4	1.9
Miscellaneous	90	403.5	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19,537</b>	<b>116,138.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: New York City Department of City Planning (December, 2008)



**Table A3 Transportation: Bus Lines**

<b>Bus Line</b>	<b>Route</b>
Q18	30 <sup>th</sup> Ave – 58 <sup>th</sup> St – 65 <sup>th</sup> Pl
Q19	Astoria Blvd
Q47	73 <sup>rd</sup> St / 74 <sup>th</sup> St – LaGuardia Marine Air Terminal
Q49	35 <sup>th</sup> Ave
Q53	Woodside – Rockaway Park Limited
Q60	Queens Blvd
Q100	Riker’s Island Limited
Q101	Steinway St
Q102	31 <sup>st</sup> St – Roosevelt Island
Q103	Vernon Blvd
Q104	Broadway – 48 <sup>th</sup> St

Source: Metropolitan Transportation Authority of New York State (2009)

**Table A4 Total Populations: CB 1, Queens and NYC**

<b>Demographic Profile</b>	<b>Community Board 1</b>	<b>Queens</b>	<b>New York City</b>
Total Population	211,220	2,229,379	8,008,278

Source: New York City Department of City Planning: New York City Census FactFinder (Census 2000)

**Table A5 Total Populations: Ethnicities**

<b>Total Population</b>	<b>211,220</b>
White	88,606
Black/African American	21,581
American Indian and Alaska Native	475
Asian	27,283
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	116
Some other race	3,099
Two or more races, Non-Hispanic	12,368
Hispanic origin (of any race)	57,692

Source: New York City Department of City Planning: New York City Census FactFinder (Census 2000)

**Table A6 Demographics: Racial and Ethnic Groups among CB 1, Queens, and NYC**

<b>Demographic Profile</b>	<b>Community Board 1</b>	<b>Queens</b>	<b>New York City</b>
Total Population	211,220	2,229,379	8,008,278
White Non-Hispanic	88,606	732,895	2,801,267
Black/African American	21,581	422,831	1,962,154
Asian	27,283	389,303	780,229
American Indian and Alaska Native	475	6,275	17,321
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	116	861	2,829
Other race – Non-Hispanic	3,099	28,098	Does not exist
Two or More Races, Non-Hispanic	12,368	92,511	225,149
Hispanic Origin	57,692	556,605	2,160,554

Source: New York City Department of City Planning: New York City Census FactFinder (Census 2000)

**Table A7 Total Population: CB 1 Population Change over 10 Years**

CD 1	1990	2000	% of Total Pop (2000)	% Change
Total Population	188,549	211,220	100%	12%
White Non-Hispanic	101,934	88,606	41.9%	-13.1
Black/African American	20,223	21,581	10.2%	6.7%
Asian or Pacific Islander	16,176	27,399	13.0%	69.4%
American Indian and Alaska Native	437	475	None indicated	8.7%
Other race – Non- Hispanic	982	3,099	1.7%	215.6%
Two or More Races, Non-Hispanic	-	12,368	5.9%	-
Hispanic Origin	48,797	57,692	27.3%	18.2%

Source: Population Division – NYC Department of City Planning (October 2001).

**Table A8 Total Populations: Gender****Community Board 1**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% Total Population</b>
Female	101,679	48.1%
Male	109,541	51.9%

Source: Population Division – NYC Department of City Planning (October 2001).

**Table A9 Total Populations: Age**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% Total population</b>
Under 5 years	11,864	5.6%
5 to 9 years	11,390	5.4%
10 to 14 years	10,243	4.8%
15 to 19 years	12,137	5.7%
20 to 24 years	19,593	9.3%
25 to 44 years	83,124	39.4%
45 to 64 years	39,643	18.8%
65 years and over	23,226	11.0%

Source: Population Division – NYC Department of City Planning (October 2001).

**Table A10 List of General Institutions**

<b>Type of Institution</b>	<b>Total</b>
Public Day Cares	9
Private Day Cares	25
Public Head Start Programs	6
Senior Centers (two are located in housing projects; one is specific to Latino culture)	9
Libraries	5
City-Owned Cultural Institution – American Museum of the Moving Image	1
Residential Facility – A Homeless Shelter for Families	1
Drop-In Centers/Food Pantries	11
Public Safety and Criminal Justice Facilities	21
Hospitals, Nursing Homes, and Ambulatory Programs	19
Chemical Dependency Services	9
Mental Health Services	9
Developmental Disabilities Services	18

Source: New York City Department of City Planning (December 2008)



**Table A11 List of Educational Institutions**

<b>Type of School</b>	<b>Total</b>
Public Elementary and Secondary Schools	27
Public Specialized Schools such as leadership for youth schools	2
Special Public High Schools such as Horizons High School and The Island Academy	2
Private/Parochial Elementary and Secondary Schools	12
Subtotal	43

Source: New York City Department of City Planning (December 2008)

**Table A12 Income Support for CD1**

<b>Income Support</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2008</b>
Public Assistance (AFDC, Home Relief)	6,564	3,321
Supplemental Security	7,346	6,243
Medicaid Only	13,969	40,723
Total Persons Assisted	27,879	50,287
Percent of Population	13.2	23.8

Source: New York City Department of City Planning (December 2008)

**Table A13 Characteristics about Astoria, New York**

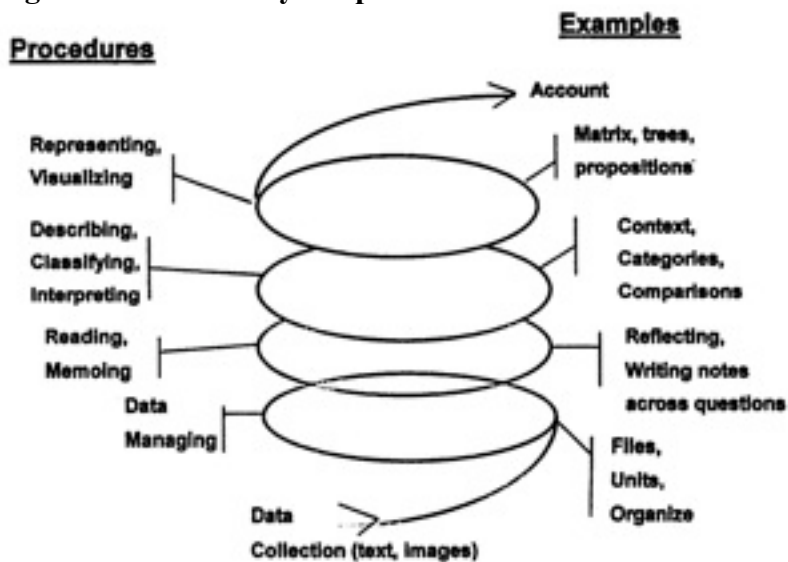
<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Total Participants</b>
Location: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close to Everything</li> </ul>	4	4
Familial Connection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Here</li> <li>• Crossed the Border with Group</li> <li>• Knew Someone in Astoria</li> </ul>	5 2 1	8
Good People at Church	2	2
Building Condemned	1	1
Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the Best</li> <li>• Safe</li> <li>• No Discrimination</li> <li>• Know Good Latinos</li> <li>• Tranquil</li> </ul>	1 1 2 3 2	4
Positive Feeling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beautiful</li> <li>• Enjoy</li> <li>• Feels Like Born Here</li> <li>• Like Buildings</li> </ul>	4 4 1 1	6

**Table A14 Demographics: Participants**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Time in the U.S (years)</b>	<b>Age at immigration</b>	<b>Entrance into the U.S</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>
I1	39	Female	17	17	Undocumented	Mexico
I2	37	Male	18	19	Undocumented	Mexico
I3	37 – 39	Female	21	15 – 17	Undocumented	Mexico
I4	37 – 39	Male	20	15 – 17	Undocumented	Mexico
I5	23	Female	8	15	Undocumented	Mexico
I6	26	Female	9	16	Visa	Mexico
I7	30	Male	14	16	Undocumented	Mexico
I8	35	Female	8	43	Undocumented	Mexico
I9	42	Male	25	18	Undocumented	Mexico
I10	40	Female	17	23	Undocumented	Mexico
I11	20	Female	17	3	Undocumented	Mexico
I12	36	Female	19	17	Undocumented	Mexico
I13	39	Male	22	17	Undocumented	Mexico
I14	37	Female	20	17	Undocumented	Mexico
I15	29	Male	3	26	Undocumented	Mexico
I16	26	Female	9	17	False Visa	Ecuador

## APPENDIX B FIGURES

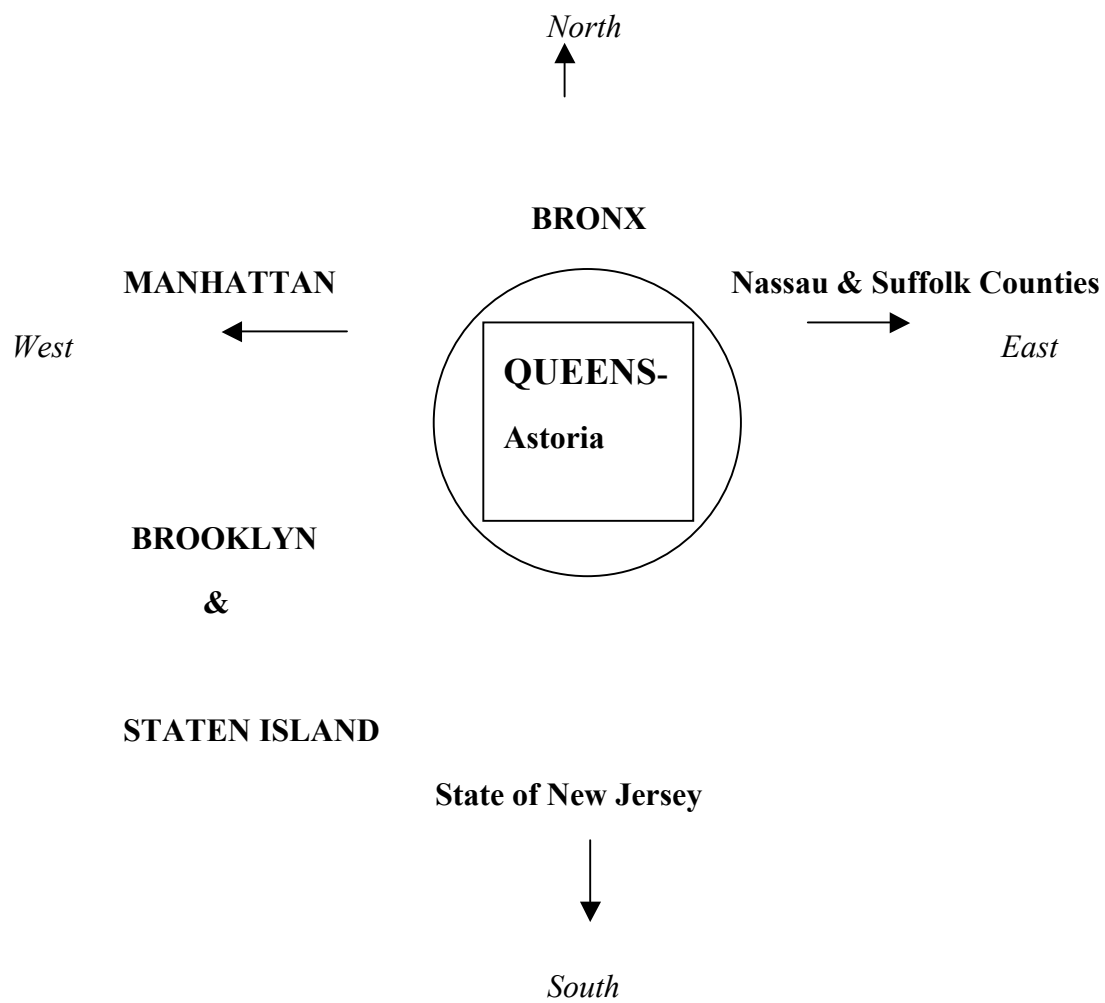
Figure B1 Data Analysis Spiral



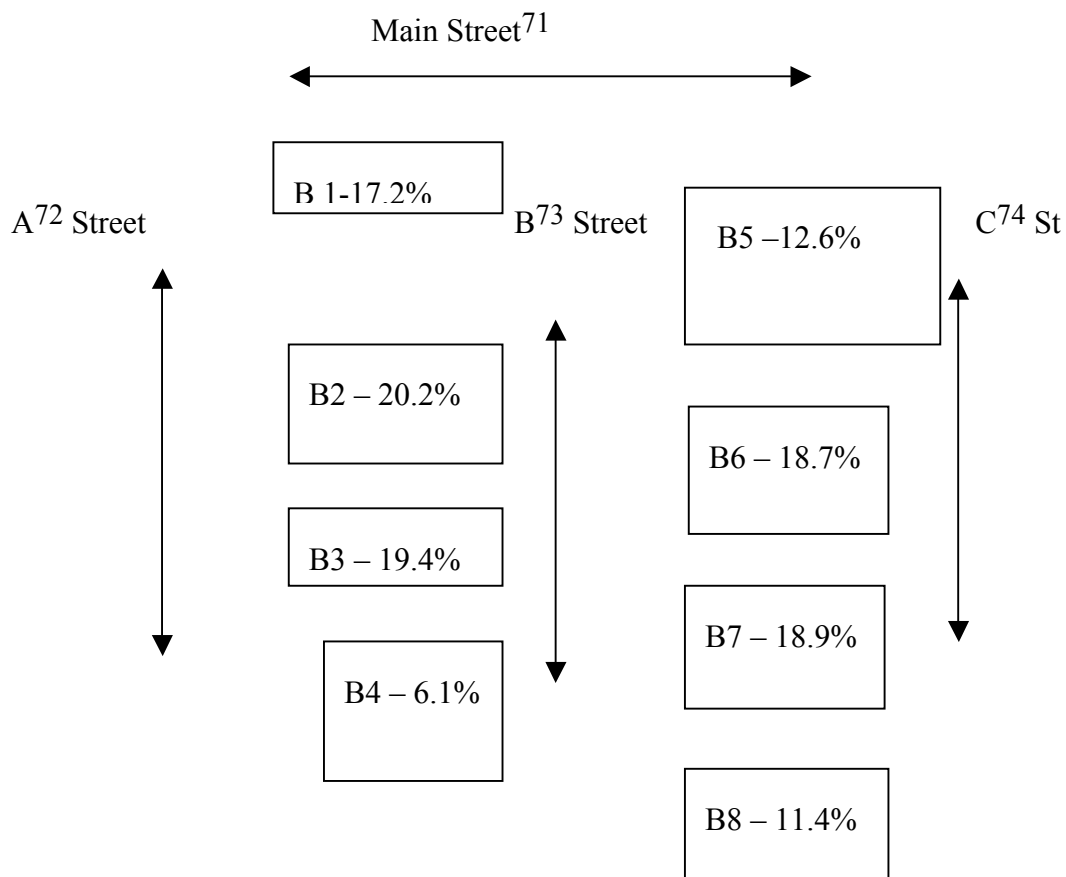

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Source: Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

**Figure B2 Diagram of the Five Boroughs in New York City**



**Figure B3 Census Tracts in Astoria: Percent Change of Latino Population from 1990 to 2000**



**\*LEGEND**

Census Tract - % change B - Block

Source: New York City Department of City Planning Queens Community District 1 Report (December 2008)

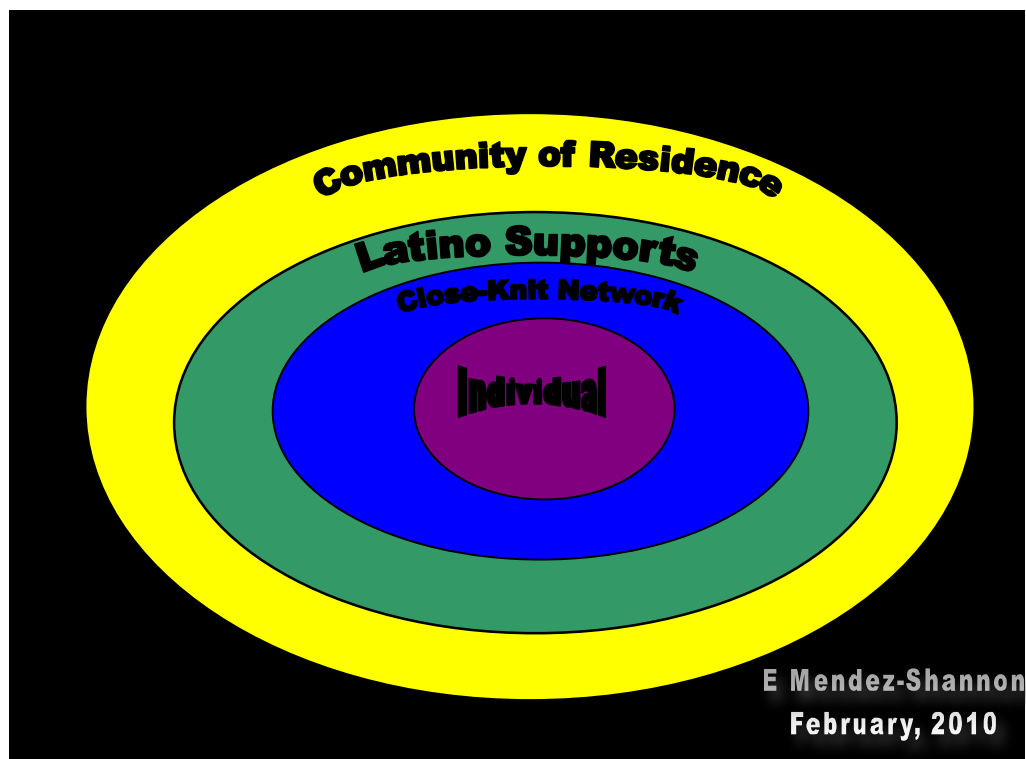
<sup>71</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>72</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>73</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>74</sup> Pseudonym

Figure B4 Conceptual Diagram for Community



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Note: Elizabeth Mendez-Shannon created this figure on February 2010 based on the findings of this study.



**Figure B5 Bio-Psycho-Socio-Spiritual Dimensions Assessment**

<b>Table 2. <i>The Bio-Psycho-Socio-Spiritual Dimensions of Assessment</i></b>	
<b>Biological</b>	Basic needs—food, clothing, shelter Comprehensive health Physical attributes and abilities Physical environment
<b>Psychological</b>	Individual history Personality style and makeup Intelligence and mental abilities Self-concept and identity
<b>Sociocultural</b>	Family (through biology, choice, or circumstance) Friends Community Ethnicity Social environment Political environment Economic environment
<b>Spiritual</b>	Sense of self, in relation to the world Sense of meaning and purpose Value base Religious life

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Source: Graybeal, C. (2001). Strengths-based social work assessment: Transforming the dominant paradigm. *Families in Society* 82(3), 233-242

## APPENDIX C DOCUMENTS

### **C1 Bilingual Project Description Created for Key Informants and Interviewees**

I met Elizabeth Mendez, a researcher working on her dissertation study. She is interested in learning more about the experience of being new Latino immigrants from immigrants themselves. Many Latinos/as come to the United States. They are a very big part of this country's past, its foundation as well as its future. She would like to hear your story in order to inform current research, practice and policy. She explains that the interview would be confidential and that your identification would be protected through verbal consent, the use of a coding system, and storage under lock and password protected. Would you like to share your story with her? If so, I can set up a meeting. What is the best way to contact you?

### **Project Description Created for Key Informants and Interviewees in Spanish**

Me encontré con Elizabeth Méndez, un estudiante doctoral trabajando en su tesis estudio. Ella está interesada en aprender más sobre la experiencia de ser nuevos inmigrantes latinos de los propios inmigrantes. Muchos Latinos y Latinas vienen a los Estados Unidos. Son una parte muy grande de este país, su fundación, así como su futuro. Le gustaría conocer tu historia con el fin de informar a la investigación actual, la práctica y la política. Ella explica que la entrevista será confidencial y que su identificación será protegida mediante consentimiento verbal, el uso de un sistema de codificación, toda información bajo llave y computadora protegido con contraseña. ¿Le gustaría compartir su historia con ella? Si es así, puedo configurar una reunión. ¿Cuál es la mejor forma de ponerse en contacto con usted?

## **C2 Interview Guide in English**

### *Preliminary questions (establishing rapport; building relationship)*

1. Where were you born? Did you grow up there? What was it like growing up there?  
-Tell me about your family

### *Core questions (probing for descriptions)*

2. What made you decide to come to the United States?
3. What is it like for Latino immigrants to live in the United States?
4. Did you have challenges when you started living in the United States? If so, what were they?
5. Has anything been helpful for you living in the United States? If so what was it?
6. How do you manage all this?
7. How did you arrive here in this neighborhood?
8. What did you expect when you came here?  
-How will you know if you made it?
9. What advice would you give to someone coming to the United States from your hometown?

### *Closing questions*

10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
11. In your opinion, did the questions seem clear? Should I change anything?
12. May I contact you in the near future in order to clarify some of the information you shared with me?
13. Do you know anyone who might be interested in sharing their story?

### **C3 Interview Guide in Spanish**

#### *Preliminary questions (establishing rapport; building relationship)*

1. ¿Dónde nació usted? ¿Allí Crecio? ¿Como crecen allí?
- Cuénteme sobre su familia

#### *Core questions (probing for descriptions)*

2. ¿Qué te hizo decidir venir a los Estados Unidos?
3. ¿Cómo es para los inmigrantes latinos que viven en los Estados Unidos?
4. ¿Tuvistes problemas cuando empezastes a vivir en los Estados Unidos? En caso afirmativo, ¿cuáles son?
5. Ha sido algo útil para ti viviendo en los Estados Unidos? En caso afirmativo ¿cómo?
6. ¿Cómo manejas todo esto?
7. ¿Cómo llegastes a este barrio?
8. ¿Qué esperabas cuando usted vino aquí?
- ¿Cómo sabes si lograstes lo que quisistes?
9. ¿Qué consejo le darías a alguien queriendo venir a los Estados Unidos de su país?

#### *Closing questions*

10. ¿Hay algo más que te gustaría compartir conmigo?
11. ¿En su opinión, si las preguntas parecen claras? ¿Debo cambiar algo?
12. ¿Puedo ponerme en contacto con usted in algunos días o meses para clarificar unos de sus puntos?
13. ¿Me recomiendas alguien más que puede estar interesado en compartir su historia?

## C4 Consent Script in English

### CONSENT SCRIPT

I invite you to participate in a research study. My name is Elizabeth Mendez-Shannon and I am from The University of Iowa. The purpose of the study is to learn about the experience of being a new Latino immigrant in the United States and identify any factors that are barriers or facilitators in the lives of Latino immigrants.

I am inviting you to be in this study because you are an adult eighteen years old or older, first generation migrating to the United States and living in the United States for one or more years. I would like to hear your story. I obtained your name and address from (*insert referring person*). Approximately 25 people will take part in this study at the University of Iowa.

If you agree to participate, I would like to meet with you and talk about questions that relate to being a Latino immigrant living in the United States such as why you came to the United States, what you expected after coming to the US, and challenges you faced after arriving here. I will record our interview on a digital recorder. This interview will be about one to two hours. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and you may stop the interview at any time by letting me know. After the interview, you will be asked if I may contact you within three months to meet to review your responses from the transcripts of your interview. You will also be invited to a community event where the results of this study will be shared. If you agree I will keep your name and contact information so that I can tell you when and where the event will take place.

We will keep the information you provide confidential, however federal regulatory agencies and the University of Iowa Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. To protect your privacy and keep all of your responses confidential, I will not use your real name in any of the notes or recordings made for the study. We will use a number and not your name to identify your responses in the interview. The study identification code will be linked to your name. The list linking your name and your study identification code will be stored in a secure location that is accessible only to me, the researcher Elizabeth Mendez-Shannon. I will store all paper copies in a locked office and all electronic records in password protected computer files. If I write a report about this study we will do so in such a way that you cannot be identified.

Despite my efforts to minimize risks to you, there still may be some emotional impact. Talking about important issues such as hardships and legal experiences may cause emotional reactions. These emotional reactions may come up during the interview or may evolve later on after some time when processing what was shared during the

interview. Moreover, any legal risks to participating will be minimized because of the strict confidentiality and privacy measures during the interview process as well as with the handling of data collecting, storage and presentation. In order to provide you with support from current and possible community resources after the interview, I have created a Resource List of counseling, family and youth services, and food pantries. This list was created to provide you with support should you need it.

You may not benefit personally from being in this study. However we hope that others may benefit in the future from what we learn as a result of this study.

You will not have any costs for being in this research study. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Elizabeth Mendez-Shannon 138 Haviland Road, Ridgefield, Connecticut, 203-300-4168. If you experience a research-related injury, please contact: Elizabeth Mendez-Shannon at 203-300-4168, or Susan Murty at 319-335-3628. If you have questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact the Human Subjects Office, 300 College of Medicine Administration Building, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242, (319) 335-6564, or e-mail [irb@uiowa.edu](mailto:irb@uiowa.edu). To offer input about your experiences as a research subject or to speak to someone other than the research staff, call the Human Subjects Office at the number above.

If you agree to be in the study, by saying yes now we can begin the interview or we can arrange for a time to meet again after you have had a chance to consider your participation. We will schedule the study procedures at mutually convenient times. If you do not wish to be in the study, please let me know now or at any time. Thank you very much for your consideration of my study.

## C5 Consent Script in Spanish

Les invito a participar en un estudio de investigación. Mi nombre es Elizabeth Méndez-Shannon y yo soy de la Universidad de Iowa. El objetivo del estudio es conocer la experiencia de ser un nuevo inmigrante latino en los Estados Unidos e identificar los factores que son obstáculos o facilitadores en la vida de los inmigrantes latinos.

Usted está invitado a participar en este estudio porque usted es un adulto dieciocho años de edad o más, de primera generación que emigra a los Estados Unidos y que vive en los Estados Unidos para una o más años. Me gustaría oír su historia. Obtuve su nombre y dirección de parte de (insertar refiriéndose persona). Aproximadamente 25 personas tomarán parte en este estudio de la Universidad de Iowa.

Si usted está de acuerdo en participar, me gustaría reunirme con usted y hablar de cuestiones que se refieren a ser un inmigrante latino, viviendo en los Estados Unidos, sobre temas como la razón por la cual vino a los Estados Unidos, lo que se esperaba después de venir a los EE.UU., y los desafíos que se enfrentan después de llegar aquí. Voy a grabar nuestra entrevista en una grabadora digital. Esta entrevista será alrededor de una a dos horas. Usted puede saltar cualquier pregunta que usted no desea responder y puede parar la entrevista en cualquier momento, solo dígame si ese es el caso. Después de la entrevista, le preguntaría si se me permite contactarle dentro de tres meses para examinar sus respuestas de la transcripción de su entrevista. También le invitó a un evento comunitario cuando los resultados de este estudio serán compartidos. Si está de acuerdo voy a mantener su nombre e información de contacto a fin de que le puedo decir cuándo y dónde se realizará el acto.

Su información será mantenida confidencial, sin embargo las agencias reguladoras federales y la Universidad de Iowa en el sector de Revisión Institucional (un comité que examina y aprueba los estudios de investigación) puede revisar y copiar los registros relativos a esta investigación. Para proteger su privacidad y mantener todas sus respuestas confidenciales, no voy a usar su nombre real en ninguna de las notas o las grabaciones realizadas para el estudio. Vamos a utilizar un número y no su nombre para identificar sus respuestas en la entrevista. El número es el código de identificación vinculado a su nombre mantenido por una lista. Esta lista de identificación será mantenida en un sitio seguro que es accesible sólo por yo, investigadora Elizabeth Méndez-Shannon. También, voy a guardar todas las copias en papel en una oficina encerrada y todos los registros electrónicos protegidos con contraseña en archivos de computadora. Si escribiré un informe sobre este estudio solo lo hare de tal manera que usted no pueda ser identificado.

A pesar de mis esfuerzos para reducir al mínimo los riesgos para usted, todavía puede sentir un impacto emocional. Hablar sobre temas tan importantes como las dificultades y las experiencias legales pueden provocar reacciones emocionales. Estas reacciones emocionales pueden venir durante la entrevista o puede evolucionar más tarde después de algún tiempo. Por otra parte, cualquier riesgos legales por participando se reducirán al mínimo debido a la estricta medidas de confidencialidad y privacidad usadas durante el

proceso de la entrevista, así como con la manipulación de datos recogida, almacenamiento y presentación. Con el fin de ofrecerle apoyo de posibles recursos en la comunidad después de la entrevista, he creado una lista de recursos de consejería, servicios para familia y jóvenes, y de alimentos. Esta lista fue creada para brindar apoyo con usted en caso de que lo necesiten.

Usted no tendrá ningún costo por estar en este estudio de investigación. No se le paga por estar en este estudio de investigación.

Tomando parte en este estudio de investigación es completamente voluntaria. Si usted decide no participar en este estudio, o si usted deja de participar en cualquier momento, usted no será penalizado o perder todos los beneficios para los que usted calificar de otra manera.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta sobre el estudio de investigación, pueden ponerse en contacto con Elizabeth Méndez-Shannon 138 Haviland Road, Ridgefield, Connecticut, 203-300-4168. Si experimenta lesiones a causa de este estudio, por favor póngase en contacto con: Elizabeth Méndez-Shannon a 203-300-4168, o Susan Murty a 319-335-3628. Si tiene preguntas acerca de los derechos de los sujetos de la investigación, póngase en contacto con la Oficina de Sujetos Humanos, 300 la Facultad de Medicina Edificio de la Administración, la Universidad de Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242, (319) 335-6564, o e-mail [irb@uiowa.edu](mailto:irb@uiowa.edu). Para ofrecer aportaciones sobre sus experiencias como sujeto de investigación o para hablar con alguien que no sea el personal de investigación, llame a la Oficina de Sujetos Humanos en el número anterior.

Si está de acuerdo en participar en el estudio, dígame ahora así podemos empezar la entrevista o si no, podemos hacer una cita para reunirnos de nuevo después que usted tenga la oportunidad de considerar su participación. Organizaremos la participación en el estudio con conveniencia para ambas partes. Si usted no desea participar en el estudio, por favor hágamelo saber ahora o en cualquier momento. Muchas gracias por su consideración de mi estudio.



## C6 Community Outline

### Community Cultural Assessment

Direct Observation

- Maps, people congregate etc.

Interviews

- Key informants, diverse groups. Look for the contrast, other perspectives

Community Documents

- Newspapers, fliers, government statistics, telephone book

#### Recording the data:

##### Validity and reliability of the sources of data

*First impressions*

*Multitude of perspectives*

*Recording the data*

*Analysis: Population, community, group level. Remember to look at trends and trajectories*

*Four basic questions: How do*

1. *data vary with time*
2. *data compare with similar communities*
3. *data categories vary within same community*
4. *data have implications for health and health care.*

Please use these categories as the outline in your community notebook.  
Also use these as the outline in your focused-community notebook.

#### I. Community as a Place in Time [environment]

##### A. Spatial dimensions (map these out – working documents)

1. Size and boundaries
2. Regional position
3. Geophysical and climate factors
4. Land use
5. Housing
6. Transportation and communication
7. Mental maps

##### B. Temporal (yearly, monthly, weekly, daily working calendars and schedules)

1. Community history
2. Cyclic population movement
3. Economic cycles
4. Psychological cycles
5. Cyclical crisis

II. Community as a population [people] (relationships between the population demographics)

- A. The total population (size, density, distribution)
- B. Temporary sub-population
- C. Biological composition of the population (age and sex)
- D. Racial and ethnic groups
- E. Income, occupation and educational level
- F. Residential and household characteristics

III. Community as a social system [social structure]

- A. Economic institutions
- B. Government, politics and law enforcement
- C. Domestic organization
- D. Religious institutions
- E. Educational institutions

F. Recreation

- G. Voluntary organizations
- H. Horizontal stratification
- I. Vertical segmentation

Source: Dr. L. Kemp, personal communication, February 2, 2009

Modification of Arensberg, C. & Kimball, S. (1972). *The Community as Object and as Sample. Culture and Community*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. p. 7-27

## C7 Community Profile

### Community Profile

#### 1. Community Outline: Physical and Social Descriptions

- a. Astoria as a Place in Time - “The Environment”
  - Location – size, boundaries, land use, transportation and communication, community history
- b. Community as a Population – “People”
  - Demographics – population, biological composition of the population (age and sex)
- c. Community as a Social System
  - Social Structure
  - Social Supports

#### 2. Observations and Informal Interviews

- a. Diverse Cultures Coexisting (DCC Factor) – (by E. Mendez-Shannon)
  - Formal Institutions lead the way to an inclusive community
    - such as spiritual institutions
    - formal community organizations
    - educational institutions
    - police
  - Informal Social Support
    - ethnic community groups
    - Cursillo Movement
    - cultural groups
    - Informal community-wide collaboration
- b. Access to Services

Source: Adapted from The Community Outline (Dr. L. Kemp, personal communication, February 2, 2009)

**C8 Sample Observational Protocol**

Length of Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
	<b>SKETCH OF SITE</b>

Source: Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

**C9 Bilingual Resource List**

## Resource List

## Lista de Servicios de Apoyo

**Queens North Family Center**

23-40 Astoria Blvd.

Astoria, NY 11102

Phone: (718) 726-9790

Fax: (718) 728-8817

Hours: 9-5 M-F

Services: early childhood, family center, senior housing, mental health

\*Counseling is offered in 3 clinics; bilingual services are referred in the community

Servicios de familia, terapia ofrecida en español.

**Holy Trinity Church**25-36 37<sup>th</sup> Street

Astoria, NY 11103

718-278-0036 speak with Roseanne

Services: Active food pantry beginning October.

Servicios de comida empiezan en octubre

**Good Will**4-21 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Astoria, New York 11102

718-777-6312

Services: Active food pantry services; mental health professionals on staff

Servicios de comida y también terapia

**St. Marget's Mary**9-18 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Astoria, NY 11102

718-721-9020

Services: Active food pantry services; youth services

Servicios de comida y también actividades para jóvenes

**Our Lady of Mount Carmel**

23-25 Newtown Avenue

Astoria, NY 11102

718-278-1834 speak with Pastor

Services: Bilingual Family services from community leaders

Servicios de familia en español hablando con líderes de la comunidad o el pastor

## C10 IRB Approval Memo

**Human Subjects Office**

340 Medicine Administration Building  
Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1101  
319-335-6564 Fax 319-335-7310  
hso@iowa.edu  
<http://research.iowa.edu/hso>

**IRB ID #:** 200808738

**To:** Elizabeth Mendez

**From:** IRB-02 DHHS Registration # IRB00000100,  
Univ of Iowa, DHHS Federalwide Assurance # FWA00003007

**Re:** Life After Immigration for New Latino Immigrants, Vida despues inmigracion para Latino inmigrantes

**Approval Date:** 09/09/08

**Next IRB Approval  
Due Before:** 09/09/09

**Type of Application:**

- New Project  
 Continuing Review  
 Modification

**Type of Application Review:**

- Full Board:  
Meeting Date:  
 Expedited  
 Exempt

**Approved for Populations:**

- Children  
 Prisoners  
 Pregnant Women, Fetuses, Neonates

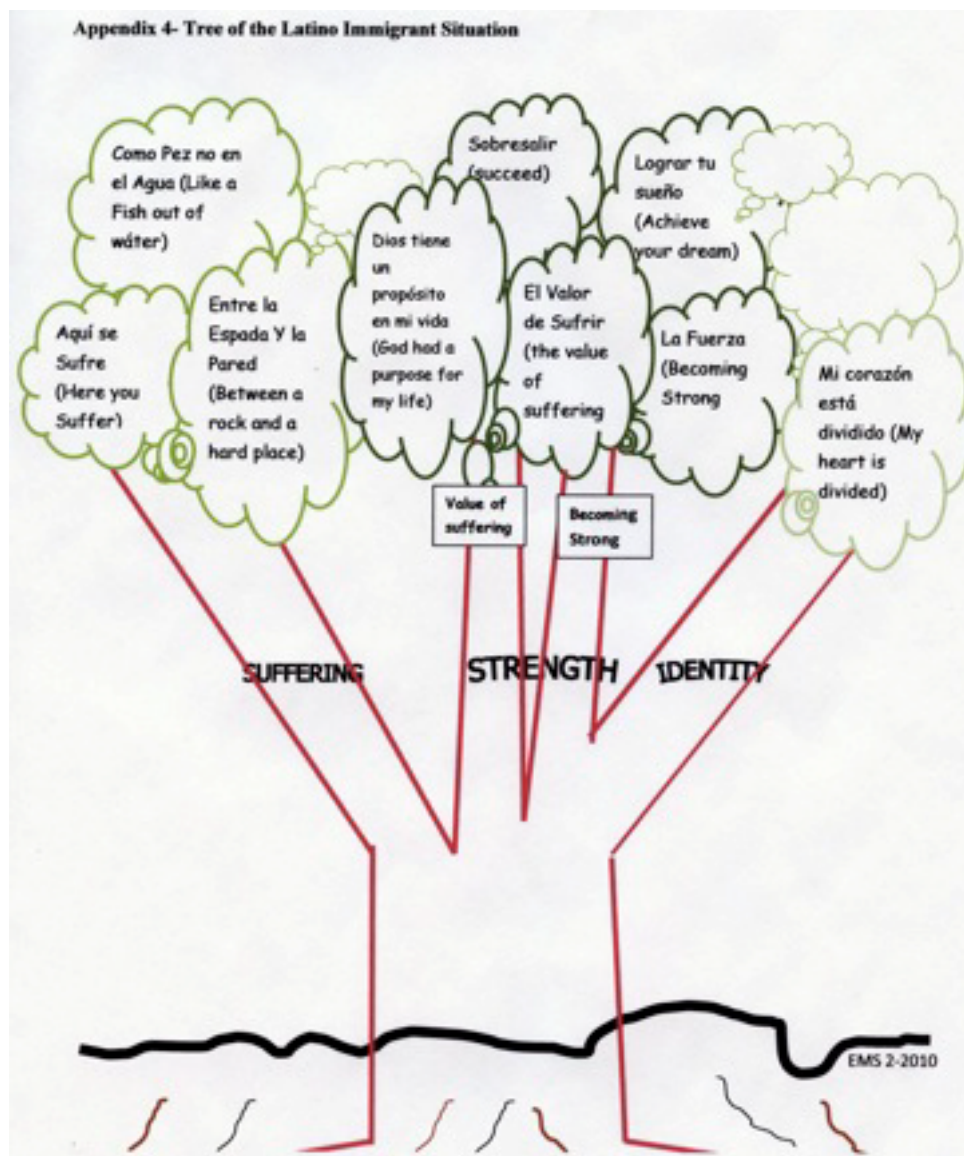
**Source of Support:**

This approval has been electronically signed by IRB Chair:  
Janet Karen Williams, PHD  
09/09/08 1708

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT  
FOR RESEARCH

<sup>75</sup> Name of thesis on Approval Memo was changed to the current title

## C11 Tree of the Latino Immigrant Situation



Note: Elizabeth Mendez-Shannon constructed this image on February 2010 based on the findings of this study

## **C12 Participant Profiles**

### **AN INSIDE PERSPECTIVE: GETTING TO KNOW THE PARTICIPANTS**

I am grateful for meeting the individuals who put their trust in me and who wholeheartedly shared their stories of triumph and struggle. While some spoke with tenderness and sometimes even humor, others shed tears and felt connected to me as Latina immigrant sisters. The participants also revealed that by sharing their stories they felt it was a positive, “uplifting” and “healing” experience, as many have never shared their story with anyone else before and carried that burden within.

Even though these sixteen Latino immigrants came from different parts of Latin America, they shared commonalities (See APPENDIX A TABLES for Demographics). Of the sixteen individuals who participated in the study, five were from El Estado de Guerrero, Mexico; four were from El Estado de Puebla, Mexico; three were from El Estado de Mexico, Mexico; two were from El Estado de Morelos, Mexico; one was from Chiapas, Mexico; and one was from Cañas, Ecuador. In the following section, I will provide brief highlights about these specific Latino origins, however, it is important to note that these descriptions include the larger geographic boundaries of the small towns from where the participants previously resided. Specific descriptions about their towns will be included in the individual profiles. The profiles are brief and include specific commonalities among all of the participants such as key words they used to describe their country of origin, why they immigrated to the U.S, how they entered the U.S, what stood out most about them during our interactions, why they chose to live in Astoria, and anything they would like to see changed or any recommendations they would like to



offer. These brief snapshots about the 16 participants offer a small window into their lives. I offer them with respect and honor to them.

### **El Estado de Guerrero, Mexico**

#### ***Carla, Juan, Dolores, Franco and Susana***

El Estado de Guerrero is one of the States in Mexico. It has a population of 3,115,202. Most of Guerrero's income and a significant portion of its employment derive from agriculture (coffee, tobacco, bananas, rice, sugarcane, corn, and cacao) and mining (silver, gold, copper, lead, antimony, and iron). Two major colonial towns are now resort centers including the city of Acapulco (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, n.d.).

#### *Carla*

Carla lived with her family in Mexico. She described her town to be small and rural. To help her family financially, her sisters would travel to Mexico City to find work. She believed that it was very difficult to survive in Mexico. Carla entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when she was 17 years old; she is now 39. Her husband had already immigrated to the United States and so she decided to join him. Together they would work and combine their money to buy land in Mexico, a goal they have accomplished. In fact, they are currently building a home on their land. One of the things that stood out about Carla was the way she described her experience of crossing the border. She said she just wanted to "give up" until she felt a "push" from those crossing with her, people she didn't even know. She said, "empujando nos llevaban a llegar" that is "because of their pushing I made it here." Today she looks back and feels astonished about all of her experiences so far. She arrived in Astoria and has lived in the same apartment for 15 years. If there was one thing she could change it

would be that all undocumented immigrants would have amnesty. She said that she would never give up hope on this dream.

Juan

Juan described his town as a small town. He said there was lack of work and therefore not enough money to live. Juan entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when he was 19 years old; he is now 37. He immigrated to the United States to “get ahead.” His phrase “one doesn’t die of hunger” means that when he is faced with a severe problem, he always finds a solution. Crossing the border was “easy.” His plan while in the U.S was to find ways “to succeed.” Juan believes that he met this goal of getting ahead, though not as “someone rich”, but as “someone who can get by.” He found that by living in the U.S he became different because life here was different. What stood out most about Juan was his strong belief about second chances. He said that he has been given several opportunities to practice being a good person, such as when he is confronted with maltreatment at work. Juan described Astoria as one of the best communities in New York because of how close everything is, such as schools, hospitals, churches and parks. He also found it “relieving” to connect with other Latinos from different countries who were “good people.” If there were one thing he could change it would be his immigration status. Juan believes that with residence documents, he could do more in the U.S.

Dolores

Dolores described her hometown as a very difficult place to live, particularly because she couldn’t sustain her household. Dolores entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when she was 35 years old; she is now 43. Although her

husband had immigrated to the United States, she said he forgot about his family and didn't send them money. Dolores said she became a "mother and a father" to her children. Her middle born son noticed that his father hadn't sent money and sought out to find him when he was 14 years old. Eventually, she and her two other sons immigrated to the United States to reunite as a family. Her relationship with her husband, however, never recovered. The first time Dolores crossed the border, she traveled with her youngest son, and they were robbed at gunpoint. The second time she crossed the border, she traveled with her second husband. The second time was even more difficult because her toenails had fallen off and her husband had to carry her for the rest of the way so that they could complete the journey. She has lived in Astoria since arriving in New York and enjoys how everything is so close, such as stores, schools and doctors. What stood out most about Dolores was how she no longer felt she had the strength to fight; she has kidney failure and receives daily dialysis treatments. Dolores had one final thing to add as her statement. She recommends that as new immigrants travel to the U.S, they should work towards keeping their families together and not separate.

### *Franco*

Franco described his hometown as a place that was difficult to live in because of poverty. He wasn't able to go to school because he couldn't afford to buy the uniform, and so he was rejected and told to leave. His older brother helped with the household finances. Franco always had a goal of marrying his childhood sweetheart. He worked many jobs including tending sheep and cutting tree logs so that he could earn enough money to get married. Franco entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when he was 18 years old; he is now 42. He came to the U.S because a friend

invited him, and at that time, he took the journey with five friends. He has crossed the Mexican border 17 times and could recall the many different experiences he encountered. The one that stood out the most was one in which he waited for a train to stop and as soon as it did, he roped himself to it, the train taking him all the way to Los Angeles. His goal was to come to the U.S to work, save money then return to Mexico to get married. He met his goal of working and succeeded to build the only house in his town. He didn't return, however, in time to marry his childhood sweetheart because she had already married someone else. He has lived in California, Michigan, Florida, Manhattan and now Astoria, where he has lived for the past 18 years. He recommends that new immigrants come to the U.S to work and save money instead of spending it just as quickly as they earn it.

### Susana

Susana entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border with her mother when she was three years old; she is now 20. Susana has never returned to Mexico and doesn't have any memory of crossing the border with her mother. What stood out most about Susana was the way she talked about helping her family. She works and saves half of her income for school and the other half goes towards rent. If there was one thing she could change, it would be the opportunities given to the youth, particularly concerning education. She believes that given the chance to go to college and receive financial aid, she could fulfill her dream of becoming a teacher. She offered advice to those who have the privilege of an education encouraging them to study, especially since there are so many other youths who would be grateful for such an opportunity and wished they could and don't have the opportunity.

**El Estado de Puebla, Mexico**  
***Maria, Pablo, Alicia and Flor***

El Estado de Puebla is one of the States in Mexico. It has a population of 5,383,133 (MEXonline, n.d.). Puebla contains works of art and has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Puebla's city is one of the Mexico's largest cities and an industrial, commercial and tourism center (MEXonline, n.d.).

*Maria*

Maria described her town as "beautiful" and a place where everyone "coexists" with family and friends. Maria entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border. Maria immigrated to join her sister, her goal being to visit the United States and work to help her parents for one year. However, she met her husband within six months and, to this date, has not returned to Mexico. She said she did not cross the border with too much difficulty except feeling very sick, with a high fever throughout the journey. What stood out the most about Maria was her happy disposition, feeling secure about her life in the United States. She recommends that immigrants should not come to the United States because being away from family is very difficult.

*Pablo*

Pablo described his town as a peaceful community. He said that in Mexico he helped his father a lot and was a hard worker. Pablo entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border and felt he didn't suffer when he crossed. Pablo immigrated so that he could "succeed" in life, and since his brother was already in the United States, he joined him. His goal was to become independent and take care of

himself. He planned to work for one year and then return to Mexico, but his plan changed when he met his wife and to date, he has not returned to Mexico. What stood out the most about Pablo was how he felt about the Latino culture. In his spare time he helps coordinate dance routines for Mexican teenage girls who want to celebrate their *Quinceañeras*, which is a cultural tradition symbolizing a coming of age for them. Pablo believes that he has not met his goals of succeeding because of being underpaid and overworked. He recommends that as new immigrants immigrate to the United States and settle, they should help other new immigrants to do the same.

### Alicia

Alicia described her town as beautiful and enjoyed the “warmth” of her community because everyone knew each other. Alicia came to the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when she was 17 years old; she is now 36. Alicia immigrated to become independent from her parents, joining her older sister who was already living in the U.S. Her goal was to buy a house in Mexico, and although she hasn’t met her goal yet, she has helped her family financially. Alicia crossed the border with her Aunt the first time and with a coyote/guide the second time. What stood out the most about Alicia was her positive disposition when she talked about dealing with difficult situations. She felt supported by her family and had a job immediately upon arriving in the U.S. Since the Department of Housing and the American Red Cross condemned her apartment in Astoria, she moved in with friends and is currently living with relatives until she finds a new home. If there were one thing she could change it would be to have one more opportunity to see her parents who are still in Mexico.

Flor

Flor described her town as a town in “ruins,” “almost dead.” She grew up on a farm and always felt the warmth of her family and the people in her town. Despite the sad tone of the physical description of her town, she always believed that one day she’d return and live as an elder. Flor entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when she was 17 years old; she is now 37. Flor immigrated to the United States to improve the financial situation of her family. Although her father had traveled back and forth helping the family survive, it wasn’t enough. Flor remembered how she felt when her mother approached her and told her that she didn’t have a choice but to immigrate to the United States to help the family. Flor said, “senti un balde de agua fria me callo” that is “I felt as if a bucket of cold water had fallen on me.” Flor felt forced to leave her family and follow a path she resented. Flor’s mom planned for Flor to work, send money to the family and return to Mexico in two years. Angered by her mother’s wishes, Flor returned eight years later after the death of her mother, only to care for her two younger siblings whom she had never met. After her mother’s death, these siblings were orphaned and suffering alone. With the help of her husband, they brought them to New York by crossing the border. Both times she crossed the border she felt it was difficult. The first time she crossed with approximately twelve other people and at the end of this trip, all twelve people had to fit in a car that would take them to California. Flor was petite enough to fit by the feet of the driver and stayed in this spot until they arrived hours later. The second time she crossed she said was much harder, because they crossed with children and got separated along the way. Eventually they made it to Astoria. Flor believes she has reached her goals because she helped her family in Mexico and also paid

back the financial fees that were borrowed to help her cross the border. She originally had hoped to buy a house in Mexico, however, her goals changed after creating her own family in the United States. She now hopes to buy a home in the United States. What stood out most about Flor was her strong faith; in herself, her spouse and in God. She described her success so far as a spiritual journey. If there were one thing she would like to see changed it would be that undocumented families get amnesty, especially those that have been separated because of their immigration status.

### **El Estado de Mexico, Mexico**

#### ***Julia, Pedro and Celeste***

El Estado de Mexico is one of the States in Mexico. It is located at the center of Mexico. It has a population of 14,007,495 (MEXonline, n.d.). Much of the state is rural and is mostly known for agriculture and livestock.

#### **Julia**

Julia described her town as “familiar,” living with her family. Julia entered the United States with a visa when she was 16 years old; she is now 26. She immigrated to the United States because she felt “restless,” and immigrated against her parents’ will. Her plan was to stay six months and then return to Mexico. She traveled back and forth four times, at first with a visa until it expired. However, since she met her husband in New York she hasn’t returned. What stood out the most about Julia was her free spirit. She said that goals emerge for her daily, such as learning English and finding work. She recommends that all Latino immigrants learn English because it creates pathway towards more opportunities.



Pedro

Pedro described his town as a place where he couldn't survive. Pedro entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when he was 16 years old; he is now 30. He immigrated to the United States to reunite with his elder brother and to find work. His plan was to work for a year or two and then return to Mexico, however, after meeting his wife, he hasn't returned. Pedro described that crossing the border was a traumatic experience. Even though he contracted a guide to help him cross, he was abandoned by him and left to find his way alone at 16 years old, without food or a map. What stood out most about Pedro was the way he spoke about his personal transformation, going from paralyzing fear to a faith in the solidarity among diverse Latinos. He described Astoria as a "peaceful" place where there was no discrimination; a community where "people can be themselves." He recommends that if Latino immigrants who are undocumented make it to the United States, they should focus on why they are here and work towards that "dream."

Celeste

Celeste described her town as beautiful with lots of activities to do with the family. She had hoped to study but couldn't afford it. Celeste entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when she was 23 years old; she is now 40. She immigrated to the United States to offer her daughter a better life. She crossed the border with her 3-year-old daughter and joined her husband in the United States. She described a difficult experience crossing the border because she feared that something could happen to her or her daughter. Celeste described Astoria as beautiful and convenient because all the stores are nearby. What stood out the most about Celeste was how proud she was of

her daughter, who recently finished high school. As a result, she felt she met her goals in giving her daughter a better life. She would like to offer advice to those who have the opportunity to get an education, to take it and commit to this goal. She believes there are those who want it and can't have it because of their immigration status.

### **El Estado de Morelos, Mexico**

#### ***Lila and Alex***

El Estado de Morelos is the second smallest State in Mexico and is 1,911 square miles. It has a population of 3,966,073 (MEXonline, n.d.). The land is extremely fertile and has an ideal climate for agriculture with the region producing a wide variety of fruits, grains and vegetables.

#### **Lila**

Lila described her town as beautiful; feeling “free to walk and be anywhere.” Lila entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when she was 15 years old; she is now 23. Lila had heard from her father about the money that could be made in the United States. She and her mother took the journey together. Lila said her experience of crossing the border was difficult. She remembered walking for two nights and three days, crossing rivers by holding hands with strangers so that everyone could get through alive. What stood out most about Lila was how she uses her personal resources. She said that she only knows a few words of English and she uses this limited skill to find work even though she is undocumented and was legally underage. Lila moved from New Jersey to Astoria after getting married; her husband lived in Astoria so she joined him. She believes that she has met her goals of working and earning money, though not the goal of learning English well or of finishing her education. She feels trapped by her

immigration status, not being able to pursue her dream of an education or becoming a hairdresser. She recommends that new Latino immigrants should understand the realities of crossing the border and the difficulties of making a living in the U.S. For Lila, it was a difficult journey and is still a lot of hard work.

### Alex

Alex described his town as small and rural. Alex had hoped to obtain an education, but when he couldn't attend his local school, the next closest school being about one hour away made it difficult for him to continue. Alex entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when he was 17 years old; he is now 39. Alex's older siblings had all immigrated to the United States, making him feel it was "his turn." His parents still live in Mexico. The plan was for Alex to work in the U.S and make enough money to pay for school in Mexico. His father would meet him in the U.S after six months. His father couldn't make the trip, however, leaving Alex with the decision to either return to Mexico or work in the U.S. Alex decided to stay in the U.S and crossed the Mexican border four times to see his family. He said that each time the experience became more difficult and more expensive, however, the people he met during these trips became like family. Alex believed he met his goals of working and helping his parents. What stood out most about Alex was his willingness to help other new immigrants in the same way he was initially supported by others. Alex has lived in Astoria since arriving in the United States. He calls Astoria his home as if it was the place "he had been born." Alex hopes that undocumented immigrants will gain amnesty. He believes that it is only through amnesty that their hard work would be "valued" and "justified."

## Chiapas, Mexico

### *Jorge*

Chiapas is one of the States in Mexico. It consists of a population of 4,293,459. It has a variety of plants and animals and rich natural resources. The landscape in Chiapas includes rain forests, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, volcanoes and coastline. It is home to Ancient Mayan pyramids. A variety of Indian dialects are spoken and as direct descendants of the ancient Maya, the people of Chiapas retained the roots of their ancient history. "Chiapas has one of the largest and most diverse indigenous populations with approximately 959,066 indigenous language speakers over the age of five, or 27% of the state's population" (Instituto de Ecología, UNAM, 1992). Chiapas is home to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, a revolutionary group since the rebellion in 1994. They are against military and corporate intrusions on their land (Instituto de Ecología, UNAM, 1992). It shares the borders with the country of Guatemala (MEXonline, n.d.)

### *Jorge*

Jorge described his town as humble. The weather is tropical and peaceful. It was easier to live there because he could hunt his food and grow vegetables. He said his philosophy is to "live for the day." Jorge entered the United States by crossing the Mexico/U.S border when he was 26 years old; he is now 29. He immigrated to the United States after losing his job. At that time his cousins were also immigrating and they took the journey together. He said that crossing the Mexican border was difficult, with tough and dangerous terrains. Jorge intended to work and buy a home in Mexico. He has accomplished his financial goal and at present would like to encourage his wife to immigrate to the U.S to join him. What stood out about Jorge the most was how he

trusted in another undocumented Latino immigrant living in the U.S to help him cross the border into the United States. Jorge described Astoria as a safe place for undocumented immigrants. He also liked the many tall buildings. He recommends that Latino immigrants stay with their families and not immigrate to the United States because it is not easy to be separated from them.

### **Cañar, Ecuador**

#### *Isabel*

Ecuador is located at the equator of the world in South America. Cañar is one of the 22 provinces of Ecuador and covers 1,508.9 square miles (Cambridge Encyclopedia, n.d.). Cañar is located in the southern region of Ecuador. It is home to the Ingapirca Archeological site where the Ingapirca Ruins make it a popular tourist destination (Ecuador.com, n.d.).

#### *Isabel*

Isabel described her town as beautiful, with a sense of togetherness among family and neighbors. Isabel's father had been living in the U.S for ten years and it was taking a toll on his marriage. Isabel said she sacrificed for her parents and immigrated with her mom so that her parents could reunite. Isabel flew into the United States with a false Visa when she was 17 years old; she is now 26. The plan was to stay for two years. Isabel's plan changed as she settled into the United States; finishing high school, learning English and working. What stood out the most about Isabel was her openness to other cultures. She said that it is one of the "greatest riches" to have the opportunity to learn

and appreciate other cultures. She recommends that new Latino immigrants try to first improve the situation in their hometown before leaving it.

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