

EFFECTS OF WORK EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES ON WORK
ATTITUDES OF MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS

by

GARNER GLENN DEWEY

(Under the direction of Roger Hill)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the work experiences and attitudes of Mexican immigrants as they transitioned into jobs in the United States. The sample was composed of nine Mexican-born adults who had settled and worked in suburban Atlanta. Narratives for each participant were developed, and a Chicano writing style was used to preserve the meaning of interview data gathered in Spanish. The narratives were then inductively analyzed using a multi-step matrix technique to determine the emerging themes. Participants were found to value work, not for its intrinsic worth, but because it provides the means of obtaining things. The participants were focused on upward mobility, and cultural upbringing minimized their view on injustice and exploitation. Although participants enjoyed work better in Mexico, their sense of having no future in Mexico and the low wages earned there convinced them that work in the United States was better.

INDEX WORDS: Mexican immigrant, Work, Work ethic, Work values, Workforce education, Education, Latino, Hispanic, Qualitative research, Symbolic interaction, Multilanguage research, Socialization, Occupational studies, Dissertation, The University of Georgia

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Shelley, who supported,
encouraged, and pushed me to complete my studies.

Thanks for all your love and sacrifices.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Prologue

While pursuing a Master's degree at the University of Tennessee in 1993, I had the opportunity to work with the High School Equivalency program providing GED preparation for Hispanic migrants who worked harvesting tomatoes. Through this experience I learned that I shared as a Hispanic many similarities with the immigrants, including language. While I had come to the United States as a young adult, many of my perspectives were very different than those of the migrants. I quickly discovered that despite the hard working conditions of collecting tomatoes during the hot and humid summer months in Tennessee, the migrants worked enthusiastically and with what appeared to be an endless amount of energy. Since my degree was in technology education and this was a summer job, I soon moved on to other endeavors. However, I never forgot my experiences working with that program.

For 6 years I taught as a technology education instructor in public schools in Tennessee and Georgia. In 1999 I had the opportunity to return to college to pursue a Ph.D. in Occupational Studies. My wife and I moved to a suburb of Atlanta and were surprised to find a large population of Mexican immigrants living in our community. In contrast to the immigrants with whom I had previously worked, this group was mostly working in construction, landscaping, factories, and restaurants and was not migrant. During my years at the University I made an effort to connect my language abilities and cultural knowledge with some type of public service. This led me to volunteer at a local elementary school where most of the children were of

Mexican origin. For 2 years I worked as a mentor with a 4th-grade student whose family had recently emigrated from Mexico. Soon I befriended him and his family. His parents had moved with him and his brother to Georgia and after arriving to the United States had given birth to a third child. After talking extensively with the student's parents, I learned more about their experiences at the workplace, their worries, frustrations, and confusion about living and working in the United States. This experience rekindled once again the desire to learn more about the experiences of the Hispanic-immigrant worker in the United States.

Background Information

Participation in work and finding success in occupational endeavors has long been an integral part of the American tradition and a key factor in the prosperity of the United States (Applebaum, 1998; Ciulla, 2000; Weber, 1958). A cornerstone of a capitalistic culture is the belief that hard work will be rewarded with prosperity (Isonio & Garza, 1987). Hill (1992) stated that “in the 21st century, work ethic will be a key component of both individual and corporate success” (p. 11). Even though the workforce of the United States has a cultural heritage impacted by immigrants from many lands, a persistent theme in the workplace has been endorsement of work ethic and belief in the benefits of good work.

In the last decade of the 20th century over 7 million foreign-born Mexicans lived in the United States of America. Between 1980 and 1997 the number of Mexican immigrants more than doubled (Cornelius & Marcelli, 2000) and this trend has continued into the 21st century. Immigrants have a significant impact on numerous sections of the U. S. workforce.

In the United States, Mexican immigrants have been observed to have a “strong sense of work ethic and satisfaction in their work” (Weaver, 2000, p. 294). Their strong work ethic is demonstrated by their pride in being hard workers, their willingness to take jobs declined by

others, and their drive to achieve more in life (Niemann, Romero, Arredondo, & Rodriguez, 1999; Waldinger, 1992). As immigrants merge into the new culture and become assimilated into U.S. society, some of their values including work ethic tend to be lost or altered (Portes & Zhou, 1994).

Work ethic has been defined in many ways and from many different perspectives. In normal everyday conversation the term work ethic in the United States is a common concept which is normally used to refer to good athletes, successful business people, and persons who have attained their goals in life (Hill & Womble, 1997). Maywood (1982) defined work ethic as the motivation to work. Yankelovich and Immerwahr's (1984) definition of work ethic, "a cultural norm that attaches a positive moral value to doing good work for its own sake" (p. 64), has been used and referred to by several researchers and writers as an appropriate definition (Cherrington, 1980; Hill, 1992, 1997; Petty & Hill, 1995). Applebaum (1998) defined work ethic in a multidimensional perspective by stating that it contained an objective and a subjective component. The objective component referred to work processes, while the subjective component dealt with work ethic.

In the United States there is a strong belief that hard work leads to rewards of economic prosperity. This belief in applying one's self in order to get ahead is encompassed by the concept of meritocracy. Arrow, Bowles, and Durlauf (2000) stated that "meritocracy is just an extension of a general system of rewarding merit, and elements of such a system clearly have been present in one form or another throughout history" (p. 8). O'Brien (1999) wrote, "meritocracy is the ideal that anyone who wants to apply herself or himself can get ahead" (p. 132). However, several authors and researchers contend that the ideal of meritocracy in the United States is a myth (Kincheloe 1999; O'Brien; Ogbu, 1994; Takaki, 1987). O'Brien stated that in the United

States there are many other structural, cultural, and economical factors that contribute to a person's success. Although hard work alone does not translate into economic success, a strong work ethic has a distinct influence on behavior by providing the individual with intrinsic motivation that enables him or her to be more industrious, dedicated, and work harder (Eisenberger, 1989). People who embrace work ethic are more satisfied and report a higher quality of life than those who do not (Cherrington, 1980).

Yankelovich and Immerwahr (1984) pointed out that the immigrant "work force brings a remarkably pluralistic set of values to the workplace" (p. 69). This variance puts a great strain not only on recent immigrants, but also on the local worker who may have been accustomed to a uniform set of values in his or her native land. Erez and Earley (1993) stated that while needs are considered essentially the same for all people, values make the person feel unique and are an essential part of one's identity. About this process, Carmon (1996) wrote:

The willingness to change one's identity, or at least to add a second identity—perhaps among the more painful psychological experiences humans can encounter but also one of the most liberating—is shaped first and foremost by the willingness of the host culture to accept the immigrant into the community. (p. 53)

Even though in the early 20th-century it was believed that the United States of America was a "melting pot" where immigrants would assimilate into one homogeneous amalgam (Etzioni, 1996; Petersen, Novak, & Gleason, 1982), assimilation does not appear to be an option for all individuals. Ogbu (1990) wrote "some immigrant and some minority groups and individuals do indeed want to assimilate and seek ways to do so. But others—groups as well as individuals—either do not want to or recognize that they cannot assimilate, no matter what they do" (p. 427). Powers and Seltzer (1998) suggested that for purposes of identity, individuals are

not willing to forget and leave behind their ethnic heritage. Even white groups such as the so-called PIGS (Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slavs) have reclaimed their ethnicity and insisted on the right to be called American without losing their ethnicity (Novak, 1996).

As much as an individual may resist assimilation, immersion into a new culture requires modifications and adaptations by the individual. The newly-arrived Mexican immigrant is faced with obstacles, such as not understanding the language, and must at times confront new values and expectations at work. The manner of confronting these differences varies from group to group and from individual to individual. Ogbu (1994) stated that on occasions “subordinate group members come to define certain forms of behaviors, events, symbols, and meanings as inappropriate for them because these are characteristic of their oppressors” (p. 276). The individual then adopts behaviors that go in opposition to those of the dominant racial group. On the other hand, other groups and individuals do not have difficulties integrating into the new culture. Because of the sense of upward mobility, newly-arrived first-generation immigrants see their work experiences in light of their Mexican worldview, a perspective other generations of immigrants cannot possibly experience (Piore, 1979).

Weaver (2000) described Mexican immigrants working on U.S. soil as “productive, cooperative, networking employees who have a strong sense of work ethic and satisfaction in their work” (p. 294). This description contradicts the stereotypes sometimes held within the American social mainstream. Television and motion pictures portrayals of the Latino as being a *bandido*, a gangster, a harlot, or a buffoon have influenced and sometimes reinforced this perspective (Berg, 2002). The relevance of these perceptions is increased when “from the ‘native-born Americans’ point of view, these new aliens are in competition for a limited number of jobs and a dwindling reserve of social services” (p. 159).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe Mexican immigrants' experiences and work attitudes as they transitioned into jobs in the United States. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Mexican immigrants describe their attitudes and perceptions towards work?
2. What are Mexican immigrants' experiences as they transition into work places in the United States?
3. How do Mexican immigrants match up their expectations to their experiences at work in the United States?

Conceptual Framework

Symbolic interactionism provided the underlying conceptual framework for this study. This is an interpretivist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998) that states that through interactions people create shared meanings and that those meanings become their reality. The question of symbolic interaction is “what common set of symbols and understandings have emerged to give meaning to peoples’ interactions?” (Patton, 1990, p. 74).

Blumer, the sociologist who coined the term symbolic interactionism in 1937, provided three fundamental positions of symbolic interactionism (Casella, 1999; LeCompte, Millroy, & Preissle, 1992; Patton, 1990):

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meaning of things arises out of the social interaction one has with one’s fellows.
3. The meaning of things is handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things the individual encounters.

The context of these positions led Blumer to adopt qualitative inquiry as the method of identifying peoples' understandings, perceptions, and interpretations of their world. The importance of symbolic interactionism is its emphasis on symbols and the systematic processes involved in interpreting interactions as fundamental for understanding human behavior (Patton, 1990). Therefore, symbolic interactionism holds that in order to study social interaction one must pay close attention to the overt behaviors and behavior settings of actors and their interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Besides close attention to behaviors and behavior settings, Crotty (1998) indicated that the word "symbolic" refers to language and other tools that humans use and share to communicate with one another. As with sociology and its theories of cultural norm acquisition, symbolic interactionism also holds that culture is obtained through processes of communication; in particular, language, socialization, and education (Lal, 1995). Symbolic interactionism identified that all people are participants in developing societies, and because of this each individual is capable of preserving or going against the culture where he or she is found (Casella, 1999).

Lal (1995) explained that from the individual's point of view the world consists of social objects. These objects are anything he or she can name, a concept, or an emotion. Love, a car, and justice are all considered objects, and the way individuals act towards each confers the meaning of the specific object. "This in turn reflects past socialization and social interaction. Old meanings may be reinforced or emergent meanings may arise on the basis of current and future interaction or on the basis of imagination" (Lal, p. 425).

Another important aspect supporting use of symbolic interactionism as a basis for work ethic research with Mexican immigrants was the use of this theory as a framework for studies

that were similar in nature. In the early part of the 20th century, sociologists at the Chicago School wanted to expose slums, street life, homelessness, factory labor, and other urban social problems. It was in the process of identifying ways to uncover these problems that symbolic interactionism developed (Casella, 1999). Other studies conducted by the group of sociologists from the Chicago School concentrated on issues of race and ethnicity. These studies were significantly important in identifying and making sense of processes of migration and urbanization of immigrants from Europe and Asia and migrants from the Southern part of the United States to the North. The studies attempted to uncover what it meant to the immigrant to leave his or her home to move into the city of Chicago during the beginning of the 20th century (Lal, 1995).

Recent studies have also used symbolic interactionism in conjunction with other theories to analyze issues related to race and ethnicity. Human ecology has used the “symbolic interactionist framework to address questions about choices and preferences, social distances, and the related phenomena of inclusion, exclusion, and boundary maintenance that demarcates ‘us and them’” (Lal, 1995, p. 425).

Davidson and Caddell (1994) conducted a study related to work ethic that used symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework. The researchers examined the influence of religion on the concept of work. The study focused on religious factors, work conditions, and personal attributes. They used elements of exchange theory and symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework. The emphasis of exchange theory was on the costs and benefits associated with work and symbolic interactionism on commitments and identities that were not reducible to self-interest. For their study the researchers used quantitative methods to obtain and analyze the data.

Although Davidson and Caddell combined quantitative methods with symbolic interactionism, the theoretical framework is more appropriate for use in qualitative research.

LeCompte et al. (1992) wrote:

The perspective required studying people in their natural environment, not through abstracted forms or in artificial experiments. The city itself was a “social laboratory,” which “magnifies, spreads out, and advertises human nature in all its various manifestations. It is this that makes the city interesting, even fascinating. It is this, however, that makes it of all places the one in which to discover the secrets of human nature and society.” (p. 338)

Initial studies that utilized symbolic interactionism used a variety of methods usually associated with qualitative research including informal interviews and observation, documentary materials, personal documents, life histories, and established participant observation. Another aspect important to the relationship between symbolic interactionism and qualitative research is that symbolic interactionism requires that in order to understand peoples’ outlooks and experiences the researcher must get close to the participants and endeavor to view the world through their eyes.

In this present study, symbolic interactionism provided a sound basis for research using qualitative methods to explore the assimilation of Mexican immigrants into the workforce of the United States. The insights gathered enhance understanding of Mexican immigrants’ attitudes and perceptions toward work and describe their transitional experiences in the workplace. Immigrant expectations were also examined and compared to the realities of the workplace. The end result provides a better understanding of processes involved when Mexican immigrants

interact with a culture of work, grounded in work ethic and permeated with stereotypes, as they strive to make a life for themselves in the United States.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of literature focused on the following areas: (a) cultural norms, (b) work ethic, and (c) Mexican immigration. A meticulous search of various databases was conducted. Articles and other information were gathered from individuals whose research and work revolves around those topics previously mentioned. I was unable to locate literature based on empirical data on Mexican immigrants' transition experiences to the workforce in the United States. This finding confirmed the need stated by Hill and Rojewski (1999) to conduct research to identify the source of work ethic and work attitude differences.

Work ethic can and has been viewed through many different lenses. The definitions, varied opinions, and the diverse type of studies that have been conducted about the topic reflect the many perspectives and disciplines involved. Issues related to economics, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and theology have contributed to the development of work ethic. However, it is sociology that plays one of the most important roles in the development of individual work ethic. This perspective is relevant to my study, which has a strong emphasis on culture.

Although there are many interpretations and perceptions about what work ethic is and is not, a common definition used throughout academic literature (Cherrington, 1980; Hill, 1992, 1997; Petty & Hill, 1995) was given by Yankelovich and Immerwahr (1984). They defined work

ethic as “a cultural norm that attaches a positive moral value to doing good work for its own sake” (p. 64).

Cultural Norms

Cultural norms are unwritten rules that govern aspects of everyday living. As compared to moral imperatives, norms do not share a universal status such as laws against killing.

Nonetheless, Etzioni (2000) stated that both laws and norms serve as the foundation for social order. Norms affect an individual’s intrinsic predispositions, which “reflect a combination of people’s biological urges and their cultural imprinting” (p. 159). Another important effect of cultural norms is that they help form the individual’s identity and shape his or her worldview.

Some norms are developed through rational processes; others are created by law and society, such as tradition, institutions, customs, and habits (Etzioni, 2000). On the transmission or delivery of norms, Opp (1979) wrote that sociology believes that norms are learned through processes of socialization, and that these processes begin occurring during childhood. Etzioni agreed with Opp that norms are usually transmitted from generation to generation, but also added that these are passed down through communal processes such as rituals, holidays, and identification with older authority figures. Ciulla (2000) stated that principles of work ethic were conveyed to children through stories. An example was the *Eclectic Readers* by McGuffey. At least one-half of the population of the United States between 1836 and 1900 read the *Readers*. “These readers reinforced the theology of John Calvin and glorified the ethic of hard labor, industry, and thrift” (p. 58).

Cultural norms affect children as well as adults by processes of internalization and persuasion. Etzioni (2000) indicated that one of the major goals of education is to foster internalization or the ability of an individual to “make his or her mind” and go with or against the

norms, despite the pressures of other members of the same culture. Persuasion is part of the processes of acculturation of the immigrant that comes from an area where the subculture is different than that of the host country or region.

Norms are usually grounded on principles of tradition, superstition, nationalism, or some other cultural identification. Many norms have their roots in remote historical events or traditions. Norms can be classified as rational, irrational, or nonrational. Nonrational norms are those that do not seem to implicate empirical logical matters. “These include whether or not one believes in God, spirituality, the idea of progress, and many other such beliefs” (Etzioni, 2000, p. 178).

Processes of Socialization

Human beings are complex and learn things in many ways. Regarding the process of socialization, sociologists have provided two well-known theories. In “social-learning,” theorists argue that children learn largely by modeling adult behavior. Organization, respect of authority, and obeying of laws are examples of children modeling actions of their parents (Elkind, 1988). Cherrington (1980) indicated that modeling had a significant impact on personal behavior, values, and attitudes. For the young child the parents are the most influential models, but as the child reaches adolescence, peers and friends also become important models. The media and co-workers can also become influential models as adolescents near adulthood.

The other theory of socialization is “social cognition.” This is a process in which one individual teaches norms or values to another individual. This process is particularly important when the complexity level is high (Elkind, 1988). Reasoning, preaching, and teaching are all examples of techniques used in this theory. Cherrington (1980) argued that this was “the most significant process by which work becomes an intrinsic reward” (p. 140).

Culture Variation

Applebaum (1998) contended that culture is needed in order to create a system of values and behaviors. Norms vary widely from culture to culture and tend to change over time. They can readily be reinforced or weakened (Yankelovich & Immerwahr, 1984). Applebaum also indicated that every society has a culture and a work ethic, which are inseparable. He wrote:

In short, work is necessary for basic physical survival and functioning of human societies. The work ethic is the value system associated with carrying out work in a particular kind of society with specific cultural patterns. A hunting and gathering society has a work ethic very different from that of an industrial or peasant society. (p. x)

In defining culture, Pickett et al. (2001) specified that culture is “the behaviors, patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought, especially as expressed in a particular community or period.” Sowell (1994) described culture with a focus on those items that provide the material for life itself and, therefore, he aligned culture with human capital. However, a more appropriate definition of culture, at least for the purpose of my study, was the one given by Kluckhohn (1951). He stated:

Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. (p. 41)

In addition to the alluded implications about why work ethic varies between cultures, research studies have also shown significant differences in work ethic as determined by culture. Furnham et al. (1993) conducted a study comparing the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) beliefs of

13 nations. A total of 1,688 individuals from the United States of America, Australia, Great Britain, Ciskei (part of South Africa), Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Israel, India, New Zealand, South Africa, West Indies, and Zimbabwe completed the PWE questionnaire. The study demonstrated a number of national differences involving the endorsement of PWE beliefs. Isonio and Garza (1987) conducted a similar study, but in this case they compared factor structures of the endorsement of PWE among Anglo-Americans, Chicanos, and Mexicans. They concluded that PWE endorsement was highest among the Mexican sample, followed by the Chicano sample, and lowest in the Anglo-American sample.

Differences in Cultural Norms Between the United States and Mexico

As previously mentioned, norms are formed and affected by issues related to culture including language, tradition, institutions, customs, habits, rituals, holidays, and identification with older authority figures (Etzioni, 2000). The processes of socialization, internalization, and persuasion also vary between cultures. Historical events such as the Great Depression in the United States during the 1930s also have a great impact on the development and change of norms (Yankelovich & Immerwahr, 1984). Ehrlich (n.d.), Kraus (n.d.-a), and Stephens and Greer (1995) described differences between the Mexican worker and the worker from the United States. They indicated that while most Anglos perceive people as the same who should be judged by their behavior and achievements, Mexicans perceive people as basically good, regardless of what they do. Another difference was that while Anglos believe in the concept that “no one is above the law” and that special favors are not to take place, Mexicans believe that upholding the law is up to the person in charge and one may break rules, policies, and procedures to satisfy a co-worker’s personal needs. A third area involves an individual’s feelings. The authors indicated that though Anglos place a great emphasis on stating the facts, Mexican workers will in many

occasions withhold or modify information in order to avoid conflicts, embarrassment, or the possibility of offending the other person. The Mexican perceives the directness and objective approach of the Anglo as somewhat insensitive and rude. A fourth difference between perceptions of the Mexican and the Anglo worker deals with values of leadership. Historically, Mexican society has respected the most powerful and believes that power is reflected through titles, position, influence, and the ability to control others. The Anglos, on the other hand, support and prefer leaders who play fair, who share responsibilities, and who play by the rules.

The previous comparisons provide examples of differences in work style as determined by socio-cultural factors. Ehrlich (n.d.) stated that these are especially troublesome because they operate unconsciously on the individual and most do not know that their behavior reflects cultural values, which are at times in opposition to their new context. Another important aspect is that these perspectives should not be forced upon someone, even when one is convinced that a given perspective is better.

Assimilation Models

Printed on the U.S. dollar next to the eagle one finds a familiar emblem that reads *e pluribus unum*—"one from the many." These words represent concepts both of unity and plurality. Since the 18th century the emblem's meaning has been a paradox and has created a debate about principles of social organization in the United States, as well as conflicting views about what the United States of America represents (Etzioni, 1996; Griffin, 1998). All things considered, the American Indian is the only group that is ethnically rooted in the United States. Through immigration, slavery, and conquest processes, the United States has changed its composition as a nation according to its historical stage of development (Steinberg, 2001). Many Mexicans became part of the United States during the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended

the war of 1848. This treaty gave one-half of Mexico's territory—including Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, one-half of Colorado and the part of Texas that had not been annexed a decade earlier—to the United States of America. Mexicans continue to pour into the United States seeking jobs and better living conditions (Steinberg; Takaki, 1998); however, today as in the past, Mexicans must confront pressures of assimilation and separatism (Weyr, 1998).

The Melting Pot Model

Early in the 20th century it was believed that the United States of America was a “melting pot” (Petersen et al., 1982). From the perspective of the immigrant, the melting pot metaphor represented a process of assimilation in which he or she “would be assimilated into one homogeneous American amalgam” (Etzioni, 1996, p. 6) which would eventually lead to the disappearance of their own group. This metaphor originated from a play written by Israel Zangwill in 1908. Zangwill, the son of poor Orthodox Russian immigrants, described himself as a militant assimilationist and encouraged fellow Western Jews to pursue the process of assimilation that he had followed. He married an English Christian and ultimately rejected all sectarian identifications. The theme of Zangwill's play was based on his own assimilation experience. The play had a tremendous effect on audiences across the United States. Even President Theodore Roosevelt indicated that he could not recall any other play which had stirred him as much as this one. Buekner and Ratner (1992) indicated that “contrary to popular belief, Zangwill's melting pot did not refer to a process whereby immigrants were to be transformed into good Anglo-Saxons, but rather to a process whereby native Americans and immigrants alike were to be thrown together into the pot to create something entirely new” (p. 155).

Anglo-Conformity Model

A model of assimilation that some have confused with the melting pot is the Anglo-conformity model which stated that immigrant groups should change their behavior and values to those of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) host group. In this model immigrants are required to speak English, and the values to follow are those based on the Protestant ethic (Murguía, 1975). Assimilation in this model involved a fundamental change, which included learning the meaning of symbols, readjusting to a new system of values, and relinquishing some old customs, beliefs, and behaviors. Although this concept of the total assimilation of the immigrant has been disputed (Burman, Telles, Karno, Hough, & Escobar, 1987), there continue to be policies which embrace and push for this type of assimilation. Other metaphors that describe the processes and perceptions of assimilation or non-assimilation are The Coat of Many Colors, the Vegetable Soup, the Mosaic, the Rope of Many Strands, the Tapestry, the Kaleidoscope, the Rainbow, the Martini Cocktail, or the Salad Bowl (Etzioni, 1996; Griffin, 1998).

The “Unmeltables”

Literature has indicated that assimilation is not an option for all individuals. Ogbu (1990) wrote “some immigrant and some minority groups and individuals do indeed want to assimilate and seek ways to do so. But others—groups as well as individuals—either do not want to or recognize that they cannot assimilate, no matter what they do” (p. 427). Powers and Seltzer (1998) suggested that for purposes of identity individuals are not willing to forget and leave behind their ethnic heritage. Even white groups such as the so-called PIGS (Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slavs) reclaimed their ethnicity and insisted on the right to be called American without losing their ethnicity (Novak, 1996).

In the United States during the 1960s there was a rise of what Eric Lott described as an “ethnic fever.” The Vietnam War (Griffin, 1998) and “the cry for black power and assertion of black pride challenged liberal assumptions of integration and assimilation” (Takaki, 1987, p. 11). This phenomenon first started with the ethnic and racial minorities, but was then followed by the “white ethnics.” This process involved finding their roots and searching for cultural identity (Steinberg, 2001). Buenker and Ratner (1992) indicated that pressures from national mass communications media to make a more unified society created a loss of identity of its members, forcing individuals to develop alliances or connections with subgroups that would identify them as different from the rest. This concept was also reinforced by Novak (1996) when he wrote that in trying to search for an American culture, ethnic groups lost their own culture, leaving them with no intermediate culture to support their needs.

An ethnic group is “a group with historical memory, real or imaginary” (Novak, 1996, p. 56). Petersen et al. (1982) stated that the areas or criteria that define ethnicity are race, language, and region. Race is in many respects the most important of the three. Race deals with the characteristics of the body and is the one that has been used most often for identification of groups or individuals. In the United States socially defined races generally have been symbolized by skin color (Ogbu, 1994). In other countries such as Mexico race has less of a connection with skin color. In the Mexican census the enumeration for “Indian” refers to the language spoken and to the type of clothing worn by the individual. If an Indian learns to speak Spanish and wears more “westernized” clothing he or she becomes a “mestizo.” Since stereotypes state that Indians do not work in factories, then the type of labor also becomes a determinant factor for race. Another ethnic indicator is language. Language as race can also be ambiguous. Linguistics is composed of languages and dialects. Dialects are not considered languages; however, on

occasion, through policy changes, dialects have become recognized as languages. The last indicator is “region.” Regions can be determined as “natural areas” which are land masses delineated by natural characteristics or as “geographic regions.” Four regions—Northeast, North Central, South, and West—divide the United States. The author was clear to indicate that usually ethnic groups can be identified only when several indexes—race, language, or region—overlap (Petersen et al.). Though ethnicity is closely related to culture, ethnicity has usually been more narrow in its perspective than culture (Novak).

Though ethnic identity is generally acquired from the parents and the place of birth, the possibility exists for the individual to either change or lose his or her ethnic identity. This loss may be a product of linguistic or religious conversion as well as intermarriage and procreation (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975). Generally, second generation immigrants try to lose many traits and characteristics from their parents’ ethnic origins. However, third generation immigrants try to regain what was lost with their own parental ambitions of losing their ethnic identity (Petersen et al., 1982). In the case of the Mexican American immigrant living in the inner city, perspectives about education also seemed to change from one generation of immigrants to the next as the children’s skepticism of the value of education contradicts their parents’ beliefs. A study by Niemann et al. (1999) reported that first and second generation Mexican and Mexican Americans indicated that they overwhelmingly agreed that they were proud of being Mexican and that they would try to pass that pride to their children. They also felt proud of being raza—Indian and Spanish heritage. The participants also felt it was of great importance to have a sense of their ethnic roots.

Cultural Inversion Theory

Ogbu (1994) described a phenomenon that occurs under racial stratification, hierarchical organization of socially defined “races” or groups, which he called “cultural inversion.” He stated that:

Cultural inversion is a process whereby subordinate group members come to define certain forms of behaviors, events, symbols, and meanings as inappropriate for them because these are characteristic of their oppressors. At the same time they define other forms of behaviors, events, symbols and meanings, often the opposite, as appropriate for them. What is appropriate for racial minority group members tends to be defined in opposition to what is considered appropriate for the dominant racial group, their “oppressors.” (p. 276)

The author suggested that this type of response in racial stratification was due to distrust of the dominant racial group as well as fear of loss of ethnic identity. Ogbu indicated in his study that although many Black Americans speak and behave as White Americans, these are learned traits to be used according to the appropriate context.

Meritocracy

There is a strong belief in the United States that hard work leads to rewards of economic prosperity. This belief of applying one’s self in order to get ahead is encompassed by the concept of meritocracy.

Aristotle indicated that those who are most “virtuous” are the ones most fit to govern. The concept of elitism originated from this thought (O’Brien, 1999). However, it was not until the publication of a book in 1958 by a British author that the term meritocracy came into being.

The name of the book was *The Rise of Meritocracy, 1870–2033*, and the author was Michael Young.

Young was an intellectual, self-trained sociologist who decided to write the book after Britain decided to use an IQ test called the 11-plus to track students into grammar schools which were designed for the high scoring students and secondary moderns or vocational-technical training for the lower-scoring majority. This tracking system would define the future jobs of the students and, therefore, determine their eventual social class. This Educational Act appealed greatly to the British Labor Party because it seemed as a step towards socialism.

Just after the enactment of the Educational Act in 1944 Young, who was serving as the Labour Party's secretary of the policy committee and head of research, started to doubt that the Act would actually help the working class. He argued that the main purpose for the Labour Party was to protect and assist the working class under the presumption of social injustice. Though economic stratification would increase, the Party would be powerless to help the working class (Lemann, 1999).

Lemann described Young's book as a dystopian fantasy. He wrote the book as a Ph.D. dissertation from the future, the year was 2030. Young created the term meritocracy by combining both Latin and Greek. Though the root of the word translates to aristocracy, this aristocracy differed from that in Britain. Meritocracy was one where only the smartest people would rule society. In his book, future elitists and leaders would be identified through IQ testing. Those who had high scores would be educated and eventually replace the existing leaders. Young indicated that highly intelligent people would intermarry passing the genes to their children, and soon a new system of aristocracy would be in place. However, this new aristocracy would be more deserving and, therefore, would become more arrogant than the elite raised by

inherited wealth. Moreover, they would become untouchable by the growing economically deprived population. Young (1958) ended his book by indicating that the author of the dissertation had been killed in a bloody uprising by the low IQ masses.

In Young's (1994) book, merit is described as a combination of IQ or intelligence and effort. In this type of merit, nepotism, bribery, and inheritance would have no part. Lemann (1999) was fast to point out that "Young mentions effort as being important, too, but on the whole he treats IQ as being an exact measure of a person's future economic productivity" (pp. 117-118). About the concept of meritocracy, Arrow et al. (2000) stated that "meritocracy is just an extension of a general system of rewarding merit, and elements of such a system clearly have been present in one form or another throughout history" (p. 8). O'Brien (1999) wrote, "meritocracy is the ideal that anyone who wants to apply herself or himself can get ahead" (p. 132). She also proposed that meritocracy encompasses a strong link between level of education, the importance of the job, and how much money is earned from the job. Though some hold the belief that America is based on meritocratic principles, where success in schools and society and hard work translates into wealth and success, it is clear that there are stronger contributing factors to maintaining the present economic stratification found in the United States (Kincheloe, 1999).

The Myth of Meritocracy

Several authors and researchers contend that the ideal of meritocracy in the United States is a myth (Kincheloe, 1999; O'Brien, 1999; Ogbu, 1994; Takaki, 1987). Kincheloe placed meritocracy as one of the four "class myths" that are perpetuated by power elites. O'Brien wrote that in the United States there are many structural, cultural, and economical factors that contribute to a person's success. Structural factors deal with availability of positions in schools

or jobs. Cultural factors reflect issues such as racism and gender inequality. An example of the influence of economical factors as it affects one's life advantages is that "children of wealthy families are more likely to be educated in the best funded schools and these schools tend to emphasize college preparation and to socialize these youth for paying jobs" (p. 132).

While some nations such as England and India follow a political-economical philosophy of elitism—where "some members of society are expected to have more than others, and in return, they are expected to provide political, social, and moral leadership for the rest of the citizens" (O'Brien, 1999, p. 134)—other nations have decided to follow a philosophy where any member who contributes to society should have an equal share. Sweden is an example of a country where the hope is for the economical gap to become almost non-existent. The question then is what philosophy has the United States followed concerning resource distribution within its country?

O'Brien (1999) stated that since the early history of the United States, Americans embraced the ideal of individualism or individual merit as well as the ideal of competition. Individualism provided every individual the right and potential to make profit from hard work and merit. Competition, on the other hand, established the motivation in individuals to do their best and in turn produce better quality work and products. These two factors, individualism and competition, reflect the principle that those who get the most are those who contribute the most to society. Equality, a third American principle, should not be viewed as the equality sought by Sweden, where everyone should have an equal or at least similar "piece of the pie," but America's equality refers to opportunity. However, both "opportunity and income in this nation are distributed unequally" (p. 160). As the economic gap increases between the wealthy and the poor, the opportunity increases and decreases accordingly. Takaki (1987) wrote, "equality of opportunity for individuals was unlikely to occur in a society of unequal groups" (p. 11).

O'Brien stated that factors that affect equal opportunity for individuals in the United States include education, race, gender, structural circumstances, and economic stratification.

Higher education is the pivotal step in the climb to success as individuals with college degrees earn an average of 75% more than those who do not have degrees. Though one of the purposes of education is to serve as a great equalizer for the individual to compete in the market economy, issues in education related to availability, quality, and prestige creates gaps in equal opportunity. O'Brien (1999) wrote that "the paradox is this: A sustainable system of meritocracy requires relatively equal access among a large majority of the population to the means for success" (p. 160). The idea that real effort, talent, and drive are the contributing factors to success will continue to maintain the myth of meritocracy in the United States.

Historical Context of Work Ethic in the United States

In the early history of mankind, primitive people worked to meet their basic needs. Food and shelter were needed, and work was the means to meet these necessities. People came together to live in a community, to work, hunt, and gather food as society.

For the classical Greek philosophers, the Romans, and early Christians, work was viewed with low value—as a curse (Greenholm, 1993; Maywood, 1982). Persians, on the contrary, viewed work as a means of obtaining material things, and this gave work an ethical value (Maywood). Frost, Meyer, Vázquez, and Días (1979) wrote that "in every European language, labor meant pain, effort, pangs, penalty, strain, drudgery, struggle, battle, suffering, grief, distress, poverty, loneliness, abandonment, ordeal, adversity, trouble" (p. 739).

Literature indicated that it was not until Christianity that work started to be described in more positive terms. Saint Thomas Aquinas taught that work was morally neutral; a process for exchanging labor for an economical equivalent. Martin Luther ascribed a higher value to manual

labor and pointed out that individuals had a moral duty to work diligently. He believed that work was a method of expressing brotherly love. Luther also believed that the purpose of work was to realize what was good for other human beings (Cherrington, 1980; Greenholm, 1993; Maywood, 1982). Max Weber (1958), the famous German sociologist, stated that it was Martin Luther who initiated the modern concept of work ethic.

Applebaum (1998) organized the development of the work ethic in the United States into three distinct historical eras: the Colonial period, the 19th century, and the 20th century. The longest period was the Colonial period. During this period, Puritans migrated into what is now known as Northeastern United States. Although work was hard, work was viewed for the most part as an opportunity to glorify God. Work ethic was a central part of religion (Cherrington, 1980). Max Weber (1958) indicated that the most influential advocate of work ethic of this period was Benjamin Franklin who lived from 1706 to 1790. Franklin was a strong proponent of industry and frugality and became a hero for artisans and working people (Applebaum). Another cultural norm that developed during the Colonial period was that “fanciful play” was considered sinful (Cherrington). Applebaum gave an interesting account that captures how the development of work values, history, and society are interconnected. He wrote:

In the years after the Revolutionary War, republican ideology extolled the virtues of an honest, hardworking citizenry, and this idea gave mechanics a new sense of self worth. Artisans and journeymen united under traditional craft symbols in new mechanics societies and during public celebrations. This trend reached its apex in the great parade celebrating the ratification of the United States Constitution in 1788. Borrowing English craft symbols, masters, journeymen, and apprentices marched together in a new political setting. This unity, however, proved to be short-lived as the craft work structure soon

would break down, with masters becoming employers, wholesalers, and retailers, while journeymen and apprentices remained employees and wage workers for all of their lives.

(p. 56)

The second period, the 19th century, was characterized by a great expansion of the territory of the United States. From the Louisiana Purchase to the acquisition of land from Mexico, the United States found itself a continental power. The values of this era were mixed. During the industrial revolution, human achievement in science, technology, and knowledge provided optimism to many people. Technological inventions such as the telephone and the typewriter changed not only homes and factories, but also the American culture. Vast numbers of immigrants reached the shores of America making the population grow from 5 million in 1800 to 75.8 million in 1900. There was also a large diversification of jobs ranging from cowboys to factory workers. Through all these changes the work ethic of the artisan persisted during the 19th century (Applebaum, 1998). Yankelovich and Immerwahr (1984) stated that during the 19th century most workers held high discretion jobs where control and pace of work was left to the worker.

The 20th century found many workers disillusioned with the job environment and limited job opportunities. During this period, workers also realized that hard work was not the only path to prosperity. Jobs became more controlled, and craftiness became less important. The Great Depression and the World Wars made lasting impressions on the value of work (Hill, 1992). As the century progressed, workers turned to a “leisure and life ethic” where attention was placed more on enjoyable activities than on tedious and methodical jobs. Towards the end of the 20th century the workday became shorter, and flexible schedules began to permeate the workplace (Applebaum, 1998). Yankelovich and Immerwahr (1984) argued that jobs in the United States

came full circle. While most of the jobs of this period could be described by their low discretion, the onset of the Information Age has brought once again high discretion jobs where the worker feels in control.

Work Ethic in Career and Technical Education

There are those who believe that work and education have been structured as two separate institutions and that these are at odds as each side provides negative stereotypes of the endeavors and missions of the other institution. At times business and industry have perceived formal education as only providing individuals with theoretical nonsense, while educational institutions have accused business and industry of prostituting academic purity (Cherrington, 1980). However, those who wrote these observations failed to acknowledge a component in education that is greatly concerned with providing “occupational knowledge and skills for immediate employment bound students, [and] also the academic skills required to function in both the world of work and postsecondary education” (Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2001, p. 3). This educational enterprise is career and technical education, previously known as vocational education.

Scott and Sarkees-Wircenski (2001) stated that historically career and technical education sought to prepare students for entry-level jobs in occupations that required less than a 4-year college degree. However, over the past decade the purpose of career and technical education has broadened to include academic, vocational, and technical skills. In the United States career and technical education spans both secondary and postsecondary education. At the secondary level, career and technical education programs are taught mostly in comprehensive schools. Postsecondary programs are taught in a variety of institutions ranging from area vocational schools to universities.

All agree that work ethic should be a key element in career and technical education as long as it prepares students for success by providing an understanding of job requirements and practices (Hill, 1997). Applebaum (1998) indicated that work and culture are inseparable and that “every society has a culture and a work ethic, whether explicit or not” (p. x). Work is multidimensional as it contains an objective and a subjective component. The objective refers to the work processes, while the subjective part deals with the work ethic. Career and technical education has played a role in teaching both components. From a sociological perspective, work ethic is taught through processes of socialization by modeling, reasoning, preaching, and teaching. Modeling is associated with social learning theory, while reasoning, preaching, and teaching refer to the cognitive learning theory (Opp, 1979).

From the social learning perspective, schools are constantly teaching cultural norms to its students by modeling values and behaviors. Hill and Rojewski (1999) stated modeling often plays an important role as an intervention strategy in teaching work ethic. On the importance of teachers’ roles as models for the students, Eisenberger (1989) wrote:

Teachers influence student’s attitudes toward work by the values communicated in assigned readings, lectures, and discussions, by the use of grading practices that reward diligence or laziness, and by the personal example of preparing classes carefully or lackadaisically. The secularization of American education has produced a widespread reluctance to use schools to inculcate children with codes of conduct useful to society. (p. 224)

Hill and Rojewski pointed out that behaviors such as poor attendance, lack of interest, and discipline problems limit the student’s ability for success at school and work.

Other methods that career and technical education have used with socialization processes are those where students are able to have experiences at the workplace. Programs of this nature include internships, practicums, school-based enterprises, or job-shadowing programs. Sheehy (1990) was a strong proponent of internships as he argued that they provide opportunities for students to experience work while being able to receive feedback on their progress, assumptions, and perceptions of work. Another program in career and technical education that has assisted in promoting the teaching of work ethic is student organizations. Career and technical student organizations, Scott and Sarkees-Wircenski (2001) indicated, are of benefit to the student because they provide “opportunities to develop positive self-concepts, social skills, problem-solving skills, communication skills, leadership skills, and occupational skills, all of which are valued universally by employers” (p. 266).

Teaching moral and ethical issues in the classroom is of potential controversy (Hill & Dewey, 2001; Hill & Womble, 1997; Miller, 1985). Usually criticism arises from individuals who argue that separation of church and state should prevent the teacher from discussing ethics and morals. Besides the criticisms about teaching issues related to work ethic to children, Cherrington (1980) and Hill and Petty (1995) indicated that there is an uncertainty of what values are important to teach children. Hill and Dewey suggested that issues of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship are important values to be taught in schools. These themes are particularly important because they do not violate church/state separation since these are attributes found in all major religions. They argued that “in fact, the rule of law found in all civilized societies reflects these fundamental principles of behavior” (p. 80). Other components that encompass work ethic and that should be discussed and modeled in the classroom are interpersonal skills, initiative, and dependability (Hill & Petty).

Hill and Dewey (2001) provided three recommended approaches to teaching ethics in the school classroom. One method is to develop a list of topics that students agree are needed as part of work ethic. A second method is to seek topics in literature, and yet a third method is to follow a more research-based process of searching characteristics and behaviors that are important for success in the workplace. Regardless of the method chosen, efforts should be made by educators to embed topics related to work ethic throughout the instructional program (Hill & Petty, 1995).

Work Ethic in Mexican Culture

Most studies about Mexican work and labor have focused on aspects related to institutions and technology, but even through these studies it has been evident that Mexicans value work. Hard work of the pre-Columbian Mexican is evident from the temples and palaces constructed by the Aztecs and the Toltecs. This is even more significant when one realizes that pre-Columbian Indians in Mexico did not have metal tools, animals of work such as horses or cattle, or the wheel. These masterpieces reveal that while Mexicans did not possess the technological advances of other cultures in the world, they had ingenuity, organization, and perseverance (Frost, et al., 1979).

Today, Mexican immigrants working in the United States are described as “productive, cooperative, networking employees who have a strong sense of work ethic and satisfaction in their work” (Weaver, 2000, p. 294). Others identify that Mexican immigrants have a strong work ethic because of their pride in hard work, their willingness to take jobs declined by others, and their drive to achieve more in life (Niemann et al., 1999; Waldinger, 1992). A study conducted by Isonio and Garza (1987) concluded that Mexicans in their study endorsed the PWE more than their Anglo-American sample. With all this said, it is important to recognize that the motives,

values, and perceptions related to the hard work of the Mexican worker may differ from those predominantly found in the Anglo-American culture.

Applebaum (1998) indicated that the Mexican work ethic is a survival ethic. He explained that survival ethic is where people are willing to work in whatever job that will earn subsistence with a lack of concern about higher needs in the workplace. In describing this population, the author pointed out that Hispanics “bring with them strong family traditions, and the cultural norms that stress the male as the main breadwinner and as head of the family, thus lowering the female participation rate in the labor force among Hispanic women” (p. 206). Kraus (n.d.-c) also described cultural differences between Mexico and the United States. As with Applebaum, she stated that in Mexico the family is the first priority and that wives generally fulfill the domestic role. She added that the majority of Mexicans come from a long Roman Catholic tradition and are very nationalistic. Mexicans find it difficult to separate work and personal relationships and attempt to shun confrontation. From a societal perspective, title and position are more important than money. The author also indicated that truth as related to ethics is tempered by the need of diplomacy.

Formal Educational System in Mexico

J. R. Atilas (personal communication, December 6, 2001), professor in Elementary Education at the University of Georgia, stated that Mexico has an extraordinary educational system which attempts to reach all of its population. Students in Mexico are required to attend school until “secundaria” which is the equivalent of middle school in the United States. The educational system is divided into six levels: (a) preescolar (preschool), (b) primaria (primary), (c) secundaria (middle school), (d) bachillerato (high school), (e) universitaria (university), and (f) especialización (graduate level). The system also includes several modalities designed to

reach special populations such as non-Spanish speaking indigenous people, illiterate adults, and full-time workers (Sistema Educativo Nacional, 2001).

Mexican education has been strongly influenced by the French and Spanish. The education base tends to be deductive in reasoning; however, implementation is not emphasized. Students are expected to memorize concepts and ideas with an emphasis on examination. Participation and class work are not very important, and appropriate behavior is strongly enforced in the classroom. Instead of searching for in-depth knowledge, the Mexican educational system endorses a general knowledge. On the implications of Mexico's educational system, Kraus (n.d.-b) argued:

Mexico produces citizens and employees who have an excellent general knowledge of the world, Mexico, culture and current affairs. But also produces people who have learned to conform; that form is better than substance; a reluctance, due to training and concern over losing face, to resolving problems directly and implementing new or different techniques. (¶ 5)

Mexico's Formal Education as Related to Work Preparation

Although no article or study was found directly pertaining to formal education for work preparation in Mexico, several factors indicate that work and work preparation is important to the formal educational systems in Mexico. Among other provisions, students in Mexico have the option to attend traditional schools or technical schools, and Mexican students can also opt to attend school at different times of the day in order to fit the schedule of the working youth.

Mexico's formal education is subdivided into six levels, and it is compulsory for its citizens to attend up to the end of the third level—middle school. From an early age, Mexican children have choices among types of education. After sixth grade, children in Mexico can

decide to attend a school system which is called “formación para el trabajo”—work formation. In this program the student who ends ninth grade is ready to join the workforce. Courses offered at this level include precision crafts, carpentry, auto maintenance, cosmetology, and electric and gas installation. The system is setup for the student to return to a traditional middle school and repeat years of study in order to continue with his or her formal education. During “bachillerato” the student once again has an option to attend a specialized technical school called “profesional técnico.” At the end of the 12th grade the student is ready to join the workforce. The areas of preparation at the technical schools vary from region to region. Some of the disciplines of study are computer data entry, electricity, food service, shoe industry, tourism, and air conditioning.

The university level offers four different options: (a) “universidades tecnológicas”—technological universities, (b) “licenciatura normal”—teacher preparation universities, (c) “licenciatura universitaria”—licensure universities, or (d) “institutos tecnológicos”—technical institutes. The options available for the Mexican student to seek technical and career preparation demonstrate the commitment that the Mexican government and culture have towards preparing their population for work. For the reasons presented, I believe that it can be inferred that the formal education system in Mexico places importance on the value of work. When asked to share her experience of learning work values at school, a recent Mexican immigrant indicated that she could not recall any time that an instructor had talked about work in the classroom. She said, “that is not the school’s job anyway, you learn about the importance of work through life. In Mexico you learn that if you don’t work hard you starve” (personal communication, December 7, 2001).

Mexican Immigrants in the United States

In 1998, Hispanics became largest minority in the United States (Contreras, 2004). The 2000 census indicated that 35.3 million or 12.5% of the population in the United States were Hispanic. Mexicans represented 7.3% of the total population of the United States. Those who identified themselves as Latino increased 60% from 1990 to 2000. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). An additional 2 million undocumented individuals from Mexico could be living in the United States (Applebaum, 1998).

Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have been living and working in the United States of America for centuries. However, it was not until recently that Mexican and Mexican-Americans became urbanized. Cornelius and Marcelli (2000) indicated that by the mid-1990s more than one-half of Mexico's population lived in cities of over 100,000 inhabitants. Applebaum wrote that "by 1970, Mexican-Americans were 85 percent urban. The outdoor manual labor of early Mexican immigrants as farm or railroad workers has given way to urban occupations" (1998, p. 207).

Another difference found with the Mexican immigrants of today is that many are moving into the United States and settling. Michael Piore (1979) in his book, *Birds of Passage*, called the immigrant who after accumulating a certain amount of money returned to the country of origin a sojourner, while he called settlers those who intended to remain in the destination country. Cornelius and Marcelli (2000) indicated that the current economical situation in Mexico, the scarcity of jobs, a decline in real income, and the increasingly difficulty of finding a stable subsistence base were reasons for an increase of Mexican settlers within the United States. Their study noted that by 1997, seven million foreign-born Mexicans resided in the United States, "representing 2.74 percent of the total population, up from 1.7 percent in 1990 and 1.0 percent in

1980” (p. 16). The researchers concluded that the increase of Mexican female immigration to the United States and the intention to settle permanently were strongly related. They reported that the Mexican sojourner was “35 percent more likely to reside permanently in the United States on average if female, and 2 percent more likely with each additional year having resided in the United States” (p. 14). Their study also indicated that:

A person who migrated to the United States during a period of economic crisis in Mexico is 19 percent more likely to reside permanently in the United States on average, those with a close U.S.-born friend are 23 percent more likely, and a paucity of work opportunities reduces one’s likelihood of residing permanently by 15 percent on average. (p. 15)

In describing the foreign-born population in the United States, Lallock (2001) stated that one-third were either born in Mexico or another of the Central American countries. Those born in Central America or Mexico were geographically concentrated in the West (58.5%) and the South (27.4%) of the United States. Around 42% of households from Mexico and Central America consisted of five or more people; this compared to 13.2% of native families being this large. On education, the report indicated that among the foreign-born adults, Central American and Mexican immigrants were the least likely (37.3%) to have graduated from high school. With respect to annual income, the study reported that “among foreign-born workers, the proportions earning less than \$20,000 ranged from 57.1% of those from Central America (and Mexico) to 16.2% of those from Europe and 22.4% from Asia” (p. 5). Central American and Mexican represented the highest number (24.2%) of people living below the poverty level in the United States.

Summary

This chapter summarized literature and research on work ethic and Mexican work and immigration. Meritocracy and assimilation theories were also reviewed to better understand influences and values existent in the United States. Formal education's role in teaching and maintaining these norms was also reviewed.

Literature indicated that work ethic can be defined as a cultural norm which is transferred through processes of socialization. In the recent past, researchers and writers in the United States have indicated a loss or change of work ethic. On the other hand, Mexican immigrants, which were described by Lallock (2001) as one of the poorest populations and with the lowest educational levels in this country, appear to have a strong work ethic. A study conducted by Isonio and Garza (1987) concluded that Mexican immigrants in their sample endorsed more favorable the PWE than their Anglo-American sample. However, Applebaum (1998) indicated that Mexican immigrants' work ethic was based on survival and not on attaching a positive moral value to doing good work for its own sake. He explained that survival ethic is when individuals are willing to work in any job as long as it earns a subsistence. In this type of work ethic there is a lack of concern about obtaining higher needs in the workplace.

Although many studies have focused on the movement and settlement of the Mexican-born, the type of work being performed, and the economic impact of their presence, no study was found related to Mexican immigrant experiences of work attitudes as they transition into jobs in the United States.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The first step in designing a research study involves the selection of a topic and a paradigm. Paradigms encompass theories and methods, which help explain phenomenon in the human and social sciences. The two most widely discussed paradigms that have their roots in 20th-century philosophical thinking are the quantitative and the qualitative (Creswell, 1994). Quantitative research is grounded on a positivist assumption that the social environment is relatively constant across time and settings (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The qualitative research paradigm, also known as naturalistic, interpretive, field study, participant observation, inductive, case study, or ethnography, (Merriam, 1998) proposes that social environments are not constant, but instead they are constructed as interpretations by individuals (Gall et al.).

For this study I selected to use qualitative methodologies. The criteria for determining the appropriateness of this paradigm were based on my ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological perspectives. These are important because the researcher brings a worldview that favors one or the other paradigms. Ontology refers to what is real. In quantitative research, reality is objective and is to be discovered independent of the researcher (Creswell, 1994). In qualitative research, reality is constructed by individuals as they interact within a social context (Merriam, 1998). In epistemology, or the relationship between the researcher and the participant, the quantitative researcher seeks to create distance from the participants, while for qualitative research the goal is to seek interaction and become “close” with the participant. With

axiology, which refers to the role of values in the study, the quantitative research does not mention values and attempts to provide only facts. In qualitative research, the researcher reports his or her values and biases. Another difference between both paradigms is the way the reports are written (rhetoric). Quantitative research is written in a formal and impersonal manner, while in qualitative research the language is personal, informal, usually written in first person, and utilizes words and definitions that evolve from the study. With respect to the methodological differences, Creswell wrote that “one approaches a quantitative methodology by using a deductive form of logic wherein theories and hypotheses are tested in a cause-and-effect order. Concepts, variables, and hypotheses are chosen before the study begins and remain fixed throughout the study” (p. 7). Qualitative research on the other hand uses an inductive research strategy where the categories are developed throughout the study from the information provided by the participants. Merriam stated, “this type of research builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses or theories rather than tests existing theory” (p. 7).

Another aspect used in determining the appropriateness of the paradigm chosen is based on the nature of the research problem. Strauss and Corbin (1990) indicated that some areas of study naturally lend themselves more to qualitative research, for instance, “research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons’ experiences with a phenomenon, like illness, religious conversion, or addiction” (p. 19). Problems with issues related to gender, culture, and marginalized groups have usually been topics researched by qualitative methods (Creswell, 1998). The lack of easily identified theories and variables, the need to present a detailed view of the topic, and the study of individuals in the natural setting were other criteria that assisted in the selection of a naturalistic research. For the reasons here described, I believe that my problem

statement-to describe Mexican immigrants' experiences and work attitudes as they transition into jobs in the United States-is one that would best be answered through qualitative methods.

Research Methods

As part of the process of identification and justification of the research process, it is important to describe the methods with as much detail as possible (Crotty, 1998). Silverman (2000) defined methods as "specific research techniques" (p. 79), and he stated that their usefulness depends on the fit with the theories and methodologies being used and the research question(s) being asked. In order to answer research questions several options are available to the qualitative researcher. These options are related to sampling and data collection. These techniques of gathering information are the same as those used by all human observers. The difference is that the qualitative researcher has a demand for selective attentiveness or the ability to pay special attention to specific things.

Sampling

The two basic types of sampling techniques available to the researcher are probability and nonprobability. Qualitative researchers usually use nonprobability sampling. For this study I used the most common form of nonprobability sampling which is purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998) through personal, work place, and organizational (churches, service providers) contacts and by snowball techniques where selected participants assisted in identifying their friends or family members that also fulfilled necessary criteria. Patton (1990) argued the reason for purposeful sampling was to obtain information-rich cases. Each case should provide depth on the issues of relevance in the study. Merriam indicated that the first step is to determine the selection criteria. These provide the rationale for determining the people to be interviewed.

Selection Criteria

The criteria for the selection of the participants in this study were that the participants be adults between the ages of 21 and 50. They must have lived and worked in Mexico. Although they might have worked as migrants for an extended period of time, participants in the study must have become settled in the United States between 6 months and 2 years (Piore, 1979). This work history and the short period of settlement in the United States enabled them to make a comparison of work in Mexico and the United States. The settler is the immigrant who wants to stay in the host country. Individuals who live with extended family, their wife or husband, siblings and children, in the United States fulfilled this criteria.

Sample Size

Kvale (1996) stated that the number of interviews in current interview studies range from 5 to 25. However, Patton (1990) and Merriam (1998) indicated that the number of participants required in qualitative inquiry is not set. Both writers agreed that the ideal sample size in a qualitative study is when redundancy or replication is obtained. Patton stated that sample size involved a trade-off between breadth and depth. Silverman (2000) wrote that the sample size may change during the course of the research. The three reasons for increasing the sample size are (a) if new factors arise, (b) if there is an interest in focusing on a small group and using the wider group for later tests, and (c) if unexpected generalizations lead the researcher to find new deviant cases. For this dissertation study I interviewed 9 participants. I concluded that this number of participants was sufficient after replication was discovered and no more participants were found in the community that fulfilled the criteria for selection.

Data Collection

The three techniques available to the qualitative researcher are observing, interviewing, and archival research (LeCompte et al., 1992). Although all three methods were utilized during a pilot study that helped determine the criteria and directions most appropriate for this study, semi-structured interviews and transcripts provided the primary source for information in this dissertation study. Kvale (1996) indicated that interviews are methods by which the qualitative researcher attempts to understand the world of the participant. In an interview both the researcher and the participant exchange themes of mutual interest. Kvale also stated that the interview should be “self-communicating” stories contained within themselves and should have as few descriptions or explanations as possible.

I conducted interviews with each participant individually. They took place at a time and location convenient for the participant. In this study all participants selected their homes as the most convenient location. After a brief introduction and explanation, participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent form either in Spanish or English regarding their participation in the study (see Appendix A). I gave each of the participants one of the copies of the consent form to keep. I then engaged the participant in a discussion for approximately 60 to 90 minutes regarding their work experiences. No questionnaires or written instruments were given to the participant during the interview; however, I used an interview guide (see Appendix B). The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Spanish. This discussion was tape recorded, and I took some notes during this time to guide my line of questions and to clarify what was stated. After the interview, I transcribed each tape verbatim in Spanish. In a subsequent visit, a copy of the transcript of the interview was provided to each participant, and their story was reverse-translated as a member check. For some of the participants the reverse-translated story was read

through a telephone conversation. The participant was asked to confirm that the story was accurate, and an opportunity was given to make any needed corrections.

During the interviews I sought to fulfill Kvale's (1996) quality criteria for an interview. These criteria include that the interview should be spontaneous, rich, specific, and provide relevant answers. The shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the answers, the better. Probing questions were used to clarify or obtain more information.

Data Analysis

I analyzed and presented the data utilizing two different approaches. For the first approach I followed Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative type inquiry to configure the events described in the interview into a story or explanation, thus presenting a participant's portrait or vignette. I completed one interview and its transcription before moving to the next participant. This procedure enabled me to determine when saturation was reached. Secondly, I analyzed inductively the data using narrative matrix techniques. I used Schell and Black's (1997) description of their research as a model for conducting this inductive analysis.

Narrative Type Analysis

Narrative inquiry is one of the many approaches of conducting and analyzing qualitative research (Polkinghorne, 1995). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) indicated that "in the recent past, storytelling and the creation of literary and narrative accounts have been utilized by qualitative researchers (from different perspectives) as mechanisms for collecting and interpreting data" (p. 55). As compared to coding and categorization, narrative analysis is not concerned with decontextualizing short phrases or word counts, but rather seeks to work with data in the form of natural language.

Polkinghorne (1995) described two distinct types of narrative analysis: (a) paradigmatic-type narrative inquiry and (b) narrative-type narrative inquiry. The first one creates taxonomies and categories from narratives or stories. The second configures events into an explanation. I decided to follow the narrative-type narrative inquiry method for the following reasons: (a) my interviews did not contain single stories and not all answers are presented as stories; (b) I was interested in understanding the individual(s) in the social context; and (c) this was a good system for “creating a set of profiles or vignettes that, alongside each other, provide greater insight and understanding of the topic” (p. 21). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggested that one should not take particular approaches as prescriptive, so I used Polkinghorne’s recommendations only as a guide to analyze and configure the narratives.

Polkinghorne (1995) and Dollard (1935) listed seven criteria for judging a life history as a good method for generating a storied history from the gathered data. These criteria included cultural contexts, description of the protagonist, mention of significant others, the goals and outcomes of the events, the historical continuity, the bounded temporal period, and the indication of what elements contribute to the outcome. In this approach, the researcher becomes “the narrator of the story, and [the narrative] is often told in his or her voice” (Polkinghorne, p. 19). The purpose is not only to restate the information gathered from the participant, but also to create a dynamic framework where the disconnected elements can be joined in an interesting and explanatory way. Another aspect that I pursued while creating the narratives was to extract descriptive information about each of the participants. Merriam (1998) suggested that this process would assist in increasing the study’s external validity. This approach also enabled me to use Chicano style writing where Spanish is intertwined with English. An example of the process of going from transcript to portrait is included in Appendix C.

Inductive Analysis

When using the inductive method of analysis, Strauss and Corbin (1990) indicated that it is essential to break down the analytic process in order to understand the logic behind the analysis. This was accomplished through pre-established techniques and procedures. These processes involved assigning participants' statements that were collected in the vignettes to categories related to the three fundamental positions of symbolic interactionism (Casella, 1999; LeCompte, et al., 1992; Patton, 1990) and the research questions as listed in chapter one. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) wrote that initial coding is intended to "identify themes, patterns, events, and actions that are of interest to the researcher and that provide a means of organizing data sets" (p. 32). Codes are the researcher's own creations. Codes allow the data to be viewed in new and different ways. Coding is also the first step in organizing the data into meaningful categories.

A multiple-step procedure was required to finalize this inductive analysis. I created a Microsoft Word table of a three by three matrix on "B" size (11 by 17 inch) paper. I wrote the name of the participant at the top of each page and labeled each of the cells with a Q1, Q2, or Q3 to distinguish the research question and a S1, S2, or S3 for the specific fundamental position of symbolic interactionism. After repeatedly reading each vignette or story, I coded and transferred the relevant participant's statement(s) as found in the vignette into the corresponding cell(s). At the same time I identified emergent categories that did not "fit" into any of the nine cells. Then I went back to the transcript to verify that the context and language used supported the reasons why the statement was considered to belong in a particular cell.

For the next step, I compared the information from each specific cell (Q1-S1, Q1-S2, Q1-S3, Q2-S1, Q2-S2, Q2-S3, Q3-S1, Q3-S2, and Q3-S3), and noted and compiled the statements that were supportive of each other and those that were deviant from the rest. The data were then

organized to discriminate between confirmatory and non-confirmatory findings. I wrote narrative statements that reflected the findings, noting any deviant cases or contradictory statements. This assisted me in compiling and summarizing the findings from each cell. The findings were then compared and examined with respect to the supporting literature. The review of literature was also used to suggest possible explanations for these findings.

Validity and Reliability

Merriam (1998) indicated that it is imperative to recognize that “all research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (p. 198). She also indicated that it is through accounting for validity and reliability that research can be considered trustworthy. Questions related to the construction of the interviews, processes used to analyze documents, and ways of reaching conclusions are critical questions that need to be answered in qualitative research. Silverman (2000) argued that some social researchers believe that concerns related to validity and reliability arise only in quantitative research and that these terms take different meanings in naturalistic or qualitative research. It is therefore important to distinguish the meaning of each of these terms and describe how they can be accounted for in order to produce quality, trustworthy research.

Internal Validity

Internal validity deals with the concept of reality; however, qualitative research views reality very differently than quantitative research. For the positivist perspective reality is fixed, waiting to be found, and can be measured. On the other hand, the qualitative paradigm views reality as holistic, multidimensional, and ever changing. In qualitative research, the researcher describes and measures how individuals construct and make meaning of reality. Merriam (1998) wrote that “in this type of research it is important to understand the perspectives of those

involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening” (p. 203). Six strategies that enhance internal validity are (a) triangulation, (b) member checks, (c) long-term observation, (d) peer examination, (e) participatory or collaborative modes of research, and (f) researcher’s biases.

Patton (1990) described triangulation as a way to strengthen a study design. It is the combination of methodologies to confirm the findings. Data, investigator, theory, and methodological triangulation are four basic types of triangulation. For this study I used theory triangulation. This is a method by which several perspectives are employed to interpret the data. I also used member checks, peer examination, and researcher’s biases.

In member checks the researcher asks the participants to indicate if the derived conclusions are plausible or if the data manipulation is accurate, as in the case of language translation in this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that use of member checks was “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). In peer examination, colleagues are asked to comment on the findings as they emerge, and for researcher’s biases, a written clarification is given about the investigator’s assumptions, worldviews, and theoretical orientation (Merriam, 1998). Because the language of the interviews and the transcripts is different than the language of the written report, translation played a crucial role throughout this investigation. I used several methods to confirm accuracy in translation and plausibility in the interpretations and conclusions. After completing the vignettes of each participant I read the stories to each participant by using reverse-translation and allowed the participant to confirm accuracy and make any needed corrections. In addition, Irma Alvarado, a bilingual colleague

who was a doctoral student, read each of the transcripts, the vignettes, and the conclusions to confirm that the translation was accurate.

External Validity

The relevance of external validity, the extent to which the findings are applicable to other situations, has been debated for qualitative research. Merriam (1998) contended that though not equal to the type of applicability sought on positivistic analysis, qualitative research should seek to increase external validity. She provided three ways to assist with the applicability of the study to other situations. First, the researcher should provide rich, thick description so that the readers can determine the similarities to their own situations or problems. Second, the researcher must describe how typical or atypical the program or individual is, and third the researcher must use several sites, cases, and situations in order to maximize diversity. I incorporated all three of Merriam's recommendations to increase external validity for this study.

Reliability

Reliability was described by Gall et al. (1996) as "the extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures as the first researcher" (p. 572). In qualitative research, however, the isolation of the laws of human behavior is not a goal. This, combined with the premise of interpretation in qualitative research, makes the thought of consistency not an option in this type of research. Merriam (1998) provided another perspective when she indicated that in qualitative research reliability should indicate whether the results are consistent with the data collected. To ensure that the results are dependable she recommended that the researcher should provide his or her position about the group being studied, the criteria for selecting the participants and a description of them, and the social context from which data was collected. Performing triangulation of multiple methods of

data collection and analysis, as well as developing an audit trail, increases dependability. An audit trail is a detailed explanation of how the researcher arrived at the results. I provided a considerable amount of description of the procedures, and included explanations of how I reached conclusions and interpretations. On the notion of reliability with regard to instrumentation, the concept can be applied to qualitative research similarly as in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher as human instrument can be refined and become more reliable through training and practice (Merriam). For the preparation of my skills as a qualitative researcher, I took five doctoral level courses on qualitative research and conducted a pilot study.

Subjectivity Statement

Peshkin (1988) indicated that subjectivities are those qualities of an investigator that can affect the results of an investigation. It is important therefore to list, identify, and pay close attention to them. In the following section I will present myself with relation to my research project.

I am convinced that hard work, formal education, and cultural capital are essential in the economic advancement of minorities in the United States. I believe that in the United States there are good opportunities for a person to become financially independent. My personal experience while living in the United States is that one is rewarded for effort; however, I am aware that meritocracy in the United States is a myth and that merit constitutes only a small component involving economic success. I agree with O'Brien (1999) when he indicated that in the United States higher education is the pivotal step in the climb to success.

Each culture holds values and traits that are dear to the people belonging to that culture. On the other hand, when a person travels to another country, the individual should learn some of

the traits and values of the host country in order to avoid possible problems, conflicts, or difficulties during his or her stay. This will increase the chances of being accepted and understood in the new country, but it is difficult to do in the United States since there are many cultures, traits, and values.. However, I believe that in order to prosper in the United States it is beneficial for the immigrant to learn how to interact with the “locals.” Immigrants and other minorities have a great necessity to acknowledge the traits of the groups with power and influence. In order for minorities to increase their possibilities of economical success, they must acknowledge the perceptions that other cultures or races have, not to create more hate or division, but to increase understanding regarding the differences and similarities between the groups. I do not agree with the Anglo-conformity model which states that immigrant groups should change their behavior and values to those of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) host group.

I share significant similarities with the subjects in this study and this proved beneficial in gaining entry with the participants. I grew up in Costa Rica and fluently speak and write Spanish. Historically, Mexicans and Costa Ricans have shared similar values, traditions, and customs. These similarities in culture ease communications between individuals from both countries. I am dark skinned and look Latino. As with the Mexican immigrant, I left my country of origin to pursue changes in my life. In addition, I share with the Mexican immigrant the fact that I have struggled in adapting to the new language, culture, and values. Although there are no automatic guarantees, as Johnson-Bailey (1999) indicated, “when there are fewer margins to mitigate, the research setting can take on an electrifying and intimate aspect” (p. 669).

There are also some distinct differences that I have from most typical Mexican immigrants that live in North Georgia. I came from a well-educated family; my father was a

university professor and my mother a public school teacher. While growing up, money was never a big concern in my family as I was raised in a middle-class family. However, I believe that the fact that my neighborhood was composed mainly of low-income families and that I went to a local public school enabled me to better relate and communicate with the participants in this study. Another difference is that I moved to the United States to further my education, and at the time of migration I could understand and speak some English. Since my father is originally from the United States and I was born in Costa Rica, I have had dual citizenship since birth and this has enabled ease of travel between both countries. I have become comfortable living in the United States. Though I grew up in a country where the Roman Catholic faith is the government's religion and attended a Roman Catholic school for 4 years, I was raised Methodist.

CHAPTER 4

COMMUNITY AND PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Introduction

The participants were purposefully selected. The interviews took place between October 2001 and May 2003. At the time of the interviews, each participant lived in North Georgia in the community described in this chapter. Although Lake Paradise is a fictitious name, the town is real and the descriptions are accurate.

All the participants were born and raised in Mexico and had become settled in the United States within 6 months and 2 years of the time of the interview. The other predetermined criteria in the selection of the participants were: (a) had worked in Mexico and the United States; (b) lived with wife, husband, extended family, or children in the United States; (c) were adults between 21 and 54 years old; and (d) included males and females.

Although all the participants were originally from Mexico, their backgrounds, work experience, and region of origin showed diversity. Another aspect that was not consistent between participants was with regard to the racial and ethnic background of the coworkers and supervisors. All of the participants spoke little or no English, and therefore the interviews and transcripts were conducted in Spanish. Table 1 shows demographic information of the participants, and Figure 1 is a map of Mexico showing the place of origin of each participant.

Table 1 Participants' Demographics

Pseudonim	Gender	State of Origin	Work in Mexico	Work in the U.S.
Chente	Male	Oaxaca	Agriculture & construction	Landscaping
Rosalinda	Female	Mexico D.F. & Michoacán	Assembly of soccer balls	Swimming pool factory
Carmen	Female	Michoacán	Assembly of soccer balls	Pillow factory & box assembly
Ramiro	Male	Oaxaca & Mexico D.F.	Public parking lot & messenger	Construction
Graciela	Female	San Luis Potosí & Tamaulipas	Child care & maquila factory	Plastics factory & door and window factory
Juan	Male	Michoacán	Agriculture & selling ice cream	Lawn care, animal care and window factory
Rafael	Male	Michoacán	Agriculture & construction	Agriculture & construction
Isabel	Female	Michoacán	Agriculture	Agriculture & chlorine factory
Lourdes	Female	Michoacán	Selling at fruit stand & agriculture	Lawn care & factory work (plastics, iron, and candy)



Figure 1 Map of Mexico. This map highlighting states where participants lived before coming to the United States. Modified from map found at <http://www.tamaulipas.gob.nx/ninos/images/mexico.gif> downloaded October 23, 2004.

Lake Paradise: From Hideaway to Hidden

Soon after arriving with my wife to live in Georgia, I learned of a community where many Hispanics lived. I am Hispanic and had worked with Latino migrants, thus I was very interested in finding out more about this place. On my first visit I had a difficult time finding this small, yet highly populated community of 3,600 people, as it was hidden in the non-developed section of the county. Although the distance from the downtown area to the entrance of the community is only three and a half miles, the cultural distance between these two places could not be further apart.

The community has two entrances. The entrance closest to town resembles a long driveway-type road leading to a home, instead of an entrance to a community with over 700 homes. For being one of the largest trailer parks in the state, I found it interesting there were no signs directing you to its location. I felt that I had been transported to another country-so many mobile homes and so much trash. People were burning trash outside their rundown mobile homes. Some trailers had broken windows, dilapidated entrances, and stairways. These mobile homes were crammed next to each other with just enough distance between them to place a fence. The roads were narrow, hilly, and curvy. The layout of the streets resembled a maze, making it easy to get lost inside its winding streets.

While driving through the community, I recognized some features typical of my home country of Costa Rica: chickens, dogs, children running near the roads, and Latino music. However, the sight of so many mobile homes brought the realization that this was not a typical town in Latin America. After cautiously and slowly driving through its roads, I reached the community's main feature-a nice lake. This was a small, beautiful lake where occasionally people fished from the road that bordered the edge of the body of water. From this perspective it

appeared to be a beautiful place to live. Up this road was the other entrance to this community where a faded sign showed the name of the place- Lake Paradise.

After talking with one of the initial developers of the town, I learned that during the early 1960s a group of investors decided to create this mobile home community to accommodate both older adults in one section and young, working families in another section. The idea of a mobile home community came from one of the members who had lived in Sarasota, Florida. The land had previously been used as a hide-away place, and cabins were built around the lake. For almost two decades it provided pristine living for many individuals. An olympic-size swimming pool was built along with a community store and a clubhouse. Things had obviously changed since then. Now, instead of being a hide-away place, it seemed more of a purposefully hidden place.

Just across the lake towards the second entrance there were two small churches. A sign outside the Baptist church read "*Cultos los domingos, todos bienvenidos*" ("Services on Sunday, all are welcomed"). Across from the other Protestant church was a trailer that served as a police precinct where a police car was usually parked outside. Near the second church there was a gas and convenience store. This small convenience store sold just about everything-milk, rice, eggs, soap, motor oil, fruit, meat-but the prices were very high. Adjacent to this building was a tiny pizza place. Their menu included tacos, burritos, carne asada (grilled meat), and of course, pizza.

I spent many hours in this community. I saw how this community came alive during the weekends, but during the weekdays this conglomerate of trailers became a ghost town as in the early morning hours school buses took the children to school and trucks and vans arrived to pick up the adults to take them to work. As I soon discovered, many of the residents, as the community itself, have gone through many transformations.

Participants' Portraits

Rosalinda

I visited Rosalinda one early summer afternoon. Due to her schedule at a swimming pool production factory she had asked me not to come earlier than 6 o'clock in the afternoon. Their home was located on the east side perimeter of the mobile home community about 150 yards from the edge of the lake. An open, large metal frame gate separated their small plot from the street.

On my arrival, I was met by Rosalinda's husband who was trimming a bush next to the gate with two of his children. Very cordially he introduced himself and then asked me to follow him inside the home. The inside of the *trailer*, as it is usually referred to by the Spanish-speaking residents, was very clean, and a large towel displaying a painting of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* hung from the wall. Rosalinda and I moved to the kitchen table, and soon after our conversation began. As we talked, one of her small children went to the refrigerator which was in the living room and offered me an orange flavored generic drink. I graciously accepted it.

Her husband and children remained in the living room attentively listening to our conversation. It was obvious that Rosalinda and her husband had told the children to be quiet as they were extremely well behaved during my visit. As I spoke with Rosalinda I was struck by her beautiful smile, her youthfulness, and her eagerness to share her experiences of working in Mexico and the United States. In an expressive manner she told her story.

I was born the youngest and only girl of five in Mexico City. Here I completed my only education. After my two older brothers married, my father said, "*No ya vamos, porque a rato se casa ella también y a rato nos vamos nosotros para el rancho y no sabes ni con quien quede*" ("No let's go, because any minute she could also get married, and we may soon go to the ranch

and never know with whom she'll stay"). People in the city believe differently than folks from the country. In the country there is machismo. Men work all the time, and the women have to stay at home taking care of children. It is believed that women should never look for *trabajos por fuera* (outside jobs). In the city, on the other hand, is like the United States in that men and women have the value of being able to look for jobs.

When I was around 12 years old and after finishing the sixth grade, my parents decided to return to the place where they were born, a *ranchito* in the State of Michoacán. My father wanted me to marry someone familiar. My middle brother did not want to move to the *ranchito*, so he stayed in Mexico City with my other two brothers. There he worked and sent us money. A year after my parents, my youngest brother, and I moved to the *ranchito* I got married; I was 13.

My father told me that before I was born the family had moved to the city because the situation at the *ranchito* became more difficult with the birth of my brothers. My parents did not want us to be exposed to the hard life of the rancho, and they wanted to protect us from hardship. At the *ranchito* my mother had to break corn on a *metate* (indigenous grinding stone) and make the tortillas by hand. My father said that in order to provide for the family he would go to the mountain and hunt for rabbit, squirrels and sell it to people with more *modo* (means), but in the city my father had to join the work force and became a tailor.

While living in Mexico City I never worked. I was always at home studying. Even after arriving at the *ranchito* where I saw my father working very hard planting corn with a *gancho* (a type of hoe), I was not allowed to do anything. However, after I married our responsibilities changed. Since times were difficult, my husband went to plant corn to provide for our expenses while I cooked. At age 16 I had my first child, and my husband left to the United States to work.

After this life became very difficult as most of the time I was by myself having to raise my children. This was even more difficult for me because I was raised in the city.

I found a job making soccer balls. Every Friday I would travel to a *taller* (shop), which was located in another *ranchito* to pick the leather, glue, thread, wax, and the other necessary materials so I could assemble the balls at home. This job was hard and paid very little, but making soccer balls and the planting and harvesting of *jitomates* (tomatoes) were the only choices for work in the area.

Because of the lack of work in our town it is common for men to leave to the United States during part of the year. During December the *ranchito* is full of people, but come February the *ranchito* becomes empty. There is no future at the *ranchito* and it is because of the needs that women stayed there while the husbands had to go. During my husband's trips back and forth from Mexico to the United States I conceived two other children.

After my children kept getting sick and constantly asked why their father was not there with us, I got angry and proposed to my husband that it would be best if we would all come to be together. I told him, "*Yo estoy dispuesta a trabajar y sacar nuestros hijos adelante*" (I am willing to work and move our children ahead). My husband agreed, but said that we could not all come at the same time. I had to come first and then bring our three children, and that is what we decided. Although I was fearful of being arrested or being involved in an accident and not being able to see my children again, I left to the United States. I crossed the border with an acquaintance and her husband. *Bendito sea Dios* (blessed be God) that the crossing occurred with no problems. God had seen how much we had suffered and all the time that we had been apart from each other. I knew God was going to help us. I had lots of faith. A year later our three children who had been staying with my parents came to be with us.

I was very lucky because within two days of my reunion with my husband in the United States I started working at a *fábrica de albercas* (swimming pool factory). The *fábrica* made the kind of inground pools found in hotels and homes. I located the job through the help of a *concuña* (sister-in-law). She told the *mayordoma* (female supervisor) to give me a hand because I had left my children behind. I had suffered so much in Mexico, and despite being married for so many years the children and I had always been alone. The *mayordoma* said she was going to help us and gave me the job.

I have been at the same factory since I arrived about a year and a half ago. For a couple of months I had to work at another factory due to a shortage of work at the *fábrica*. The *fábrica* is not very large as it employs 28 people. Four are American, four are black, and the rest are Mexican. People get paid hourly, and the work is seasonal as demands for pools drop during the winter months. Most employees work from January until August.

When I was first hired I started as everyone else, at the bottom. The first week I was asked just to observe and see the movement and what different people did. One day while I was still observing, I noticed that the *mayordoma* needed a swimming pool to be assembled, but there was no one available to do it. Because she could not speak Spanish I made gestures and signs telling her that I could do it. I told her, “¡Que yes, que yo la hacía!” (“That yes, that I would make it!”). She told me that she trusted me. I went to the machine and assembled the *alberca* in 15 minutes. The *mayordoma* patted me on the back and said, “Thank you! Is good!,” and gave me a thumbs up. That day I felt extremely happy. I wanted to do well and show them that a Mexican could do it and I did. When I got home I told my husband, “*Lo que se propone uno lo logra*” (When you put your mind to it, you can accomplish it).

I now know all the tasks required to operate the *fábrica*. I like to learn everything, and the *mayordoma* encourages us to teach each other about the machines. She recognizes my friend and me as dependable, fast workers and when needed she asks us to complete the *albercas* in 10 minutes. I enjoy that my job is flexible and that I have been allowed to get off when they call me from my child's school because one of my children is sick. I am more comfortable in the United States, but I hope to learn how to speak English so that I can understand and speak to the Americans. My dream is that my children can achieve more through education. Although I am happy to be here in the United States, I miss my family, my roots back in Mexico, and sometimes I get homesick. If you could just make a living in Mexico things would be much better there.

Chente

Turning left from Rosalinda's house, heading toward the lake about half a block, one finds Chente's home. When I first saw his house I was impressed because it was a large doublewide *traila* up on a small hill. At the bottom of the hill there was a two-car parking area; however, besides my own car there were no cars parked. As I got out of the car I noticed a large bag full of aluminum cans resting against a big tree in their yard. Many other cans, which were mostly beer cans, littered their lawn. As with Rosalinda, I had to come to conduct the interview late in the afternoon because Chente worked in landscaping or construction jobs during the day.

To reach their front door I went up about four concrete steps, up a concrete ramp, and then another six steps. Chente's wife, a short, dark skinned woman with long black straight hair, greeted me at the door. Her two children, a young boy age 4 and a girl age 6, looked around the door. "*¡Bienvenido, pase adelante!*" ("Welcome, come in!"), she said. As I entered their home I realized that although the *traila* appeared to be a doublewide, actually it was two separate houses

with no way to go from one side to the other unless one walked around the building. I was struck by how narrow the living room and kitchen appeared.

Chente came from one of the bedrooms in the back of the *trailer*. He looked as if to be in his mid-20s. He was very dark skinned, and short in stature, about five-feet two-inches. “*¡Mucho gusto!*” (“Pleasure to meet you!”), I said and he replied likewise. As we shook hands I noticed that unlike my firm handgrip, he gave a very gentle, timid-like handshake. I wondered if this was because he was nervous by my presence or if this was his usual way of shaking hands. He appeared shy as he would not look at me in the eye, and when he spoke he quietly mumbled. He asked where I would prefer for us to sit and I said, “*Quizás en la sala?*” (“Perhaps in the living room?”). As we both sat on the couch, in a very quiet voice he told his story. At times it was difficult for me to understand his Spanish, which is his second language. He told his story.

I have now been in the United States for 2 years. My wife and our two children were born in Mexico and did not arrive here until 1 year after I came. This *trailer* is the only home we have lived in the United States. I am a shy person, in big part because of problems related to language. I cannot speak English and have difficulties even speaking Spanish, since my first language is Zapoteco, which is an indigenous language from Mexico. This language difference also caused me problems in school when my teachers could not understand me, and I was not able to respond to their requests. But regardless of language difficulties, I have always been respected because of my hard work.

I grew up very humbly in Oaxaca, Southern Mexico. Our living was one of subsistence where little or no money was earned. My father was a peasant who tended cattle. He also grew corn and beans. While I was still a young child my father, who never married my mother, left with another woman. However, I continued to work for him. Initially I watched my father as he

worked with cattle and planted beans and corn. I started to work by taking care of the animals and, although I did not want to learn, my father taught me how to use a plow. This was very backbreaking work. From a young age I knew that this type of life and work was not for me.

Like my father, I initially did not marry the mother of my children. But after being pressured by family members to baptize my children, I was informed that in order to baptize them I had to present a marriage certificate. For this reason I decided to marry their mother; however, any engagement and reception required money, and the economical cost of the marriage and baptisms forced me to get a loan. Soon I realized that I would not be able to pay the debt so I decided to come to the United States. I also wanted to better the family and myself.

To prepare for the trip my mother and grandmother took me to church and bought me flowers. My paternal grandparents have the belief that before going anywhere one must be blessed. This was especially important because I was not going to be in my land. *¿Qué tal si algo pasa?* (What if something happened?), I did not know anyone here and that was the reason that before coming I went to the chapel to pray and come with lots of faith.

While still in Mexico I heard that most work in the United States involved dishwashing, and that without being able to understand English, people would take advantage of me. Nevertheless, I really did not know how work was going to be over here, but I was willing to do anything since I had suffered enough. I did not believe people here suffered too much, as I had heard about all the farm equipment available in the United States, but regardless, *yo decidí, no importa aunque sea a mano o de sol a sol [yo iba a] trabajar* (I made-up my mind, it did not matter even though it is by hand or from dawn till dusk, [I will] work). However, I never thought that I would end up landscaping yards.

I feel my work in the United States is like the lottery in the sense that it involves a lot of luck. I rely on employers to come to the trailer park to choose me from a line and give me a job. My experience has been that after employers see my dedication, hard work, and ability to operate certain equipment, they seek me from the crowd. I feel that the most important characteristics that the employer looks for in the employee are his or her hard work and their responsibility of meeting them on time and at the correct location. At times I have felt anger at work because I have observed that other co-workers, particularly *americanos* (Americans), do not carry an equal load of work. At times I have wanted to confront the employer about the situation, but because of fear and my inability to speak the language I have never approached the *patrón* (person who takes care of the employee).

I believe that there are huge differences between work in Oaxaca and the United States. For one, work is better paid so I can afford to buy things for my children. The equipment available in the United States makes outdoor work easier to accomplish. In Mexico jobs are scarce, and with as little formal education as I have work availability is close to none.

Although I have the opportunity to find work and make a living in the United States, I still miss my family in Mexico, my house, our land, and the food. *No, no puedo olvidar mi casa, mi tierra* (No, no I cannot forget my house, my land). I am in this country because of work.

Graciela

Graciela lives in a very nice trailer near the center of Lake Paradise. I met her at church about a year prior to the interview. I could remember from that occasion how she had referred to the value and importance of work. I was also intrigued that she was a single mother raising three beautiful daughters.

When I entered the house for the interview, I noticed there was not much furniture in the living room and the inside of the house was not completely painted. The living room was dark in part because the curtains were closed, but also because there was only one low wattage bulb hanging from the ceiling. As with the previous interviews, I was accepted into her home with a smile. After a short greeting and some explanation about the project I was working on, our conversation started. Graciela was by far the most talkative of the interviewees and with extreme excitement she narrated her story.

I come from a large family of eight brothers and three sisters. I am the second oldest. I was born in Ciudad de Valle, which is a city with businesses, hospitals, and accounting firms. There I completed 2 years of *academia* (academy) and 2 years of *comercio* (business). However, after I got married and had a child *hubo problemitas* (there were problems), and I had to move to the border town of Matamoros Tamaulipas to find a job. Because the job I found was at a *maquila* (assembly plant whose products go overseas), I was never able to use my education. At this *empresa* (business company), I wound motors with copper wire for parts of airplanes. I worked at this *empresa* for 13 years. Then as a *casualidad de la vida* (coincidence of life) I came to visit my husband in the United States, and I ended up staying.

Siempre he trabajado (I have always worked). When I was a little girl I worked taking care of children and at other houses so I could pay for my education. My family was poor, and I even had to share my underwear with my older sister. When I was young my father traveled far to work on road construction, and he came home only once every 15 days. He would always bring us food. Because he worked on the roads, sometimes they would find trucks on the side of the road and he would take a *costal de cebollas o papas* (sack of onions or potatoes). *Y ya viene mi papá, ya viene mi papá-corriamos a ayudarle* (And here comes my dad, here comes my dad-

we ran to help him). Although he was a *canijo* (womanizer), he never left us without food. Even if it was only *frijoles con chile* (beans with hot pepper), he never let us down. This whole situation of my father not being around and us not having much materially made my brothers and sisters very close to each other.

I was the first from all my brothers and sisters to leave Ciudad de Valle in search of work. I moved to Matamoros Tamaulipas, but soon after arriving I started to bring all of my other brothers and sisters. I still have three brothers living there in Matamoros. The main differences between these two cities were the availability of work, income, and how often the employers paid. In Valles the minimum wage was very low and they paid monthly, while in Tamaulipas I was paid every 2 weeks. Even though at the beginning I had to rent a place to live, I still made more money in Tamaulipas.

My husband never spent much time with us. He would stay for long periods of time in Houston, and when he would come to Mexico he would say, “*Me voy pa’ ya porque voy a ver a mi papa*” (“I’m going over there because I’m going to see my father”), and he would leave to Valles. He did not know about the *biles* (bills). He would just leave me working-she will find a way to pay for the electricity, the water... ¡y yo me lo aguantaba! (and I put up with it!). Then after living in Matamoros for 13 years he asked me to come to visit him in the United States. He had left 6 months prior to work in Georgia. I asked for permission at work and got my visa. I did not even say goodbye to my coworkers. I was sure I would go back. I had my job, my family, and my house in Tamaulipas. Although I brought two of my daughters with me I had to send my other daughter to stay with my father in Valles. I thought it would be a short visit, I even told my daughters, “*Vamos a ir a pasear*” (“We are going for a visit”).

After we arrived, my husband begged for us to stay. *Pos yo no me quedo porque mi hija se quedo allá* (Well I am not staying because my daughter stayed over there), but he arranged for her to come using her cousin's documents and she made it through. *Créame que estoy arrepentidísima de no haberme quedado* (Believe me, I am so sorry for not having stayed) in Mexico. I really did not want to come to the States. For 12 years I had a good job and then I just left it behind. Even my coworkers had told me not to stay.

When I first arrived in the States I did not work, but my husband was making \$450 a month and we had to pay for *la traila, los biles* and I said, "*Yo tengo que trabajar para ayudar*" ('I have to work to help'). My husband did not want me to work because he wanted to do it himself, but I did not trust him. I told him, "I don't care if you get mad, I'm going to work". Soon after he got in trouble at his own work, and he quit working. I became the only provider of our house. He could not understand that I had to work to get my daughters ahead. He thought I was just being stubborn, and he even tried to correct the situation with violence. Finally he gave up and instead of saying I can do more, he said, "*¿Para qué me quedo aquí?*" ("Why should I stay here?"), and went back to Mexico. He told me that he regretted bringing me here to the United States because everything had come to an end.

The first job I had in the United States was where my husband worked. It was at a company making wooden windows and doors, and my job was painting them. Although I did not know how to paint, I learned how to paint at work. This was an outdoor job, and because I worked from January until April I got very cold to the point that my hands really hurt. We were living at my sister's and they had no heat. *Yo batallé, yo sufrí, y aquí sí sufrí* (I battled, I suffered, and here I really suffered). Soon after I had to leave this job because my husband

changed jobs and he did not want me to stay by myself so he told me, “*Ya no vas*” (“You’re no longer going”).

I did not work during the months of April, May, June, and then it was July when I really wanted to work. I would see some shoes I wanted, but I couldn’t buy them and then the payment of the *traila* and the *biles*. That is when I started to work without my husband’s permission at my present job. I work at night at a plastics factory. They make plastic lids, spoons, buckets, and other things like this. At this job I have to work fast, but it is easy to accomplish. I like to work on a machine that keeps you busy because otherwise I say, “*¡Ay Dios, aquí me va a dar sueño!*” (“Oh God, here I am going to get sleepy!”). At the beginning I was very nervous of not being able to learn how to use the equipment, but I learned how to operate the equipment because other Mexicans trained me. I feel proud that after 1 year I can operate any machine in the factory. I can work wherever they ask me to work. I really like my job, but I get tired because many times I have to work overtime.

Mexicans help each other at work, but one day I had to work with two *morenos* (blacks) and they wanted me to do all the work. The supervisor was also *morena* (black female). I had to even bend down and pick up things for the man. He said his back was hurting. How can it be possible that a woman had to ... and *me dio mucho coraje que no comprendieran a uno* (I got very angry that they would not understand me). I even cried.

This company also takes advantage of the Mexicans because they know that we do not have good *seguro* (could be insurance or social security). Well some Mexicans do, but most of us do not. The factory does not give secure positions to Mexicans, and they ask us to take our breaks when work is slow and we have to be the first ones to work when work is needed. I have

always said *que ganas de ser hombre* (how I wish I was a man) so I could earn more money, a man moves more, can work in construction, works more.

I thought my experience in the United States was going to be very different from what I am living today. Here you have to work and work is hard. There is also racism. Now I am the one who has to get the family ahead, and my daughters can see that. If I ended up without work I can always look for a *lavada* (laundry). *Allá voy a lavar, tengo manos* (There I will go to wash clothes, I have hands).

The most important thing to me is my job because from there I can give food to my daughters. Despite my bad luck, I am happy that my daughters can learn more here in the United States. They have more privileges, more opportunities, and they can learn English. I tell them they are fortunate because each of you has your own clothes; instead I grew up in a constant fight about who was going to wear the clothes.

Loneliness makes work very difficult. My mother tells me, “¿Cómo te juistes para allá?” (“How did you go over there?”). “*Pos es que yo creo que mi destino era aquí*” (“Because I think that my destiny was here”). Although I regret coming to the United States, I say we are here to stay.

Carmen

I grew up at a *rancho* in the State of Michoacán. I spent all of my childhood in the *rancho*. *No salí a ningún lado* (I never went anywhere). I did not work as a child and had to drop out of school half way through fifth grade because my father did not have more money to give us education. I wanted to study, but he would say, “*No, no tengo dinero para darte vecas*” (“No, I don’t have money to give you scholarships”).

My life growing up was sad. I was the second youngest of nine brothers and sisters. When I was still very young, my dad worked *sembrando en el campo* (planting in the countryside) and had lots of *maíz* and *garbanzo* beans. He even owned cows, but he started selling them one by one so he could drink. Then he gave the land to others so they could plant on our property. They would give him some of the harvest and that is how he survived. We ended up with nothing.

Once I stole from my father some *maíz* because I had a craving for sweets from the store and he would never give us money. He would mark the buckets with sticks so he could tell if someone had taken his *maíz*, but I moved the stick. I took the corn and sold it to my sister-in-law. I told my brother what I had done and he went and did the same. This corn was used to make *tortillas, tamales, atole, pinole and pozole* (all typical foods based on corn) or sometimes would be used to feed the chickens.

My father left to work in Baja California. He was there for a long time. While gone he did not look after my mother, he would not call, he would not write. He was over there as they say *de volados* (with women). Sometime later he came back sick. When I was around 15 my dad left again, but this time for good. We had to continue there at the ranch on our own.

After dropping out of school I went to work making *bolas de fútbol* (soccer balls). I made between 12 and 15 *bolas* a week, and with this work I brought home about \$10. *¿Se imagina? ¡Nada!* (Can you imagine? Nothing!). I never felt proud of my work in Mexico, people do not make much money and it is spent the same day. I used this money to *vestirme* (to dress). My brothers and sisters also worked at this small factory. *Así nos manteníamos* (This is how we survived). Most people making *bolas* were women because their husbands would leave to the

Estados Unidos (United States). Some men would have bad luck and get caught or go to jail. The women had to stay behind, and with this job they could feed their children.

I married at 17. My husband has been coming to the *Estados Unidos* since he was 14 or 15, so soon after our wedding he left me by myself to return to the *Estados Unidos*. When I was 18 I had our first daughter. Later I had two other daughters in Mexico.

My daughters would only share about 2 months a year with my husband. I would say, “*Llevame yo quiero ir*” (“Take me, I want to go”). He would reply saying, “No, stay here because over here you are *más a gusto* (more comfortable) with the girls. I will work and send you money”. I would tell him, “You already missed when they first began to crawl, their first words,” but he still would not arrange for me to come.

While at the ranch I had noticed that individuals who came back from working in *Estados Unidos* dressed really nice. This made me think it was great over there. I thought *que aqui se vivía de maravilla* (that here life was marvelous). If you come, we will suffer my husband would tell me. OK, I said, we will suffer together; however, I had in my mind that I was coming to work and that we were going to have a *vida bonita* (beautiful life). Through God’s help, we can both work to get ahead. You need to share with your daughters, I said, and he finally agreed.

Through my sister’s advice I decided to leave my two oldest daughters in Mexico. We still had to get an \$8,000 loan to cover the expenses involved in coming to the *Estados Unidos*. For this loan we had to put a lien on our house. The house was the only thing we had. “What if we get caught? How can we recover the loss?,” I would ask my husband. We crossed through the *línea* (railroad line). ¡*Bendito sea Dios!* (Blessed be God!) I did not suffer during the crossing, but soon after arriving I became pregnant and got very sick. I could not find a job and was unable to pay for *las drogas* (the medicines).

I have not been working here very long, about seven months. I have held two different jobs here in the *Estados Unidos*. One at a pillow factory and then I worked for a little while at a factory that assembles boxes.

At the pillow factory there are only Mexican workers. Others *han entrado* (have entered), but they do not last. When I was first hired, a *güera* (white person) also started, but she could not work and left the job. A *morena* (African-American) also came, but she only lasted 2 days. A *mexicana* (female Mexican) lasted 8 days. She told the *mayordoma*—“*¡Yo no puedo ya, me voy!*” (I can no longer do it, I’m leaving!). They don’t care if the workers are tired. Sometimes they run the machines very fast and that is when people get hurt. A coworker after only 5 months had to quit because she messed up the tendons in her hand. One time we produced in one 8-hour shift 700 boxes that contained 12 pillows each.

At this factory Mexicans treat their people very ugly. They would criticize me when I still did not know how to do the job. They are not patient and are very hypocritical. Your coworkers expect that you know everything when you start, and the boss would at times fire employees after only 1 week. I don’t think people can learn how to sew after just 1 week, especially if that person had never used a sewing machine. When I started my coworkers told me that I would be fired if I could not learn within 2 weeks. I wanted to learn fast. I really wanted to work hard and not lose my job because I needed money to bring my other daughters to live with us.

At this factory there was no system for learning. There were a few nice coworkers that would tell me do it like this or do it like that, but it was really up to me to learn. *La mayordoma* did not help. I would say, “*¡Dios mío!*” (my God!) I cannot teach myself.” On top of all of this, they told me that the supervisor did not like me. I came here to work not to make my supervisor like me. To do your job is one thing, to be liked by your supervisor is another. My hands would

sweat when the *patrón* would stand up. ¡*Hay Dios mío!* (Oh my God!), make him walk away, but after some time I resolved that if he did not think I was doing my job then he could fire me. I can always look for another job where I'm not embarrassed. After this resolution I became so confident in myself I learned how to sew. This was the proudest day at work. From that moment on I felt more comfortable, *más segura de mi misma* (more sure of myself), and more satisfied.

After some time at the pillow factory I was let go. They ran out of work, and since I was the most recent employee I was one of the first ones to go. Soon after, I found another job at a very small factory where I had to put foam inside big boxes. The factory only had six workers and most were *güeros*. My *patrón* (boss) could not speak Spanish, but he never made me feel bad. When we ran out of work, we would sit down for about 2 hours and jokingly he would say “*no mony*” and I would reply “*no workin.*” He was very nice.

After working at the box factory for about 2 months, I heard that the pillow factory was once again looking for workers and because the job where I was making boxes was coming to an end I applied for my old job. At the pillow factory they offered me a day shift. Because I had a baby to take care and my other daughters were in school I asked them to give me a night shift. They agreed. This shift pays a little more, about \$9.35 an hour. This leaves me with about 300 *pesos* (dollars) a week.

Since I still owe \$3,000 to my husband's aunt, I entered a *tanda*. Matter of fact, I am in two *tandas*. A *tanda* is something common here and in Mexico and it is a way to save money. Let me explain how it works. You get with other people who are trustworthy, usually family, and we agree to give a certain amount of money per week. Lets say there are 10 individuals involved, each person puts in the pot \$100 per week. The group then collects \$1,000 every week and every 10 weeks the money goes to you. In one *tanda* we agreed to give \$200 a week. This is really

helping me pay the money I owe and it also helps many people to send money to their relatives in Mexico.

I tell you, life is much better over here. There's lots of poverty over there (Mexico). Over here there is more possibility for work, to live with your family and be together. You can eat better and dress better. In Mexico my daughters would wear something new every 3 to 4 months, but here I can buy them clothes very often. I don't go to the *mole* (mall) because it is too expensive, but I can still buy them something at the dollar store. We do not want to cause any harm to the *Estados Unidos*. The only thing we want is for our children to study and to progress economically because over there (Mexico) you cannot find work.

Ramiro

Ramiro's trailer is in a corner, but his house shares the lot with two other trailers making for a very jammed space. I met Ramiro previously having helped him on several occasions by taking his second child to the doctor and a hospital in downtown Atlanta. His daughter had to have surgery, and he and his wife were in desperate need of transportation and for someone to help them with translation. During those trips to Atlanta he seemed very shy and quiet; however, when I called to ask if it would be OK for me to interview him, he enthusiastically agreed.

When I arrived at his trailer on a Saturday morning he guided me to one of the bedrooms in the back of his house. There were several people in the living room, and I felt that he did not want to disturb them. Later I found out that 11 people lived in this small trailer. I sat on the bed, and he sat on top of a small desk. His oldest son, who was about 6 years old, sat on his lap and his second child, the one I had taken to the hospital, walked in and out of the room during the interview. Although we were in such a small space I was glad to see that he was very happy to tell his story.

He provided this account: I was born in the State of Oaxaca. Here I worked very little, mostly cutting brush as I helped my father. I stayed in this State until *secundaria* (middle school). In 1985 I left to the *Distrito Federal* (Mexico's capital) where one of my sisters who was living there found me a place to live and also found me a job. I lived in the *Distrito Federal* for 15 years and then I came to the *Estados Unidos*. I live with my wife and three children. We brought two of my children from Mexico, and one was born over here.

The place where my three brothers, five sisters, and I were raised is located in *el campo* (the country). My parents planted and harvested *café* (coffee), *maíz*, *frijol* (beans), *calabasita* (type of squash), *sandía* (watermelon), and everything else that grows in the region. We also had chickens, pigs, and horses. That is how we lived. In the area there is only *primaria* (elementary school), *no secundaria*. And for us to go to *primaria* we had to walk 2 hours in each direction. I wasted 4 hours every day. School went from 9:00 in the morning until 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon. Where we lived there were no factories, and when I was young there was no *electricidad* (electricity), *teléfonos* (telephones), and no *kinder* (kindergarten). *No había trabajo ni nada* (No work or nothing). The only jobs one could find were at restaurants or selling things in the street. So basically one had to live from parents' assistance. There are jobs in *el campo*, but they would not give me one. It was expected that when one got out of *primaria*, between 12 and 13 years old, one needed to look for a way out of the village so one could go to *secundaria*.

Once I arrived in *D. F. (Distrito Federal)*, I started to work and study. At the beginning it was hard to adapt to the city life because I did not know anyone, and I was by myself, always by myself. Life there was very *agitada* (busy). There were so many cars, and if you wanted to go out you were obligated to have some money. There you could not leave without money. This was new to me because before I never had to buy anything. I could always find everything I needed

at home, but now by myself I was forced to find a job. After some time in the city I started to meet people, classmates, and neighbors, and I started to adapt to life in *D.F.* Now I'm used to life in the city, and I even believe that life is better here than in the *campo*.

While in *D.F.* I was able to finish *secundaria*, *preparatoria*, and two semesters of *carrera* (college), but it was impossible for me to continue studying because the job's schedule did not match my school's schedule. I had two jobs while I lived in *D.F.* I worked as a messenger and at a public parking garage. I felt proud working at the garage because after working as a messenger, I saw a big difference in salary. For the first time I started to have money, and I could even save some money. After I had to leave school, my schedule allowed me to work two shifts. I saved enough money to buy a property, and I started to build a house.

The garage where I worked is a company that has locations throughout Mexico and even here in the United States. I even think there are those parking garages in downtown Atlanta. The work at the garage was not hard as I was only responsible for charging the drivers and collecting the parking tickets. However, towards the end of my stay in *D.F.* life became very difficult. Work was paid very poorly. The money earned was not enough for the expenses. There was just not enough and that is when I decided to come to the *Estados Unidos*.

One of my brothers had come to the *Estados Unidos* about 2 years before we decided to come, and he helped us to pay for our tickets. He had told me that work in the *Estados Unidos* was very hard. For us the crossing of the border was very difficult because we were caught four times. We had to spend 15 days at the border, but we finally made it.

When I first arrived to the *Estados Unidos* I had to spend a month in Louisiana where I found a job running cable underground. Then I came to Georgia where at the beginning I only found jobs that required me to work 2 or 3 days a week. The job I found was in construction

hanging vinyl siding on houses. I started working for a Mexican *patron*, and there I learned the needed skills. He taught me how to measure in inches and how to cut wood. He also taught me about the handsaw, the nails, and the staples. It took me about 2 months to learn all of that, but he did not pay very well. Then I met *un americano* (an American) who hired me as a *maestro* (Ramiro's way of saying master, actual translation of maestro is teacher). I am presently working for him. A *maestro* makes more money.

For this type of job we worked in *cuadrillas* (teams) of five people. Our group worked with another two *cuadrillas*. The workers that hung the siding were all *mexicanos*. However, my *cuadrilla*, while I worked for the *patrón mexicano*, had two *gringos* (American). One of these *gringos* did not last very long because he was always late bringing in the materials.

I first felt good in the *Estados Unidos*, when I received my first pay increase and also when I had the skills to become a *maestro*. I still have not learned English, but in each *cuadrilla* there is one person who serves as translator. These translators are paid more because they are in charge and they tell the group where they need to go and what they need to do. They make good money because they speak English. The *gringos* are also paid a little more because I believe they are paid by the house (number of homes constructed) instead of by the hour. However, sometimes when we did a very good job the *patrón* gave us a little bonus. One hundred, 50, 150 *pesos a la semana a parte del sueldo* (a week besides the salary).

I have never felt racism here in the *Estados Unidos*. The *patrones* have always treated me good, and I get along well with my coworkers. There are a few lazy coworkers that party during the weekend and do not show up Mondays, but since we are paid independently by the hour then I do not care about what the others do. Besides the *patrón* sees who works hard, and this is a

factor for the pay raise. Some people never get raises, but that is because *no les rinde el trabajo* (they do not make their work bear fruit).

Work in the *Estados Unidos* is very hard and there is no rest. At the beginning one suffers, but as one learns and gets to know the *patrón* and one builds trust you start making more money. In the *campo* in Mexico you worked the hours that you wanted, but over here there is a schedule. At the rate that I work here in the *Estados Unidos* I will only last about 5 or 6 more years before my body gives way. *Porque se desgasta uno mucho, bastante* (Because you wear out too much, a lot). However, I would also say that work here as compared to Mexico is better, because you can live a little better and you can dress nicer. The hardest thing here in the *Estados Unidos* is transportation. Here you are forced to use a taxi or you have to call a family member or someone with a car.

I consider myself to be a good worker. This I learned from my parents. They would punish us if we did not follow their directions. My parents did not allow us to go to parties, to drink, *y hablar mal* (and say bad words). My dad took us since we were 10 or 12 years old to work in *el campo*. Whatever he told us to do we did. No one from my brothers ended up being a drug addict or an alcoholic. Yes, sometimes we drink two or three beers, but never to get drunk.

My hope in the United States is to make enough money to finish the house that I left half-built and to start a business. I hope with God's help to save money and take it to Mexico. I hope that in 2 or 3 years I will be able to return to Mexico with my family and finish my house.

Juan

Juan is a gentleman who lives near the center of the community of Lake Paradise. His trailer is different from many of the trailers in the area because it has enough space to park three or four cars in the front of his small property. When I arrived for the interview two of the spaces

where taken by two enormous American built cars, but I was still happy that I could park my car out of the road in front of his home.

I contacted Juan through his cousin who I had become friends with soon after my arrival to the region. Although Juan had traveled back and forth between the United States and Mexico for many years, it was within the past 2 years that he had decided to settle in the United States. He had finally decided to bring his children and his wife to live with him in Georgia. In a quiet manner he told his story.

I came to the United States to change my life. My friends told me about work in *El Norte* (The North). They said that *toda la raza* (all the race referring to Hispanics) went to pick fruit in the summer and prune trees in the winter and that in *El Norte* one had the best opportunities even if one did not know how to read. So one day I asked my father about going to *El Norte*. At that time he did not want me to come because he himself had never been to the United States.

After I got married when I was only 20, my father said to me “*pues ya te casastes, ahorita nos vamos a sembrar*” (“well you got married, now we go to plant”). Sometime later I ran into some cousins and they told me “*y te casastes, independisate de mi tío*” (“now you are married, you need to become independent of my uncle because you will not be able to live like that”).

I was raised in *La Piedad de Michoacán* with my other two brothers and two sisters. I remember my parents being worried about my education, *pero osea a mi me mandaban a la escuela y yo me iba de pinta* (but well they would send me to school and I would just take off). I would go with my friends to the river because I loved to fish. On other occasions my father would pull me out of school so I could help him with work. I worked for my dad since I was very young. I started bringing him lunch, like tacos. My father also had cattle that I had to look after.

Once I became older and stronger I worked tilling the land with *a yunta* (a plow pulled by oxen). Later I found a man who planted garbanzo, and since my father did not give me money for my work, I decided to go work for him. I ended up dropping out of school in third grade.

I finally decided to come to *El Norte*. My father agreed that it was fine for me to travel, and he even gave me some money to pay someone to cross me through the border. It was at that time that I was forced to leave my wife with my parents. I first worked *en un rancho* in Illinois. There I planted and cared for grass for *yardas*. My job was to cut it in rolls and place them on palettes. After this job I returned to Mexico, and I was able to buy a pump to irrigate a garden I had planted back in Mexico. During this time in Mexico I went to work for a man who owned *puercos* (pigs). I worked there for 1 year and with the money I saved I returned to *the States*.

On my second trip to the States I worked at a chicken farm in Santa Ana, California. From there I went to Fresno, but immigration caught me and sent me back to my land. Sometime later I traveled north again, and this time I went to Chicago. With the money I earned in Chicago I built a house for my family in *La Piedad*. Some time later I returned to Santa Ana where I worked as a groundskeeper. Soon after this I got sick, and I lost my job because I was in the hospital. Around that time my father also passed away, and I had to return to Mexico.

A brother-in-law told me about work in Alabama, and that is how I ended up in this area. In Alabama I worked *en una perrera* (at a dog pound) where I had to clean the kennels. But once again I got sick, and I had to return to Mexico. During this stay in Mexico I found a job selling *paletas* (ice cream on a stick), and that way I was able to provide for my four children. On Saturdays and Sundays is when I sold the most *paletas*. The owner of the business gave me the merchandise, and I would keep 40% of the sales. During the week I worked in what my father left—*tierritas que quedaron ahí* (lands that were left there).

I then spent a long time not coming to the States, but I really wanted to come. I ended up borrowing some money from my uncle to come back. A person from *La Piedad* told me that there were lots of jobs in Georgia. Lots of people from Mexico that lived in Chicago also started to come to Georgia. However, initially here *a la raza no la querían* (Hispanics were not liked). I found a job at a window factory for campers; however, at the present time I work for a developer. At my job we press the roads, and then we press them again and then we level them. All work *es una gracia de Dios* (is a grace from God). Whatever one gets, one gets it through work.

I get along well with my coworkers. All of my coworkers are Mexican with the exception of the *mayordomos* who are *Americanos*. I now know how to operate a truck that has a shovel in the back that removes dirt, and I can also drive Caterpillars. They give you an opportunity, they say climb on that machine, and then they point and say this is for this and that is for that. That is how you gain experience. You have many opportunities to advance here without distinguishing races.

I believe life here is very different as compared to life over there in Mexico. Children here do not work. Over there you have to plant and from there you harvest the crops and that is what one eats. And those who own a cow milk it and sell the milk, and that money is used to purchase soap, sugar, and salt. Life is very different than here. To me work is also easier here in the United States. In Mexico one needs *secundaria* to find a job. Here they do not even ask you for your education. If they need you they give you the application and then the job.

I had wanted to bring my wife for a long time, and my children also want to come. My oldest son was the first to make it over here to live with me. My wife told me that he was perverse and she could not longer stand him so she sent him when he was 15 years old. Soon

after he arrived, I found him a job where I worked. He was very lazy. Then my other children started to say “*que yo me quiero ir pa’ ya*” (“I want to go over there”). *Y ni modo de dejarlos y ya les daba para que se vinieran y ya estamos acá* (Oh well, I had to let them, and I would provide for them to come and now we are here). Now we even own this house. We bought it between all of us.

Nothing is difficult here in the United States. The only difficult thing is the language. My *patrones* are very good people, especially at the beginning when they treated me very good. A concern I have is that if I had to leave my job other jobs would not pay me by my age.

Rafael

I met Rafael for the first time when I went to interview him. I was somewhat desperate because I could not find any more new residents at Lake Paradise that fulfilled my study’s participant requirements. I had spoken to several individuals who are leaders in the community, and no one could think of more possible participants for my study. However, one day I received a call from one of my dear friends in the community who indicated that she had just learned about a family who lived in the community, and she believed that either the mother or the father could “qualify” for my study. She gave me their phone number and address, and I proceeded to call them to find out the likelihood of visiting them. After speaking to the wife I learned that although she could not participate because she had not worked in the United States, her husband Rafael fulfilled the requirements and was willing to share his story with me.

I came to their house that is located in the opposite side than all the other houses I had visited for interviews. They had a nice yard and the neighbors’ *trailas* were not within arm’s reach as was the case for most houses in the community. I also noticed that someone was

building a new porch and that working clothes were lying outside the front door. I knocked on the door and Rafael opened it and welcomed me into his house.

Rafael recounted: I was raised in a rancho in Michoacán in the *Municipio de La Piedad*. My father and all the known relatives have been *campesinos* (workers in agriculture). I come from a big family of 12. As *campesinos* we worked very hard but we still ate badly. We planted *maíz, frijol, sorgo* (sorgum), and other seeds, but the most important and basic were *maíz* and *frijol*. We worked for ourselves, and what we produced is what we ate. Although we were poor, by the end of the year my parents were able to buy each child a pair of pants and a shirt.

I started to work when I was about 10 years old *tirando abono y cuidando ganado* (fertilizing the fields and looking after cattle). This was hard work for a boy. I had to get up at 6:00 in the morning to take the animals to the pasture. Then I had to bring lunch to my father, then to the *milpa* (corn field), and then back to the pasture. This was my daily work until I was 17 or 18 years old. I had to do this regardless if it rained or not. Because of all this work, I had to drop out of school. I left school in fourth grade. Only two of my brothers made it to sixth grade. The truth is that life in Mexico is very hard. Mexico is beautiful, but unfortunately although there is life, there is no future.

After I got married my father gave me some of the land that he was planning to give for as inheritance. So I started to plant it, but soon I discovered that there was no opportunity in this type of work. I planted some hectares with *sorgo*. The price for a sack of 25 kilos was at that time 400,000 pesos. Then we got no rain, and I didn't even make my initial investment on the seed. I then decided to leave my town and went to work on the construction of the *autopista* (highway) Mexico-Guadalajara. I first had to work in security looking after the equipment at night, but afterwards, thanks to God, they gave me a position as an operator. I felt very proud

when I was moved to operator. I was able to move up thanks to my own effort. I would pay close attention to how they operated the machinery, and then I asked a friend to let me drive the truck and that is what led me to get a better position. Because we were far from our house I ended up renting a house so my family could come and stay with me.

The highway job finished, and although some people had discouraged me to go to work in the *Estados Unidos* by saying that work was too hard, the need became so great that I said *pues no, yo me voy* (well no, I will go). So I went to California where I worked picking grapes, pears, and doing other odd jobs in farms. I went and came back between the *Estados Unidos* y *México* every year. It was during this time that I had the best days of work. This occurred when I had to work continuously for 19 and a half hours driving a tractor at a grape farm. This was the day I earned the most money because after the first 10 hours it was all extra money. I also worked at an almond farm. This was the roughest work ever because I had to spend the *todo el santo día* (the entire holy day) on my knees.

From California I then decided to come to Georgia. Sometime after arriving in Georgia a *patrón* came to the house where I was staying, and he asked another person if he wanted to work and this is when I told him that I would work. I am coming from California, I said. He replied, “¿Sabes inglés?” (“Do you know English?”) and through his translator I said, “No, yo no sé (No, I don’t know), but I really want to work,” I exclaimed. “Ok”, he said, “tomorrow someone will come and pick you up,” and this is the same place where I work today. This work involves putting water lines and sewer lines into buildings.

At work we are five Mexicans, two blacks, and two *gabachos* (white folks), and we work to perfection. There is no racism. Initially I had to communicate to my *patrón* by making signs with my hands, then I started to learn how to do my job by observing how things were done. I

also learned that the black workers were greatly needed because they find a way to communicate with the Spanish speakers and are responsible for telling us where to go and what to do.

After working for some time at this place I had to return to Mexico. My *patrón* asked me, “¿Vas a regresar?” (“Are you going to come back?”). “I want to”, I said, “but I need money for the *coyote* (slang name for individuals who are paid to lead people across the border).” He then told me that he would lend me the money. I was planning to be gone for only 3 months, but instead I was gone for 1 year and 3 months. While in Mexico I worked as a *peón de albañil* (mason’s assistant) working in whatever so I could stay with my family, but because of the need I had to return to *los Estados Unidos*. I asked a friend for money so I could pay the *coyote*, and when I arrived back in Georgia I asked the *patrón*, “¿Me das trabajo?” (“Can you give me work?”), and he said, “Yes, here is your job.” Then the *patrón* gave me money so I could pay my friend in California. He then asked about my family, “¿te la trajiste?” (“Did you bring them?”). I said, “No, I came by myself.” “You should have brought them.” “No,” I said, “because it costs a lot of money to bring them here.” “No,” he said, “bring them, I will lend you the money.” I then contacted my wife, and she wanted to come, so thanks to God I was able to bring them here. The *patrón cumplió su palabra* (kept his word).

I miss the traditions from Mexico. I used to spend the weekends with my in-laws. I got along very well with them. I tell you, Mexico *es muy bonito, porque allá el día que no tienes ganas de ir a trabajar no vas a trabajar, pero realmente no hay futuro* (is beautiful because over there the day you don’t feel like going to work you just don’t go, but really there is no future). At the same time I am very happy to be here in the *Estados Unidos con mi familia* (with my family). The hardest thing of my experience of working in Mexico and the *Estados Unidos* was to be by

myself while my family was still in Mexico. Now that my family is here time seems to fly. Now my children can speak English, and this is what I am proudest and that is what will remain.

I believe that based on what I know, what to do, I am making little money, but, oh well, the main reason I came to the *Estados Unidos* was to work and that is what I will do. Up to now I have tried to give my children a better life. I don't want them to suffer as much as I did. That is what I like about the *Estados Unidos* that if one wants a pair of pants one can buy them after only 12 hours of work. In Mexico you require a whole week of work without spending any of it to be able to buy the same pants. I believe that my wife, my three children, and I will stay in the *Estados Unidos* the rest of our lives. I have my own house in Mexico, but then after we get there, there is no work. *¿En qué voy a trabajar yo en México? ¿Allá de qué voy a vivir?* (Where am I going to work in Mexico? How am I going to live?).

Isabel

Isabel and her sister, Lourdes, (next interviewee) live in a trailer on the North side of Lake Paradise. Their trailer sits on an incline and a steep driveway takes you to their home. As in the cases of many of the other participants' homes, they also have trailers neighboring theirs within a few feet on both sides.

When I came for the first time to meet Isabel I was surprised with the inside of their *trailer*. The paint resembled the color of the walls that one would find in adobe houses in rural Latin America. The color was a mixture of dark browns and beiges in a pattern that seemed to have been smeared by waving hands. There were also blooming plants hanging from the living room walls. After closer inspection I realized these were plastic plants. The inside of their rental home was spacious as the owner was expanding the space available by opening the back wall of

the *trailer* and adding a few more rooms. It was obvious that the place was still under construction as plastic covered some of the furniture.

After greeting Isabel at the door she invited me to come inside their home. Then Isabel, who is short in stature, stocky, and dark skinned, directed me to one of the rooms that was still under construction in the back of the *trailer*. In a very timid and quiet voice Isabel told me her story.

I am 24 years old, and I come from a small family. I have only one brother and one sister. I come from the *Estado de Michoacán* where I was raised in a *rancho* where people work *en el campo* (in agriculture). There is no industry near where I grew up. The *rancho* is very big, but there is much poverty, and people have to survive from their own agriculture. Many people from the *rancho* traveled to the *Estados Unidos* in search of work, and my father was one of them. He would come back to Mexico every year. He would stay for 7 months in the *Estados Unidos* before returning to see us. While my father was gone my mother would embroider, and then she would send her work to Mexico City and sell it so she could buy us things.

I started to work when I was 8. I worked picking *jitomates* (tomatoes) and *tomatillos* (popular type of tomatoes), and I also had to *abonar* (fertilize) the *maíz*. While still at school I worked in the *campo* during the afternoons and during my vacation. I worked most of the time for my father, but sometimes I worked for another man who owned even more land. By working for this man we were able to earn some money for ourselves. We also had to work for other people because what my father had was not enough to last us the whole year. I remember that when I was young I enjoyed going to pick *tomatillos* because I made some money. Although I gave most of that money to my mother, I was able to keep some that I used to buy a few things for myself.

I went to school until sixth grade, and so when I was 12 I started to work all day long. I continued to work in the fields full time until I became 18, and that is when I started traveling as a migrant to the *Estados Unidos*. I continued to work in *campo* but this time in California picking grapes. I was a migrant until very recently when I found a job at a factory.

While growing up I spent a long time in Mexico wanting to come to the *Estados Unidos*; however, my father never told me that he would let me come. It was not until some *primas* (female cousins) of my father told me, “we will take you,” that I decided to come. While still in Mexico people would tell me that work in the *Estados Unidos* was very hard, very hot and that many people would even become dehydrated. I still decided to come to see how I would do. I knew that not everything can be the same, and not all people can experience the same things. I was sure that many people did well.

As I mentioned, I started working in the *Estados Unidos* picking grapes. I enjoyed that work because it was an outdoor job. There were lots of people working in the fields. Then things changed in California and work was not the same. During that time I had some uncles, distant uncles, well they were more like friends than family, tell me that there were good jobs and plenty of work in Georgia. So I came to Georgia.

My first year in Georgia was very difficult because I could not find work. We got very cold during the winter. We went through these hard times because people here did not know us. After some time, I started to seek help by talking to other people around us and started to find that there was work at factories. I actually found work through a neighbor whom I had only met 2 weeks before. She mentioned this place that was hiring. The job involved packaging powdered chlorine to go into *albercas* (swimming pools).

I learned my job by observing others work. We have to wear masks, but sometimes they are not sufficient to hold the smell. When it gets hot is when it burns the most. This is a large company with about 2,000 employees. Most of the workers there are *morenos* (black). There are a few *gringos* and a few *mexicanos*. The *mayordomos* are *gringos*, and the machine operators are *morenos*. We are only five *mexicanas* (female Mexicans) working there, and we work during the same shift.

We, the *mexicanas*, always hang out together. When we walk by the *morenos* they say, “*ahi va la banda de mexicanas*” (“there goes the Mexican band”). We do not socialize with the others until we have work at the machines. The *mexicanas* get the hardest work at the factory. Perhaps it is because they are racist, but they demand more from us than from any other worker. We all get paid the same, but we sure work more than the rest. It is good for us when the equipment breaks down because it gives us a chance to take a break.

My worst experience at work was one day I was working with a *morena*, and I noticed that when it was her turn to pack the operator who was also a *morena* would turn the machine very slow. Then when it was my turn to pack, she would turn it up high. I tried my best to keep up with the machine, but I couldn't, and the operator got mad and started throwing things to the floor. She then told me to pick them up which I did and I even organized them, but then she would say, “*Que muevate más*” (“move more”), and I replied, “why don't you slow down the machine,” but she refused. She then called the *mayordoma*, but the *mayordoma* told the operator to slow down the machine and then told me not to pay any attention and to pack the chlorine at my own pace.

Even though work in the factory is difficult, I still believe work at the factory is easier than picking grapes because factory work occurs in the shade, there is no sand, and one does not

have to walk on their knees. Work in Mexico is also easier than work in the *Estados Unidos*, but it pays much less in Mexico. What I earn here in 1 hour is what I would earn there in 1 day. It is easier to survive here in the *Estados Unidos*. In Mexico it is impossible to get ahead, and that is the reason why I decided to stay here permanently. I live here with my sister, her baby, and my father, but my mother and brother still live in Mexico. My mother wants to come here, but because she is a large lady the *pasada* (crossing) would be very difficult for her to complete.

My hope living here in the *Estados Unidos* is to get ahead in life and to have something that is mine. Have something that I have earned by myself. I do not want to depend on my parents. That is the same reason why I am not married, because I want to get ahead by myself and see what I can do. I plan to get married in 10 years. This is unusual because most girls in Mexico get married at 13 or 15.

Lourdes

Two days after interviewing Isabel I returned to the same trailer to meet with her sister, Lourdes. I had met Lourdes a few months earlier as she needed somebody's help with transportation as she wanted to visit a temporary employment agency, and she could not afford the taxi. At that time she had given me the impression of being a good communicator. I was aware that she had had difficulties in her recent past as her husband had abandoned her and her newborn baby, and together with her sister they were forced to make a living to provide for their family. Lourdes appeared to be very interested in talking with me. Her voice was loud, and her eyes looked directly into mine as she spoke of her experiences growing up in Mexico and experiences working in the United States.

I had a nice time growing up in Mexico. Mexico is very pretty. I went to school and finished *secundaria*. My mother's father had cows, and they sold us the milk, and my mother

made many types of cheeses. I started selling cheese in the street when I was only 9 years old. This money helped our family a lot. After I finished *secundaria* we started a *puestito de frutas y dulces* (fruit and candy stand) outside our house. This *puestito* also provided some income. We bought the fruit at the market, and then our neighbors from the *pueblito* (village) bought the fruit from us. My mother and my sister also did embroidery and that also helped with income. My father emigrated to the *Estados Unidos* to work for about 25 years. He mostly worked picking grapes in California. Because of all this work we did not have crisis in our family.

Late in life when I got older I worked in agriculture *piscando* (picking) *jitomate y tomate*. We went to help the people from our *pueblito* with their *cosecha* (crops). We usually made 100 pesos a day, which is about 12 dollars. Some time later my sister also started to emigrate with my father, and I told myself that I was going to come to live in the *Estados Unidos*.

Some folks would tell me nice things about the *Estados Unidos*, but the truth is that my father never said anything nice about his trips. He told us that people had to work to survive in the *Estados Unidos*. "If you don't work, you don't eat," he said, and "they don't give you rent, and it is expensive." However, I knew that people made more money over there, and I would think of all the work I was doing for just 100 pesos a day. Some people told me that they made 15 dollars an hour. So, when I would finish my work in the *campo*, I thought, I could have earned that much in just one hour, but then you get here and it's a different reality. You don't make 15 or even 10 dollars an hour.

Some people also told me that work in the *Estados Unidos* was easier because the *mayordomos* were not bad, that they always had water for the employees and that they gave breaks every hour. People in Mexico never said anything bad about work in the *Estados Unidos*. Now I know that work is harder here because you are more *obligado* (forced) than in Mexico.

The biggest difference is that work is paid less in Mexico, but work is also more comfortable there. There are no *mayordomos* to deal with, and there is not so much *racismo* (racism). Over there you are with your people. The language, the color, that he or she is not of *la raza* (the race), and the *racismo* are all obstacles of working here in the *Estados Unidos*.

The decision to come to the *Estados Unidos* came from my parents who decided to send me with the hope that I could help our family a little more. I came to the *Estados Unidos* in an airplane *y ya me mojaron* (and they got me wet—referring to crossing the border). Regardless of who sent me, *yo aun quería conocer el sueño americano* (I still wanted to know the American dream).

My experience of work in the *Estados Unidos* has been in factories and working *en la yarda* (in landscaping). I worked at a plastics factory, at an iron factory, and at a candy factory. From all these jobs I felt the proudest at the candy factory because not every one could learn the job, but I was able to understand it from the beginning. That was my favorite job. Unfortunately this was a temporary work. I would love to go back to that job. I would even work there because of pleasure and not just because of need. The other jobs I would only go to because I had to go.

At the plastics factory I worked the last shift that started at 11:00 at night and went until 7:00 in the morning. There were lots of Hispanics in this shift. Why do you think that is that case? It was because this was the toughest shift. At this factory we made windows for luxury homes. We had to make them with knives. This was very hard work, and we were paid by the hour at this factory.

Another of the jobs was working at an iron factory where I had to hang grills on hooks so they could be transported for painting. I was fired at this job because I missed one day. This made me very mad because I noticed that other workers missed even weeks. I felt this was very

unjust. However, the worst experience at work happened while working in the *yarda*. My *patrones* were *tejanos* (from Texas), you could actually say they were *mexicanos*, and they treated us worse than *gringos*. They treated their employees that way because they thought we were their property. They thought that because they paid you *cualquier cosa* (just a little) they could become domineering.

One time while working in the *yarda*, the *patrona* told me that I was her new *gata* (cat). She told me that once she had been someone else's cat and that now it was my turn. I figured she meant that I had to do whatever she asked me to do, like her property. She also abused us by not paying what she owed and by not bringing water for us to drink even when it was hot, but we stuck with them because of responsibility, because one is responsible, and we know about work.

I worked for them for 4 months, and I had to leave because they ran out of work. We were all Hispanics working there, and they treated all of us bad. Most of us knew when they were demanding too much, but some coworkers did not know, and we had to tell them that it was not right. Sometimes it is our own fault why *mexicanos* are treated the way we are. This happens because we try to *quitar el alma por quedar bien con el patrón* (lose the soul in order to please the boss).

I worked at another factory for about 10 months. This was a good place to work, and I really enjoyed it. There was also racism, but it was reversed. The Hispanic was treated very well, while the blacks and the *gabachos* were treated badly. The managers were also *morenos*, but I guess that they noticed that the *hispano le hecha ganas* (hispanic does it with an effort). We know the truth is that the *gabacho* and the *moreno* do not like to work. The bad thing is that they always leave the hardest work for the *hispano*, and although we resent it, we still do all the work. Perhaps we let it by because work is hard to find or because of fear of losing the job. I am

different though. When the *patrona* was not paying the hours we had worked I was the only one who said something about it. Then the *patrona* got mad and spoke Texmex saying “I don’t *quiere lo que tú pienses*” (“I don’t want what you think”). I told her that was no way to speak to an employee. I even convinced the rest of the workers to leave. She then said it was just a joke. “*Con eso no se juega* (you don’t play with that) because we are not working for pleasure,” I said. I also told her that “You need our work, but we also need from you.” Later she called my house to apologize. I went back to work the next day.

Another thing I have noticed here in the *Estados Unidos* is that politics in work and competition among *mexicanos* is very big. I have seen where some of my coworkers go and tell on others to the *patrón* so they will look better. That doesn’t happen as much in Mexico. The majority of the *gabacho* and *moreno* don’t do that, they just work, or at least pretend to work, and they still get paid the same as we do. That is one thing I feel good because I know that when I go to work, I go to work.

I have one baby girl, and I am now pregnant with a second baby. I met the father of my first child at the window factory. He is from *Oaxaca*. I got married to him, and after my daughter was born he did not want anything to do with us and he left us. My daughter is now 1 year old, and we don’t know anything about him. A while later I met this other *muchacho* (young man) with whom I lived. He got me pregnant, and then he also left. I can say that it has not gone very well, but *aunque no han pasado cosas muy buenas* (although very good things have not happened) I am still planning to stay in the *Estados Unidos*, and I am happy to be here. My hope is that my children grow healthy here in the *Estados Unidos* because life is very difficult in Mexico. At least over here you have food, access to a doctor, and the government provides more

assistance than in Mexico. I also like living in this community because there are lots of *mexicanos*, and when you are in need they lend you a hand.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a description of the community in Georgia where the participants lived during the interviews. Also contained herein are translated vignettes of each participant's story as they related to their lives in Mexico and the United States and their work experience in each setting. The interviews were conducted between October 2001 and May 2003 with the average interview lasting 60 minutes. Nine Mexican-descent individuals participated in the study; five females and four males. The Mexican states where they had lived were Michoacan, Oaxaca, San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas and Mexico City. Their education levels varied from third grade upward to college level. All of the participants spoke little or no English.

With the exception of Juan, Rafael, and Isabel who had worked as migrants before settling in the United States, all the other participants had only lived in the United States for less than 2 years at the time of the interview. The age range of the participants also varied. Juan was the oldest at 52 and Lourdes the youngest at 24. Although most of the participants came from the same state in Mexico, Michoacán, the only participants that were family related in the pool of interviews were Isabel and Lourdes, who were sisters.

All of the interviews took place at the participants' homes of residence. Although the *trailas* were extremely small, crowded, and some in disrepair, it was obvious that all participants were very proud of their homes. None apologized to me for the state of their houses, and in most cases the participants or their families offered me something to drink or eat during my visit. I felt very welcome in each home, and I felt that the interviewees were dynamic and enthusiastic. Despite the fact that I never asked about issues concerning their status of residency, in all cases

the participants brought up their legal issues during the interview and gave detailed description of their experiences in crossing the border into the United States. This openness indicated the level of trust they felt toward me and reflected the relaxed atmosphere during the interviews.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe Mexican immigrants' experiences and work attitudes as they transition into jobs in the United States. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Mexican immigrants describe their attitudes and perceptions towards work?
2. What are Mexican immigrants' experiences as they transition into work places in the United States?
3. How do Mexican immigrants match up their expectations to their experiences of work in the United States?

In conjunction with the research questions, this study utilized symbolic interactionism as its theoretical framework (Casella, 1999; LeCompte et al., 1992; Patton, 1990). The three fundamental positions of symbolic interactionism are:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meaning of things arises out of the social interaction one has with one's fellows.
3. The meaning of things is handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things the individual encounters.

This chapter presents the inductive analysis of the findings drawn from the qualitative study by using the research questions as the key guide of analysis. A step-by-step description of the process used to organize and inductively analyze the data from the 9 participants is presented. The chapter also devotes a section to discussing emergent categories which did not align with any of the stated research questions.

Process Description

After using the narrative type analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) to condense the transcripts to the portraits found in Chapter 4, the study proceeded using a narrative matrix analysis technique. This technique provided the means to perform a structured multiple-step procedure of organizing and analyzing the data to answer the three research questions. Schell and Black's (1996) inductive research methods served as the model for developing the matrix and identifying required procedures for completing the analysis. A three-by-three matrix was developed which combined the three research questions with the three fundamental positions of symbolic interactionism. This procedure allowed the data to be organized into meaningful categories (Coffee & Atkinson, 1996). Themes that emerged from the stories that did not "fit" into any of the cells were listed at the end of the chapter.

Each of the three columns from the three-by-three matrix were labeled (a) S1-Meaning of Things, (b) S2-Social Interaction, and (c) S3-Handling and Modification. The three rows were labeled Q1, Q2, and Q3, and each corresponded to one of the research questions. Table 2 describes each of the nine cells. The three-by-three table was printed on an 11-by-17 sheet of paper, and the name of each participant was placed in the left margin. See Appendix D for reduced copies of the original sheets showing the process of condensing the data. Line numbers were placed on each of the stories from Chapter 4 so as to be able to confirm and track selected

statements. The stories were carefully read and statements or sections were transferred to the appropriate cell. Other information relevant to the research that did not seem to correspond to any of the nine cells was written on a separate sheet of paper. This second paper was labeled with the participants' pseudonym and the title "Emergent Categories." In both cases, statements were written as they appeared in the stories and, for tracking purposes, the line numbers where the statement appeared in the story was written. This process was completed for each of the 9 participants.

Table 2 Matrix

Q1-S1 Attitudes and perceptions towards work with respect to the meaning of things.	Q1-S2 Attitudes and perceptions towards work as related to social interaction.	Q1-S3 Attitudes and perceptions towards work and the dealing with things encountered.
Q2-S1 Experiences transitioning into workplaces in the U.S. with respect to the meaning of things.	Q2-S2 Experiences transitioning into workplaces in the U.S. as related to social interaction.	Q2-S3 Experiences transitioning into workplaces in the U.S. and the dealing with things encountered.
Q3-S1 Matching up expectations to experiences of work with respect to the meaning of things.	Q3-S2 Matching up expectations to experiences of work as related to social interaction.	Q3-S3 Matching up expectations to experiences of work and the dealing with things encountered.

The next step was to condense the statements from the individual matrix into initial participant categories. Another 11 by 17 sheet of paper with the same cell descriptors (Q1-S1, Q1-S2, etc.) was printed, and the names of the participants and the title "2nd Step-Condensed" were placed on each sheet. I returned to the initial pages containing the matrix and read all the

statements. To confirm the context and the translation of the statements I went back to the stories and then to the original transcripts. I condensed the statements by writing titles or short descriptors which captured the essence of the content found in each cell. I conducted the same procedure for the sheets containing the emerging categories that did not “fit” into any of the cells. This process provided an easy method for later comparing and analyzing emerging themes and categories for each of the research questions.

The third step was to bring together the 9 participants’ themes and categories onto one single sheet so as to determine similarities, consistency, and deviancy in their perceptions and experiences related to work. I labeled each of the previous sheets (2nd Step–Condensed) with a number to identify each participant and to allow for easy tracking. I made one more copy of the 11-by-17 inch sheet of paper containing the table with the nine-labeled cells. I then combined the themes/categories found on the previous sheets to the new sheet. Beside each category I wrote the number corresponding to the participant. This enabled me to keep track of the number of participants for which that category was relevant, to confirm accuracy with the interview transcripts, and to mark useful quotes to use as examples. On a few occasions during this process I had to shift categories between cells upon noticing that for some participants the themes had been placed in the incorrect or less appropriate cell. On these occasions I included beside the participant’s number an identifier of the correct cell. As previously mentioned, I also performed this procedure for those categories that did not “fit” into any of the stated cells.

The last step was to determine and decide on the relevant themes and categories that emerged from each of the cells. The previous step provided an effective method for determining the number of participants that shared similar experiences or perspectives. By looking at these categories and number, I was able to specify which participants shared which categories.

Research Question 1: Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Work

Q1-S1 (The Meanings of Things)

With the exception of Carmen, all other participants indicated that they started working while still children. Juan indicated that this was one of the main differences between Mexico and the United States when he said “*Pues sí la vida es diferente a la de allá, porque aquí los chamacos no trabajan*” (Well yes life is different to over there, because here children do not work). For Lourdes work started at age 9 selling cheese. Isabel said, “*Tenía ocho años trabajando cortando jitomates y tomatillo, poniendo abono a las plantas de maíz. Era lo que hacía desde que yo tenía ocho años*” (I had eight years working cutting *jitomates* and *tomatillos* (varieties of tomatoes), fertilizing the corn plants. This is what I did since I was 8 years old).

Most of the participants indicated that they started working for their parents. They learned skills and values by observing their father and mother’s work. Chente stated:

... y pues allí mi papá con el ganado sembraba frijol, maíz, todo lo que se cosecha por allá. Y yo con el tiempo miraba y el me enseñó, así aunque uno no quiere por las malas por las buenas, me enseñó a arar y todo eso y eso pues me dolió mucho y tuve que aprender a hacer todo eso... (... and while there my father with the cattle he planted beans, corn, and everything else that is raised over there. And as time went by I observed and he taught me, for the good or for the bad, he taught me to use the plow and this was painful and I had to learn to do all of this ...)

Parents and other family members modeled, guided, and persuaded the children to work, and this led to the cultivation and development of strong cultural norms.

It can be concluded that the participants value and appreciate work. Ramiro stated, “*Todo el trabajo es una gracia de Dios, pues lo que consigue uno lo consigue con trabajo* (All the work

is a grace of God, because what one obtains one gets it with work). The question then becomes, from this sample of recently settled Mexican immigrants, what is valued from work? For the majority of the participants work in Mexico was related to meeting basic needs. Chente, Isabel, Ramiro, and Rosalinda were raised in *ranchos* where they lived from their produce, and money was scarcely found. During the interview Isabel related how she would go and work for another gentleman who had more resources. She also said that she enjoyed working for this gentleman because she made money. This last statement from Isabel reflects a theme that emerged from the data which relates to the pleasure of working for income. This new symbol of work became stronger for several of the participants when they first moved to the United States, and for others, such as Ramiro, the change occurred when he moved from rural Oaxaca to the Mexico's capitol city.

Several interviewees stated that they felt most proud of work when they made significant amounts of money. For instance, when I asked Rafael to share an experience where he felt very proud of work, he related an occasion when he worked 19 and a half hours. The reason he said it was his proudest was because "*Fue la vez que yo gané más dinero*" (It was the time I earned the most money). Graciela indicated that in the United States she wanted to work so she could provide for her children, pay bills, and purchase shoes. The only indication that work was appreciated because of its intrinsic value was given by Lourdes when she said the following statement about her job at a candy factory: "*Si me gustaría volver a trabajar porque por ganas de trabajar, no por la necesidad*" (Yes I would like to go back to work because of wanting to work, not because of the need). However, in contrast to many Anglos who place high value on material things, during the interviews and through my observations, participants placed value on

work which enables them to obtain basic necessities like food and clothing. Maywood (1982) stated that a similar type of ethical value originated from the Persians.

Q1-S2 (Social Interaction)

Several themes originated from looking at the attitudes and perceptions as related to social interaction. As with the previous section, socialization processes during the participants' upbringing in Mexico were fundamental in the development of attitudes and perceptions towards work. Family responsibility, influences from coworkers, and the responsibility towards supervisors and employers were the themes that emerged in this particular section.

Data indicates that taking the role of a family provider became crucial in changing attitudes towards work. For several of the participants, marriage, the birth of a child, or even the societal responsibilities laid on parents constituted a turning point in finding new jobs or taking a job more seriously. Juan provided a clear example of this when he indicated that after his wedding his father said "*Pues ya te casastes ahorita nos vamos a sembrar*" (Now you are married, now we go to plant). For Graciela this feeling of responsibility to provide through work for her children started after her husband left to find work in the United States. For many these changes of responsibility led to their immigration to the United States. Chente indicated that it was the required baptism of the children and marriage to their mother that forced him to obtain a loan, and this in turn pushed him to seek work in the United States. This theme aligns with Applebaum's (1998) and Kraus's (n.d.-c) statements that family in Mexico is first priority.

Another category that emerged from the data was regarding the responsibility that the settled immigrant has towards work, the supervisor, and employer. Several of the participants shared stories related to work responsibility, and many indicated that even when employers mistreated them they continued to be responsible workers. Chente felt that responsibility and

hard work were the most important characteristics that the employer looks for in the employees. Lourdes illustrated the responsibility towards work by saying, “*Tuvimos muchos problemas con ella, pero no dejamos el trabajo porque por la responsabilidad no lo dejamos. Porque uno es responsable y uno sabe de su trabajo* (We had many problems with her (supervisor), but we did not leave the job because of responsibility. Because we are responsible and one knows about his or her work). Lourdes also alluded to her view of the Mexican workers’ responsibility towards the supervisor when she recognized how they try to “*quitar el alma por quedar bien con el patrón*” (lose the soul to please the boss). Both Lourdes and Chente partly credited fear as a reason for Mexican immigrants being so responsible to work, the supervisor, and the employer. Other reasons given were to avoid confrontation and the inability to speak the supervisor’s language.

The influence of others in determining attitudes and perceptions about work was another area that emerged from the data. Processes of socialization while still in Mexico served for developing initial attitudes and perceptions about work. However, it was also evident that many of the participants confronted new and different attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors with respect to work as they merged into the workforce in the United States. Many of the participants expressed that they “were held” to a different standard of work than the coworkers that were originally from the United States. Although some expressed frustration for these inequalities, none stated a change in perceptions and attitudes towards work.

Q1-S3 (Handling and Modification)

Etzioni (2000) stated that internalization and persuasion serve as processes of acculturation and that these may result in changes of norms. For this third section of Question 1, I present three emergent categories that correspond to the third concept in symbolic

interactionism. These categories encompass the handling of work with relation to formal education, gender roles, and starting from the bottom.

The participants valued formal education and many stated that they were very happy to be in the United States because their children had the opportunity to learn English and go to school. All of the participants themselves completed some level of formal education in Mexico, but the majority stated that they had dropped out during elementary school. Rafael and others of the participants explained that work and their family needs were the main reasons for dropping out of school. Ramiro and Graciela were the only participants who completed the equivalent of high school. Ramiro left rural Oaxaca to pursue his high school and college education in Mexico City. However, when his work schedule did not match his course work he opted for work instead of college. Graciela said that she was unable to use her education when she moved to the border with the United States and found a job at a *maquila*. Another interesting finding related to the roles of education and work was that several participants had the perception that formal education was more necessary in Mexico than in the United States. Juan clearly stated this position when he said, “*Aqui en este país tiene uno todas las oportunidades aunque uno no sepa leer y en México para agarrar un trabajo necesita tener la secundaria* (Here in this country one has all the opportunities even when one does not know how to read, and in Mexico to find a job one needs middle school).

Change in traditional gender roles was another theme that emerged from the data. Applebaum (1998) and Kraus (n.d.-c) stated that in Mexico wives generally fulfill the domestic role; however, the interviews and other observations indicated that the role of family provider could be shared or on occasions be the sole responsibility of the immigrant women. The role of the women as breadwinners seemed to increase once the families moved to the United States;

however, for those women (Carmen, Graciela and Rosalinda) who initially remained in Mexico while their husbands worked in the United States this role started in Mexico. These roles were learned and reinforced during childhood as Graciela stated that at age 6 or 7 she was working at home taking care of smaller children. Rosalinda was fast to point out that differences exist between the traditions and norms found in certain parts of Mexico. She stated that in rural areas:

El hombre trabaja todo el tiempo y la mujer tiene que estar en la casa. [La mujer] nunca tiene que salir a buscar trabajos por fuera. [Pero,] en la ciudad viene siendo como aqui en los Estados Unidos (The man works all the time and the woman has to stay inside the house. [The woman] never has to go out to search for outside work. [However,] in the city it comes out to be the same as in the United States).

Therefore, for some individuals adapting to the new symbols related to gender roles was easy, while for others it caused incredible friction within the families. Graciela gave an example of the level of friction from changing gender roles in her household by stating that her husband refused to let her work because he wanted to do it himself. She then shared that her husband abandoned her and her three daughters after she started to work. A very interesting comment that Graciela shared with me during the interview was that she wished she were a man. This comment came not as in a sexual manner, but instead as a reflection of her perceptions of options and opportunities that men have as compared to women. For other couples it seemed that gender role changes were able to occur without major distress or that the families had already decided the women were also going to assist as breadwinners. Carmen stated that she had in her mind that she was coming to work and that the family was going to have a beautiful life.

Another interesting concept that emerged from the data was the perception of always having to start from the bottom. Rosalinda alluded to this when she said, “*comenzé desde abajo*

como todas” (I started from the bottom like everyone else). The inability to communicate in English and the lack of documentation stating work history and expertise makes this a problem that most immigrants have to face. This also relates to Juan’s emphasis on wanting to stay with the same employer after several years of service. He stated that the *patrones* were very nice at the beginning and that now he was concerned that if he had to leave the job other employers would not pay him by his age. I interpreted age as not only a reference to his actual years of life, but also to his level of experience. This perception, although unjustly affecting the immigrant, benefits the employer since they can start all workers regardless of experience or years in the field at the same low wage as a novice.

Summary of Question 1

Several categories and themes emerged from the data when looking at how Mexican immigrants describe their attitudes and perceptions towards work. Socialization processes during their upbringing in Mexico contributed to form strong perceptions and attitudes about work. All but one of the participants started working from an early age. Parental modeling, guidance, and persuasion assisted in developing work habits and perceptions which included a strong value and appreciation of work. This appreciation is different than that described in the PWE in the sense that it is not generated from intrinsic rewards alone, but instead it is similar to the ethical value originated from the Persians (Maywood, 1982) where the value is found in work providing them with things.

The data from this study suggested that Mexican immigrants’ change in marital or parental status greatly changed their views as workers and breadwinners. This aligns with Applebaum (1998) and Kraus (n.d.-c) who wrote that family in Mexico is first priority. The participants also related to a strong sense of responsibility towards the work, the supervisor, and

the employer. This show of allegiance and responsibility even when being mistreated can be credited to the difficulty separating work and personal relationships as indicated by Kraus. The data from this study also revealed that fear, lack of communication, and a desire to hold onto what was gained through years of service at a single location such as trust and pay increases also were influential aspects related to responsibility. Data seems to indicate that the participants' perceptions and attitudes regarding work was not affected by the attitudes and behaviors of coworkers from the United States.

As presented in the related literature review in Chapter 3, higher education is pivotal in the progress to higher income and "better jobs." Participants in this study appreciated that their children were able to be part of formal education. Several participants indicated that they felt education was more important in Mexico in order to obtain work. None of the participants were able to utilize their formal education in the United States, and the belief existed that all must start from the bottom. Gender roles showed to be another theme that emerged from the data. Some families were able to adapt to the wives contributing as breadwinners in the United States while other families struggled. In another family, the husband and wife separated due to these conflicting norms.

Research Question 2: Experiences in Transitioning to Work in the United States

Q2-S1 (The Meaning of Things)

Although six of the participants had lived in the United States for less than 2 years at the time of the interviews, all shared experiences that were rich and useful for this section of the analysis. The other 3 participants had worked on and off U.S. soil for more than 2 years, but had changed from being migrants to being settled within the previous 2 years of the interview. The data suggested that participants had mixed experiences and perceptions in transitioning to work

in the United States. Finding work, learning new skills, health related topics, and experiences of exploitation were themes that emerged from their portraits and interviews.

Juan, Isabel, and Rafael worked in the United States as migrants before deciding to settle and work in more suburban type jobs. As migrant workers, Isabel and Rafael worked in California in agricultural-related jobs. They both agreed that work as migrants was harder than the jobs they presently had in Georgia. Juan had extensive work experience as he had traveled working as a migrant in several states. He worked at a ranch in Illinois, at a chicken farm in California, worked for some time in Chicago, and prior to settling in Georgia he worked at a dog pound in Alabama. Isabel stated that the first year after she settled in Georgia was very difficult because she could not find work and because the weather was very cold. Most migrants return to Mexico during the winter, so the cold of the winter is a new experience to most immigrants who transition and become settled.

Their first experience of transitioning to work was finding a job. This experience varied among the participants. Chente and Rosalinda attributed luck to finding work. Chente compared work to the lottery, because he felt that his chance of being chosen from a line of men was purely based on luck. Carmen struggled to find work as she became pregnant soon after arriving to the United States, and Ramiro felt frustrated because he could only find part time work. Although differences existed in their experiences of finding their first jobs in the United States, all shared the sentiment of being thankful for having a job. Another experience shared by all the participants was that none had previous experiences with the type of jobs they found.

Learning new skills was a common experience in transitioning to work in the United States. Rosalinda stated that she liked to learn everything at the workplace. Carmen related how she struggled to learn to sew and how she was told that she was going to lose her job if she

could not learn it fast enough. Lourdes shared that she enjoyed her job at the candy factory because she was able to understand it from the beginning. Ramiro shared how it took him about 2 months to learn the necessary skills to hang vinyl siding on houses. Participants' stories reflected eagerness and enthusiasm in having to learn new skills, and in many cases these needs were taken as opportunities and challenges. Juan felt these were opportunities when he stated that he had to learn how to operate new equipment. Rosalinda's nationalism and pride were expressed in showing how she had learned the needed skills when she said:

Yo quise quedar bien y quise demostrarles que uno de mexicano puede hacerlo, puede lograr lo que uno se propone y necesitaban una alberca y yo me ofrecí a hacercelas y se la hice (I want to do good and I wanted to show them that I as a Mexican could do it, that I could accomplish it, and they needed a swimming pool and I offered to make one and I did).

A negative experience that most participants shared in their stories was related to exploitation. This exploitation was mostly expressed when participants noticed that they were being held to a different standard than their American coworkers. Chente stated that Americans did not carry an equal load of work as the immigrants. Isabel said that the Mexicans were given the hardest work at her factory. Lourdes shared that most of the immigrants at her factory worked during the last shift because this was the toughest shift. Ramiro was the only participant who did not have a perception of exploitation during any of his experiences of work in the United States. He shared that the supervisor could discern who had worked the hardest and that this became a factor in the raising pay. Interestingly, Lourdes also shared that at another factory where she had worked supervisors gave preferential treatment to Hispanics. She attributed this to the employers and supervisors at this factory noticing that Hispanics worked harder.

Several participants also related experiences where they felt their health was threatened at their jobs. Isabel indicated that at the chlorine packaging plant where she worked, masks were unable to contain the fumes, which made her eyes and face burn. Carmen indicated that at the pillow factory where she worked it was common for individuals to be injured and that at times they operated the machines too fast. Rafael gave an insightful comment when he stated that he did not believe his body would be able to take the punishment that his job required for more than five years. Perhaps he could provide this assessment since he was hoping to return to Mexico in about 3 more years.

Q2-S2 (Social Interaction)

Part of Weaver's (2000) description of Mexican immigrants working on U.S. soil was that they are cooperative and networking employees. In this section of the study categories emerged that alluded to experiences related to networking and cooperation; however, not all experiences shared by the participants described the Mexican worker or employer as cooperative. Race and race relations were other themes that emerged from the stories. Data indicated that at certain locations of work, segregation and friction between races were prevalent.

Lake Paradise is located in a very isolated area of suburban Atlanta. The fact that individuals from the interior of Oaxaca and Michoacán were able to learn about this community and find jobs in the area attests to the Mexican immigrants' communication and networking skills. This illustration becomes even more impressive when one considers that none of the participants in the study and very few adults in the community speak English. When asked how they had ended up in the area, most interviewees indicated a family member or a friend had told them that there was work in Georgia. Rosalinda, Graciela, and Carmen came to be reunited with their husbands who already lived in Lake Paradise. For those participants who did not have

connections in Lake Paradise, the task of relocating and finding jobs seemed to have been more difficult and things did not stabilize until they built friendships and acquaintances in the community. Isabel stated that after work changed in California she learned about job opportunities in Georgia through some distant relatives, but then alluded that her first year in Georgia was very difficult. She said, “*pasamos frio, pasamos todo porque no nos conocían a nosotros*” (we got cold, we got everything because they did not know us). Later during that year she found work through a neighbor. Chente had to resort to going to a specific area of the community to wait for contractors and other local employers to drive by and pick up workers. For Rafael, he created his first contact for work when an employer came looking for someone else in his house, and he asked the employer to hire him because he really wanted to work.

All of the participants were incredibly cooperative, trusting, and open during my interviews. In addition, many of the participants’ stories corroborate that indeed Mexican immigrants are cooperative and helpful. Lourdes, when referring to living in Lake Paradise, said that she liked living in this community because there were many Mexicans, and they were willing to lend a helping hand. Graciela indicated that Mexicans help each other at work, and Ramiro shared that it was thanks to a Mexican employer that he learned his skills. However, there were also stories shared by some of the participants which indicate that Mexican immigrants were not always cooperative, and in actuality it appears that under certain conditions Mexican immigrants acted with malice even to people with their same background.

Carmen and Lourdes shared two accounts that opposed the examples depicting the cooperative nature of the Mexican immigrant. Carmen shared that while working at a pillow factory where there were only Mexican immigrant workers she received much criticism while trying to learn the needed skills. She said that other employees were not patient and were very

hypocritical. A statement that illustrates her treatment is reflected when she said, “*Me decían, hechele ganas ...si no terminas en quince días te van a correr. Y yo con ganas de aprender rápido pues me desesperaban y yo más nerviosa me poní*” (They would tell me, do it harder... if you don't finish in 15 days they will fire you. And I wanted to learn fast, but I would become desperate, and I would get even more nervous). Carmen concluded that at this factory Mexicans treated their own people very ugly.

Lourdes also shared a story of when she worked for employers of Mexican descent who provided an example of uncooperativeness among Mexicans. She also expressed very eloquently some of her observations of working with fellow Mexicans. In her story, Lourdes and the other coworkers were taken advantage of by the employer by not getting paid the correct amount of money for their work. As in Carmen's case, all of the workers were Hispanic. Lourdes said that all of the employees were treated badly. She also said that she had noticed much more negative “*política*” (politics) and competition between Mexicans than what she had experienced while working in Mexico. She said that this was evident because Mexicans were more accusatory to supervisors about the actions of other Mexicans. Juan also worked at a location where only Mexican coworkers were employed, but this race exclusiveness at work was not the normal experience for most of the participants.

Rafael worked side-by-side with Anglos and African Americans and indicated that work was good; however, he also clarified that the job descriptions, responsibilities and pay were exclusive to the races represented. He explained that at his work there were 5 Mexicans, 2 blacks and two *gabachos* (whites). He indicated that the *gabachos* worked as supervisors, the blacks communicated to the Mexicans, and the Mexicans did most of the work. Interestingly, Rafael did not notice racism and said that their teams worked to perfection. Ramiro's experience was

similar, but there were no African Americans employed at his workplace. As in Rafael's case, Ramiro said that translators and *gringos* (Americans) made more money than the Mexicans. Rosalinda expressed that one of her hopes was to learn to speak English so she could speak to her American coworkers. Carmen and Isabel also worked at factories where Anglos and African Americans worked side-by-side, but their experiences were much different from those shared by Rafael and Ramiro.

When I asked Carmen to share with me her worst experience working in the United States she told a story of having to work with African Americans. She said the supervisor and coworkers wanted her to do all the work, and she even had to do work for a male coworker who had told her that his back was hurting. Isabel also provided a description of race relations at her workplace. She presented a picture of segregation among the coworkers. She said the Mexicans always hung out together, and they did not mix with others until work time. She also stated that Mexicans completed the hardest work, and the company demanded more from them than from any other workers. An experience she shared during the interview in which she worked with an African American was one of frustration when the coworker increased the speed of the machine to where Isabel could not keep up with the work. In another experience, as previously mentioned, Lourdes worked at a plant where she noticed it was the whites and the blacks that were mistreated while the Hispanics were treated with preference. On discussing the relations between races in southern rural Georgia, Studstill and Nieto-Studstill (2001) wrote that "some of the Euro and Afro working class may not have been as welcoming of the new immigrants as the Euro employers have been, although we have found little evidence of overt hostility" (p. 78). The authors also concluded that the hospitality is probably based on economic self-interest and not on

the welcoming nature that people from the South are known to have, and they provided a warning that this hospitality could easily be reversed if the economic conditions worsened.

Q2-S3 (Handling and Modification)

As previously indicated, most of the participants reported they worked harder than their American coworkers did, and yet they received less pay. Lourdes stated that most of her Mexican coworkers knew when the employers or supervisors were demanding too much of them. Rafael felt he was underpaid based on his skills and knowledge. Some participants brought up concerns related to health, and race interactions seemed at times to bring the worst out of coworkers and supervisors. These negative and unjust events and actions usually prompted a response from those involved and for many would lead to an argument or confrontation; however, Kraus (n.d.-c) wrote that Mexicans attempt to shun confrontation. In the following section, I look at the data on how the participants confronted problems and injustices and how their perceptions of the role they play in the United States may have affected their attitudes and behaviors.

Chente stated that he felt anger because his American coworkers did not carry the same load of work as the Mexican workers. He also stated that he felt like confronting the employer, but he had decided not to follow his desires. During the interview (not included in the story found in Chapter 4), Rosalinda indicated that several workers at her factory became organized and talked to the supervisor about increasing the salaries of the employees and differentiating pay depending on years of service and difficulty of jobs. She indicated that the supervisor presented their thoughts to the owner, and he agreed to meet their requests. Rosalinda said, “*Y todas quedamos conformes y dijimos que esta bien*” (And we were pleased and we said that is good).

Graciela's negative experience at work was when two African American coworkers wanted her to do all the work. Her response was "*Me dio mucho coraje que no me comprendieran*" (I got very angry that they would not understand me), and she cried. She also reacted to her shortcomings and problems by wishing she were a man. Carmen initially responded to threats of being fired with fear and asking God for protection, but after some time she said she resolved that she was not going to worry any more. Ramiro worked for a Mexican employer who did not pay very well, and he simply found another job working for an American who paid more. Rafael also considered that he was underpaid. Isabel's account of mistreatment by a coworker who kept turning the machine faster on her shift was that she asked the coworker to slow the machine so she could keep up with it. The situation ended when the supervisor intervened and told Isabel not to pay any attention to the other coworker.

Lourdes was the most confrontational of all the participants. Her story states she got into an argument with her employer because the employer refused to pay the employees their income. Lourdes indicated she convinced the other employees to leave, but after the employer apologized, she went back to work. This was interesting because, although literature (Applebaum, 1998; Kraus, n.d.-c) indicated that Mexican women are expected to be passive and domestic, it was Lourdes who stood up to stop injustice.

Besides cultural norms, their perceptions of their role in the United States and the feeling of upward mobility were also influential in not recognizing exploitation or deciding to avoid confrontation. Lourdes indicated there were some coworkers who did not know they were demanding too much of them and said those who knew had to tell them it was not right. This issue of not recognizing or ignoring exploitation is associated with the perception that the immigrant came to this country to work. Carmen illustrated this point when she shared the

purpose for her coming to the United States was to work, not to be popular with her supervisor. Rafael said, “*En fin, viene uno a trabajar y pues para eso viene uno y aqui estamos en eso*” (Oh well, one comes to work and that is the reason one comes and here we are doing that). Chente also indicated that he was in this country because of work. Guthey (2001) wrote that “the immigrants tend to see their situation in terms of upward mobility, not in terms of exploitation” (p. 58). This view was very common among the participants. For those participants who recognized injustices, it appeared as if they decided to ignore exploitation as long as they could experience upward mobility or at least fulfill their family basic needs. This was best illustrated when Lourdes said, at least over here (United States) there is food, access to a doctor, and government benefits.

Summary of Question 2

Regarding the question, What are Mexican immigrant’s experiences as they transition into work places in the United States?--several themes emerged from the data. Finding work, learning new skills, health issues, and experiences of exploitation were emergent themes related to the first fundamental position of symbolic interactionism. Networking, cooperation, and race relations were categories that became apparent when analyzing social interaction. The participants’ reactions and thoughts when coping with problems and injustices were examined for the third fundamental position of symbolic interactionism.

As an educator and individual who has lived, studied, and worked in the United States for 17 years, I found the theme of exploitation the most significant and disturbing in this section of the study. Not all participants recognized exploitation and injustices as part of their experience of transitioning to work in the United States; however, it was prevalent and easily detected while reading each of participants’ interviews. These sad or unfortunate occurrences did not only

happen when race differences were present, but also when everyone involved was of Mexican origin. Paulo Freire (2000), in his book *Pedagogía del Oprimido [Pedagogy of the Oppressed]*, stated that it is very common for the oppressed to become oppressors once the opportunity arises for them to have a position in power. He described that this phenomenon becomes a cycle and both the oppressor and the oppressed are affected by the fallacy of oppressing through power. However, from the data in this study and as described in Guthey's (2001) research, it appears that recent Mexican immigrant workers view their situations more from an upward mobility stand point than from a perspective of justice or exploitation. This view provides the recent Mexican immigrant worker with a sense of accomplishment, success, and a means to confront a difficult life and work with a positive attitude.

Research Question 3: Matching Expectations to Experiences of Work

Q3-S1 (The Meaning of Things)

Participants shared their stories of coming, finding jobs, and settling in the United States. In Mexico, they left behind most of their family members, their land, their customs and their traditions. In most cases, participants invested economically more than they had in order to reach the United States. They came to the United States with expectations and hopes. For this part of Question 3, I will first present reasons why participants said they left Mexico and examine their initial thoughts and hopes about life and work in the United States. The second part will explore how those expectations matched up with their experiences.

As previously indicated, participants said they came to the United States to work; however, this desire to come to work was also associated with specific expectations and hopes. Isabel said that while growing up she longed to come to the United States, especially since her father was a migrant and constantly traveled to the United States. Her sister, Lourdes, had a

desire to come to the United States because she knew people made more money, and while working in Mexico she constantly thought of how much more money she would be making if she lived in the United States. She also said that the decision to come to the United States came from her parents with the hope that she could help the family situation. While still in Mexico, Carmen had noticed the clothing people wore after being in the United States, and she then believed that life on the other side of the border was wonderful. She also came to be reunited with her husband. Chente believed his immigration would end his suffering because he knew equipment used in the United States would make work much easier to accomplish. He also came to the United States because he needed to pay for a loan. Rosalinda wanted to come to the United States to be reunited with her husband and hoped by so doing they could move their children ahead. Graciela was the only participant who did not want to come to the United States, but her husband asked her to come and visit him. She thought she was coming for a short visit.

In her interview, Carmen indicated that initially her expectations of coming to the United States were shattered because she became pregnant, sick, and could not find work. However, her dream of being reunited with her husband came true, and she said she was happy that here in the United States she could often buy her daughters clothes. Through her experiences, Lourdes discovered that Mexican immigrants in her condition did not make as much money as she had expected, and up to the point of the interview she could not find a permanent job. Chente was surprised he found a job working for a landscaping company because he had heard that most work in the United States was in dishwashing. Rafael indicated his hardest time after arriving was during his experience as a migrant worker because he had to be by himself; fortunately, he reunited with his wife who immigrated to Georgia to settle. Graciela experienced the biggest difference between expectation and “reality.” After arriving for what she thought would be a

short visit to see her husband, she indicated he begged her to stay, and then after she settled and started to work to help to provide for the family needs, he left her and their children.

Q3-S2 (Social Interaction)

Besides the hope expressed by some participants of being reunited with family members, participants did not share what their expectations were with regard to their personal lives or social interaction at work in the United States. However, through social interaction such as talking with other Mexicans who had lived and worked in the United States, many participants developed concepts and created expectations of the United States. In this section I present some of those messages that participants received from others about coming to the United States.

Ramiro, Rafael, and Isabel heard while still in Mexico that work in the United States was hard. Ramiro received this message from his brother. Rafael shared that some individuals had discouraged him about going to the United States because they said work was too hard and Isabel also was told by people that work in the United States was very hard, very hot and there was danger of dehydration. Isabel and Lourdes' stories corroborated when they said their father had never encouraged them to come to the United States. Lourdes said her father told her people in the United States had to work too hard and that if they did not work, they would not eat.

Chente was the only one throughout the interviews who shared that he had heard of injustices being committed toward Mexican immigrants in the United States. He said he heard that since he could not understand English, people were going to take advantage of him. Dale, Andreatta, and Freeman (2001) reported about this fear when they wrote, "A few felt that their lack of English resulted in their being discriminated against, since those who spoke English well seemed to be given preferential treatment" (p. 99). With regard to language, the authors also

indicated that the ability to speak English is viewed as important in socioeconomic advancement and building community.

Graciela shared that when she came to visit her husband her coworkers told her it was not a good idea to stay in the United States. Carmen on the other hand, said it was her husband who discouraged her from coming to be reunited with him. She stated that her husband was afraid if she came they would all suffer. Although Lourdes' father discouraged her of coming to the United States, she indicated some people had told her that work in the United States was easier because the supervisors gave water and long breaks. She also said, "*Pero nunca contaban cosas malas del trabajo, nunca contaban*" (But they never told bad things about work, never told).

Q3-S3 (Handling and Modification)

At the time of the interviews, the participants had lived in the United States as settled immigrants for less than 2 years. This short period of time provided the opportunity for the participants to have a good recollection of differences between life and work in Mexico and the United States. In this third section of this question, I present participants' comments and perceptions about their thoughts with regard to work and life between these two countries.

All of the participants except for Ramiro expected to remain living indefinitely in the United States. Only Graciela indicated that she was sorry for coming to the United States, but she still wanted to stay in the United States in a temporary basis. Guthey (2001) stated that many workers feel tied to North Georgia because their children are enrolled in local schools.

Participants in this study also indicated one of their main hopes and reasons for wanting to stay in the United States was for their children to learn English and to move ahead. Both Chente and Rafael said they hoped their children were not going to suffer as they had during their childhood in Mexico. Juan's wife sent their oldest son to the United States in hopes he would overcome his

laziness and bad attitude. Carmen also referred to her hopes for her children when she indicated the only thing she wanted was for her children to study and to progress economically because over there (Mexico) you cannot find work.

Although all participants indicated that the biggest difference between working in the United States and Mexico was the amount of money they were making, participants had mixed views about where was better to work and live. This was nicely illustrated by Lourdes when she said, "*El trabajo en México es menos pagado, pero es más a gusto porque no tienes mayordomo, pues allá estas con tu gente*" (Work in Mexico is paid less, but you are more comfortable because you do not have a boss and because over there you are with your people). Isabel agreed with Lourdes as she commented that work in Mexico was easier, but that it paid less. She commented it was easier to survive here in the United States, and in Mexico it was impossible to get ahead. Rafael also shared about this when he said, "*México es muy bonito porque allá el día que no tienes ganas de trabajar no vas a trabajar, pero realmente no hay futuro*" (Mexico is beautiful because over there the day that you do not want to go to work you don't go to work, but truthfully there is no future). Guthey (2001) concluded, "The immigrants' choice of location does, however, have some negative aspects. While they may be making their lives here in the economic sense, they still experience an emotional pull toward Mexico and its way of life" (p. 58).

Rosalinda and Juan agreed that if not for English, they would be more comfortable in the United States; however, Rosalinda also indicated if one could make a living in Mexico, things would be much better there. Ramiro stated that work in the United States was better because people could live a little better and they could dress nicer. These impressions reflect some of the conclusions derived for Question 1 where it was indicated that the values of work are not based

on the joy of work, but on the economic gains obtained through work. The data in the study indicates that in Mexico most participants did not work as hard as they did in the United States, and employers in Mexico, if any, would not expect them to work that hard. This finding corroborates with Guthey (2001) who reported that Mexicans seem to enjoy living a slower life and do not like to be in a rush. He stated that his participants argued that in the United States people did not even have time to know their neighbors. In my study, Chente was the only participant who argued that work in Mexico was harder than in the United States.

Summary of Question 3

Participants' main expectation and goal was to come to the United States to work and to progress economically. Several participants indicated they liked Mexico, but they could not see a future living in that country. Several of the female participants came to be reunited with their husbands, and one female participant came for a short visit but ended up staying indefinitely. Only one of the participants hoped to return to Mexico with his family. Chente was the only participant who said people told him that he would probably encounter injustice because he could not speak the language. Data also indicated that participants hoped that by staying in the United States their children would learn English and succeed. Several participants heard while still in Mexico that work in the United States was hard, and many were initially discouraged to come to the United States to work.

In some cases participants' expectations matched their experiences. For instance, although some initially struggled to find work, participants were able to find jobs that earned significantly more money than in Mexico. Several realized that requirements in the United States for money were higher than in Mexico. One example of this was Carmen who realized she would also have to work in addition to her husband working to pay for all the expenses. Graciela

concluded she had experienced something very different than what she had expected mainly because work in the United States was hard and because she had to face racism. All but one of the participants said they were happy to be in the United States. Some of the expectations included long-range goals such as the success of their children.

An interesting finding from this question is that participants' expectations were all based on basic needs and none indicated wanting ostentatious things. Participants did not say they dreamed of a bigger house (only Ramiro mentioned that he wanted to finish his house in Mexico), a car, or money for travel and entertainment. Instead, interviewees were thankful and hoped they would continue to have enough food to provide for their families. Several said they were happy they could buy nice clothes for their children. These expectations strongly contrast the type of dreams and hopes of most workers in mainstream America.

Other Themes, Categories, and Surprises

Two other categories emerged from the data that did not "fit" into any of the questions previously presented. The first category was related to a pattern present in most of the participants' stories that dealt with suffering, separation, and reunion. The second theme was family disintegration. Although this second theme could easily have been merged into the first category, I felt that since family is such a pillar in Latino culture it was important to reflect on this phenomenon separately.

Most participants presented a pattern in their stories about suffering, separation, and reunion. Participants acknowledged suffering as part of their upbringing. Several interviewees indicated having to work at a very early age and having to drop out of school caused them suffering. Carmen described her upbringing as sad. She also said she wanted to continue her education, but because her father could not afford her schooling, she dropped out half way

through fifth grade. Rafael indicated he wanted his children not to suffer as he had, and Chente said he had suffered enough.

Economic hardships were also reasons for suffering. Interestingly, the lack of clothing was mentioned on several occasions as a representation of economic strife or as a means for comparing the worth of work. Graciela indicated that as a young girl she had to share her underwear with her older sister. Rafael stated that in Mexico you require a whole week of work without spending any money to be able to purchase one pair of pants, and Carmen said life was better in the United States because people could eat and dress better.

Suffering also was prevalent in the lives of the participants due to separation. This separation was perhaps more obvious in the stories of the women who were left behind in Mexico by their husbands when they came to the United States to seek work. Rees (2001) wrote, "On average, men migrate the year after they marry" (p. 39). Because of this migration, women had to remain in Mexico to tend for their children. Rosalinda and Carmen found work making soccer balls near their village so they could pay for food. Carmen experienced separation from her father who would leave to the United States for work and then from her husband who left also for work in the United States soon after their wedding. Carmen and Rosalinda had to endure separation from their children because when they first came to the United States their children remained in Mexico.

Men also had a sense of separation while traveling and working in the United States. Rafael indicated the hardest thing about his experience of work was those times he was by himself away from his family. Chente shared how his mother and grandmother took him to church to be blessed in preparation for his trip. He said this was especially important because he

was no longer going to be in his land. This last statement indicates that a sense of separation is also created by being away from the land, the traditions, and from what is known.

Together with suffering and separation came reunion. As a normal theme, participants alluded to the joy of being reunited with family members. Rees (2001) stated that “since the 1990s, most women migrants from Mexico follow their husbands to Atlanta within three years of the males’ migration” (p. 40). Husband and wife reunions were presented by many participants as a positive landmark in their experiences. Rafael indicated he was very happy that he could be with his family in United States. He stated that since they had arrived he felt that time flew by. Juan, who had lived a life of a migrant for many years, said he had wanted to bring his wife for a long time.

Rosalinda provided a comment that nicely combined how suffering, separation and reunion became the experience of many Mexican immigrants. When telling her story about crossing the border to be reunited with her husband she said, “*Dios nos va a ayudar. Él ha visto todo lo que hemos sufrido y todo el tiempo que hemos estado separados. Primeramente Dios nos va a ayudar*” (God is going to help us. He has seen how much we had suffered and all the time that we had been separated. First of all God is going to help us).

The second theme that emerged from the data that did not “fit” on any of the previous questions was family brokenness. Data collected through the interviews and my observations while interacting with individuals at Lake Paradise made me realize that family disintegration is a common occurrence in this community. The family of the child who inspired me to pursue this topic for the dissertation, disintegrated after his mother filed for divorce. Four of the 9 participants experienced some type of family break up in Mexico, the United States, or both. Chente indicated his father left with another woman when he was still a child. Graciela shared

that her father was a womanizer who eventually left her mother. She also said her own husband left her and their 3 children after she started to work in the United States. Carmen indicated her father sold everything in Mexico so he could drink. He then left to Baja California where he was with other women. Eventually he left Carmen's mother for good. Lourdes came to the United States single, but soon after arriving at Lake Paradise she married a young man from Oaxaca and became pregnant. She shared that he left her before the daughter was born. Soon after, she met another man who also left her pregnant and who also left her before the baby was born.

This theme should come as a surprise considering how much family is valued by Mexicans. Once I asked the wife of a Mexican immigrant worker who lived at Lake Paradise if she knew of any man in her hometown that did not drink and physically abuse their wives. After some silence, she stated she knew one man who had become a Christian and had decided no longer to drink. "Besides him," she said, "I cannot think of anyone else." For Graciela the family problems seemed to have erupted from cultural conflicts. The gender role expectations between Mexico and the United States appeared to have been too much for her husband to withstand.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided data to answer the three research questions. It was found that through processes of socialization, participants developed strong cultural norms related to work. Data from the interviews indicated that the participants valued work, not because it contained intrinsic rewards, but because it is the method of obtaining things needed for subsistence. Their view towards work also seemed to change with their own responsibilities and the work settings. Participants expressed enjoying work in Mexico better than in the United States. This preference was based on their perceptions that work in Mexico was more flexible and there were no supervisors to monitor their work; however, because of the lack of jobs in Mexico and the better

paying jobs found in the United States, participants concluded they preferred to work in the United States.

Participants in this study were found to have great networking skills and were very cooperative. Their experiences though, revealed that Mexican immigrants did not always display cooperative attitudes, even to individuals within their own ethnic group. Most participants recognized and cited injustices and abuses that had been committed against them at their work places. Several participants also reported race and gender role conflicts as part of their experiences in transitioning to work in the United States. The relevance of these conflicts appeared to have been minimized by their focus on economic gain and a sense of upward mobility.

Participants identified themselves as hard workers and this brought a sense of pride. Although there was a feeling of pride towards hard work, participants were not meritocratic in the sense that they were able to recognize that other factors such as race, language attainment, education, age, connections, etc., were stronger contributors to success than just hard work. Some participants also indicated that Mexican immigrants worked very hard to please their supervisors. Participants stated an appreciation of education and recognized the role formal education had in finding jobs in Mexico; however, none indicated the importance that higher education has in the United States. Most hoped for their children to advance and progress through their education. Interviewees also appreciated the opportunity to learn how to perform their new jobs, and some felt compelled to show their nationalism through the attainment of skills.

A cycle of suffering, separation, and reunion was identified as a common process in the population examined in this study. For some participants, a feeling of redemption occurred when

families joined in the United States, but it was also clear that separation from other family members, the land, the culture, and other things that were known continued to bring a level of incompleteness and of suffering among participants. Family disintegration was also identified as common occurrence among the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe Mexican immigrants' experiences and work attitudes as they transitioned into jobs in the United States. To obtain the data, I conducted in-depth interviews with nine participants who lived in a trailer park community in suburban Atlanta. The interviews were transcribed and then the data was subjected to two separate analyses.

The first analysis used was a narrative type analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) which enabled the long interviews to be condensed. The product of this analysis was portraits or vignettes of each participant within their social context. The portraits provided stories that were organized and interesting to read. It was during this process of analysis that the translation of the interviews from Spanish to English took place.

To guarantee accuracy in the translation and in the developing of the portraits, I used member check and peer examination. Once the stories were completed, I reversed translated them to the participants and gave them the opportunity to change or add anything that was incorrect or missing. For the peer examination, I sought the help of a bilingual colleague who read the transcripts and the portraits. The colleague then verified that the stories were accurate and that I had not ignored or misconstrued any of the transcripts.

I also decided to use the Chicano writing style (Behar, 1993) in presenting the portraits of the participants. The purpose for using this style of writing was two-fold. First, I felt including

Spanish in the stories would be a good method to introduce the reader to the cultural aspects and differences that were prevalent in this study. I also wanted to expose the audience to the language difficulties that the participants deal with everyday. Second as the researcher I used the Chicano writing style to remind me of the language and cultural differences that exist between Mexico and Costa Rica. I made a conscious effort to keep statements in Spanish that included colloquialisms. I also kept statements in their original language if they were much richer in Spanish or if they were very difficult to translate. My hope in including the portraits in chapter four was not only to give an opportunity for the reader to become immersed in each participant's story and better understand their lives, but also to provide the audience with the information and tools to accept or refute my interpretations and findings.

After the portraits were completed, a second analysis was conducted to explore the possible answers for the three research questions. A narrative matrix analysis (Schell & Black, 1996) was conducted which allowed me to organize each research question using the three fundamental positions of symbolic interactionism. In chapter 5, I linked the findings to the literature, listed examples from the participants' own words and gave my own interpretations for the findings. In analyzing the data I also kept categories or themes that did not "fit" into any of the questions separate and then reported on these themes.

Research that dealt with the experiences of Mexican immigrants' transition into work in the United States was very limited. Therefore, I approached this study as one of introductory research that was characterized by its broadness. The research then provided a significant number of themes and categories. It is important to emphasize that each of these categories and themes requires further analysis.

Conclusions

The sample used in this study is representative of the recent Mexican immigrant who has recently settled in the United States and who worked and lived in suburban Atlanta. Nevertheless, as a qualitative research, the findings and conclusions are not to be over-generalized. I provided rich, thick descriptions to allow the reader to determine existing similarities and differences to other cases or situations. All of the participants originated from Mexico, all provided a sense of nationalism, and were all proud of being from that country. Participants had in common that none of them spoke English and that all had recently settled in the United States. At the time of the interviews, all lived with family members in a marginalized community in suburban Atlanta. All the participants also shared that their work experiences were in low-wage and low-skill jobs.

In describing Mexican immigrants' experiences and work attitudes as they transition into jobs in the United States, I sought to answer the following three questions.

1. How do Mexican immigrants describe their attitudes and perceptions towards work?
2. What are Mexican immigrants experiences as they transition into work places in the United States?
3. How do Mexican immigrants match up their expectations to their experiences at work in the United States?

Table 3 provides an overview of the questions listing the themes and categories that emerged after the matrix analysis. All participants did not always share the same views or answers. Nevertheless, the categories and themes listed are significant because of their connection to existing literature or because they were shared by several participants. Chapter 5

contains details and examples of how each of these themes and categories emerged from the data.

Table 3: Questions with Themes and Categories

<p>Q-1 Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work is part of life • Work is valued as a means of obtaining things • Work is necessary because of family responsibility • The employer and supervisor are highly regarded • Education is valued as a means of finding work (especially in Mexico) • Gender roles are strictly defined • Employees must start at the bottom
<p>Q-2 Experiences Transitioning into the Workplace in the U.S.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding work • Learning new skills • Health concerns and exploitation • Networking • Cooperative and uncooperative attitudes • Race relations • Focus on upward mobility
<p>Q-3 Matching Expectations to Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for coming to the United States <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Find work ▪ Make more money ▪ No future in Mexico ▪ Reunited with family ▪ Help children advance • Participants' findings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Made more money, but in some cases not as much as expected ▪ Work is more demanding in the United States ▪ Enjoy working in Mexico more, but because of income and availability prefer working in the United States • Reasons for staying in the United States <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide basic needs for family ▪ Move ahead economically
<p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycle of suffering, separation, and reunion • Family disintegration

First Question

For the first question, how do Mexican immigrants describe their attitudes and perceptions towards work? It was found that participants had worked since childhood. Following Opp's (1979) contention that norms are learned through processes of socialization and that these begin during childhood, it can be stated that the unwritten rules regarding work were established for each participant long before his or her migration into the United States. Rational processes as well as society influenced these norms (Ezioni, 2000). The data from this study revealed that the participants valued work and were very thankful for having jobs. However, under further analysis it can be concluded that participants did not value work for its intrinsic value, but because work brought a sense of satisfaction since it was the method of obtaining things for subsistence. Maywood (1982) stated that this particular view of work originated with the Persians. Participants also acknowledged that they were hard workers and felt a sense of pride from their effort.

The data suggested that views related to the responsibility towards work varied according to the participant's family role and responsibilities. The employment setting and the presence of a supervisor also affected this view. Marriage and the birth of children appeared to be crucial in prompting work-related changes. Participants indicated that soon after one or more of these events took place, they decided to migrate to other parts of Mexico or to the United States in search of better paying jobs. The sample indicated that they worked harder in the United States than in Mexico. Interviewees also referred to a high respect for authority and indicated that they sought to please the supervisors and employers.

Education was another area that was found to be of importance to the participants. An interesting observation was that several participants believed that education was of more

importance in Mexico than in the United States. They concluded this because when applying for jobs in the U.S. they were never asked about their formal education, while they said that in Mexico this would have been a deciding factor for who to hire. Participants wanted their children to learn English and to go to school to improve their lives. Although only two of the participants had some college education from Mexico, it was noted that none of the participants' formal or informal education or experiences were of benefit in finding work in the United States. Connected to this notion that education did not assist them in finding jobs was the belief that all workers must start from the bottom. This idea instilled in the participants a strong desire to remain with a particular company or employer so as not to lose wage levels or benefits through years of service.

Literature indicated that Hispanics in general and Mexicans in particular have strong views on gender roles. Applebaum (1998) and Kraus (n.d.-c) wrote that in Mexico cultural norms stress that men should be the breadwinners and women should remain at home. Participants in this study had several opinions and experiences related to gender roles. Most of the participants seemed to have adapted to women becoming breadwinners in conjunction with their husbands; however, one participant's family disintegrated due to this cultural conflict. Interestingly, all of the female participants not only broke gender role tradition by becoming the sole or joint breadwinners for their families, but several of the women in the study also worked in jobs which are traditionally performed by men even in the United States.

Second Question

Question 2, concerning Mexican immigrants' experiences as they transition into work places in the United States, provided interesting and valuable findings. In arriving to the United States, one of the participants' first experiences was related to finding work. Participants fell into

two categories. Once they arrived from Mexico, some participants had assistance, usually from family members already living in the United States in finding employment and started working soon after their arrival. For other participants, the experience was more of “trial and error” or “hit and miss” as they came without any connections for jobs. These connections or networking systems, or lack thereof, proved to be a crucial factor for some of the participants who came without connections in the area and as a result struggled to find work. Networking skills, in general, were found to be a strength of the participants. Their ability to utilize connections not only helped them in finding work, but also was fundamental in locating and moving to the community where they resided during the interview.

In coming to the United States, participants were forced to learn new skills. As previously mentioned, participants found jobs in the United States for which they had little or no experience. Employers and companies did not have a single method for training or teaching their immigrant employees the needed skills. Several participants learned their new skills through the help of other Mexicans who worked at the same workplaces while others indicated that it was more of a visual (stand-and-watch) method that was used. Some participants stated that hand signals became important when language barriers existed. Whatever method was used to teach the needed skills to the immigrants, data indicated that participants wanted to become competent in their jobs and felt both proud and satisfied when they mastered the skills.

A more disturbing finding in this study was related to issues of health and exploitation. Several participants indicated concern for their physical well-being due to practices followed by some of the companies. Niemann et al. (1999) and Waldinger (1992) identified Mexican workers as having strong work ethic because of their willingness to take jobs declined by others. Several participants stated they had noticed that workers from other races refused to perform some of the

tasks they did as part of their normal work routine. Some participants attributed the refusal to work by individuals from other races to the dangers and hardships involved in accomplishing the work. Most of the participants were also aware of other exploitations they faced at the workplace. Harder work and longer hours with equal to lower pay than other coworkers was a common experience for the participants. Some of the participants attributed this exploitation to racism while others indicated that the inequality was due to their own lack of language skills or that it was acceptable because of their questionable or non-existent legal documents.

Literature indicated that Mexicans were very cooperative. However, this was not always experienced according to the data from the participants' interviews. Several participants stated that Mexican and Hispanic coworkers and supervisors were at times vindictive and uncooperative. The data from this study also indicated that some participants faced racial conflicts at the workplace. Segregation due to language, race, and culture appeared to be normal at several workplaces described by the participants. Other participants had very different experiences as they indicated, although there were several races represented at their workplace, relationships with coworkers were great. One participant also said she encountered "reverse racism," at a factory because the supervisors, who were African American, gave preferential treatment to the Mexican immigrants.

A finding that has impact on the previous conclusions was the immigrants' principal focus and goal of upward mobility. Achieving a sense of economical gain and progress minimized their view of the gravity that issues such as health concerns, injustice, and exploitation had on them. Personal buying power and the ability to provide for the family gave the participants a sense of pride and fulfillment. Their worldview of rural Mexico, which for

most of the participants signified a life of subsistence, gave them, now that they were in the United States, an opportunity for significant upward mobility.

Third Question

In matching the participants' expectations to their experiences, participants shared that they wanted to come to the United States: (a) to find work, (b) to make more money, (c) because they had a sense that there was no future in Mexico, (d) to be reunited with family and/or (e) to help children move ahead. The data indicated that since their arrival to the United States, participants believed that they had reached these expectations.

Although participants made more money in the United States, several indicated that the money earned was not as much as expected. Some participants stated it was difficult to make enough money to pay for all their obligations. One participant shared a technique called "*tandas*" as a method of saving money. This creative technique provided opportunities for the undocumented, who is unable to use the services of banks or lending institutions, the ability to obtain larger cash amounts. This money was said to be used for emergencies or to be sent to family members still living in Mexico.

An interesting conclusion was drawn from the participants' comparisons between work in Mexico and the United States. The flexible, unsupervised, and slow-pace work experienced in Mexico by the participants, in combination with the familiarity of the culture, made participants decide that work in Mexico was more enjoyable. However, their sense of having no future in Mexico and the low wages earned there convinced them that work in the United States was better. All but one of the participants planned to stay indefinitely in the United States. Their hopes and dreams as workers in the United States were also found to be very different from those

shared by most workers in mainstream United States. Participants unanimously indicated their hope was to provide for their families and to have their children move ahead.

Other Conclusions

Suffering, separation, and reunion were common themes among the participants. They referred to their difficult upbringing in terms of suffering. This suffering was also expressed as a reflection of the economic hardship and the hard work endured as children. The suffering was exacerbated in several cases by separation from their fathers or husbands. Although there appeared to be a sense of redemption once the families were reunited in the United States and hardships were offset by higher pay, the sense of separation continued to exist because of the cultural and physical distance from their country of origin. For several of the participants, separation became more pronounced in the United States as their families disintegrated after their arrival to the United States.

This remarkable and sad observation of family disintegration came as a stark contrast to comments from participants and the literature which stated that the most important thing for the Mexican is the family. For many of the participants, family disintegration involving abuse and domestic violence was very common. Another aspect that created family disintegration originated from the differences in upbringing between the Mexican parents and their children. During my observations and volunteer work at Lake Paradise I noticed that many parents could no longer communicate or relate to their children. School-aged children lose their Spanish at a surprising rate while their parents take a long time to learn English. It is typical for the educational system to teach Mexican children to speak and write only English without an emphasis on maintaining their language of origin. School environments also immerse children in a predominantly Anglo culture, and these factors create immense barriers between the parents

and their children. Freire (2000) referred to this type of conflict as “*invasión cultural*” (cultural invasion) (p. 195). He also indicated that it is important for the invaded to see their reality through the lenses of the invaders and not through their own reality. Schools decision makers need to consider these alternative perspectives as they design services for immigrant children, and research, education, and dialogue are critical to success in this arena

Immigrants come to the United States with an interest in bettering themselves and their families. However, most arrive and settle in the United States without knowledge of the possible negative impact this transition could have on their lives and their families. Immigrants need to be aware of these repercussions before coming to the United States with their families. Formal education systems need to reevaluate the impact of their practices and seek new and creative ways to strengthen the family bond between the immigrant parents and their children.

Implications for Theoretical Understanding

In 1998, the Latino population in the United States, for which Mexicans constitute the highest percentage, became the largest minority group in the United States. Estimations indicate that in the near future non-Whites will actually become the minority in several U.S. states (Contreras, 2004). The United States has become dependent on the Mexican immigrant workforce, which is now responsible for many jobs that no one else is willing to do. The stories, findings, conclusions, and recommendations drawn in this study add to the understanding of the Mexican immigrants’ experiences, perspectives and attitudes regarding their lives in general and their work in specific.

In this study, among other findings, it was concluded that the participants who represented recent Mexican immigrants value work both as a part of life and as the means for obtaining things for subsistence. Their goals in the United States are to move ahead and to

provide for the basic needs for their families. Although oppressed by racism, inequalities, and other injustices, the Mexican immigrants' focus on upward mobility and economic gain causes some to ignore those negative aspects present in their daily lives. Cultural norms such as avoiding confrontation (Kraus, n.d.-c) and values taught in schools across Mexico which focus on learning to conform (Kraus, n.d.-d) enforce complacency in the face of injustice and exploitation. From a humanitarian perspective, this oppression is wrong. Freire (2000) argued that exploitation also has a negative impact because it teaches an unjust model of how to use power. He indicated this provides the venue for an unending cycle of oppressors and oppressed.

The fact that Mexican immigrants are hard workers, who appear complacent and happy, makes them appealing as workers to employers in the United States. The combination of the economical situation in Mexico and the welcome extended by companies and employers to the Mexican worker has contributed to the population of Mexicans expanding across the United States. Another aspect noted through research and reflected in this study is the changing dynamics of their immigration and migration. Mexican immigrants are going from being migrants, who mostly worked in agriculture, to individuals who bring their families to settle in urban and suburban environments. Dale, et al. (2001) wrote, "By all accounts, the Hispanic population is in transition from a temporary migrant to a permanent residence status" (p. 94).

Besides the alluded aspects of oppression that take place at many worksites, the settling of the immigrants with their families in the United States brings another concern. Literature indicated that cultural norms, that encompasses work values, perceptions of authority among other areas that govern our everyday lives, are learned through processes of socialization and are grounded on cultural identification (Opp, 1979; Etzioni, 2000). Cultural norms in combination with worldviews provide the immigrants with a base from which to measure and discern upward

mobility. Through the descriptions of the living conditions in Mexico in the participants' vignettes and statistical indicators available regarding Mexico's economical condition, upward mobility in the United States is easily attainable for the Mexican immigrant who comes to the United States escaping poverty. However, for the children who have not experienced or cannot recall the extreme poverty conditions of their parents' home country in combination with a lack of knowledge and value of the traditions, nationalism and historical events of Mexico, the worldview and cultural norms in the children of recent Mexican immigrants are destined to be different from those cultivated in their parents.

As the cultural norms change for the children of Mexican immigrants, there is the strong likelihood that the attitudes towards work will also change. Niemann et al. (1999) reported the children of immigrants' skeptic view on education contradicted the views of their parents who believed education was of utmost importance. This research provides an example of changes to cultural norms that occur between generations. If the values that have made the Mexican immigrant welcomed across the United States were to change, would this ethnic group still be welcomed to stay? In addition, once the children can no longer attain a sense of upward mobility because of their own new standards, could there be a change of focus? Would the change of focus lead to cultural inversion as indicated by Ogbu (1994)?

The satisfaction that many employers and companies presently have in receiving Mexican workers because of their hard work and good attitudes, even under oppressive conditions, could change with the rise of the next generations. Studstill and Nieto-Studstill (2001) raised another concern related to the immigrants' welcome as they stated that the hospitality could turn into hostility if the economy changed. They warned a major blight in the economy that leads to loss of jobs would make the Latino workforce unwelcome.

Contributions to Qualitative Research

A qualitative paradigm was used for answering the questions of this dissertation. I evaluated the ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological perspectives to determine the appropriateness of this type of research. Implications of time, course work requirements, and amount of writing required were also considerations taken before choosing to use qualitative methods. Nevertheless, it was the topic and the nature of the research questions which became the decisive factors in choosing this approach.

Five doctoral level courses in qualitative research assisted in preparing me as a researcher by providing an introduction to the philosophies, writings, and evolution of this discipline. The strong emphasis of hands-on research enabled me to improve my skills as a writer and data collector. However, the decision process, implementation, and completion of this study were fundamental in recognizing the value of qualitative research.

The writing flexibility in qualitative research allowed me to be creative. This became especially important since I believe it was imperative to incorporate Chicano writing style into the participant portraits. The options of organizing and analyzing the transcripts and narratives from different perspectives and using different methods (narrative type analysis and narrative matrix analysis), gave me an opportunity to see how different analysis provide different types of output and data. I feel the in-depth interviews in combination with the observations were a good method for developing descriptions which, in turn, provided the reader with a contextual setting.

The experience with the interviewees was wonderful and I felt they were all eager to tell their stories. At times, I was surprised by their comfort and openness displayed towards me during the interviews. An example of this was, although I did not ask anything regarding their residential status, every single participant shared their intimate stories of crossing the border. I

believe that my Hispanic background was influential in obtaining entry. It is also important to mention that significant differences existed between my social and economical status and those of the participants. Discrepancies between the culture in Costa Rica and Mexico were also evident. Because of these differences, I believe I was able to look at the data as an “outsider.” This insider-outsider balance was instrumental in completing this research.

Symbolic interactionism provided guidelines on how to view and interpret the data. It reinforced the notion that it was through qualitative methods that I could seek to answer the research questions. It provided a means of focusing on symbols like behaviors and to look at social interaction, language, and education as interpretations of the participant’s world. Symbolic interactionism’s premise of empathy was influential in deciding to include the participant’s portraits as part of this document. It was my intention for these stories to provide a glimpse of the participants’ lives and a view of their thoughts, fears, and hopes. This was a tedious process because of the number of steps involved in developing and confirming each story. The fact that each interview was in Spanish and had to be converted into English also increased the amount of time required to complete each story.

I also was able to use the conceptual framework as a fundamental part of the inductive analysis in the study. By using the narrative matrix analysis as described by Schell and Black (1997) the three fundamental positions of symbolic interactionism (Casella, 1999; LeCompte et al., 1992; Patton, 1990) were embedded within the three research questions. This technique provided a system for inductively analyzing the data. The merger of the three research questions with the three fundamental positions provided an opportunity to code the data into meaningful categories. The development of the nine categorical cells also provided a structured and

organized way of determining the influences and attitudes regarding work of the recently settled Mexican immigrant to the United States.

This study can be counted as another contribution to qualitative research and as a continuation of the tradition of using symbolic interactionism in cultural studies. For the most part, this study utilized traditional and widely used methods and techniques for collecting, analyzing, and presenting the data. There were also some innovations and unconventional techniques utilized. Through every aspect of the study, conventional or innovative, I sought to provide details so that others may follow and better understand my methods and strategies. I did not follow any existing mold or strategy which makes this study unique. I integrated the Chicano writing style. I also made an effort to provide descriptive information about the settings and of each individual to increase the study's external validity.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study to qualitative research in general and symbolic interactionism in particular relates to the multi-language factors and decisions made in this study. I was unable to find another study where detailed information was given about how to conduct a qualitative study with several languages. This lack of information provided a gap and also an opportunity to explore methods and techniques for how and when to transfer data from one language to another. During the pilot study of this dissertation, I manipulated and translated the language at different stages to best determine when to make the transition into English. On one occasion I translated one of the interviews into Spanish as I listened to the tapes, but this method did not provide the original words for verifying accuracy in translation. I then decided to transcribe the interviews into the original language.

With the internationalization of the World, it is expected that more qualitative research will require completion in multi-languages. An effort to provide details and to examine better

strategies for dealing with these factors is required. Techniques similar to the Chicano writing style can provide unique methods for the reader to glimpse at and experience other languages and cultures. However, further research is needed to identify the effectiveness of these techniques for readers.

Implications for Practice

A major finding of this study was that participants valued education. This was concluded because: (a) interviewees stated that without a certain level of education, they could not compete in the job market in Mexico, (b) they appreciated learning at the workplace and (c) participants said that they hoped that their children would progress by learning English and through education. Formal and informal education can provide an opportunity to improve the chances for success and uplift the lives of those oppressed. Educators in challenging students to re-evaluate the commercialization and materialism ideologies shared by the American mainstream could capitalize on the Mexican immigrants' values of work, family, and the satisfaction exemplified by the participants on simpler living.

The Role of Formal Education

Higher education is pivotal in the climb to success, since college graduates earn an average of 75% more than non-graduates. It is then imperative to provide this as a viable option to the Mexican immigrant and the Mexican American. However, current policies relevant to college acceptance, costs, and the fact that many immigrants and children of immigrants dropout before the completion of high school make attainment of a college degree a goal that is almost impossible to reach.

Participants indicated an interest for their children to attend school. However, cultural differences as well as economic and academic limitations create gaps that prohibit parental

involvement in the child's learning process. In reporting these difficulties Dale, et al. (2001) wrote:

Parents expressed frustration in dealing with the educational system, especially when their children attended schools that lacked the resources to bridge the language gap. Parents were willing to become involved in their children's education, but they faced many obstacles, such as the absence of bilingual teachers, the inability to communicate with teachers regarding their children's academic progress, not being able to attend school meetings and activities (due to conflicting work schedules or lack of transportation or child care), and being unable to understand school correspondence sent home with the children (p. 97).

Montecel, Cortez and Cortez (2004) reported that, although the numbers are hard to determine concerning ethnicity dropout, the dropout rate of Hispanics is very high. In Texas, they estimated that on average 140,000 students are lost every year and that a large percentage of these dropouts comes from Latinos. They also wrote that nationally "43% of the Latino population did not earn a high school diploma, and that of that number, 26% had dropped out before the ninth grade" (p. 171). Participants in this study had an even higher dropout rate as only two participants completed high school. The other seven participants dropped out of school while living in Mexico before completing sixth grade. The dropout rate among Latinos, in light of the fundamental need for college education in the United States, provides a dim outlook for the ever-growing population of children of Mexican immigrants. Programs like Achieving a College Education (ACE); Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID); Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG); Mathematical, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) and Upward Bound provide some options to assist students to achieve higher educational levels

(Montecel et al., 2004). However, these should be seen as a merely beginning in the shadow of tremendous need in motivating and assisting the Mexican immigrant and their children to complete their education.

The Role of Workforce Education

Career and technical education has traditionally prepared students for entry-level jobs and historically has focused on helping those populations in need. An example of this was the Mechanics Institute Movement, which emerged in the early 1880s “to improve the economic and social conditions of industrial and agricultural workers and to provide a pool of educated and efficient workers” (Scott & Sarkees-Wirceski, 2001, p. 123). Besides the opportunity to educate and prepare youth and adults for work, career and technical education is the component in education best suited to discuss and teach about work ethic, attitudes, and values. The internationalization of the world requires areas associated with workforce education focus more of their teaching to cultural and international aspects as they relate to work.

Educators in career and technical education should find ways to connect with their students. By understanding the traditions, experiences, and expectations of students with different cultural backgrounds, teachers can find ways to better communicate and motivate the students. The role of the educator is not to make students follow the Anglo-Conformity Model, but instead to increase the students’ cultural and intellectual capital.

Other Opportunities in Education

The need to inform immigrant workers of their rights and obligations is required. However, to empower them to be able to confront racism, exploitation, and other injustices is not an easy task to accomplish. This is especially difficult when the worker although being exploited, is content with their job. Myles Horton, Paulo Freire, and David Tabalos are examples of

individuals who dedicated their lives to awareness, transformation and empowerment of those who are oppressed. Freire (2000) indicated this transformation should not occur to the oppressed alone, but also to the oppressor. Dialogue is fundamental in empowering and understanding the dynamics, options, and opportunities for change. As more Mexican immigrants go from being migrant to settled, the opportunities for dialogue increase. Dale et al. (2001) wrote that immigrant workers had needs of education that were usually utilitarian in nature, such as learning how to drive and learning English, and they indicated that churches and community colleges on many occasions provided these educational services.

The participants' belief that having to start from the bottom should also be explored. Mexican immigrants for the most part have extensive experience and incredible skills. A system that could evaluate and record the immigrant workers' experiences and abilities is needed. This record would empower the worker and assist the employer in better job matching and utilization of available resources.

Implications for Future Research

This study revealed several findings that are fundamental in the understanding of the experiences and attitudes of the recently settled Mexican immigrant to the United States. While other writers provided anecdotal perspectives, this was a study that looked empirically at data to provide answers. As previously mentioned, this study was an introductory research and thereby requiring the broad nature of the questions asked. The broad nature of this study uncovered areas that need further inquiry.

Participants in this study were diverse in age, state of origin, gender, race, educational level, work backgrounds, and their experiences of work both in Mexico and the United States. Although most participants shared similar experiences, further research is needed to identify if

these conclusions are most distinctive with certain populations in Mexico. All of the participants in the study worked in entry level work. Additional empirical studies are needed to determine if the findings of this study were due to cultural reasons, or if socioeconomic and educational levels affected the attitudes and values towards work. More research is also needed to examine how the experiences of the immigrant worker vary among those working at low discretion jobs and high discretion jobs, and to determine which managerial system is best accepted by the Mexican immigrant worker.

Gender roles with regard to work is other area that needs further analysis. An aspect that intrigued me in the study was comparing the reactions between genders in the study. Although the literature indicated that women in Mexico were taught to hold domestic positions and be subservient, the information in this study did not support that assumption. Women in this study appeared more determined, more dedicated, and more confrontational than the men. Further study is needed to determine the impact of gender roles as governed by the dominant culture and the impact that these changes have on individuals.

The phenomenon of the immigrant workforce found in the United States is not unique to this country. For instance Costa Rica, my home country, receives thousands of workers from Nicaragua, to labor in agriculture, housekeeping, factory work, and other jobs that Costa Ricans refuse to do. The immigrant Nicaraguans face issues of racism and exploitation similar to those of the Mexicans in the United States. This dynamic between countries also occurs throughout many countries in the World. This study could be replicated to examine how experiences of immigrant workers equate or differ between nations.

For my future research agenda, I hope to look at some of the previously recommended studies. However, as a new researcher I would like to conduct what Velázquez (1998) identified as transformative research. In describing this type of research, she wrote:

Transformative research is not a methodology. It is an orientation toward research that is defined by its intended outcome: producing a more just and equitable world.

Transformative research should be evaluated against emergent universal ethical ends in the public interest, with attention given to human rights, social justice, reconciliation, and the preservation of environmental sustainability (p. 65-66).

As a new resident in North Carolina, I found that research and service opportunities abound. Chapa and De La Rosa (2004) indicated that North Carolina had the largest increase of Latino population between 1990 and 2000, which was reported at 394%. Watauga County (where I live and work) and its neighboring counties have also seen an increase of Latino immigrants. Although most of the workers are still migrant working for the Christmas tree industry and the ski resort industry, immigrants are slowly starting to settle in the region. The increase of settlers is evident by the number of Mexican stores and the emergence of Spanish organizations. A non-profit organization called High Country Amigos, Inc. was founded to bridge the local and Spanish-speaking communities. Churches organized a group called *La Luz del Mundo* (The Light of the World) to assist the Spanish speakers in the area. This increase in Latino population provides me with a unique opportunity for research and service in the local area.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a discussion of the conclusions reached from this study. Answers were given for each of the research questions by presenting the findings and linking them to

research and literature. The chapter included implications for theoretical understanding and contained a section devoted to the contributions of this study to qualitative research and symbolic interactionism (conceptual framework). Implications for practice with an emphasis on the roles of education and workforce preparation were given. Finally, I presented needs and opportunities with regard to future research associated with work, immigration, attitudes, and values. I also wrote about my interests for future research and discussed opportunities available to continue working with the Latino immigrant population in Northwestern North Carolina.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
CONSENT FORMS

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in the research titled *Effects of Work Experiences in the United States on Work Attitudes of Mexican Immigrants*, which is being conducted by Garner Dewey (Department of Occupational Studies, University of Georgia, Tel. 706-542-1682) under the direction of Dr. Roger Hill (Department of Occupational Studies, University of Georgia, Tel. 706-542-4100). I understand that my participation is purely voluntary; I can stop participating at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The purpose of this study is to describe the effects of work experiences in the United States on work attitudes of Mexican immigrants. It is hoped that my participation in this study will draw attention to (a) the struggles, pressures, and concerns that the Mexican immigrants have with respect to their work ethic, (b) the perceptions of work of Mexican immigrants as they transition into the workforce of the United States, and (c) how interactions with co-workers affect the Mexican immigrant work attitude.
2. Upon completion of a 60-minute interview, I will receive a \$10 gift card from Walmart supermarket. If I am unable or unwilling to complete the interview, I will receive a \$5 gift card from Walmart supermarket.
3. The procedures are as follows:
 - a) The date, time, and place of the interview will be agreed upon by telephone or by person. The date, time, and place will be convenient for the participant.
 - b) I will read this consent form, ask the researcher any questions that I may have, and sign the consent form.
 - c) The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded on audio-tape. The researcher may take some notes.
 - d) I will receive a copy of the transcripts of my interview.
4. No discomforts or stresses are expected.
5. No risks are expected.
6. All information collected about me will remain **confidential**. For purposes of confidentiality, tapes and transcripts of the interviews will be labeled with pseudonyms. The master list matching the pseudonyms and real names will be kept by the researcher in a different location than tapes and transcripts. The tapes and transcripts will be kept in a safe place for 5 years for the purpose of analysis, after which time the tapes will be destroyed. If any of this information is published or presented in public, all characteristics that can identify me will be removed. The exception to confidentiality involves information revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse, which must be reported by law.
7. The researcher will answer any further questions about the study now or during the course of the project. He can be reached by telephone at 770-761-5350.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all my questions to my satisfaction. I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Dr. Chris A. Joseph, Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

Translation of Consent Form

FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Yo, _____, acepto participar en el proyecto de investigación titulado *Efectos de Experiencias en el Trabajo en los Estados Unidos de América con Respecto a las Actitudes hacia el Trabajo de Inmigrantes Mejicanos*, el cual es conducido por Garner Dewey (Departamento de Estudios Ocupacionales, Universidad de Georgia, Tel. 706-542-1682) bajo la supervisión del Dr. Roger Hill (Departamento de Estudios Ocupacionales, Universidad de Georgia, Tel. 706-542-4100). Entiendo que mi participación es completamente voluntaria; puedo terminar mi participación en cualquier momento sin dar un motivo, sin penalidad alguna. Puedo pedir que se me devuelvan, que se borren de los registros de la investigación, o que se destruyan todos datos relatados a mi participación.

Los siguientes puntos me han sido explicados:

1. El propósito de este estudio es de describir los efectos de experiencias en el trabajo en los Estados Unidos de América con respecto a las actitudes al trabajo de inmigrantes mejicanos. Es la esperanza que mi participación en este estudio ayude a resaltar (a) las luchas, presiones, y preocupaciones que tiene el inmigrante mejicano con respecto a sus actitudes hacia el trabajo, (b) las perspectivas hacia el trabajo del inmigrante mejicano así como se incorpora a la fuerza del trabajo en los Estados Unidos de América y (c) como las interacciones con compañeros afecta la actitud hacia el trabajo del inmigrante mejicano.
2. Al completar la entrevista de 60 minutos, me regalarán una tarjeta del supermercado Walmart que vale \$10. Si no puedo completar la entrevista, o no estoy dispuesto(a) a completarla, me regalarán una tarjeta del supermercado Walmart que vale \$5.
3. Los procedimientos son los siguientes:
 - a) La fecha, hora, y lugar de la entrevista serán acordados por teléfono o por persona. La fecha, hora, y lugar serán convenientes para el (la) participante.
 - b) Yo leeré este formulario de consentimiento, preguntaré al investigador si tengo alguna duda, y firmaré el formulario de consentimiento.
 - (c) La entrevista tendrá una duración aproximada de 60 minutos. La entrevista será audio grabada. El investigador tomará apuntes.
 - (d) Yo recibiré una copy de la transcripción de mi entrevista.
4. No se anticipa que el estudio produzca tensiones ni angustias.
5. No se anticipa que el estudio tenga riesgos de ningún tipo.
6. Todos los datos recopilados sobre mí quedarán **confidenciales**. Por eso, las cintas grabadas durante las entrevistas y las transcripciones de ellas serán etiquetadas con pseudónimos. La lista que indica a quien pertenecen los pseudónimos se mantendrá en un lugar diferente que donde se localizan las cintas grabadas. Las cintas grabadas y las transcripciones se mantendrán en un lugar seguro por cinco años por motivo de análisis. Después de este periodo de tiempo, las cintas serán destruidas. Si algunos de estos datos se publican o se presenten en un lugar público, se quitarán todas las características que pueden identificarme. Las excepciones a la confidencialidad involucran el suicidio, el homicidio, y el abuso infantil, los cuales deben reportarse obligatoriamente.
7. El investigador contestará todas las preguntas en cuanto al estudio ahora o durante el curso del proyecto. Se puede comunicar con él al teléfono 770-761-5350.

Mi firma abajo indica que el investigador ha contestado mis preguntas y estoy satisfecho(a) con las respuestas. Estoy de acuerdo en participar voluntariamente en este estudio. He recibido una copia de este formulario.

Firma del Investigador

Fecha

Firma del Participante

Fecha

Preguntas o problemas en relación a sus derechos como participante deben ser dirigidas a la: Dra. Chris A. Joseph, Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Teléfono (706) 542-6514; Dirección de correo electrónico IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following were guiding questions used during the interviews:

1. Tell me about your life growing up and working in Mexico.
2. Tell me about what you thought work in the United States would be like while you were still living in Mexico.
3. Tell me about some differences that you have noticed between work in Mexico and the United States.
4. Tell me about an experience where you felt proud of your work.
5. Tell me how you interact with your co-workers.
6. Tell me about an experience where you had a bad day at work.
7. Tell me how you learned your profession.

GUIA PARA LA ENTREVISTA

1. Cuénteme acerca de su vida y trabajo en México.
2. Cuénteme cómo creyó usted que sería el trabajo en los Estados Unidos mientras aun vivía en Mexico.
3. Cuénteme algunas diferencias que a notado entre el trabajo en México y los Estados Unidos.
4. Cuénteme alguna experiencia donde usted se sintió orgulloso(a) de su trabajo.
5. Cuénteme como se relaciona con sus compañeros de trabajo.
6. Cuénteme una experiencia donde usted tuvo un mal día en el trabajo.
7. Cuénteme como aprendió su profesión.

APPENDIX C

NARRATIVE TYPE ANALYSIS PROCESS

(Samples)

414 you! Que es good! – me decía. Y me hizo con el dedo así –
 415 [Thumbs up!] y yo me senti muy contenta y le dije a mi esposo.
 416 Y yo le dije que lo que se propone uno lo logra. Yo quize quedar
 417 bien y quize demostrarles que uno de Mexicano puede hacerlo
 418 puede lograr lo que uno se propone y necesitaban una alberca y
 419 yo me ofreci hacercela y se la hice. En muy poco tiempo y bien
 420 para que me la revisaran como era primera vez que agarraba yo
 421 asi que la maquina y me felicito y me senti bien que les alla
 422 gustado mi trabajo.
 423

Section of transcription showing selection

Rosalinda
 Goals + Outcomes

56 Moved (family) ^{so} daughter (Rosalinda) could marry someone they
 new - interp - to keep track (¿o rato nos vamos nosotros
 para el rancho y no sabes ni con quien quede")

166 - There was no future @ the ranch

293 - I would tell him: You better come back...

339 - Left the children behind, suffered too much +
 so many years married + by herself + the children
 also by themselves + they wanted to become a
 family.

416 And I told him (husband) "Que lo que se propone
 uno lo logra."

417 I wanted to show them that ^a Mexican can
 do it

Section transferred into organizing category (Goals and Outcomes)

When I was first hired I started as everyone else, at the bottom. The first week I was asked just to observe and see the movement and what different people did. One day while I was still observing, I noticed that the *mayordoma* needed a swimming pool to be assembled, but there was no one available to do it. Because she could not speak Spanish I made gestures and signs telling her that I could do it. I told her: “¡*Que yes, que yo la hacia!*!” “(That yes, that I would make it!).” She told me that she trusted me. I went to the machine and assembled the *alberca* in 15 minutes. The *mayordoma* patted me on the back and said: “Thank you! Is good!” And gave me a thumbs up. That day I felt extremely happy. I wanted to do well and show them that a Mexican could do it and I did. When I got home I told my husband: *Lo que se propone uno lo logra* (when you put your mind to it, you can accomplish it).

Insertion of the selection into Rosalinda’s portrait using Chicano Style Writing

APPENDIX D

INDUCTIVE NARRATIVE MATRIX ANALYSIS PROCESS

(Samples)

CARMEN

ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS	MEANINGS FROM SOCIAL INTERACTION	INTERPRETIVE PROCESS
<p>Q1-S1 1509 Father teased 1202 to others so they could point on our property. They would give some of the harvest and that is how he survived. 1504 I brought home about \$10.00 a week. Can you imagine? Nothing.</p>	<p>Q1-S2 1537 At the pillow factory there are only Mexican workers.</p>	<p>Q1-S3 1537 Others (over) have entered, but they do not last. 1501 I can always look for another job where I'm not embarrassed. 1562 Learning to sew was the proudest thing I work - more secure, comfortable + skillful</p>
<p>Q2-S1 1505 I never felt proud of my work in Mexico, people do not make much money & it is spent the same day. I used this money to dress. 1515 I would tell my husband to take me I would go. 1522 I wanted to learn Cost. I really wanted to work hard & not lose my job because I needed the money to bring my other daughters to live with us.</p>	<p>Q2-S2 1610 The women had to stay behind + with this job (soccer balls) they could feed their children. 1617 My boss would criticize me when I still did not know how to do the job. 1618 Co-workers expect you know everything when you start, & the boss would @ times fire employees after only one week. 1668 Most workers were white (2nd job). My father could not speak Spanish, but he never made me feel badly. He was very nice.</p>	<p>Q2-S3 1501 They don't care if the workers are tired. 1566 They ran out of work and since I was the most recent employee, I was one of the first ones to go.</p>
<p>Q3-S1 1520 While @ the ranch I had noticed that individuals who came back from working in U.S. dressed really nice. This made me think it was great over there. I thought that life here was marvelous. 1523 I had in my mind that I was coming to work and that we were going to have a beautiful life. 1522 Soon after arriving I became pregnant & got very sick. (Could not find a job and was unable to pay for the medicines. 1526 There, I left @ poverty over there. Over here there is more possibility for work, to live with your family and be together. 1529 Here I can buy my daughter's clothes; my other</p>	<p>Q3-S2 1572 If you come, we will suffer my husband would tell me. Oh, I said, we will suffer together.</p>	<p>Q3-S3 1557 I came here to work not to make my supervisor like me. To do your job is one thing, to be liked by your supervisor is another. 1560 After some time I realized that if he did not think I was doing my job then he could fire me. 1586 I tell you, life is much better over here... you can eat better & dress better. 1591 We do not want to come any more to the U.S. The only thing we want is for our children to study & to progress economically because over there you cannot find work.</p>

EXPERIENCES IN TRANSITION TO THE U.S.
REALITY vs. EXPECTATIONS

CARMEN (2nd Step) Condensed

<p>Q1-S1 Worked, but not enough for subsistence</p>	<p>Q1-S2 Only Mexican workers</p>	<p>Q1-S3 - Other races do no just (Harder / heavier workers) - Look for another job - embarrassment would cause - Learning the job proud moment.</p>
<p>Q2-S1 - Money → reason to be proud. - Husband already in the US. - Fear of losing job. Needed \$ to bring daughters.</p>	<p>Q2-S2 Women stay behind Find local jobs to feed children Bad treatment from same race Pedagogy of the oppressed Preferred job with all white workers.</p>	<p>Q2-S3 - Don't care for employees - Let go in order of hiring.</p>
<p>Q3-S1 Visual - Dress Thought it was great Work = Beautiful life Address times - pregnancy + sickness no work More possibility for work in the US. Purchasing power.</p>	<p>Q3-S2 Husband discouraged her to come.</p>	<p>Q3-S3 - Interpersonal skills not related to being a good worker. - You can eat + dress better here / Purchasing power - Children's education - upward mobility - No jobs in Mexico.</p>