

THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE: MEXICO AND CENTRAL
AMERICA TO THE UNITED STATES

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Research Proposal

The purpose of this research paper will investigate the motivational factors that contribute to immigration from Latin America to the United States. I will apply the push pull theory of immigration to differentiate between these factors and assess how the motivation behind immigrating affects the individual's well-being and life after relocating. This paper will present data on which areas of Latin America provide the U.S. with the most immigrants and will also analyze reasons behind data patterns.

To gather research I will use two different methods. I will gather my own research by interviewing five different individuals about their experiences emigrating from Latin America to the United States and how their decision to leave has affected themselves and their families. The testimonials gathered through these interviews will give an accurate picture of an immigrant's transition from one country to the other in the most firsthand telling of the story available. My second method will involve drawing information from other resources are relevant to my topic.

Annotated Bibliography

- 1) Cohen, Jeffrey H. 2004. *The Culture of Migration in Southern Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

This book studies specifically life in Oaxaca, Mexico. The author discusses migration from Oaxaca's Central Valleys, how it can affect the household, and the positive affect remittances have on the rural environment of Oaxaca. The history and process of migration within this region is explored. It is said that today most migrants rely on social networks in their decision to migrate; they know another migrant in their destination city and in a sense follow them to the U.S. Through interviews of local citizens, the author determines that the majority of individuals remaining in Oaxaca would use remittances toward daily living costs. It also shows, in percentage, remittance use by community. For my senior project, this book can provide reasons for migration and data that reflect some of the effects of migration on the state of Oaxaca. The author only presented information from this specific state of Mexico, I would have liked to see how Oaxaca compared to other regions. (159 words)

- 2) Diaz-Briquets, Sergio, and Sidney Weintraub. 1991. *Determinants of Emigration from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean*. Boulder: Westview Press.

This book aims to investigate the motivations for immigration. Evidence is presented for migration from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean to mainland United States. The author also explains different types of migration including permanent family, temporary, and irregular labor migration. Temporary and irregular migrants now compose significant portion of migration. The book also discusses the push-pull theory of migration. Push factors are found in the poorest regions and tend to drive citizens out of their homeland. Pull factors can be found in relatively wealthier regions of the country or world and pull citizens toward a different life. The

author points out the problem within this model that involves the tendency for some individuals to remain in an environment, ignoring push-pull factors, while others will migrate. This source offers information on the theoretical aspects of migration with respect to individual countries that I am interested in researching. For my senior project, this source is important because it offers information about the push-pull model of immigration which I am interested in specifically. (171 words)

3) Glick, Jennifer E., Frank D. Bean, and, Jennifer V.W. Van Hook. 1997. Immigration and Changing Patterns of Extended Family Household Structure in the United States: 1970-1990. *Journal of Marriage and Family* vol. 59, no.1, pp. 177-191.

This article looks at how the family structure within households has changed between 1970 and 1990. The author attributes the increase in extended family households within the U.S. to the increase in immigration, mostly from Mexico, Guatemala, and, and El Salvador. These countries are targeted because there are a large number of single adults living with relatives within the U.S. due to poverty within their home country. The author differentiates between vertically and horizontally extended (single generation) households and makes the claim that there is a greater likelihood for recent immigrants to live within a vertically extended (multi-generational) household. As a conclusion, it is stated that more information and future studies are needed to explain the overall increase in population during the 1980s, which cannot be explained simply by the increase in extended family households. This article provides numerical data on the number of immigrants and native citizens living within extended family households and presents information on the most common, typical family structure for immigrants from Central America and I feel this will be helpful toward my senior project. (179 words)

4) Hamilton, Nora, and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla. 1991. Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis. *Latin American Research Review* vol. 26, no.1, pp. 75-110.

This article goal is to develop a framework for analyzing migration from Central America, taking into consideration political and economic motivating factors, domestic and international societal structures, and both historical and modern dimensions of society. Coffee is used as an example to show how capitalism has affected this region from the 19th century through WWII. The article argues that migration begins when capitalism reaches areas and regions that are less developed. The penetration of capitalism results in the migration of citizens from less-developed areas to more-developed areas of the country, or the world. The article claims that the three main concepts that are central to migration within and out of Central America are the emergence of capitalism, structural changes that result within the society, and foreign intervention. This information is important for my senior project because it provides an overview of trends and factors that contribute to migration throughout Central America. (151 words)

5) Juniu, Susana. 2000. The Impact of Immigration: Leisure Experience in the Lives of South American Immigrants. *Journal of Leisure Research* vol.32, no.3, pp.358-381.

This article analyses the impact immigration has on leisure experiences through a study done with interviews of 8 males and 9 females. The study found that an individual undergoes an adjustment process after immigrating during which their perception of time and views about work change. Through social interaction the individual starts to integrate their behaviors to better match or at least compliment American culture. The article also presents the marginality theory and the ethnicity theory which offer explanation for the meaning of leisure within Latin culture. The information presented here can impact my senior project because it accurately displays the differences between life in South America and the United States and shows how immigrants are negatively and positively affected by U.S. culture. Because the study was done with individuals

from South America instead of Central America and Mexico the data may not relate directly to my topic, but I think that the theories presented in the article still apply. (159 words)

6) Leslie, Leigh A. 1993. Families Fleeing War: the case of Central Americans. *Marriage and Family Review* vol.19, no.1, pp.193-205.

This article looks at Central Americans who have migrated to the United States as a means to escape war within their home country or political related violence. The author composes her own study to assess the adjustment level of this demographic within the U.S. after living in the country for a period of time. The families and individuals that migrate to the U.S. face difficulties after they cross the border, but they seem to be less severe than ones to be faced in their home country. Many families deal with psychological strain because of having to adjust to a new culture and the fragmentation of their family. Data is presented on the age range, education level, and reasons for migrating from Central America. This information is important for my senior project because the article presents a picture of life for an immigrant after their move and discusses issues of adjustment that the individual can face. The article only discusses the perspective of Central Americans feeling their home country because of war; I would like to have more information about other motivating factors that could lead to immigration. (187 words)

7) Monto, Alexander. 1994. *The Roots of Mexican Labor Migration*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

This book presents a study about the Mexico and United States migration pattern. The study done involves a small village in Mexico called Chaudan that has a high migration rate to the U.S.; the migratory patterns of this town are meant to be representative of Mexico as a whole. It discusses reasons for migrations at both the macrosocial and microsocial level. The author discusses household structure and kinship relations within the village and how they contribute to

either pushing an individual to immigrate or holding an individual in the village. The study then looks at the town of Salinas, CA for observations of immigrants living within the U.S. Because the author wrote this book based on fieldwork and observations he did himself, it will present an accurate representation of life both before and after immigration. The process of migration that the author portrays, from Mexico, crossing the border, and into the United States, will also be important for my senior project. (161 words)

8) Rivera-Batiz, Francisco L., Selig L. Sechzer, and Ira N. Gang. 1991. *U.S Immigration Policy Reform in the 1980s*. New York: Greenwood Publishing Group.

This book discusses the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) and the effect it has on different aspects of society. Also given is a background of policy reform which describes in detail the major provisions of the IRCA. It holds basic data regarding immigration that will be helpful to my project such as the percentage of legal and illegal immigration into the U.S. and concentrations of undocumented workers and those with green cards in CA that are hired by the farm labor force. The book concludes that the IRCA will not improve the earnings of U.S. workers or decrease their susceptibility to unemployment; however, it does make the United States more accessible for undocumented immigrants. This source provides current data on immigration within the framework of how it relates and is affected by U.S. immigration policy. For the purposes of my project, I would have liked to see more data on a smaller scale or a more individualized basis. (161 words)

9) Suarez-Orozco, Carola, Hee Jin Bang, Erin O'Connor, Francisco X. Gaytan, Juliana Pakes, and Jean Rhodes. 2010. Academic Trajectories of Newcomer Immigrant Youth. *Developmental Psychology* vol.46, no.3, pp. 602-618.

This article looks at the effect a typical immigrant household and lifestyle can have on a student's academic achievement, focusing specifically on Central America, Mexico, The

Dominican Republic, China, and Haiti. Success in education does not depend solely on the individual, but also on social and familial factors. If the student's family is ill-equipped to support the student it can negatively affect their performance. Likewise, if the student has difficulty adjusting to cultural norms at school it could affect their educational performance. Other factors that contribute to academic trajectory are the presence of two adults in the household, English proficiency, school segregation/ poverty, gender, and being correct age for grade. This article provides my project with information about the effect immigration may have on youth and their education. The source provides reasons for success and failure in school amongst the immigrant population and presents numerical data for my area of research as well as other area of the world. (159 words)

10) Wilson, Tamar Diana. 2006. Strapping the Mexican Woman Immigrant: The Convergence of Reproduction and Production. *Anthropological Quarterly* vol.79, no.2, pp. 295-302.

This article focuses on the impact that the recent influx of Mexican women immigrating into the United States has had on both U.S. society and how it has changed family structure for immigrants. Reasons for this influx of women are more permanent migration from the Mexico to the U.S., keeping men in the U.S. and creating the need and desire for family reunification. A greater emphasis on companionate marriage also leads to more couples immigrating together. Exposure to waged-labor within Mexico and the "feminization" of the labor market within the United States created more opportunities for women. A major consequence of women crossing the inability of the host country to take advantage of inexpensive labor without cost because the labor will be returning to a different country in old age. However, after the migration of women the processes of reproduction and family maintenance and production converged within the U.S. This article provides important information for my project because it provides recent trends

within immigration and explains how they affect both Mexican lifestyle and family structure and U.S. society. (178 words)

Outline

- I. Introduction
 - a. Topic
 - i. migration flow specifically in the areas of Mexico and Central America and the U.S. within the context of the push-pull theory of migration.
 - b. Problem
 - i. better understand reasons why individuals leave home countries
 - ii. better understand the reception and lifestyle immigrants in the U.S. experience
 - c. Purpose
 - i. To investigate the motivational factors that contribute to migration from Central America and Mexico to the United States.
 - d. Methodology
 - i. research from literature relevant to my topic.
 - ii. conduct 5 interviews with individuals that immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico and Central America at age 17 or older.
 - e. overview/ outline
- II. Migration Theory
 - a. Push: conditions in source country that force out
 - i. economic
 - 1. poverty
 - 2. lack of jobs/ employment
 - ii. political
 - 1. war
 - 2. persecution
 - 3. corruption
 - iii. environmental
 - 1. natural disasters (hurricanes, droughts, famine, earthquakes)
 - 2. climate
 - 3. lack of resources
 - b. Pull: conditions in receiving country that draw in
 - i. economic
 - 1. job/ employment opportunities
 - 2. education
 - ii. political
 - 1. peace/ security
 - 2. immigration policies offer asylum/ residency
 - iii. family reunification, “chain migration” (friends/ family)
 - iv. environmental
 - 1. climate
 - 2. abundance of resources
 - v. geographic proximity
- III. Immigrant Experience
 - a. Journey
 - b. Life in U.S.
 - i. assimilation

- ii. social interaction
 - 1. acceptance/ discrimination
- iii. expectations/ perceptions
 - 1. before/ after
- iv. challenges
 - 1. success/ failure

IV. Interviews

- a. Jorge – Mexico
- b. Ana – Guatemala
- c. Frank – Mexico
- d. Miguel – Mexico
- e. Luis - Mexico

V. Conclusion/ Analysis

- a. Summary of research findings from interviews

I. Introduction

The relationship between the United States and Mexico and Central America as a region has been affected by a heavy flow of migration for decades. While the decision to immigrate itself impacts the individuals, their families and the greater economies of both regions, there are many factors that can motivate the individual from Mexico or Central America to immigrate to the United States. Central America and Mexico as a region has a specific set of characteristics that can force some individuals out of their homeland. These are sometimes called push factors. Likewise, the United States can offer more opportunity which draws the individual and sometimes whole families out of their native country. These are also known as pull factors. The concept just described is called the push-pull theory of migration and will be used to analyze the different motivating factors behind migrating to the United States from Central America and Mexico.

The lives of individuals that have already settled in the United States can be affected by a number of factors. Assimilation, and to what degree the individual undergoes this process, will affect their lifestyle and overall quality of life. The level and quality of social interaction within the community that one experiences, especially in the form of acceptance or discrimination, also affects their well-being post-migration. I will also discuss how one's expectations and perceptions of life in the U.S. can vary before and after migration. Because of the challenges they face in a new society, immigrants are particularly susceptible to experiencing successes and failures in all aspects of life.

I will also be looking at the overall experience of the immigrant, which can be affected by several things. Each individual's journey from their home country to the U.S. is a unique

experience and can be drastically different for everyone. The interviews I have conducted with immigrants from Guatemala and Mexico will give firsthand insight into the experience of an immigrant, including their reasons for migration, their journey, and life in the U.S. after migration.

II. Push-Pull Theory of Migration

The push-pull theory of migration originated from ideas proposed by Ernst George Ravenstein in “The Laws of Migration” in 1885. These ideas have been built upon by many migration theorists since then, but for the purposes of this paper I will be focusing on Everett Lee’s “A Theory of Migration” and the push-pull theory that resulted from his writing. According to Lee, “every act of migration involves an origin, a destination, and an intervening set of obstacles” (Lee 1966: 49) with migration being defined as a “permanent or semi-permanent change of residence” (p. 49) He stated that within every area there are various factors that can operate to hold people within the area or attract others to it (positive or pull factors) and there are also those that deter people from the area (negative or push factors). Some factors can affect all residents of a region in the same way, while other factors can affect them differently. Additionally, different people can react differently to the same set of obstacles, making migration possible for some but not others. I will discuss push factors versus pull factors, how they differ from each other, and how they affect the migration process.

Push factors are conditions in the source country that force the individual to migrate to another area. Most push factors are economic, political, or environmental. The economies of Mexico and Central America can sometimes be affected by poverty and a lack of jobs. Since capitalism was introduced in the region there has been a structural move away from peasant

farms toward larger agricultural development. This has caused an out-migration of the poor in search of employment and higher wages. These immigrants respond heavily to fluctuations in economic conditions in both the receiving country and the source country in that “they are most likely to enter areas when conditions there are improving and least likely to enter when conditions are declining.”(Jenkins 1977: 179)

Politics play a role in migration throughout this region in that it can often directly cause wars, persecution of people groups, and corruption within the government. Decades of civil war and racial and ethnic tensions in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala have created a large refugee population who immigrated to the U.S. in an effort to escape the hardships of war. In a study done involving migrants fleeing war zones from these three countries, 50% of respondents “stated that their primary reason for leaving their country was ongoing warfare” and of the remaining respondents 50% cited the political situation as playing a role in motivating them to migrate (Leslie 1993: 196).

Environmental push factors for migration can include natural disasters, climate, and limited resources. In Mexico, farmers are dependent on regular, moderate rainfall. But recently a pattern of drought and intense storms have begun the process of forced migration for many small farmers who can no longer maintain a living due to environmental degradation. Climate change forces individuals into urban areas and the U.S. as “climate models project that by 2080 much of Mexico will suffer from significantly reduced rainfall”. (de Sherbinin 2011: 71)

Pull factors are aspects of the receiving country that attract and draw the individual out of the source country despite the intervening obstacles they will have to overcome. The economy of the United States can offer employment or higher wages for most citizens of Mexico and Central

America, and it can also offer a better educational system for some. For political purposes, an individual might immigrate to the U.S. because it offers them peace and security that their native country cannot. Some immigration policies in the U.S. have offered asylum or residency to immigrants over the recent decades. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 targeted the population of illegal migrants and attempted to cut back on further illegal immigration through a number of provisions. The Special Agricultural Worker (SAW) program offered temporary residency to illegal immigrants who were working with perishing crops as field laborers for at least 90 days ending in 1986. Another provision, Replenishment Agricultural Worker (RAW), began in 1991 and allows replenishment workers permanent residence if they continue to work at least 90 days per year for 3 years in seasonal agriculture (Rivera-Batiz 1991: 21).

Another pull factor involves the reunification of families or friends; this is sometimes called “chain migration”. Migration from Central America and Mexico has become more permanent and semi-permanent than in previous decades. This, paired with a greater stress on companionate marriage, “has led to a desire for family reunification, especially on the part of wives. It is now common for family members to join others after they migrate” (Wilson 2006). Environmental pull factors include an abundance of resources and a desirable climate in the destination country. Geographic proximity of origin to destination also affects the level of migration. Individuals from Mexico and Central America are likely to immigrate to the United States as opposed to other countries, for a number of reasons, it provides them with opportunities and safety not offered anywhere else, but also because it is simply close in proximity. One intervening obstacle that was stated to be a constant is geographic proximity; therefore, the

greater the distance between origin and destination, the less likely it is that the individual will migrate (Lee).

III. Journey

Every immigrant undergoes different experiences, including the journey that they will endure from their home country to the United States and the degree to which they are able to adjust to the American lifestyle after they arrive. The journey across the border is always dangerous, yet people everyday still take the risk. Many migrants will depend on “coyotes” for guidance across the border. A “coyote’s” job is to help people cross the border that do not have documentation, but they only do so for a fee and have been known to rape, rob, and desert those that they are helping enter the U.S. Because of a recent increase in Border Patrol surveillance, many migrants “are crossing through ever more isolated and dangerous terrain in hopes of avoiding capture.” (Pringle 2011:42) Many are now walking further, longer, and will sometimes do so without food and water.

Mexico’s southern border, primarily at the city of Tapachula, still operates as a crucial gateway to the North for many Central American immigrants. This area is also known for being overrun with drug smugglers and extortionists sometimes dressed in official police uniforms. The city of Tapachula, for many years, “was the southern terminus of the freight train that rumbles north toward the U.S. border, with migrants clinging to the roofs and sides.” (Gorney 2008: 63) Many people have lost their lives or limbs while struggling to hold onto the roofs of the cars for days. The perilous journey north is filled with obstacles that many migrants are willing to endure if the reward involves starting a new life across the border.

IV. Life in the United States

After migration, the immigrant experience will be influenced by several factors. Adjusting to life in the U.S. can be affected by the assimilation process, while social interaction within the community is the primary aspect of life in the U.S. that causes the individual to feel either accepted or discriminated against. The ability for the individual to interact effectively and how they are received by the native population is essential for adjustment into their new life. Each person may have perceptions of the U.S. or expectations of what will be waiting when they arrive, but those expectations and perceptions may change after the individual migrates.

Assimilation can be defined as a “natural process by which diverse ethnic groups come to share a common culture and to gain equal access to the opportunity structure of society...this process consists of gradually deserting old cultural and behavioral patterns in favor of new ones.” (Zhou 1997: 70) The degree to which an immigrant will assimilate into a new society and the length of time it takes them to do so will affect the individual’s ability to succeed within the host society.

The assimilationist perspective claims that the “characteristics of immigrant are the primary influence on their incorporation into society.” (Wallace 1986: 658). Country of origin can impact how the individual will adjust to life in the U.S. Evidence has been presented that shows the differences in assimilation processes of Central American migrants and Mexican migrants and why these differences exist. Many Central American immigrants settle into communities, usually in urban areas, that are made up of immigrants from countries in Central America; these communities make it more difficult for the individual to assimilate into the surrounding culture. Central Americans tend not to rely on the family as a large support network

after migration, while Mexican immigrants often live with many family members in extended family households and cite family reunification as motivation for immigration. (Wallace 1986)

Assimilation into the U.S. is easier for the individual if they have higher human capital because increased human capital “leads to higher income and occupational levels” and ultimately more social mobility. (p. 661) Because education is valued and rewarded in the U.S., an individual that migrates and has already received some education will be presented with more occupational opportunities. In 1980, “approximately half of all Central American immigrants [had] completed high school versus under a quarter of Mexican immigrants...Central Americans are about three times as likely to have attended college as Mexican immigrants” (p. 661) “Mexican immigrants...have been kept in a secondary labor market with few mobility opportunities”(p. 657). Between 1975 and 1980, 20.0% of the male Mexican immigrants above the age of 15 living in California and 11.1% who were female were working as farm workers or in the agricultural field. This compares to 3.1% of Central American males who were working jobs in this industry and only 0.9% of Central American females. Also between 1975 and 1980, 15.1% of Central American males were working in white collar position along with 20.3% of Central American of recently immigrated females. Only 6.6% of Mexican males and 14.4% of Mexican female immigrants were working in similar white collar positions (p. 664). As stated before, one argument for the greater number of Central American immigrants working in white collar jobs and less so in agricultural jobs could be related to higher human capital.

The ability to speak English will also have an effect on how the individual assimilates into the United States. The language barrier severely limits social and occupational mobility; therefore, those that are able to communicate in English at some level will be more successful in finding employment and will probably report less discrimination from their daily interactions

with others. The perceptions one has of the host society will also change as they begin to assimilate into this society. “Immigrants acquire greater education, knowledge of the language, and information about the new society and as they move up in the economic ladder, their social acceptance will improve...” (Portes 1980: 202)

Ideas and perceptions of the U.S. may vary widely across but there are some general themes that are often presented when discussing perceptions of the U.S. before migration. Many view the U.S. as a place of endless opportunity and a resource for great wealth. If not to this extreme, then they see the opportunities and money waiting for them in the U.S. as greater and more accessible than those available to them in their home country. Although there are many different reasons for migration to the U.S., the country “promises new experience, excitement, [and] adventure.” (Gamio 1971: 1)

As stated previously, the individual’s perceptions of the host country will change as they assimilate into the society. Therefore, immigrants from Central America and Mexico will have different perceptions of the United States after migration compared to before. How the individual’s perceptions and expectations of the society around them will change after migration can differ greatly depending on each person’s experience. The individual’s perceptions of the host country “will definitely affect their behaviors and their reporting of experiences with the native population.” (Portes 1980: 221) The individual has certain expectations of the native population and these expectations may affect their social interactions level of discrimination that they will report.

Those recently immigrated from Mexico and Central America will face a unique set of challenges while adjusting to their new life. The most basic challenge is presented simply because the individual is separating themselves from their family, home country, and everything they are familiar with. The individual must assimilate to a certain extent in order to be successful, but the struggle will be balancing the assimilation process while still maintaining their own cultural identity. Recent migrants will also struggle economically for a period of time while adjusting, partly because of the lack of economic mobility that plagues this group. Some evidence suggests that the “economic well-being of immigrants in the U.S. may have suffered as a result of the restricting of the economy and an environment less amenable to workers with fewer skills.” (Glick 1997: 180) This shift has caused many migrants to choose to live in extended family households out of financial necessity. It also makes it close to impossible to achieve occupational mobility without an education.

V. Interviews (Some names have been changed at the request of interviewees)

Interview 1: Jorge

Jorge was born and raised in Jalisco, Mexico. He came to the U.S. on October 17th, 1996. Jorge worked in agriculture in Mexico, but there was not enough work and his family needed more money. He had a brother in Los Angeles and decided that opportunities for work would be better in the U.S. Choosing to reside in L.A. with family when he first arrived, Jorge walked through Tijuana to cross the border. Jorge now works as a heavy machine operator and says, “I like the money making, but there is no culture. I miss Mexico. People make it seem like you will get rich, but no one tells you how hard it is.” The lack of culture is the aspect of the U.S. that

Jorge says he likes the least. Jorge still has family living in Mexico and maintains that being apart from them is what he misses most about his home country. Jorge maintains strong cultural connections to his home country and family. The transition into the American lifestyle for Jorge was “very, difficult, you don’t understand anything and you feel alone.” Something that may have contributed to his slow transition process was his inability to speak English at the time of migration. He learned English through his family and new job and later through a home course that he purchased. When asked if he would ever want to return to his birth country, Jorge responded, “I already have. Once I got my citizenship, that’s the first thing I did, but I’m planning on staying here. I just go visit.”

Jorge did not know English when he immigrated. His struggle to communicate affected his ability to assimilate into U.S. society. Jorge’s decision to reside with family immediately after migration also supports the idea of “chain migration”. Jorge’s decision to immigrate was influenced by both push and pull factors. The poor economy in Mexico and an inability to find work served as a push factor and greater opportunities for freedom and employment in the U.S. served as a pull factor.

Interview 2: Ana

Ana was born in Guatemala and lived there until she immigrated to the U.S. three years ago. The desire to be closer to her husband, Jorge (previously interviewed), was her main motivation for leaving Guatemala and coming to the U.S. Ana used her cousin’s documents to gain entry into the U.S. She first lived in Long Beach, California with her husband before moving to San Luis Obispo where they have remained ever since. Ana left her mother and son in Guatemala and says that she will soon be “going back to Guatemala to bring [her] child. It’s

much safer here than in Guatemala.” While living in Guatemala, Ana studied English and owned her own restaurant. The ability to speak English made Ana’s transition into life in the U.S. somewhat easier, but she still claims, “there were a lot of changes when [she] got to Long Beach, [and] it was harder to get used to the SLO lifestyle.” Today, Ana works at Subway and says that the money and opportunity for work are the two things she likes most about living in the U.S. Being apart from family is the aspect of her new life Ana cites as her least favorite. Ana has not returned to Guatemala since she immigrated, but says, “I want to go back and live in Guatemala, but first we need to make money to build a house in a better city.”

One of Ana’s motivations for migration was the desire to be closer to her husband, which exemplifies chain migration and is also a pull factor. The assimilation process for Ana had its difficulties, but because she was already able to speak English at the time of migration the adjustment was easier. Ana already has a stable employment at a job where she is expected to communicate with others in English.

Interview 3: Frank

Francisco, also known as Frank, was born and raised in Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico. He immigrated to the United States on September 2, 1984. Frank was 17 and had been fighting with his parents; his father’s alcoholism had begun to negatively impact his life and he saw better opportunities for freedom in the U.S. “Everyone always thought of the U.S. as number 1, and so I thought, ‘I have to get there’,” says Frank, “I wanted to own a car, have a girlfriend, get a job—all of those things.” Frank says he relied a lot on his grandmother for help with his journey from Tepic to San Fernando, California. He first took a bus to the border Tijuana where he waited in a hotel for a coyote that his grandmother had contacted. When the coyote arrived he picked up

Frank and nine others from the hotel and the group walked all night to cross the border. Frank now works for the Gas Company, but plans on migrating back to Mexico to live permanently. He feels that parents in the U.S. are too lenient with their children. He does not like the negative stigma associated with harsh punishment of one's own children that exists in the U.S. But he likes the country because "anything you can dream of, you can do." His mother now aged 76, still remains in Tepic and he tries to visit her approximately every six months.

Frank's experience crossing the border is very typical and is supported by research presented by Gorney. He describes the United States as a place with never-ending opportunity; the economic opportunities in the U.S. served as a pull factor in Frank's situation.

Interview 4: Miguel

Miguel lived in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico until the age of 25. He immigrated to the United States eight years ago in 2003. His mother, brother, and sister still reside in Guadalajara, but Miguel has not yet been back to Mexico to visit them. He decided to come to the United States to escape family problems and to hopefully take advantage of more opportunities for work. Miguel did not know any English when he first immigrated and felt very limited by the language barrier, so he went to school to learn English for several years and can now says he is happy that he is able to better communicate with others. He was disappointed with how few Spanish-speakers he encountered in the U.S. and said, "people here can sometimes be racist." Miguel is currently living with his father in Paso Robles, California and working as a farm worker. The transition into life in the U.S. has not been very easy because of how different the people are, and Miguel says he will probably move back to Mexico "after he works more and can make more money."

Miguel's desire to find greater employment opportunities in the U.S. served as a pull factor for migration. According to research presented by Portes, his perception that some U.S. citizens can occasionally bare racist attitudes could be a result of his inability to assimilate. As Miguel begins to communicate more effectively and assimilate into society his perceptions of others will change.

Interview 5: Luis

Luis came to the U.S. 17 years ago from Durango, Mexico. He had been trained to work in construction, but was having a hard time finding enough work to support his family and says that he did not get paid very much when did find work. Luis spoke with his neighbor, who had just sent her son to the U.S., and was able to get in contact with a coyote who took him across the border. Now living in San Luis Obispo and working in the construction field, Luis says he "enjoys the U.S. for the money, but I miss my family and home." The hardest part of living in the U.S. is not being able to see his family, but he appreciates that opportunity is more readily available. Luis says that adjusting to his new life was difficult for the first few years, until he began to learn English. Being able to communicate, "made everything easy. I could work and approach people and it was much better." Luis's parents still live in Mexico and he will go visit occasionally, but he has no plans to return permanently.

Luis found that the ability to communicate effectively with others increased his quality of life. He reported less discrimination and his perceptions of others had changed. This is consistent with the idea that as the individual assimilates into a society their perceptions of that culture will change. In Luis's situation a lack of jobs in his home country served as a push factor for migration.

VI. Conclusions

The United States receives a constant influx of migrants from the regions of Mexico and Central America. These individuals choose to leave their home countries and immerse themselves in a society that has not necessarily guaranteed them success, but it can only guarantee a new life. While each individual may have different motivations for migration, all of their motivations will classify as either a push or pull factor. Whether the individual was motivated by either a push or pull factor leave will affect their experience of living in the U.S. There tends to be a stigma that accompanies being an immigrant from Mexico or Central America, and many Americans make this known during their interactions with individuals from these regions.

There were several themes that were common throughout the five interviews conducted. The most common motivation for migration was a desire to find employment. With the exception of Ana, who studied English before immigrating, the inability to communicate with others was frustrating. Several interviewees expressed displeasure with the lack of culture in the United States and all five left family in their home country to move to the U.S.

The challenges the typical immigrant will face begin with their journey northward. During this process there are countless opportunities to risk death and life-threatening injury; if able to successfully cross the border, the individual will still have to face numerous challenges before settling into a relatively successful lifestyle. In order to function within the U.S. society, the individual will have to assimilate to a certain degree. However, assimilation and distance from their home country can cause a loss of cultural identity. The economic and social structures

of the U.S. make it almost impossible to achieve social or occupational mobility unless the individual can obtain a higher education. Success is not impossible, just difficult to obtain.

Appendix: Interview Questions

- 1.) Where were you born? Where were you raised?
- 2.) When did you come to the U.S.?
- 3.) Why did you want to leave your home country?
- 4.) Why did you choose the U.S. as your new home?
- 5.) How did you get the U.S.? What was your journey like?
- 6.) Where did you live when you first moved here and why did you choose that area?
- 7.) Do you have family in the U.S.? If so, did you live with them when you first arrived?
- 8.) Do you still have family in your home country?
- 9.) Do you maintain cultural ties to your home country and your family?
- 10.) What did you think of the U.S. before you arrived?
- 11.) What do you think of the U.S. now, after you have lived here? Have your ideas changed?
- 12.) Was it difficult for you to transition into life in the U.S.?
- 13.) Did you speak English before you immigrated? If not, how did you learn English? What problems did the language barrier present?
- 14.) What was your occupation before coming to the U.S.?
- 15.) What is your occupation now that you live in the U.S.?
- 16.) What do you like most about the U.S.?
- 17.) What do you like least about the U.S.?
- 18.) What do you miss most about your birth country?
- 19.) Have you, or do you plan to, return to your birth country at any point? Either permanently or temporarily?

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