The Lived-Experiences of Latino Meatpacking Workers in a Small Midwest Town:
An Existential and Emotional Conflict of Migration

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Acknowledgments

A doctoral degree is one of the highest realizations one can dream. It is very significant because I it is an intentional decision, but also a privilege that not many have; and here I am, finishing this passage. This degree is a result of many factors providing me experiences, and these experiences took me far. I didn't walk alone and in this journey, and it wasn't the easiest; for some probably I took the long way, but the right way. I am sure that all that I have learned in these years made me grow and become a better person, hope that it is for the benefit of those surrounding me. If I can make a difference, a small difference in this world it was worth.

This achievement wasn't possible without the support of my family; Walter, Camila, Juan Domingo and Lucia who are my inspiration and were there to support me. Each in different ways shows that we are a team and this achievement is a proof of it. My committee played a key role; Dr. Katherine Fennelly, Dr. Rosemarie Park and Dr. Joanne DeJaeghere supported and coached me when needed. Special thanks to my adviser Dr. Shari Peterson who strode with me in the final steps to complete this study. To Dr. Mike Baizerman, who gave me last push to enlighten the findings of this research, he made me feel the expert and shared his expertise and understanding of Phenomenology with me. Finally, to my extended family, professors, friends and colleagues who supported me in different ways. I wouldn't finished if it wasn't because their support in joyful and difficult circumstances. I don't have to name them; they know who they are and how grateful I am for their company.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to optimists like me, those who are eager for opportunities to shape a better world here or there. Particularly to the 10 workers who unveiled their experiences and shared their stories, similar to the stories of migrants like them, who deserve the dignity and respect afforded any human being.

Abstract

This phenomenological study adds understanding of the experiences of Latino workers in the meat-processing industry in rural Midwest as thousands of people, and a large number of Latino immigrants work in the meat and poultry plants in rural Midwest. Data was collected through in-depth, open-ended interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to gather data from the participants' perspective about their experiences and the meaning they made of these experiences while working in the meat plant and living in a small Midwest town. The stories of 10 Latino meat packing workers constituted the text to examine the phenomenon as a single case, to relate it to its universal qualities, and then come back to its particularities to understand the meaning of the experience.

Seven major themes were found core to the phenomenon of being a Latino worker in the meat packing industry in rural Midwest: feeling forced to make the decision, willing to make it "no matter what", reaching the American dream: a job at the plant, living like a machine, becoming the "desired unwanted", life in two places, and the "payoff" . Participants of this study represented immigrants who came from high-poverty communities in Mexico and Central America with limited social and economic resources.

This study supported theories of economics of migration labor force segmentation, and social capital; as well as foundations of meaning of work. Participants in this study face a difficult, painful, dangerous life, less enjoyable than they hoped, but profitable enough to become economic providers here and now. At their new community they live, deal with sociological struggles derived from their lack of information and skills to look for better opportunities, and their needs to fulfill commitments and loyalties. They feel discriminated and isolated while raising families and children and facing the existential and emotional conflict of migration.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Some years ago, when I took a night trip to *EL Rastro Municipal,* the

slaughterhouse in a southern Guatemalan town, I never thought that what I was going to

experience would be related to my doctoral dissertation topic. As a young college student

from Guatemala City, I sought to understand the rural areas of my home country. I was

eager to explore and learn about life in its small towns.

I was in Escuintla, a town surrounded by sugar cane fields, with crowded small

shops, restaurants, grocery stores, and businesses. I observed the vivid atmosphere:

throngs of people bustling on the street, the insistent sound of horns honking, and huge,

rumbling buses, weaving through traffic. During my stay, a local family hosted me. I

quickly became intertwined in their family routine, sharing a room with the middle

school-aged daughter, despite our age difference. The oldest son told me that his father

worked at *EL Rastro Municipal* where every night they slaughtered cattle so that fresh

beef could be delivered to market the next morning. He said that he often visited his

father at work and offered to take me along. Before long we went to the slaughterhouse in

a suburb of Escuintla.

EL Rastro Municipal in Escuintla is one of the biggest, old-fashioned

slaughterhouses in Guatemala, preparing meat for many businesses. They also distribute

cattle hair, bones, and blood.

I never imagined how tough, violent, and cruel it would be to work in a

slaughterhouse. All the workers were notably strong men; there were no women. When

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we arrived, the workers noticed that I was a nervous intruder and tried to scare me with the brutality with which they performed their slaughtering.

Because it was an enormous open space, I was able to witness the entire process, from the cattle being led toward a hallway to where they were killed with a sharp blade. The last step was to cut the meat into pieces to be shipped to a local market and meat stores. The environment was gruesome, with a strong scent of blood and death.

My visit to *EL Rastro Municipal* was shocking; many years later I still can remember the noises and wet environment in which those people worked. After I left, I wondered how those men were able to deal every day with the continuous presence of blood—particularly in a country where we were all scared and vulnerable because of the violence, persecution, and cruel repression by our military. I believed that if these men were not working at the slaughterhouse, they would probably be in the armed forces.

At that point, I did not think about the workers' salaries, working conditions, or wellness. Years later, with new vision, I can see that their lives were even worse than I once thought. There is no more armed conflict in Guatemala, but there is still the need for someone to work those slaughterhouse jobs, to survive on the low wages, and to risk injury.

These memories came back years later when I learned that many Latino immigrants in the Midwest of the United States do this work. I began finding out about the lives of Latinos living in the rural U.S. with working conditions similar to those at *EL Rastro Municipal*. Those enormous plants in the rural Midwest are modern slaughterhouses, where thousands of workers make it possible to bring meat to U.S. tables. I discovered that many of these Latino workers lack documentation and face

unfair and unjust treatment because they are vulnerable to deportation, and that they face abuse by those who take advantage of their legal status.

The names of the brands at the grocery stores where I shopped began to have more meaning. I found, for instance, that the Spam produced here is the same as that found on the shelves in Latin America. I also learned of a town in Iowa called Perry, where a huge plant gave its name to sausages, ham, and pâté, available in Guatemalan grocery stores during my childhood.

Not surprisingly, I found a large bibliography about the working conditions of U.S. meatpacking workers, including novels focusing on the social impact and lives of workers, such as *The Jungle* (Sinclair, 1906), and ethnographic studies of the context and experiences at the meatpacking plants in the rural Midwest (Champlin & Hake, 2006; Dalla & Christensen, 2005; Fennelly & Leitner, 1992; Fink, 1998).

Latinos make up the majority of U.S. meatpacking workers, yet they are largely ignored until something happens to make them more visible. In 2006, newspapers and local Minnesota news broadcasts focused on the lives of Latino meatpacking industry workers because of a government immigration raid that had a negative impact on their families and communities. The news stories highlighted their migratory status, raising public concern and giving room to a broader debate about the impact of undocumented immigrants on Minnesota. It was then that I became more intrigued with this topic.

December 12 is a special day when Mexicans celebrate La Virgen de Guadalupe, their most significant religious holiday. On that day in 2006, ten buses lined up to take away at least 400 workers from the nation's second-largest meat-processing facility in Worthington, Minnesota. The raid created widespread panic in homes and schools in

Worthington, where about 39 percent of the students are of Hispanic origin and many are children of meatpacking workers (*Star Tribune*, 2006).

In 2007, the news again focused on the meatpacking industry, but for a different reason: a rare illness was found which affected eleven workers from a meat processing plant located in Austin, Minnesota. This rare illness was identified as *chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy* (CIDP) and was exclusively affecting a group of employees working in a specific production line at the meat-processing plant. That part of the production line used compressed air to clear away unwanted brain tissue so that meat in the head of the pig could be removed (*Star Tribune*, 2007).

In May 2008, immigration officers performed a raid in a meat processing plant in Postville, Iowa, detaining as many as 300 people, all of them immigrants, all of them meatpacking industry workers. The raid by agents from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was the largest operation in Iowa's history, and it came after months of planning. Immigration agents took detainees to the National Cattle Congress grounds, where ICE built an intake center. The majority affected by the operative were Latinos, many from Mexico and Guatemala (*The New York Times*, 2008). Later, in the spring of 2011, I had the opportunity to host an event at the University of Minnesota where Guatemalan film producer Luis Argueta screened his film, *The AbUSed: The Postville Raid* (2010). This film presents the effects of this brutal raid and tells the stories of these deported Guatemalan workers and their experiences at the plant where they used to work. I had the opportunity to discuss the film with experts and human rights advocates. We talked about the implications of the raid on the Latino community and

analyzed the immigration environment in rural U.S. communities, where Latino workers perform food-processing and agriculture jobs.

As the U.S. migration regulations and authorities have shifted from massive to selective foci, they continue to affect the immigrant workforce. The work and lives of meatpacking workers remain the same. This has been documented in a number of ways. There are human rights organizations, such as Nebraska Appleseed and the Midwest Coalition for Human Rights, which have done relevant research and work as advocates for workers' rights (Alvarez et al, 2012). Others have portrayed the various difficulties that meatpacking workers—mostly undocumented and lacking migratory status—face while living in the U.S. and working in the meatpacking plants. My goal with this study was to learn from the experiences of participants and to unveil the meaning of these experiences for these hardworking immigrants, people who are simply looking for better opportunities for themselves and their families.

Background

The working conditions of the U.S. meat-processing workforce has been documented from the early 20th century to the present, portraying the way the industry has been related to the transformation of work and American political economy (Barkema et al., 2001; Bauer & Ramirez, 2010; Broadway, 1999; Broadway & Stull, 2008; Commons, 1904; Dalla & Christensen, 2005; Gouveia & Stull, 1977; Grey, 1997; Horowitz, 1997; Jones, 2000; Nebraska Appleseed, 2009).

Prior to 1860, there were neither sufficient transportation nor refrigeration capacities to allow perishable goods to be shipped significant distances, so meat was provided locally or salted in barrels and thrown into a river for shipping elsewhere (Fink,

1988). It was not until the late 1870s, with the perfection of the refrigerated railroad car, that the national market for meat was expanded, thus increasing the demand over larger space (Commons, 1904; Horowitz, 1997).

This innovation, along with the Gustavus Swift and Philip Armour disassembly-line technique, led the way in remarkable changes within this industry. Line production increased production capacity and transformed the lives of meatpacking workers by the mechanization, speed, division of labor, and the continuous correction of production flow (Barret, 1987).

The harsh conditions for meatpacking workers are not new; in *The Jungle* (1906), Upton Sinclair portrays the lives of workers at a slaughterhouse in Chicago, where a century ago, workers from Europe performed similar jobs. They suffered injuries from repetitive movements and heavy lifting, as well as injuries and burns from exposure to hazardous chemicals. The release of *The Jungle* raised public concern and led to a public cry to increase food production standards. The improvement of workers' conditions took more time, and the public kept an eye on the sanitation and inspection of the slaughterhouses.

The meat-consuming habits of Americans by the 1950s were oriented to beef followed by pork and then chicken, the latter was not as popular then as now. To increase profit, the poultry industry introduced specialized processing to reduce the prices and subsequently increased demand (Kandel & Parrado, 2005). As Americans started to choose chicken for their daily diets the poultry industry grew and began to compete with the beef and pork industries. Those industries moved to rural areas to lower production costs, focusing on extensive mechanization and plant productivity to bring products to the

market at affordable prices. They also responded to the demand of modern families, offering more products that were already cut and clean. This demand was due in part, as Barkema et al. (2001) noted, to the inclusion of more women in the national labor market in the early 1970s. This created a demand for easy-to-cook prepared items to ease demands on women's tightened schedules. The meat industry's innovations and trends in public consumption led to a consolidation of the poultry, beef, and pork industries, resulting in a concentrated handful of large and highly integrated firms.

In the late nineteenth century, Eastern European immigrants were holding meatpacking jobs in the United States; subsequently Slovaks, Lithuanians, Bohemians, and Poles replaced the Eastern European immigrants (Commons, 1904). It was during the late 1990s that meatpacking plants began hiring Latino workers, even though the plants moved to rural areas where there was generally a low concentration of Latinos (Stull et al., 1995; Dalla & Christensen, 2005; Champlin & Hake, 2006).

This large-scale migration between developed and underdeveloped U.S. regions and the flow of low-skill workers into the meatpacking industry can be explained by the *Labor Market Segmentation Theory*, which links workers' characteristics at their place of origin to the roles they assume at their destination (Piore, 1986).

The rationale for immigrants to take these *so-called* bad jobs is to resolve their economic needs to survive when moving to seek better economic opportunities. These jobs provide migrant workers earnings unimaginable in their home country (LeDuff, 2000).

The characteristics of the "deskilling" line work and the inability to standardize the shape and size of animal carcasses or poultry limits the ability to mechanize the

process, which presently takes place in multistory, multi-space plants near terminal

livestock markets (Champlin & Hake, 2006). In 2005, the U.S. Government

Accountability Office (GAO Report, 2005) indicated that meat and poultry workers

sustain a higher range of injuries and illnesses compared to those of other industries, in

part due to the work environment. For example, the speed of the production and the types

of tasks generate great physical effect on the workers' health: cuts, amputations, skin

diseases, and permanent arm and shoulder damage from the force of repeated hard cutting

motions are commonplace (GAO Report, 2005; Human Rights Watch Report, 2004).

This is also found in data on fatal injuries among Latino workers in the United States,

indicating that workplace fatalities for Latino workers are higher and suggesting that

foreign-born workers do the most dangerous work (Sanchez et al., 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Research shows that the U.S. meatpacking industry had undergone a

transformation by the end of the twentieth century, representing innovations, process

improvements, and increasing profitability (Stull, 1995; Kandel & Parrado, 2005).

However, the main strategies used to increase production and lower costs were to move

the plants to rural areas, to hire a low-skills workforce, and to reduce wages and benefits

to workers.

Latino workers find available jobs and are able to move from their home

communities and learn about these jobs through their conational network already

performing these unattractive jobs. Consequently, the meat-processing sector in the

United States relies on an ethnically diverse population, mostly immigrant and refugee

populations that is typically characterized by lower skills and fits into the low-wages

labor segment. Meat packers recruit their workforce among minorities, including Latino immigrants who tend to face job insecurity and a lack of jobs in their home country. Workers migrate to the United States and end up performing these risky jobs despite the stigma of the work (Champlin & Hake, 2006; Kandel & Parrado, 2005). Most of these immigrant workers lack English language skills; this too may aid in suppressing wages and allowing current working conditions to continue.

In Minnesota, thousands of people are working in the rural meat and poultry plants where the tax incentives and relaxed environmental regulations attract companies. This is one of the reasons that a large number of immigrant low-wage workers are noticeable in meatpacking towns (Fennelly & Leitner, 2002). Latinos as an immigrant group are overrepresented in the United States (Capps et al., 2003; Capps et al., 2005; Capps et al., 2007). They began to arrive in the Midwest attracted by available jobs. These new arrivals have to deal with the tensions related to their integration into a non-classical immigrants' destination, which are mostly communities characterized by an aging white population (Huffman, 2003; Fennelly, 2005a). Because the presence of Latino populations has increased in rural communities and the labor conditions of the meatpacking workers are critical to local community development and demographic dynamics, different scholars have been paying attention to the ruralization of the Latino population, focusing particularly on U.S. Midwest meatpacking towns (Baker & Hotek, 2003; Dalla & Christensen, 2005; Gabriel, 2008; Gouveia & Stull, 1997; Kandel & Parrado, 2005).

This phenomenon is happening in small, medium, and large rural communities and is producing profound and unanticipated changes. There is a call from community

developers, workforce educators, and policymakers to understand the experiences and the reasons these immigrant workers choose to seek a better life in these communities where they work and live, despite their language and cultural barriers. All of these issues lead to the study's purpose and in turn, to the study's major research question.

Purpose of the Study and the Research Question

The purpose of this research is to understand the lived experience of Latino workers in the meat-processing industry in the Midwest; it is also to understand what motivates the Latino workers to take those unattractive jobs and to bring their families to live in these communities as "outsiders". This study addresses the research questions What are the lived-experiences of Latino workers in the meat processing industry? and How does their work in this industry affect their personal lives, their families, and their communities? This study examines the working conditions at a meatpacking plant and the lives of the immigrants in the rural U.S. Midwest community while it pays particular attention to the personal development, family, and community life of Latino meatpacking workers.

Need and Significance for the Study

Need for this Study

Regardless of the modernity and the advancements occurring within the meat industry over the past 100 years, the working conditions for meatpackers has not improved and still remain as they were during *The Jungle* era, in part because of the industry's strategies to lower production costs (Kandel & Parrado, 2005). Meatpacking remains one of the industries recruiting low-skill workers, mainly new immigrant populations with limited options because of language or cultural barriers that prevent

them from acquiring better quality jobs (Broadway, 1999; Gabriel, 2008; Gouveia &

Stull, 1995). Although the meat-processing industry offers abundant jobs to a low-skilled

workforce, it is unattractive to many because of the terrible working conditions compared

to employment alternatives. The working environment is as unpleasant as it is crude, and

the physically demanding, repetitive nature of the work results in the highest injury rates

of any U.S. industry (Gabriel, 2008; Grey & Woodrick, 2000; U.S. Government

Accountability Office, 2005).

The dynamics of the actual state of this industry has been defined by the

innovations and structural changes in that sector. Individual meat processors in the

United States merged their capital and started an industry with the goal of increasing

profits by cutting production costs and supplying the large demand for their products

nationally. One of their strategies to reduce costs was to rely on unskilled workers to get

by with lower wages (Stull, 1992). Due to the nature of the work, most of the plants have

the same characteristics: "The meatpacking plants are necessarily dark, wet, and noisy…"

(Kandel & Parrado, 2005, p. 458).

Significance of this Study

The significance of this study lies in understanding what it means to be a Latino

meatpacking worker living in rural Midwest. It adds knowledge about the needs and

wants of immigrants and the barriers they face while working in difficult environments

and trying to adapt to a new society and culture. The richness of the data provides

valuable information for Human Resources Practitioners and Community Developers to

formulate programmatic responses for the Latino workers and the community. Failure to

engage this particular phenomenon has negative consequences for both.

This study deeply explores the phenomenon of immigrant Latino meatpacking workers as they live and experience their lives, bringing meaning to their perspectives, and providing evidence for further research which can be used to contribute to the wellbeing of the workers and their families and to the local communities where they now live.

Definitions

Latino immigrant: For the purpose of this study Latino, a U.S. immigrant, is defined using the U.S. Census definitions. Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, or Cuban, including those whose origins are in the Spanish speaking countries of Central and South America or the Dominican Republic, are people identifying themselves as Hispanic, Hispano, or Latino, including people of any race. (U.S. Census, 2000 Questionnaire).

The Latino population is nationally and ethnically diverse; their shared roots are in history and the Spanish language, and these often make them seem to be and look identical. However, there are deep differences shaping each group and culture. For example, ethnic groups from Mexico, Central and South America, and other Spanish-speaking countries have populations that speak native languages, as do some participants in this study.

In terms of their origin, Mexicans and Central Americans represent a large portion of Latinos residing in the U.S. In terms of Latinos' countries of origin, the largest group is Mexicans which comprise 65.6percent of all Latinos (Sanchez et al, 2011).

Meatpacking worker: Meat packing workers are employed in beef, pork, and poultry plants in the South and U. S. Midwest. Meatpacking workers slaughter and process poultry, cattle, and pork. Their jobs are characterized by an extensive use of knives and

other hand tools, and include manual lifting and lugging of meat (Personik & Taylor, 1989).

Secondary sector jobs: The secondary sector of the economy requires relatively little training, and jobs can be learned quickly. In the secondary sector, job management is enabled to complete control because there is a larger expected turnout; therefore, there are hierarchic structures enforcing power (Reich et al., 1973). These jobs give low emphasis on job morale and their workers lack motivation. Employers determine the key parameters of the employment relation and labor process, and involve forms of stereotyping of job applicants (Gordon, 1995). In industrialized countries, a local workforce does not fill the secondary sector jobs because they are not appealing, and the working conditions cause the local populations to reject the idea of working there. Hence, these unwanted jobs are filled by low skilled workers, minorities, and immigrants lacking human capital and skills (Capps et al., 2003; Capps et al., 2005; Capps et al., 2007).

Undocumented Latino workers: Yamamoto (2007) defines the unauthorized migrants from the receiving country's perspective as people who entered or reside without effective authorization from the government. Unauthorized migrants can be categorized into different groups based on how they violate immigration laws: entrants without inspection, over stayers, and migrants with false documentation. The proportion of each category varies among countries.

Undocumented are populations that are not granted visas to cross the border. Because of the complexity of the migration phenomenon, the local populations often see undocumented workers as unauthorized migrants who are a major threat to society. The

legality of these populations is controversial and raises awareness in the economical, demographic, and labor force arenas.

Research Assumptions

Phenomenological methodology focuses on the description of an experience from the participants' perspective; it emphasizes in the structure and meaning of the experience of a particular phenomenon. It is used to study how individuals experience their world (Patton, 1990; Van Mannen, 2007).

This approach requires the researcher to "bracket" her assumptions, prejudices, and preconceptions so as to be able to describe the phenomenon as it is. Thus, I here recognize and make explicit my prejudices, and focus on questioning the essential nature of what is like to be, live, and experience being a Latino meatpacking working and living in a small U.S. Midwest town. To get at the truth, I consciously attempted to suspend or "bracket" my beliefs. More specifically, I made the assumption that Latino immigrant meat packing workers have a difficult life because of their difficult jobs—that it is their work which deeply influences their lives, and that they are disposable workers who may come to see themselves as individuals without redeeming social value.

Second, human rights are a core value for me and I believe in the right to be respected for who one is, no matter their culture, national origin, or role in the social structure. I have a strong belief that all humans deserve equal treatment and it is not justifiable to harm anyone, either mentally or physically. My assumption was that the human rights of meatpacking workers are violated and they are mistreated intentionally.

My third assumption was that I was going to find a group of individuals that are diminished and stigmatized workers, feeling unwanted because of the types of jobs they

have. I anticipated that these workers were not pleased with their jobs, and consequently were not able to think positively about their and their family's future.

My final assumption was that these workers would share their experiences with me because I was able to explain the importance of this academic work, especially the value of raising the discussion about their lives. My confidence in this comes from training and practice as a social researcher, my ability to build rapport with interviewees, and because I too am Latina, hence sharing language and culture; this assumption proved to be true.

The phenomenological approach was used to get at the essentials of their experience, using this to analyze and reflect. What I learned in this way is the substance of this report.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One provides the context of the study, summarizes its purpose and the research question, introduces terms used in the study, and makes explicit my assumptions when beginning this research.

Chapter Two is a review of the literature on migration phenomenon. It explores labor market theory, the foundations of social capital theory, and links this to social networks that influence migratory decisions. Included is a discussion of the meaning of work, and a review of studies of meatpacking in the U.S. Midwest.

Chapter Three describes the research approach, reviews the foundations of phenomenological research, and describes the methods used in this study.

Chapter Four presents the interpretation of the narratives of Latino immigrant meat packing workers and provides themes that reflect the nature and meaning of this experience to the interviewees.

Chapter Five discusses the themes, presents their implications, identifies the study limitations, and suggests directions for further research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived-experiences experiences of Latino workers in the meat processing industry in the rural Midwest. The guiding research questions of this study were: What are the lived-experiences of Latino workers in the meat processing industry? How does their work in this industry impact their personal lives, their families, and the community where they live? Literature related to migratory movements, work motivations, and segmentation of the workforce frame the study and provide context to understanding the issues that Latino meatpacking workers face while moving to Midwest communities.

This chapter includes a review of the literature. The literature was reviewed in five areas: (a) Economics of Migration, which presents a synopsis of two important migration theories: Neo-Classic Economic and the World System theory; (b) the Labor Market Segmentation; (c) Social Capital; (d) Meaning of Work; and (e) The meat packing industry: A review that brings together studies focusing on the meatpacking industry, Latino workers, workers' conditions, and the Midwest communities impacted by structural changes in the meat industry.

Economics of Migration Theory

This study focuses on the Latino U.S. immigration phenomenon, which is characterized by the larger and increasing numbers of Latino populations in the United States. The foreign-born population data from 2010 U.S. Census show that the Latino population grew from less than one million in 1960 to 21.2 million in 2010, with Mexico being the largest country of origin, accounting for 29 percent of all foreign born (Acosta

& de la Cruz, 2011). When looking at patterns of the migrant Latino workforce, it is well known that Latino workers move from areas where wages are lower, relative to those of the United States, where the work wages seem much better. Accordingly, participants in this study, motivated by economic incentives, moved mostly from poor communities to places in the United States where the incomes are higher. Their migration can be explained by job markets' failure in developing countries, such as by Mexico and Central American countries promoting international labor migration, and also by the influence of previous migrants, friends, or relatives who facilitated the move to the United States.

In small and poor Latin American communities, migration is seen as a method of procuring income by joining the international low-skill labor force. Among the economic motivations to decide for a migratory movement is the acquisition of housing, the purchase of land, and the establishment of small business. Another reason for this type of migration is the demand for capital determined by a community's economic condition. For example, in agrarian communities, farmers have a greater incentive to migrate because they have access to land but they do not have the monetary capital to make it productive, which is the case for many Mexican and Central American immigrants moving to the United States.

After their arrival, participants in this study joined the meat-packing industry guided by their networks, which provided enough information for them to get a job, to settle, and to develop more social networks, which influenced the amount of benefits they procured.

The literature in the economics of migration theory can be read at micro and macro levels. At the micro level, the neoclassical economy theory explains the

contributing factors to the individual's decision for international migratory moves, and at the macro level it is through the world system theory, which pays attention to the distribution of resources and economic trends impacting populations globally.

The Neoclassic Economic Theory

Neoclassic economic theorists argue that potential migrants make a cost-benefit calculation when deciding whether or not to migrate internationally. Thus, Todaro and Markuzo (1987) explained that one of the important factors promoting Mexico–U.S. migration is the binational wage gap. Potential migrants balance their lack of sources of income, project their possibilities, and rely on relatives and friends and make the decision to leave their community. When migrants calculate the expected benefits and the anticipated costs, if a return is positive, then they decide to leave for the United States. But Massey (1994) argued that according to the Economics of Migration's scholars (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Stark and Taylor, 1989), it is more complex.

While the neoclassical model suggests that human capital impacts the probability of international migration, and social networks lower the costs of the move, the impact cannot be predicted without knowing how different forms of human capital are likely to be rewarded at the destination. In other words, the status of one's social networks directly the amount and quality of benefits, creating either positive or negative effects. As Weber (2011) asserted, the context, as the composition of the neighborhood and work places, could limit the opportunities and experiences for new arrivals. Therefore the model of the neoclassic economic theory predicts that expected benefits are comparable to those within the networks, and they affect not only individuals but also their networks in both the sending and the receiving community.

The World System Theory

Supported by the work of scholars like Wallenstein (1974), Castells (1997), Portes & Landolt (2000), and others, this theory argues that the penetration of capitalism into peripheral societies creates a mobile population susceptible to migration. Economists see the capitalist development as essentially disruptive, creating social and economic transformations that displace people from traditional sources of income, and this forces them into transnational labor markets. A good example is the overproduction of corn in the United States, a fact that impacted the global economy. This overproduction of corn in the United States lowered prices, thus affecting small producers in Mexico and Central America. Small producers cannot compete with large corporations such as Maseca, the main processor and distributor of corn in Mexico and Central America. Small producers have to adapt to new economic realities and they begin to look for jobs nationally and/or internationally.

When migrants enter the transnational labor market, they are already situated in a labor segment characterized by their profile and this in part determines the types of jobs they have access to. Labor market scholars as Rosenthal et al. (2008), asserted that an individual's lack of marketable skills is a factor contributing to poverty, and, consequently, this inhibits a migrant's ability to find better jobs and escape poverty; therefore they have to find jobs elsewhere where they'll fill jobs that aren't available in their communities. Despite the fact that individuals migrate seeking better employment opportunities, the social networks they are part of are a predictor of their migration outcomes.

Labor Market Segmentation Theory

Overall, the literature for international migration focuses on work force migration, as it has become one of the most prominent and controversial issues. After all, most migrants move to find work, and much of the public concern concentrates on the consequences impacting the receiving community. However, it is important to see migration as a process under the influence of the state policy and practices and more specifically within the area of labor. Therefore, in addition to the economics of migration and the social capital theory, migration analysts proposed another way to understand the migratory phenomenon—through labor market segmentation theory. This theory was developed by scholars such as Piore (1986), arguing that immigration is intrinsic to the structure of postindustrial economical life and is caused by an integral demand for immigrant labor which is inherent to advance industrial societies. Therefore, as large corporations grow in developed countries, and the demand of low-skill workers is high, immigrant labor force will be needed to fill those jobs.

The Segmentation of the Labor Market

Labor market segmentation theory explains that United States labor markets are segmented as a result of modern capitalism tendencies, creating a primary sector that produces jobs with high pay, generous benefits, and good working conditions; and a secondary sector characterized by instability, low pay, low benefits, and unpleasant working conditions, as Piore (1986) described. Due to the characteristics of the secondary sector available jobs, developed societies have a shortage of local workers willing to take them. Therefore, employers need to recruit immigrants and minorities to fill these positions with few economic returns (Piore, 1986).

Within the global division of labor and the relationship among production strategies and immigration investment production, it is evident that the role of recruitment of minorities and immigrants has played a significant role in U.S. economic history.

Furthermore, the dichotomization of the industrial structure as Reich et al. (1973) emphasized, was the result of the effort of monopolistic corporations to increase control of their product markets. That approach included the restructuring of the internal relations of the firms and development of internal rules to manage distinctions among hierarchies and to manage distribution of power. Job ladders, entry levels, and promotions were some of the strategies used to accomplish this goal, which gave margin to the creation of internal labor markets. Similar efforts were taken regarding corporations' external relations; employers quite consciously exploited racial, ethnic, and sexual antagonisms to undercut unionism and break strikes (Reich et al. 1973). Employers started to manipulate minorities' labor as a means of redirecting class conflicts into race conflicts.

Consequently, one of the functions of labor market segmentation was to facilitate the operation of institutions within capitalism; it helped to reproduce the hegemonic schemes at the institutions. It lowered mobility aspirations for workers by providing vertical job ladders so workers perceive separate segments with limited mobility and access. Additionally, labor market segmentation deeply divided workers into segments, which also legitimize power disparities between supervisors and subordinates (Reich et al., 1973). In other words, this dualism creates a division in labor force, creating a capital-intensive primary sector, which offers secure jobs with regular increments and

promotions, and a labor intensive secondary segment, offering poor wages and conditions and a lack of opportunities for promotion (Piore, 1986).

As a result of these internal job sector dynamics, large numbers of immigrant populations are significantly excluded from the primary labor market and placed disproportionately in the secondary labor market with limited possibilities for education, skills development, and experience. Secondary sector workers are likely to have fewer human capital requirements such as education and language skills, and they sometimes fall into the undocumented category (Massey et. al., 1994). Being unauthorized, immigrants are likely to find double barriers to mobilization to primary jobs over those documented legal workers because of their migratory status (Taylor, 1992).

Migratory Movements as Response for Supply and Demand of Labor

The labor market segmentation theory has been tested in countries outside of the United States—Blossfeld and Mayer (1988) and Daniel and Sofer (1998) in Germany; Flatau and Lewis (1993) in Australia; Fan (2002) in China. Overall, scholars correlate by asserting that workers share identical characteristics and that all jobs make the same demands on workers' skills. Furthermore, the role of labor migration appears to be equilibrating the geographical balance of aggregate labor supply and demand through the responses of potential migrants to differences between areas in attainable real incomes. Piore (1986) identified that migration is chronic and unavoidable by asserting that migration is simply a response to labor shortages that occur during periods of prosperity. When the economy expands, native workers move to more prestigious positions that become available. Employers must decide whether to raise wages, to replace capital, or to recruit foreign workers. The easiest is to recruit low-skill workers who are more

concerned with economic survival and do not hesitate to take low-status jobs that lack

opportunities and promotions, but provide enough earnings (Piore, 1986). Accordingly,

the low-skill immigrant work force is more likely to find openings in this sector.

When job arrangements take place within this context employers particularly

determine most of the key parameters of the employment relationship and labor process

regarding production methods, payment, and training practices. The employment process

strategies and job design are commonly characterized by the manipulation of antagonism

and ethnic "differences "as tool in the strategy of 'divide and conquer '" (Reich et al. ,

1973, p.363). In other words, there is a marked tendency to generalize according to racial

or ethnic attributes. For example, there is a generalized idea that Latinos like to work

hard; and there is a tendency to offer better jobs to Americans, as they are more interested

in status and promotions than their immigrant counterparts.

Secondary Sector Workers Face Similar Challenges in Different Contexts

The challenges of testing the labor market theory have driven studies in different

contexts. One example is the Ziderman and Shoshanna (1971) study in Israel. In this

study, differences in the wage determination process in the two labor market sectors were

examined looking for evidence of differences. The Neuman & Ziderman (1986) study

showed that the results for the case of Israel are very closely in line with predictions of

the dual labor market model. It was also found that, within the secondary sector of labor,

workers of Asian origin earned significantly less than those of Western backgrounds

(Neuman & Ziderman, 1986). Workers in secondary markets in Israel do not generally

form lasting attachments with employers. Years of service with the same employer fail to

contribute to higher earnings because the firm and the individual workers do not

undertake human capital investment on the job. Consequently, the tenure of secondary sector workers with the same employer does not last, and employers evidently do not find such workers an advantageous human capital investment (Ziderman & Shoshanna, 1971).

Accordingly, participants in this study moved to the United States in response to the supply of jobs available in the labor-intensive secondary sector and concentrated on their economic survival rather than accumulation or maintenance of social status. Therefore, work became an essential share of their lives and source of meaning to their experiences.

Social Capital Theory

In contrast to other migration theories, social capital theory argues that potential migrants consider a move for better opportunities when influenced by networks of relatives and/or friends. Research supports that immigrant ties to current or former migrants are a valuable benefit and help them to obtain information and support, as to reduce costs and risks, while increasing chances of finding a job at their destination (Bourdieu, 1992; Coleman, 1988; Massey & Espinoza, 1997). One of the main concepts for understanding migratory movements is social capital. Social capital is defined as an affiliation in a group which provides each of its members with the support of collectively-owned capital, a record that entitles them recognition in the various domains of the society (Bourdieu, 1985). The volume of social capital possessed by a given person thus depends on the size of the network connections this person can effectively mobilize, and also on the volume of the capital he or she possesses in his or her own right by each of those to whom he or she is connected (Bourdieu, 1985 Mouw, 2007).

Social capital exists in the relationships among persons, and it is part of one's ability to make use of relationships with other people to improve economic well-being (Portes 1998). Social capital is not a single entity but a variety of different entities with two elements in common: They all consist of some aspects of social structures and they facilitate certain actions of the actors within the structure (Coleman, 1988). This perspective of social capital suggests that individuals can move within the structures if networks making these movements possible support them. Although social capital promotes actions, it is important to note that social capital is restricted to the networks within the same scale in the structure, as in the case of the structure of transnational work force filling the meatpacking jobs (Portes & Vickstrom, 2011).

In the late eighties the concepts of social capital theory started to be related to migration. It was by observing that Mexican poor were able to benefit from social networks and translated this benefit into improved labor marker and higher earnings. Massey (1988) argued that once migration has begun, other factors contribute to maintain it, one of which is previous migrants, because current migrants can rely on them for information, financial support, housing, and jobs. Later, he focused on the assumption that the presence of institutions facilitates international movement and perpetuates international migration flows (Aguilera & Massey, 2003). In other words, once migration has begun, these flows become sustainable because of the existence of networks of assistance, information, and obligations, which connect migrants in the host society to friends and relatives in the sending area (Boyd, 1989). Consequently, those in receiving and sending countries are understood not only as individuals but also as members of

networks. The same networks of social relations shape and transmit economic and social structures in households, families, and individuals (Boyd 1989).

One example in the United States is the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. (Donato et al, 1993; White et al, 1990) The U. S. Congress authorized an amnesty, making legalization possible for approximately 2.3 million undocumented Mexicans. This program created an important source of social capital for people in Mexico, enabling them to sponsor friends and relatives to become migrants (Massey, 1997). From this perspective over time, migration tends to become self-perpetuating because each act of migration promotes supplementary social capital, which is used to create more migratory movement.

Social capital theory is also defined in terms of the nature, and the accessibility, of resources embedded in relationships. These relationships constitute the networks, which for the migrant community are a form of kinship or friendship and tie relationships between residents in the receiving area and family and friends in the sending area (Massey, 1988). In the international context, social networks are maintained in several ways. One example is the visits by migrants, typically those who had settled in the receiving country, since those are the ones who have the economic resources to travel more easily between countries. Social networks are also maintained by their reliance on activities, such as sports, associations, clubs, or any other kind of activity connecting the receiving and sending areas. Finally, marriages also sustain social networks by establishing kinship, obligations, and enduring attachments among groups, communities, and countries.

It is important to notice that even though assets such as information, referrals, and sponsorships are accessible through the migrant's ties, it is not just the number but also the quality and range of the ties that lead to positive outcomes (Lin, 1999). Because an individual's position can affect access to social resources, and the availability and quality of social resources determines status and wealth, then ties strongly affect outcomes—particularly in the case of immigrants relying on already settled migrants in the recipient community.

The social capital among Latino workers participating in this study promoted migration and provided enough information to find jobs; however, those sources were both beneficial and negative. On one hand, they were beneficial as they lowered the cost of the move and reduced the risks of the border crossing. On the other hand, there were limited opportunities to enter different types of jobs and settle in one of the higher scale of conational enclaves.

In general, norms of reciprocity, bounded solidarity, and enforceable trust are key elements associated with kinship and friendship by migrant networks to lower the costs and risks of international movements. Aguilera (2003) pays particular attention to the cost and risks of undocumented migration, asserting that the cost may be higher for the first to leave the community. The social capital gained by those succeeding the border crossing becomes a valuable resource for others in the community. Those who develop social ties to that person dramatically reduce the costs and risks of their own migratory movement (Massey & Riosmena, 2010). There is substantial evidence that migrants' reciprocity, solidarity, and trust is key to sustaining and enhancing social capital in transnational communities (Gardner & Grillo, 2002; Guarnizo et al, 2003; Levitt &

Jaworsky) which develop strong loyalty and solidarity in order to overcome the effects of isolation while adapting to the point of destination, as it is expressed by Latino workers participating in this study; the strong connection within the enclave strengthens their ties and increases the amount of social capital.

Social Capital and Families of Migrants

The social capital concept has been applied in different contexts at the family, community, and national levels. In the context of migratory movements**,** it refers to the stock of friends, knowledge, experience, and social networks possessed by transnational communities and even nations and their consequent structural effects on their development (Massey & Lastra, 2011, Portes & Landolt, 2000). Accordingly, families as migratory units are an important component in the social capital, as these units create kinship networks and influence migration decisions. It is common that the meanings and norms of migration and the obligation between members are created and reproduced within the family structure (Kuperminc et al., 2013). The family represents a small unit regulating and multiplying social capital, particularly in the context of transnational communities. Equally important are the domestic units represented by households.

The importance of the household for immigration resides in the fact that domestic units are benefactors, have their own structural characteristics, and define their own rules connected to those with their relatives and friends on the other side of the migratory circuit. Moreover, in the immigration equation the families and domestic units are very important for providing information, support, and access to jobs. In this study, families represented in all the cases were the social capital provider, enabling migrants to overcome whatever barriers might be faced.

Social Capital and Access to Jobs

Work on social capital shows a positive relationship among friendship, households, and networks with access to jobs. Aguilera (2002) studied the relationship between friendship networks and workforce participation looking to explain employment and hours worked, using network structure, network quality, and network diversity as predictors. For network quality, it was assumed that friends and relatives who are community leaders own a business or have good jobs and have more valuable information than those, non-community leaders not owning businesses and having lower quality information.

Aguilera (2002) also suggested that friendship networks improve labor market outcomes, and networks possessing superior resources provide richer information leading to employment and ways to procure more hours at work. Additionally, diverse networks would lead to increased labor force participation because diverse networks would be expected to provide non-redundant information. Moreover, both group involvement and religious friends are positively related to employment, but not to hours worked. Aguilera (2002) also claimed that racial diversity is positively related to hours worked. Therefore, for Latino immigrants it is likely to predict that the better situated the connections to new arrivals are, the more opportunities for employment and access to resources for the settlement they will find. Social capital theory can be applied nationally, internationally, across the broader gender, and on ethnic and racial scales.

Both unemployed and underemployed workers can use social networks to gather information that leads to employment, increasing labor force participation (Aguilera, 2002). The roles of social networks in migration and settlement are proportional to the

process of settlement of the first arrivals, as transnational connections play a great role in immigration decision making (Hardwick, 2003), as shown in this study which disclosed how interrelated social, cultural, and economic networks guided and informed new immigrants to settle while their networks were already adapted in the United States.

Social Networks as a Determinant of Migrants' Earnings

Social capital has a positive effect on wage rates. Migrants who are socially connected to current or former U.S. migrants generally earn higher wages than those who lack those connections. Moreover, social capital has both direct and indirect effects on U.S. wages of both documented and undocumented migrants. However, the indirect effect of job research technique is significantly higher for undocumented immigrants (Aguilera & Massey, 2003) as undocumented people receive more consistent, diverse, and stronger benefits than their legal counterparts because of their vulnerable migratory status.

Social Capital as a Great Asset for Vulnerable Immigrants

Social capital is strongly related to the total hours worked and earnings of migrants at their point of destination. Having friends is positively associated with hours worked. Immigrant individuals with friends who are manual workers work more hours than those without these friends (Aguilera, 2002). However, female Latinos with personal friends outside their racial or ethnic group work more hours than those without such friends (Aguilera, 2002). In this study, immigrant workers were limited in their ability to promote themselves in the labor market; they received greater guidance and support from their networks to have access to employment, to find a place to live, and to settle.

Families were key components in their decision to move in most of the cases, as they provided resources, guidance, and support at both ends. However, they didn't have connections or involvement with social institutions or community organizations in the United States so they received limited information from close family or friends to access resources, find a job, and settle. Despite the fact that the support seemed to be redundant and limited, it predicted a better economic opportunity to improve life conditions.

Foundations of Meaning of Work

Work as such has been seen as a vehicle for positive social relations and contributions to society (Ross et al., 1999); however, its definition is controversial because of the political, economic, psychological, and sociological components of the concept (Provis, 2009). Even though work is intrinsic to human life, it needs to be differentiated because there are many different systemic types of jobs, making it difficult to compare work in different contexts across time. However, there are attributes inherent to the idea of work that help in the understanding of an individual's degree of connection and commitment toward a particular job. The meaning of work embraces the study and understanding of how work gets meaning and becomes individually meaningful. Human resource practitioners look for this in four different dimensions: self, others, work context, and spiritual life (Ross, et al., 2010). In the same way, these dimensions of work help us to understand the meaning that immigrant workers provide to their jobs and help us to learn how they provide rationale to their intentional dedication to the jobs they perform.

The Self or Internal Sources of Meaning of Work

For the self and for self-perception, the meaning of work is affected by the internal values and motivations that determine the centrality of work to one's life as an absolute value; values and related motivations are sources for the meaning of work (MOW) for the individual (Chalofsky, 2010).

In looking at MOW, Schwartz (1999) has proposed that the construction by an individual of his or her sense of work is closely related to personal values because an individual's values influence decision-making. To Schwartz (1999), individuals' attitudes and behavior are prioritized according to their values. Basic individual values are conceptualized as "desirable trans-situational goals that vary in importance as guiding principles in people's lives" (Ros et al., 1999, p. 51). Values represent responses to universal necessities that relate to all individuals and societies. These universal requirements are the needs of individuals as biological beings, the needs of individuals to interact socially, and the needs of groups of individuals to function and survive. Values then influence occupational choices, as well as the meaning people make of their work (Brief & Nord, 1990).

In the frame of human resources, and in the sociological and psychological literature, motivations of work are found in the interconnection of meaning and motivation (Oldham, 1976). Oldham argued that the more positive internal feelings on individual experiences, the greater impact of these on work performance, on expectations, and on others. Theoretical and empirical research cited by Rosso et al. (2010) has pointed out that when jobs are meaningful to employees their performance is improved.

The literature of MOW categorizes motivation toward work into two types: internally and externally driven motivation. Internally driven motivation is when employees seek personal challenges, seek satisfaction, and demonstrate interest; whereas externally driven motivation is when employees' commitment to work derives a reward outside of the work itself, like pay and rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A common observation is that motivation is an individual response to a particular motivator; for example, two people working in the same work environment or performing the same tasks might experience very different levels of motivation. In other words, the meaning and motivation for work is the same as the meaning of life. It differs from one person to another.

Influence of Others in the Construction of the Meaning of Work

A second dimension in the study of the MOW is "others." How individuals interact and relate to other persons or groups influences the meaning they give to work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). While co-workers, leaders, groups, communities, and families are the influence of "others" in the construction of MOW; the influence of family is critical in understanding the attitudes and meanings of individuals assigned to work. Typically, family and work represent a distinct yet interconnected domain of a person, and family represents a close-tie domain and a cultural value in life.

Although family can put a strain on the individual's work by demanding time, energy, and economic resources, family may also improve positive meanings of work and commonly have a reciprocal relationship as each can shape the meaning of the other (Brief & Nord, 1990). The meaning of work in relation to family is important in regard to immigrant families, because immigrants often find themselves in lower status jobs in the

receiving country compared with those they had in their home country. Therefore, they find a broader purpose in work and feel this is pursuing a better quality of life for their families (Rosso et al., 2010). In the case of this study, it is particularly important to note that participants were highly influenced by family, not only in their decisions with regard to the move, but also in the extrinsic motivations of work related to income, as it benefits families both at the destination and the community of origin.

The Context in the Construction of Meaning of Work

The context of work is crucial to the meaning of work for an individual (Rosso et al., 2010). Context includes components of the design of job tasks, the organizational mission, and the financial circumstances. Included too are non-work domains; these are challenges, boundaries, and balances between work-and non-work domains.

It is important to highlight that for individuals performing low-skill jobs, as the case of participants in this study, who are more likely to be employed in jobs that demand physical and psychological strength, the influence of others provides a strong source of MOW (Lambert &Waxman, 2005). Although low-skill workers are typically not well integrated with others in higher hierarchies within the organization, coworkers at the same level positions have a strong influence on the meaning of their work through an interpersonal sense making process whereby workers draw meaning and value in their work from other persons in the workplace (Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001). For example, immigrant workers rely on conational relatives and friends for cues about how to behave and how to obtain basic information to construct their interpretation of the meaning of work. To make sense of their jobs, they create a common belief and assign specific qualities to them.

Spiritual Life in the Construction of the Meaning of Work

Spiritual life has an important influence on the meaning of work. Maslow (1971) indicated that spiritual pursuits seem to engender self-transcendence connecting the ego to something greater and larger. According to Maslow, spiritual workers relate their work activities to a higher purpose that also provides meaning to their lives (1971). Literature in the field indicates that individuals typically turn to spirituality or religion in their fundamental search for meaning and purpose in life. Although they may be reluctant to discuss it at work, a large number of workers think of their work and the outcomes from it in spiritual terms (Sullivan, 2006). This connection to the sacred includes a guiding force or energy in their belief system, which allows them to give meaning to the tasks they do as part of their work.

Job Crafting in the Creation of Meaning of Work

In the creation of meaning in work, it is said that it is not the design of the work that determines the meaning; it is the manner in which workers structure their work. In other words, it is not what workers do rather it is how workers create meaning of what they do at their work. Literature in work meaning focuses on job crafting as a source of MOW. Job crafting refers to the "physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work" (Wrzeniewski et al., 2003, p.303). It applies particularly to those workers who find a way to create meaning in any job by the way it is constructed by them. It also provides individuals the ability to do their work differently in ways that allow them to experience it as a source of satisfaction and meaning in their lives. For example, workers performing alienating tasks with no meaning, as participants in this study who perform the same repetitive tasks their whole shift "can change the way

they approach the tasks in their work."(Wrzeniewski et al. 2003, p.303) They can increase or decrease the number and kinds of tasks they do, create meaning of their job, and express themselves in a creative manner, crafting actions that create positive possibilities in the work they do. Although job crafting adds a positive meaning to work, it cannot be established without an intrinsic motivation, which relates individuals' attitudes and behaviors to values and expectations that contribute to the individuals' satisfactions.

Based in their research, Harpaz & Fu (2001), looking at change in characteristics of individuals of Israeli Jewish workforce at different points in time over a period of 12 years, concluded that MOW remains stable over time. Furthermore, it provides meaning to one's life in forms of economic, social, and personal identity and will continue to constitute a major central basic value in peoples' lives in society.

The United States Meatpacking Industry

The focus of this research is the living and working conditions of Latino meatpacking workers in rural Midwest. Meatpacking is one of the largest agriculturally based industries in the United States, which has been impacted by consumers' habits and the response to public demands (Barkema, 2001). Workers' conditions and memberships to this industry have been shaped by the historical trends, and presently represent a big share in the United States economy. For this study, a review of previous work in meatpacking was enlightening as it portrayed the trends, particularly in the areas of workers' demographics and working conditions. This section includes a review in the areas of meatpacking in the United States' history, the impact of the industry's growth on

workers' conditions, the ruralization of the industry, the meatpacking workers' injuries, the industry's hazards, and the meatpacking workers' rights and legislation.

Meatpacking in U.S. History

Prior to 1860, local slaughterhouses supplied the meat for consumption locally because there was neither transportation nor refrigeration to transport perishable products (Horowitz, 1997). For sanitary reasons, meatpacking operations could only be carried out during cold winter months, with ice used for refrigeration. The colonial farmers of New England were the first meatpackers in the United States; they used salt to preserve meat, the only known preservative at that time. Slaughterhouses were built near population centers so meat could reach the table before it spoiled.

In the late 18th century, a handful of companies dominated Midwestern industry, which extended into the countryside with the development of the railroad connecting major cities (Horowitz, 1977) Livestock herds were driven over land or barged to these early packing plants by railroad (Commons, 1904).

The United States meatpacking houses in the19th century were harsh and dangerous places to work. Low wages in combination with unsafe conditions made the stockyards of Chicago and other cities hazardous worksites. It was not until those conditions were reported—thanks in part to Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel, *The Jungle*, which described in detail the deplorable environment of the stockyards of Chicago—that the government turned its attention to the industry. Slaughterhouse conditions were used to grow unions over the following years (Sinclair, 2006). From late 1865 until the 1920s, Chicago was a central city for the railroads and became notorious for its collection of

stockyards that received and slaughtered livestock, often under disturbing working

conditions (Commons, 1904).

Impact of industry's growth in workers' demographics. Meat production grew

significantly in the early 20th century with the production of sausages; however fresh

meat and products like ham remained dominant (Horowits, 1997). In the mid-20th

century, the meatpacking industry became an oligopoly due to the merger of individual

capital (Stull et al., 1995). The rapid gains in poultry consumption in the 1950s

influenced the industry's trends (Barkema et al, 2001). Between 1967 and 1987, three

U.S. companies dominated the meatpacking industry: IPB, ConAgra Read Meats, and

Excel. Workers on the production line started to perform simple repetitive tasks at high

speed while receiving lower wages.

In addition to these changes, the new plants were opened in rural areas close to

feedlots. By moving the plants to rural areas, the cost of transportation was lowered, as

were the chances of unionization because of the isolation of workers. This last structural

change facilitated the innovation of boxed beef, first developed and marketed by IBP in

1967 (Stull et al., 1995). At the same time, between 1967 and 1987, employment fell by a

third, particularly in urban areas, and bigger areas of employment reduction took place in

states where unionization was more likely. The cost of production was lowered, and labor

cost was lowered with the development of the disassembly line, which eliminated the

need for highly skilled butchers (Stull et al., 1995).

Demographics of the meatpacking labor have changed over time, and the

meatpacking industry is clearly representative of demographic changes and population

growth in rural areas. The demographic changes are the result of the plants' recruiting

strategies. The companies were intent on keeping labor costs as low as possible and the volume of production as high as possible, so they recruited "cheap labor." Recruitment of immigrants became an industrial strategy in American meatpacking (Champling & Hake, 2006). It was argued that to succeed economically, the industrialization of meatpacking required a large pool of easily replaceable labor that had no control over the speed of the production line. In this way the amount of product is increased while the speed of the line constitutes the powerful regulator of worker productivity. Immigrants with few rights became the ideal labor pool for this type of production.

Until the late 1980s, there was little attention on the packing workers and the nature of their work (Stull et al., 1995). Studies of Latino immigrants started to report new waves of workforce filling the meatpacking plants and changing the landscape of the rural Midwest (Green, 1994) while in the 1990s the studies also focused on workers' power and authority relations on the floor. For example, Stull (1995) described the rigid hierarchy marked by the color of hardhat worn by each worker. Additionally, he found that the supervisors kept track of their assigned workers and wrote infractions for many reasons, such as calling in sick, failure to show up for work, safety issues, arguing, using inappropriate language, and misuse of the equipment. The group of workers, who exerted power on the floor, was defined by a hierarchy of position and scope of work. This per se is typical in industrial plants. But when attention was paid to work on the killing floor, the atypical was found. There were fifteen or twenty lines and every hour they would "turn" four or five hundred (Stull et al, 1995)

Training was developed and provided to workers since training should be vital for employees with no experience, particularly in this type of industry. There were

discrepancies between the reports of the company and the employees' reports on training. The company declared that it provided extensive orientation and training to each employee, whereas employees asserted that they watched and imitated one person for two days before starting to perform their job. Training was inadequate for the very precise tasks performed by the workers. More precise training would have been counterproductive to the packing industry's high-productivity goal (Stull et al., 1995).

The imbalance in power was demonstrated in the work-related hiring arrangements. Probation was the first step in plant employment. All employees had 90 days of probation, which meant they could be discharged without notice or recourse during this period. It was also found that there was little time for either conversations or job-related discussions. Lunch and breaks occurred in spaces segregated by ethnicity and gender (Stull et al., 1995).

Literature on meatpacking workers in the mid-1990s described similar working conditions and examined the recruitment of foreign-born workers as an industry strategy. Recruiters went to areas of high unemployment to conduct interviews and offer jobs to those willing to move, offering compensations and pay in advance for those moving more than 100 miles away (Fennelly & Leitner, 1992). By then, as part of the continued practice of immigrant recruitment, Latinos constituted a large share of workers at meatpacking plants, and immigrants and refugees were largely represented in the workers' population. High rates of turnover were associated with poor relations of workers with other workers and managers (Grey, 1999). Turnover was described as a product of the industry's labor practices, but it allowed employees a certain degree of control over their work conditions (Grey, 1999).

There were several points of contention between Anglos and Latinos encompassing two important issues: the relationship between "quit behavior" and the expectation of finding another job, and the role of immigration in Latino lifestyles. When Latinos were asked to explain why they quit, they responded that they returned to visit their families in their home country. Latino workers kept their ties with their family and friends in their home community and went back and forth, even bringing more relatives and friends to work in the plant on their way back. Many workers quit in December to return for Christmas, and in spring to attend their hometown's annual fiesta. Additionally, supervisors complained that Latinos wanted to make jobs seasonal, and under-appreciated that Latino migration was a strategy that allowed immigrants to tap available wealth in the United States and use that wealth to its fullest potential in their home regions (Grey, 1999).

The lack of meaning to and lack of motivation for the employees were associated with workers' attitudes, and it was merely to keep up and maintain minimum standards. The quality of relationships between supervisors and employees in general indicated that supervisors had little in common with the immigrant workforce, particularly regarding expectations and conceptions related to the quality of work. Turnover was a very complex problem and not easy to solve. There were deep ethnic differences between workers and supervisors and managers, basically belonging to a different ethnicity (Grey, 1999).

Ruralization of the meatpacking industry. The effects of the ruralization of the meatpacking industry has been subject to study because plants moved to rural areas, and the share of local workers was not interested in filling those positions. Therefore, the

labor pools and the size of the plant demanded large numbers of workers, and the

industry sought new strategies to recruit labor supply (Fennelly & Leitner, 2002).

Because of the low wages and unpleasant working conditions for local populations, the

new immigrant labor force became available, and the communities became overwhelmed

by immigrants. Housing, social services, health, schooling, and reemergence of racism

along with isolated instances of discrimination were the main concerns of the researchers

after assessing Latino immigrant workers' needs. Among their recommendations were

the need for a positive context of reception for immigrants, including public policies and

positive attitudes on the part of the members of the community.

Additionally recommended was the creation of strategies for economic

development targeting the creation of sources of better paying jobs to complement those

in the meatpacking and pilot programs designed to serve the needs of immigrants and

their children (Gouveia & Stull, 1997;Broadway, 1999). Workers' advocates contended

that Latino immigrants needed assistance in dealing with policies and institutions that

drove them to seek work in the United States. It was during this period that the literature

called for the voices of Latino workers themselves and urged policymakers to devise

ways of hearing more directly from the often invisible workers (Green & Barham, 2002).

From the workers' perspective, Grey & Woodrick (2002) studied the emergence

of transnational communities and examined the impact of sending and receiving

meatpacking labor communities. The transnational connections between communities,

and the religious and economic obligations, reinforced interdependency between those

living in the United States and those living in their community of origin, which remained

socially and spiritually connected to their sending community through worship and

Catholic rites. According to Grey and Woodrick (2002), employers and workers benefited from this relationship in different ways. On one hand, the meatpacking plant benefited by having a steady workforce since immigration reinforcement and crossing the border became more difficult and forced workers to become more stable. On the other hand, the sending community also benefited by the wages of workers, who were able to send remittances, thereby increasing the flow of economy.

Not all of the cases of meatpacking towns had the same dynamics while receiving immigrant workforce as a result of the meat and poultry industry growth, employing thousands of people with a high concentration of minorities and refugees. The explosive growth created a demand of low-wage workers that could not be met by U.S.-born employees (Fennelly & Leitner, 2002). Workers were struggling to secure employment, form families, establish credit, accumulate capital, gain competency in English, and obtain legal status; these remained unsolved differences between newcomers and local populations. Fennelly and Leitner (2002), also asserted that rapid immigration of poor and culturally distinct workers and their families created tensions in rural Minnesota, despite the benefits of what the researchers called "new diversity."

Latinos' perceptions of work and residence in meatpacking communities were studied by Dalla, Ellis, and Cramer (2005). More stable year-round Latino meatpacking workers were looking for relatively high wages, more stable jobs, and low living costs. Although they found available jobs, line speed was a particularly difficult part of their jobs. Despite the reported adequate training, workers also described the line production as dangerous, difficult, and physically demanding. The speed of production and safety of working environment were dramatically impacting workers, while language and cultural

barriers were adding to the challenges of powerless workers who had no control over the production process. Another reported concern was the discrimination; non-English speakers were treated more poorly and those suspected to be undocumented were treated the worst. Meatpacking jobs were described as having hidden costs, costs to the health and well-being of workers and host communities.

Meatpacking: One of the Industries with a High Rate of Workers' Injuries

Despite the modernization of the industry, at the end of the 20th century, mechanization had not replaced manual labor and the extensive use of knives and other hand tools to process meat. Workers were still lifting and carrying heavy carcasses on slippery floors, and suffering from exposure to extreme temperatures due to the need for continuous refrigeration systems. Currently the meatpacking industry still has one of the highest rates of employee injuries according to a 2012 report by the Midwest Coalition for Human Rights (Alvarez et al, 2012). The industry has had few innovations due to the fact that the shape and size of the carcasses continue to be variable (Stull et al., 1995).

Furthermore, in the early 1990s, the industry rate of cumulative trauma disorders was higher than in all other manufacturing industries. The most commonly reported injury was carpal tunnel syndrome (Gorsche et al., 1999), in which repeated, rapid, and forceful motions pinch and compress the nerve that runs through the wrist to the hand. Lower back and various tendon disorders were also commonly reported. Injuries and illnesses were still very much a part of the industry, which debilitated employees at the end of long years of service. Underreporting of injuries and illnesses remained a systemic problem because the majority of the meatpacking workforce was undocumented immigrants mainly from Mexico and other Central American countries (Human Rights

Watch, 2004). Workers have a tendency to not make themselves or their injuries known due to the fear of losing their job and being sent out of the United States forcibly.

Safety and health of workers in the meat packing industry. The impact of the growth of immigrant workers and recruitment methods and purposes all influence workers conditions. The plants moved away from urban centers to rural areas in order to cut transportation costs and the industry's consolidation increased worker hazards. Human Rights Watch, an organization dedicated to protecting human rights around the world documented how workers in American beef, poultry, and slaughtering and processing plants perform dangerous jobs in difficult conditions (Human Rights Watch, 2004). They reported on workers' health, safety, and issues related to compensation rights for workplace injuries; freedom of association; and the socio legal status of immigrant workers. The report is based on data from Omaha, Nebraska; North Carolina; and Northwest Arkansas. Many workers suffer severe life-threatening, and sometimes life-ending, injuries that are predictable and preventable.

Moreover, many workers cannot get the compensation to which they are entitled for workplace injuries; and government law, regulations, policies, and enforcement fail to protect workers' health and safety at work and their right to injury compensation. Human Rights Watch (2004) reported that workers trying to form trade unions and bargain collectively are harassed, pressured, threatened, suspended, fired, or deported for their exercise of the right to freedom of association.

Finally, it is evidenced that a large number of immigrant workers are unaware of their rights, and that many undocumented workers or relatives of undocumented workers fear seeking protection of their rights, as they could be fired and deported. Migratory

status constitutes a vulnerable condition for workers, one that employers take advantage of to keep workers in abusive conditions, thus violating their basic human rights and their labor rights.

Another report, from Nebraska Appleseed, found similar realities in the working conditions of meatpacking workers in 2009. Workers again described the high rates of speed in line production, the supervisory abuse, the persistent high injury rates, and not being permitted to use bathroom. Additionally, workers described employers' indifference to safety concerns and failure to treat workers as human beings. Similarly, the Southern Poverty Law Center in Alabama in 2010 reported working conditions of immigrant women, including a poultry worker's testimony, indicating that these women perform physically demanding jobs in extreme cold conditions, experience dangerous industrial surroundings with sharp metal and fast-moving machines, and receive cruel and abusive treatment from supervisors.

<div style="text-align:center">Summary</div>

As noted through this review, there was a substantial discussion in the literature to set the stage for an examination of the factors that cause the low-skill workforce to migrate and take unwanted jobs in the community they bring their families to live in as "the others." Based on the review of the literature, a number of key considerations to understand the experiences of Latino immigrant meatpacking workers are summarized below.

1. The body of literature suggests that although there are factors contributing to the individual's decision to move, there are also factors impacting the global economic trends that promote the international recruitment of "cheap labor" as one of the

main predictors of migration. There is reason to believe that this difference in

approach suggests that international migration is complex and has to be supported

by different theories covering the multiple factors embracing the phenomenon.

2. The literature base in social capital was abundant and shows substantial interest in

the social networks as facilitators of migratory movements describing the extent to

which friends and relatives reduce risk and lower the costs of migration. Following

the review of labor market segmentation, the literature is clear in describing the

origin of the segmentation of the labor market as capital intensive and labor

intensive and explaining why immigrant meatpacking workers with less human

capital and lower skills fall into the labor intensive secondary sector, promoting the

perpetuation of poverty.

3. Although the types of jobs available in the labor–intensive sector, such as

meatpacking, are often repetitive, physically demanding, and commonly in unsafe

working environments, literature covering MOW provides a foundation to

understand how workers develop connection and commitment toward a particular

job. Despite the fact that work gets meaning and becomes individually meaningful,

the context, the relationship to others, and the spiritual life provide a way for an

individual to turn difficult or meaningless jobs into positive and rewarded tasks.

Thus the meaning of meatpacking jobs can be explained by the relationship of the

extrinsic motivators of family and job crafting, which allows workers to assign a

positive meaning to their sometimes harmful and risky jobs.

4. The low-skill Latino migrant community is commonly associated in the literature

with the possession of lower rates of human capital as a result of the lack of

opportunities in their communities of origin, situating them among the low skills

labor force. On the contrary, they are characterized by the possession of high

numbers of connections and networks that, after experiencing migration

themselves, facilitate the migration process to others facing the same conditions.

However, this social capital in forms of networks and social connection is seen in

the literature as a restrainer because immigrants receive redundant information,

which limits the ability to find better jobs.

5. Labor Market Segmentation Theory was revised to understand the relationship of

immigrants' recruitment and performance in secondary sector jobs. It was also

helpful to understand the internal segmentation within firms by the introduction of

a strong system of hierarchies combining ethnicity and gender, which negatively

impacts the mobility of contemporary Latino immigrants in the secondary sector of

the United States labor market.

6. A broad look at the literature of meatpacking workers in the Midwest found that

the main reported workers' issues were the speed of the production line, the risks

and hazards of workers because of the unsafe working environment, the power

disparity between line workers and supervisors, discrimination, and fear resulting

from undocumented status. The interest in how Latino workers face these issues

was more recent and provided a powerful piece to the field, as Latino migration is

unique not only because of the geographical proximity of the Mexico-U.S. border,

but because of the particular characteristics of the Latino low-skill immigrant

workforce.

Although the theoretical framework may offer significant knowledge to understand the phenomenon, there is much that can be learned from the experience of meatpacking workers as it is lived and described from their own perspective. The lived experiences approach is more recent, and contributes to understanding the changes and dynamics of these workers within their communities of arrival, which are shaping the face of the rural Midwest.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This qualitative study considered a phenomenological approach to better

understand the lived-experiences of Latino workers in the meat-processing industry in

rural Midwest and to understand the motivators for Latino workers to take those

unattractive jobs and to bring their families to live in these communities as "outsiders."

The research questions were: What are the lived-experiences of Latino workers in the

meat processing industry? How does their work in this industry impact their personal

lives, their families, and the community where they live?

When I moved to the Midwest, there was considerable tension about the

immigration policies among the large numbers of low-skilled, undocumented workers

filling jobs in the areas of service and manufacturing (Dalla & Christensen, 2005; Nobles,

2006). Scholars discussed the costs and benefits to the immigrant population and their

social and economic impact locally (Huffman, 2003; James, 2006). As a trained Latina

anthropologist I came to be fascinated and appalled by the issues and realities of the

Latino people and their working, social, and personal lives in a small Midwestern town.

The contextual observations guided my natural curiosity and desire to explore a

social phenomenon in relation to my field of studies. I focused on the lived experiences

of Latino meatpacking workers and this became my thesis topic. This phenomenological

inquiry was centered on unveiling, analyzing, and reporting the everyday experiences of

10 Latino immigrant workers. This chapter introduces the research method, defines the

foundations of phenomenology as a method of inquiry, and presents a detailed

description of the participant selection strategy, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Research Approach

The goal of this study was to understand the meaning of the lived-experiences of Latino workers in the meat-processing industry living in a small rural town in the United States Midwest. It is grounded in the human sciences tradition that "studies persons, or beings that have consciousness and that act purposefully in and on the world by creating objects of meaning that are expressions of how human beings exist in the world" (Van Manen 2007, p. 4). Human sciences include humanistic modes of inquiry and use empirical methodology, including specific methods, based on systematic approaches to the verification of knowledge. To Van Manen (2007), human science research can be pursued by (a) turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (b) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (c) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (d) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; (e) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and (f) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

Following these principles, this study used a naturalistic approach with the aim of getting closer to the phenomenon in its natural setting, applying qualitative methods, selecting purposive sampling, being tentative, presenting an application of findings, and introducing the special criteria of trustworthiness as Lincoln and Guba (2001) suggested. Naturalistic inquiry is a process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of inquiry, one that explores social or human problems, as Creswell (1997)

explained. Its main characteristics are that there is not pre-selection of variables to study, no manipulation of variables, and no *a priori* commitment to any theoretical view of a targeted phenomenon. This allows the targeted phenomenon to present itself as it would if it were not under study (Sandelowski, 2000).

This research used description, interpretation, and critical analysis to explain the meaning of human phenomena, following Van Manen's (2007) approach to uncover the meanings of actions and to extend the knowledge of how social life is perceived and is experienced the way it is.

Foundations of Phenomenological Research

A phenomenological study "describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 1997, p. 51). Phenomenological research comes out of the phenomenological movements in philosophy, hence to psychology, sociology, anthropology, and geography. Phenomenology derives from the Greek word *phenomenon*, which means, "to show itself" and attempts to reveal the essential meaning of human experiences (Ray, 1994, p.118). A phenomenological research approach encourages attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday lives (Van Manen 2007). The modern foundation of this philosophical discipline originated from the writings of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer (Ray, 1994).

In phenomenological research the researcher reflects on lived experiences that have already passed so as to understand the essentials of a phenomenon (Van Manen, 2007). The aim is not to discover the "true meaning" of a phenomenon, but rather to understand it. Phenomenology aims to come to a deeper understanding of what

individuals go through as they conduct their day-to-day lives in the language of everyday life (Hultgren, 1989). Hence, phenomenology is defined as the study of lived-experiences, which allows the understanding of unique individual experience and meanings, interactions with others, and one's environments.

It is important to note that there are two main approaches to phenomenology. One distinction is the way research findings are used: Husserl's descriptive tradition and Heidegger's interpretive tradition. According to Lopez and Willis (2004), Husserl's descriptive tradition acknowledged that experience as perceived by human consciousness has value and should be an object of scientific study. The approach is to bring out the essential components of the lived experience specific to a group of people. Within this perspective "reality" is considered objective and independent of history and context. An important element of Husserl's phenomenology is the belief that it is essential for the researcher to discard all prior personal knowledge to grasp the essential lived experiences of those being studied and gain transcendental subjectivity. Accordingly, some techniques have been developed to accomplish this. One is bracketing, which implies that the researcher set aside previous knowledge and assumptions while listening and reflecting about lived-experiences of a certain group of participants. The second is omitting *a priori* literature review to avoid researcher biases (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

In contrast, Heidegger's interpretive tradition led to a circular way of interpretation of the everyday experiences between persons in their interactions within time and place, focusing on how we make sense of the world, our place in it, and how we become aware of this place (Conroy, 2003). Gadamer extended Heidegger's work into practical application, going beyond a description of core concepts and essences to look

for meanings embedded in common life practices. The relationship of the individual to his or her lifeworld should be the focus of phenomenological inquiry; these realities are influenced by the world in which the participants live.

The goal of interpretive phenomenology is to describe the meanings of the individuals' being in the world and how these influence the choices individuals make. The researcher's personal knowledge and theoretical approach help to make decisions about the focus of the study, participants, and research questions. Van Manen (2007), a recent leader from education of this hermeneutical perspective and method, suggested that in phenomenological studies, one should focus on the experiences through existential lifeworlds that permeate the lifeworlds of all human beings, regardless of their historical, cultural, or social situations. Van Manen (2007) pointed out four existential components of the lived world: (a) lived space or spatiality, which refers to the world or the landscape in which human beings move and find themselves at home; (b) lived body or corporeality, which is related to what we reveal through our physical presence in the world; (c) lived time or temporality, referring to our temporal way of being in the world; and (d) lived human relations or communality, which relates to the lived relations we maintain with others. The researcher must interconnect these components and go further by interpreting the meanings of the experiences with his or her informed and culturally sensitive knowledge (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

The interpretive phenomenological approach helps the researcher interpret the individual's meanings so as to describe these. In that sense, as Van Manen (2007) proposed, it is the researcher's responsibility to "construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience," (p. 41). Following a phenomenological tradition

in this study, I became the instrument of data collection while gathering words, analyzing them inductively, focusing on the meanings of participants, and describing a process in expressive and persuasive language. Through this process, the practical knowledge of Latino meat-processing workers was uncovered in its natural context and reported with the support of a theoretical framework from the human sciences.

Methodological Procedures

Selection of Participants

Several researchers agree that there are no rules on sample size for qualitative studies (Patton, 2002; Van Manen, 2007). However, there are some guidelines. The sample for this study was determined primarily by the research objective, the research question, and, subsequently by the research design. Following Patton (2002), Ray (1994), and Sandelowski's (2000) suggestions for sampling design, I began by looking at previous qualitative studies in which the number of participants ranged from 8 to 20. Based on the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994), who asserted that qualitative samples must be approached on their own, I developed study inclusion and exclusion criteria and anticipated undertaking from 10 to 15 interviews. The number of interviews was also based on a "saturation level" as Strauss and Corbin (1994) suggested. "Saturation" is reached at the point where the amount of new relevant data merging from the interviews diminishes (Pope et al., 2000). When I had completed 10 interviews, I reached saturation by hearing similar stories, with no new or relevant data emerging from the interviews. At that point, I found that I was going to gain little by having more interviews. The repetition of themes was an indication that the number of interviews was adequate for this research, following Weiss's (1994) suggestions.

My sample was a "purposive" sample, in that all participants were purposely selected according to the theoretical needs and direction of this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I deliberately looked for information-rich cases that analytically captured important variations; this process was not only about sampling people per se, but also about trying to capture a variety of events, incidents, and experiences (Sandelowski, 2000). For this research, the process of selecting a group representing diverse experiences was crucial to collecting good quality data because the quality of experiences has a proportional relationship to the quality of the study.

Accordingly, the community-selection process was done with the aim to interview participants nested in their natural context. I chose a small Midwestern town because it houses a Fortune 500 meatpacking company's corporate offices and manufacturing plant. The population size is estimated to be 23 thousand inhabitants with 2,667 (11.6 percent) of Hispanic origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This town plays an important role in the history of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), because it was the site of two significant chapters in U.S. labor history. In 1930, workers organized the Independent Union of All Workers and reached out to more communities in the upper Midwest. Half a century later, the workers organized a strike there against concessions, plant closings, and deunionization (Rachleff, 2005).

The inclusion criteria for the participants' selection were (a) men or women who have worked in the meat-processing industry at least six months; (b) men or women who have Latino roots or origin and are foreign-born immigrants; and (c) men or women who have emigrated from one Latin American country to the selected community in the United States. The exclusion criteria were (a) meatpacking workers who are not Latino

immigrants; (b) meatpacking Latino immigrant workers who do not live in the selected community; and (c) Latino workers living in the selected community but working in an industry other than meatpacking.

I was particularly interested in those workers who have been working in that industry at least 6 months and had emigrated from Latin American countries. Furthermore, I was interested in recruiting participants willing to share their experiences and to attend at least one in-depth interview. Initially, I contacted participants through an informal network called Community Center. The reason to work with this community-based organization was to have a bridge organization that would allow me to get in contact with potential participants due to the existing tension as a result of constant migration raids and the unfriendly climate for immigrants, particularly to those unauthorized workers who do not trust people beyond their family or close circle of friends.

Participant Profiles

The 10 participants in this study were all from Latino origin, and none of them were born in the United States. Seven were male and three female; from the total of 10, only one was single. The age of the participants ranged between 21 years to 51 years; all had relatives back in their home country; five had their nuclear family in the United States; one had children here and a second family in Mexico; and four had their close family and relatives in their home country.

From the total participants, three had adult children living independently. Three of the participants had school-age children living in Mexico, and one had school-age children in the United States. Four of the participants had toddlers in the United States,

and one had school-age brothers and sisters back in his or her home country. All had

relatives and friends living in the same town, and all knew at least one person from the

same town at the time they applied for the job. Two of the participants were American

citizens, two were residents, and six were undocumented. Nine were from Mexico, and

one was from Guatemala. One of them had a high school diploma, while one went to

middle school but did not graduate. Four had completed elementary school, and four

were educated up to the fourth-grade level or lower.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Nationality	Years in US	Years in Plant	Education Level	Language	Status
Andres	M	50	Mexico	14	13	High	Bilingual	Doc
Beto	M	50	Mexico	8	8	Middle	Spanish	Undoc
Daniel	M	51	Mexico	32	14	Elementary	Bilingual	Doc
Felipe	M	21	Guatemala	4	4	Elementary	+Spanish	Undoc
Gustavo	M	50	Mexico	18	15	3rd grade	+Spanish	Doc
Hector	M	50	Mexico	4	4	1st grade	Spanish	Undoc
Ignacio	M	51	Mexico	18	10	4th grade	Bilingual	Undoc
Julia	F	22	Mexico	9	6	Elementary	Bilingual	Undoc
Laura	F	50	Mexico	5	3	Elementary	Spanish	Undoc
Miriam	F	50	Mexico	11	9	4th grade	+Spanish	Doc

Notes: Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. High = high school; Middle = middle school. +Spanish = Spanish and some English. Doc = documented; Undoc = undocumented.

Regarding language skills, four participants were bilingual, one of them reported

to have English at "street level," and six were only able to speak a few words in English.

The length of time living in the Midwest varied between 4 and 23 years, while the length of time working at the plant ranged between 2 and 14 years. Only four participants had valid driver's licenses, and six reported that they had not traveled to their home countries because they had no documents with which to re-enter the United States. All of them have had previous paid or unpaid working experience; all of them had worked since they were very young.

Data Collection

I started my fieldwork by having informal conversations not only with Community Center leaders but also with local Catholic Church leaders. This information helped me understand the dynamics of the community. While getting to know the community, I was also checking the initial information with secondary informants, such as store attendants and the community college outreach liaison. Checking this basic information was useful and was done not only to ensure reliability for the study, but also to identify potential gatekeepers and participants. My first visits to the community were done with the goal of beginning to know a new community. To me, it was a very interesting experience, since it was my first time in greater Minnesota. My fieldwork was a learning process that opened my eyes to the context; coming from a country with many geographical contrasts, this area looked very flat, quiet, clean, and peaceful. The large expanses of corn crops, the similarities between the small towns, and the size of its populations were a surprise to me. I arrived in this small Midwestern town with no contacts at all, but with the determination to find allies to complete my study.

Approach to the community. My first formal visit was to the priest of a Catholic church in the middle of the town. I asked for an interview and made an appointment with

Father Lucas, who was willing to talk about the latest changes in the town and the dynamics and tension among the local population and the new arrivals. He said, "I see a vibrant Latino community. They are filling empty spots at school; they are the ones who come to our church asking to celebrate baptisms and *Quinceañeras,* while I celebrate funerals for the locals."

He gave me a handwritten piece of paper with phone numbers and names so I could contact some local Latinos who could guide me in contacting workers.

Because I was interested in local organizations too, I contacted the Community Center. I found that they had been working in the area for many years and had the trust of Latino immigrants, which I thought was crucial to my research. At the first meeting, before allowing me to explain the purpose of my study, the Executive Director gave me a lecture about the conditions of meatpacking workers and wished me good luck. I was a little disappointed at the beginning because I was not able to offer anything as an exchange for the contacts, so I felt that I was not going to receive anything from them. However, I learned from his lecture that I needed to be patient, and only in that way would I be able to start a relationship.

I contacted a community organizer suggested by the Executive Director of Community Center, and described the goal of this research and discussed the characteristics of the sample participants. I also described the required rigor to select participants and the significance of following the process described in my study design. We then came to some agreements and started to think about the recruitment process. This community organizer turned into a gatekeeper and helped me gain entrance into the community by accompanying me on visits to the community a number of times. I also

went to public places like ethnic stores and restaurants to get a better sense of the environment in this Midwestern town.

Despite the fact that Spanish is my first language, my physical features come from my European ancestors, so my appearance was not helpful in building trust at first sight within the immigrant Latino community. It also was not helpful because of the strong mistrust and resistance of Latino workers to talk to strangers based on previous experiences with immigration officers who sometimes come to town with the purpose of catching undocumented workers. However, I gained trust through the gatekeeper and was able to overcome this.

I recall one Saturday morning when the gatekeeper and I arrived at an apartment building and rang the bell of a potential participant. We received no answer, but we waited and saw a shadow by the window. Then the participant opened the door and said, "I am glad he is with you, because we do not open the door to strangers."

Participants' interviews. The procedure to recruit participants for the interviews was as follows: the community gatekeeper identified potential participants, contacted them, and asked if they were willing to share their story with me; they then selected a convenient time and place for the interview.

My headquarters for the interviews was set up in a small ethnic store. This store offered a mixture of Mexican and Central American products; the groceries and the ethnic products were shipped from different countries. The owner was there most of the time with his family, and he gave me the opportunity to meet people and conduct some interviews there, despite his reluctance to help me contact potential participants. Some interviews were done at the homes of participants, as well. I was able to enter and

observe their habitats and also to meet family members. In some cases, spouses were present at the time of the interview, perhaps moved by the curiosity of what I was going to ask. After a few interviews, I discovered that it is common to talk about the migratory experience and very intimate details were naturally uncovered during the interviews.

I collected data through in-depth, open-ended interviews. The purpose of the interview was to gather data from the participants' perspective about their experiences and the meaning they made of these experiences while working in the meat plant and living in this small Midwestern town. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, my first language and the first language of participants in the study. This gave me the advantage of communicating with participants at the same level and allowed participants to share their experiences with confidence. The climate of the interviews was friendly, open, and sincere. The flow of the interviews was very rich because participants used their native language to tell their stories.

In this study, the lived experiences of participants constituted the text to be analyzed. Language was the vehicle to know the experiences, because "lived experience is soaked through language," as Van Manen (2007) asserted. In accordance with phenomenology, as a researcher I was the instrument of data collection gathering the words that were analyzed inductively and focusing on the meaning of participants (Creswell, 1997).

In-depth, open-ended interviews were chosen as the central data collection procedure for the study based on the belief that an open-ended context would provide an opportunity for participants to clarify and elaborate their lived experiences. A very general outline was purposely presented in order to make participants aware of the

dimensions of the interview format. In addition, it was useful, as Van Manen suggested (2007), for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material, with the purpose of developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and as a vehicle for developing a conversational relationship with the interviewees about the meaning of their experiences (Van Manen, 1997).

The interviews were unstructured and the main question was: What has your experience of working in the meat-processing industry been? The participants were asked to (a) describe the experience as they lived through it; (b) describe the experience from the inside, as if it were almost a state of mind (i.e., feelings, mood, emotions); (c) focus on particular examples or incidents of the experience, specific events, adventures, or happenings; (d) focus on an example of the experience; and (e) avoid trying to beautify the account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology (Van Manen, 2007). The secondary question was: How does this type of job impact your personal, family, and community lives?

I audio recorded the interviews with each participant's consent. As previously described, some of the interviews took place at a local ethnic grocery store, while others were at the participants' homes. Before an interview, the gatekeeper had telephone conversations with participants to ask them to reflect on their experiences in the meatpacking industry. This procedure was useful in helping participants increase the quality of their narratives and details of their stories.

The interviews took place between fall 2009 and spring 2010. After each interview, I produced the transcripts and compared them with the early interviews, then developed a sense of the richness about each experience. During the fall, the interviews

were inside and often not in very warm locations, while the ones in spring and summer were frequently outdoors in shaded backyards. The interviews lasted from 1 to 3 hours, depending on the length of each participant's sharing. Prompts such as:

"Tell me more about…"

"Can you give me an example of…?"

"What have you heard about…?"

were helpful when there was no spontaneous description of the experience.

Notes were taken during the interview process. A demographic information sheet (Appendix C) was used as a supporting document to keep track of participants. To compensate participants for their time and willingness to share their experiences a $30 gift card from a local store was given after the interview.

Gaining Familiarity with the Data

Consistent with the phenomenological approach, I started with no assumptions and no structure to this study. I began by reflecting on my biases and examining my own prejudices in order to be conscious about them and to be open to new or different perspectives shown by the phenomenon. I carefully listened to participants' stories and constructed a set of data and transcripts, to read and re-read. After a number of readings, I started to identify patterns. It was a very interesting process. As the literature in phenomenology suggests, words turn into voice. After identifying the themes, I grouped them. It was like a sculpture taking shape little by little. At the very beginning, I was afraid to spoil my data; I was uncertain about finding the essence of the experiences. It was not until I gained familiarity with the data set that I was able to recognize each of the

interviews as a whole, and I deconstructed the text into the parts that provided structure to the phenomenon.

During the process, I was able to analyze the core meaning of the experiences. I compared this research experience with the experience of an artist who starts with a piece of rough material to be modeled and develops a shape, refining the details with patience and gentleness, contemplating small advances and working in a very fine way. To me, research is a delicate labor that needs to be done with patience and devotion. The result is a piece of art that becomes an extension of the researcher, who carries it permanently. This last thought summarizes my experience while performing this academic exercise, when my whole existence was developing a sense of attachment to this data set as a parameter of comparison with facts, information, and all events surrounding me.

Analysis of the Themes

In the process of interpreting the interview data, my aim was to uncover the essential structure or central characteristics of the phenomenon of being a Latino meatpacking worker living in a small Midwestern town. I transcribed verbatim the audio-recorded interviews conducted in Spanish. The recorded interviews were checked and contrasted for accuracy against the transcripts. This process helped me to associate the voice to the text and to recall singular moments during the interviews. The transcriptions were done in Spanish as it represents the original source language from which interpretations were made.

The texts of all transcripts were analyzed as follows: First, the initial focus for reading was to question, to reflect, and to write out findings in order to identify and uncover themes. I chose the selective or highlighting approach (Van Mannen, 2007) to

uncover and isolate thematic aspects of the phenomenon in the text. The text was read a number of times to establish the general perspective of a whole. I asked myself what statements or phrases seemed particularly essential or revealing about the experience being described. My task was to represent these themes by lifting appropriate phrases and capturing singular statements that were central to the experiences, and then to describe the thematic statements in more phenomenological sensitive paragraphs. The qualitative data management software program NVivo was used to store, codify, and group the interview text. NVivo is a software program used by social researchers to manage and to code data, as well to retrieve text for data analysisis. NVivo provides support for social researchers using methods that require an organizing system to do their data analysis (Crowley et al, 2002). My transcripts were storage in an NVivo file, and then I used them as the text to organize my initial "nodes" or main ideas that were interrogated to become themes.

The second phase of analysis was to isolate and differentiate the themes that were essential to the studied phenomenon. For that purpose, the themes became objects of reflection and the selected participants were asked in a second interview to weigh the appropriateness of each theme, as Van Manen (2007) recommended. I met with them in an informal way, some at the ethnic store and others at their homes. They were asked: Is this what the experience is really like? I interpret this as: Is it the same meaning for you? This turned into an interpretative conversation that brought the significance of the phenomenological question into view for me, as Van Manen (2007) indicated.

The third step was to write short descriptions of the experiences, including verbatim examples, and to reflect on these descriptions, seeking all possible meanings

and divergent perspectives. I also went back to the literature to look for those themes highlighted in the transcripts. I read about them and looked for descriptions and explanations.

Lastly, I constructed an overall description of the meaning and the essence of the experiences. For that, I reflected on and reconstructed my account of the experience and combined it with that of the participants. I experienced a process of questioning, posing, reflecting, and writing, as Van Manen (2007) emphasized.

Consideration for Rigor in the Study

One of the main concerns for this study was to adequately represent participants' experiences in the way I found them. Contrary to Positivist research, where the researcher tries to keep the outsider perspective so as to remain objective and to gain credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 2001); objectivity in phenomenology is based on the assumption that researchers conduct studies with high levels of trustworthiness by following a structured method to represent the stories of participants as closely as possible in fair and ethical parameters (Padgett, 2008). To adequately represent participants in this research, I followed the principles of phenomenology by capturing participants' stories from their own points of view and interviewed the data set asking questions when needed. I approached the phenomenon with a scientific attitude, taking away my assumptions and identifying my biases to enhance my self-awareness.

Objectivity in this research was also sought through the continual checking throughout the interview process, recommended in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2001). In order to have an unbiased understanding of the experiences of participants, as they unveiled them in a pre-reflective stage; I also had informal interviews for member

checking. These interviews were done seeking verification of preliminary findings by asking for clarifications by some of the participants to avoid distortion, inaccuracies, and misinterpretations as Horsburgh (2003) discussed. This type of validation allowed me to clarify my understanding of the phenomenon. However, I follow the ideas put forth by Morse et al. (1998), so only went back for clarifications with participants who were willing to interact in an interpretative dialogue when needed. As Morse et al. (1998) suggested; it is inappropriate to expect that all participants will have the willingness to validate the findings of the research. This is the case with vulnerable participants, such as Latino immigrants, who most of the time are not willing to get contacted again and again due to migration status and the raised distrust of strangers from the fear of being deported.

I made special emphasis in carefully reading and re-reading the interview transcripts by checking and reflecting on their content, and by comparing and contrasting them against each other to gain representativeness and avoid misinterpretation. I used reflexivity during the whole research process, acknowledging possible biases that could impact my actions and decisions, and consequently the quality of my research.

Review and Approval

The University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study for the Protection of Human Subjects prior to beginning it. (See Appendix A.) Participants signed informed consents prior to my interviews. Following IRB requirements, informed consent was a written agreement showing that voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were discussed to protect the rights of human subjects as suggested by Creswell (1997) and Patton (2002). Accordingly, these

regulations were followed to protect the participating individuals and to help the researcher maintain a considerate and conscious position while gathering data and conducting a qualitative study.

Due to the in-depth nature of the extensive interviews with participants, a consent form was also a way to establish a common understanding about (a) the right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time; (b) the central purpose of the study; (c) protecting the confidentiality of the participants;(d) the possible risks associated with participation in the study; and (e) the expected benefits to the participants in the study (Patton, 2002). The consent form was discussed with participants before the interview (Appendix B), and a copy was offered for participants to keep. While it is unlikely that I will receive any calls with questions, most participants kept the form. I saw it as a way to formalize our relationship and to define our roles as interviewer–interviewee, a cultural interpretation.

I was careful when I approached these vulnerable workers because they are immigrants, but most importantly, most of them were undocumented and at-risk of deportation, since they are not authorized to work in the United States.

Summary

In this qualitative study, I used a phenomenological strategy and approach to get closer to the participants' experiences and realities. I was guided by Van Manen's framework to conduct the research process, and then uncover the practical knowledge of participants. I interviewed 10 Latino meatpacking workers living in a small Midwestern town in their natural context. I recruited them through a gatekeeper, following inclusion and exclusion criteria. These 10 interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and

constituted the analyzed text. I followed the information analysis procedure suggested by

Van Manen (2007) as follows: I read the text to identify themes that were unique to the

Latino meatpacking workers living in a small Midwestern town, constructed the structure

of the phenomenon and developed an overall description of the meaning and essence of

the experiences, and reflected and constructed my account of the experience, then

combined it with that of the participants to meaningfully understand the phenomenon

under study.

To gain rigor for this research, I followed the steps suggested by Van Manen

(2007): I disclosed my biases and assumptions to look consciously at the phenomenon as

it is presented in the experiences of the participants in this study; I used reflexivity to

elude biases; and used continual checking to avoid misinterpretations.

Chapter 4

Developing Meanings of Migration: The Lived-Experience of Being a Latino

Meatpacking Worker in a Small U.S. Midwest Town

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of Latino workers in the meat processing industry in rural Midwest. The research questions of this study were: What are the experiences of workers in the meat processing industry? How does their work in this industry impact their personal lives, their families, and the community in which they live? This chapter presents the findings of the study and the themes that emerged from interviews with 10 Latino immigrants working in a meatpacking plant and living in a small Midwest town.

The experience of working in a meat packing plant has a direct impact on workers' family and community; however, the experience of being an immigrant permeates their entire life and life worlds, profoundly influencing their lifestyles. Despite the fact that it was not my aim to focus on what motivated these 10 Latino workers to move to the United States, they described their migration, beginning when they left their communities of origin. They talked about their move, providing detailed accounts of their experiences while crossing the border to seek better opportunities. Therefore their stories and this report begin there.

The first section of this chapter portrays how participants' lived-realities were organized and the second presents the seven emergent themes and their stories. The broad architecture of this chapter is provided next.

Emergent Themes

Seven themes emerged from face-to-face interview data. These were named so as to get at qualities of the experience, consistent with Van Mannen's (2007) recommended process. Interview quotes included in this study represent what are for me significant elements and moments of participants' lived-experiences. Within each theme are sub-themes organized as follows:

Theme I: Feeling Forced to Make the Decision

    Having limited choices

    Working but not having a job

    Feeling incomplete

 Theme II: Willing to make it "No Matter What"

    Someone waiting across the border

    Getting into forbidden land

Theme III: Reaching the American Dream: A Job at the Plant

    Breaking the law

    My back is broken; I have no energy

    One after the other: I even dreamed about it

    Always "an Eye on You"

    Being at a place I don't like

    Next could be a coworker or me; we have to live with it

    If you show you are weak, it is even worse

 Theme IV: Living like a Machine

    Same thing every day

No time for friendships

Not being able to travel

Theme V: Becoming the "Desired Unwanted"

Chilly welcome

Carrying the stigma

Those Güeros are racist and isolate us

Theme VI: Life in Two Places

Hoping they'll do better here

Becoming the long distance provider

Enduring attachments

Dreaming of a better life

Theme VII: The "Payoff"

Families getting ahead

Vacations we never had

Celebrating *Quinceañeras*

Theme I: Feeling Forced to Make the Decision

Participants of this study represented low income immigrants who came from high-poverty communities in Mexico and Central America, worlds with limited social and economic resources. Characteristic of their home communities are endemic conditions of lack of access to land, poor agricultural conditions, and low wages; and scarce employment opportunities, vertical mobility, and access to quality education and health care. In this world of limited choices and life-changes, these workers made a rational economic decision to move to the United States. In most cases, a network of

earlier migrants facilitated their departure and settlement, opened a path for later ones, and lowered the cost and risk for the initial journey away from home and toward to the United States.

Additionally, in some cases participants were indirectly recruited by nationals who facilitated them getting a job in the meat industry. These Latino workers described how their inclination to move was fed by individual motivations along with family aspirations, and necessities, always with the aim of gaining access to capital to enable them to finance consumer purchases to survive, and also to "buy" social mobility for them and their families which they left behind at their community of origin.

When participants recalled their experiences of migration, they described what influenced them and how they were influenced to make the decision, describing the factors that influenced them as well as the lack of choices they had back in their home communities. Here are three themes: Having limited choices, working but not having a job, and feeling incomplete.

Having Limited Choices

The tension between living in a poor community lacking resources and the option to look for better economic opportunities somewhere else is found here. The majority of participants came from agrarian economies characterized by agricultural production and a crucial shortage of available jobs. Moving is one practical way to find a job. Most thought about their move as an economic opportunity to move ahead:

One moves here to get a job. If we are told to go to the war we would go, as long as we get paid. If I had a job there [Mexico], I wouldn't come here. (Hector)

Having limited life choices is related to poor economic and social prospects, and having had a difficult childhood. These earlier events made leaving seem better than staying, in part because they could not work-at how to overcome the effects of this as adults in their hometowns:

> I was very young when I lost my parents, and later one of my brothers. [had] a good
> relationship with my brother, and he died too (Andrés).

Such events combined with poverty together give a sense of their socioeconomic marginality and personal troubles, along with earlier humble socioeconomic marginality and personal troubles:

> We suffered a lot when I was very young; my dad worked at the *rancho*. He worked
> at the cotton fields. One day there were some small airplanes spraying chemicals to
> the cotton fields; he couldn't run and, and he got sprayed with the chemicals. (Daniel)

Words like "scarcity", "lack of opportunities", "lack of support", "poverty" and "no hope" were used by most of the workers while telling their stories:

> I became widowed at the age of 21. I lost everything when my husband died; one day
> I was desperate and wanted to kill myself and my children to stop suffering. I was
> going to open the gas pipe and put everybody to sleep. I was pregnant and that was
> the reason I didn't do it, only because [of] the life I had in my belly. (Miriam)

Although in childhood they depended on the head of the family for their livelihood, there were events which significantly impacted their lives:

> My father was murdered when I was four years old. I had four brothers and sisters
> and worked hard to help my mother until I left to look for [a] better life. (Hector)

When the father died the family's economic situation was completely transformed.

Quality of life in poor and often marginalized households was negatively impacted by poverty. These too had economic consequences, short and long term, and in turn these contributed to moving north. Between these events and the move was childhood and youth, and these were shaped by direct economic needs and limited access to schooling:

> My father died from cancer when I was 10 years old. We were six brothers and sisters. My younger sister got appendicitis and had a surgery in Mexico that cost US $1,000. My mom did not have money to pay and she got a loan. She decided to come here and work to earn the money to pay the debt. I also worked hard to help her.
> (Miriam)

Children, youth, and adults all worked hard but could not find a way to solve their limitations.

Working but not Having a Job

The absence of work, education, and skills led to the feelings of hopelessness, common among these populations. They had a lack of expectations to find a paid job and to participate in productive activities back in their home community:

> Our country is facing a bad economy; wages are so low. To be honest, regardless of our hard work, sometimes we didn't have anything to eat. (Ignacio)

"Working hard but not having a job" presents one limitation of their poor community. In their farm village tradition, with little industry or other job sources and without sources to make their land productive, they felt helpless and experienced themselves as incomplete—in large part due to economic conditions.

We had crops to have food for the whole year, but we had no cash. I helped doing

different errands but I earned nothing; there was nothing else to do. (Andrés)

Furthermore, following the pattern of multiple occupations which is very common in

Latin American rural poor areas, everybody owned some land in their home community

and almost everybody did at least some farming. The majority of participants performed

more than one type of activity to earn a living. For example, Gustavo belonged to the

informal sector before moving to the United States, as he explains:

I worked as a scalper; I sold tacos, vegetables, and onions. I also worked on trading.

Back there, you have to be creative to find a way to earn money.

All of these individuals owned some land back home and did some farming. Most

worked the land and also held several jobs, when available and possible. Daniel's family

lived in the same situation:

I worked a couple of days here, a couple of days there. There is not always work to do

like a regular job; it forces you to live in poverty.

According to Latino tradition, most were raised to look out for the family, as well

as themselves. They assumed additional responsibilities such as fulfilling familial

obligations:

We were many children. It was our obligation to work to help my father to bring food

to the family. It was a hard work; we worked doing everything: clearing the soil,

planting, and cropping to sustain our family. It is really hard, not only in my case but

all people there. (Gustavo)

Traditional gender division in their communities were that men cultivated the

land, while women tended to do animal rearing, growing fruits and vegetables, sewing,

and household chores, such as cleaning and cooking. These are very time consuming activities, particularly in the Mexican culture where women show their strength by feeding their families and show their family commitment in the kitchen:

> I helped my mom to do the house chores all the time. We worked at home while my father and brothers did in the fields. Household chores start very early and there I was all the time, side to side with my mom. (Miriam)

Children too worked, doing chores, and other family survival tasks. Some households sent their children to work for others. Schooling and leisure were a childhood luxury:

> I am the oldest child. I was the first to start helping my father to sustain our family. I became a construction helper. Then our situation improved, and we were able to get more food. (Daniel)

Birth order effects were visible, and commonly, the eldest male children did not attend school, but instead contributed to family income:

> My dad worked hard, but it wasn't enough to support a family of eight. We were five brothers and my sister. I am one of the oldest, and I worked to help my father to sustain our family. (Ignacio)

In contrast, Laura, a third child, didn't have such responsibility. In her case, two older brothers moved to the United States to help the rest of the family back in Mexico:

> Back in Mexico, I didn't have the obligation to work. I helped my mom with the house chores because my dad was already here in the U.S. I had enough to live, of course in a modest way, but it was enough to us.

Children often worked side by side with their parents, learning and being a family:

I am the second child. I always helped my father to take care of the crops and to sell

them at the local market. But even though we worked hard, there were not many

opportunities. We were poor. (Felipe)

Most of the men did unpaid jobs for their parents, often preventing them from attending

school:

I wanted to go to school, but my father wasn't able to sustain the family alone. When

you have a big family and there is not enough income, it becomes impossible to cover

even the basic needs. (Gustavo)

When these stories are taken together, a picture emerges of the economic

participation of the family back home, with its poverty, traditional occupational role

divisions, and child economic involvement. This is context, source, and meaning for the

choice and decision to move north for work, opportunity, and a "future." However potent

they may have been, the economic realities alone presented only one reality. Another was

the existential sense of incompleteness in their own lives and the estrangement felt

because of their family or some of their family members being in the United States.

Feeling Incomplete

Some of the participants felt lonely, incomplete, or estranged as their family was

in the United States. This is a cost of migration with consequences on the family system

and composition; and a cost on their psychological and economic well-being. Varieties of

experiences are related because of family separation; some suffered the separation from

parents and loved ones, while others from their children:

I followed him [now her husband] because I thought he was a good man. He came

first [to the U.S.] and I followed him; I decided to leave my children with my sister

because I wanted to see and try first, and to decide later if it was going to be fine for

them. (Miriam)

Periods of separation and reunification are typical processes that families

underwent while deciding whether to migrate as an economic strategy. But this was not

the sense for all. Documented and undocumented workers worked hard to protect their

dependents from the exposure to arrest and deportation, especially women and children.

For undocumented families, sometimes as a result of separation, families were

temporarily destabilized, and experienced pain, sadness, and instability, impacting family

members.

For example, Julia was a single teen living in Mexico with her mother. They had

been living apart from her father and brother since both decided to move to the United

States to find better jobs. She explains how she and her mother felt, and why they ended

up making the decision to move to the United States:

My father and brother were already here and were working to send my mother and

me money. We felt lonely and we missed them so much, so we finally decided to join

them.

A common pattern for some was a temporary separation from parents, followed

by reunification in the United States. In some cases, while missing their parents or

relatives, they experienced incompleteness and aloneness and felt lonely, despite having

extended family members caring for them. Some joined family members, seeking family

reunification. They described how they felt about where their family was. For example,

Laura was young when she and her brother suffered the death of their parents, first their

father and then their mother. They wanted to join their brother and sister already living in the United States, and decided to move:

I was 17 when [I] lost both my parents. By then, my brother and I started to live on our own, trying to survive in Mexico, but our lives became pointless, our older brother and sister were already here, and we wanted to be with them.

Andrés had a similar experience. He already had relatives in the United States and because of the death of his parents, his life changed dramatically. It was then that he decided to join them:

I was by myself in Mexico, and you know when you don't have the head of the household, you are lost. I felt lonely and helpless. It was then that I decided to move here, following my people to bring meaning to my life.

To be complete in their world meant to be in, with, and surrounded by family. When a member left, a hole was made in psyche and soul. Yet they decided to leave and head north.

Theme II: Willing to Make It No Matter What

One of the main reasons to move was to look elsewhere for better opportunities because of financial vulnerabilities. Their local economies were depressed, in part as a result of the modernization of the global financial system. They sought better opportunities in a more stable economy with job offers. Crossing the border was psychologically, politically, and morally difficult. It was a powerful metaphor about choice and chance and future... At the very moment they crossed the border without documents, they became guilty of "unauthorized migration," breaking U.S. migration law and border regulations.

As undocumented migrants in the United States they often perceived themselves as being viewed by U.S. citizens as outsiders, strangers, aliens, and even as a threat to the well-being of the community and the larger society. In contrast to these external perceptions, the migrants saw themselves as solving their personal, familial, and economic crises.

"Willing to make it no matter what" poignantly reveals the ways undocumented migrants crossed the border and made their way to Midwest meatpacking plants. "Someone waiting across the border" and "Getting into forbidden land" captured these lived-realities.

Someone Waiting Across the Border

Crossing the border involved preparation, such as getting funding and gathering information from friends and relatives. In general, crossing the border was a team effort requiring at least someone with previous experience to plan the journey. There are multiple ways to cross the border and each decided and tried their own according to friends' and relatives' suggestions, networks, and available resources. Money was crucial, and many times they got loans from their predecessors. None had a written contract and verbal deals were most common. These were done by honor and loyalty:

> I decided to come to the U.S. because my brother and sister were already living here. At that time, I didn't have anything or anybody else in Mexico. They helped me to make it. They paid for everything. I didn't have a single penny. (Andrés)

Regardless of how closely related migrants were to the money-lenders, most paid back the loans, even to their own children. Money, support, and guidance were strong at the border crossing and beyond. They found support from those experiencing similar

situations, even from those unknown to them. Migrants seem to develop sentiments of solidarity with others in their situation. For example, Beto explained how he found a community with immigrant workers in a different state while he was waiting to be brought to the Midwest:

> The *Coyote* [smuggler] took me to California and I stayed there for a while with some construction workers who were living in the same house. They welcomed me and said, 'Look, we are friends! We are peers. Please make yourself at home and eat whatever you like…'. I was there waiting for a ride to Minnesota, and it took several days. I helped to clean the house and to cook and I watched TV until the *Coyote* brought me here.

There were other supports and forms of solidarity, as friends or relatives helped during the journey. Gustavo had the support of his *compadre* who was living in San Antonio Texas; he helped him plan and pay and also walked him to the border:

> I decided to come because of my *compadre.* It was him who paid; I did not pay a dime since I left. We took off together; he left me at the border and waited for me on this side…. After crossing the river, he was there; he whistled and called my name.

Sometimes, there were chains of support—relatives and friends who cared about the traveler got in touch and contributed to the plan. While some helped at the border crossing, others helped in settlement or the job search. Each contributed to the goal of helping the voyager to make it. For several, the others were friends already in the United States who made the move practical, reachable, and real. Since most had little or no traveling skills, didn't speak English, and had no idea how the world here works, they needed and solicited help, and took it when offered.

The goal of these workers was economic stability and sufficiency for them and their families. Influenced by earlier migrants, they tried to imitate the same patterns and go north to look after their families. To the latter they sent remittances; Felipe explained how his uncle and brother inspired and helped him, asserting that without them, he would not have been able to make it:

My uncle came first, and he was already here when my older brother decided to join him. My uncle gave him a hand, and then, later on, both my uncle and my older brother helped me to come. I had witnessed how remittances from my brother had arrived to my family. It was a lot compared to what I was able to make back in my community, working very hard. Then I decided to come, but coming on my own, without knowing somebody, would have been very difficult. There are many who die because of hunger or sunstroke; because of this, you may not want to try to come here without help.

In the small communities that migrants come from, earlier migrants visiting the community were seeing as very successful because they had gotten jobs and sent remittances to the improvement of their families. Money empowered them, and it turned them into a point of comparison with locals in their home communities:

I had countrymen from my own town already here in the U.S. They were doing well! They had gotten jobs and they made good money; it was easy to see by the trucks they drove and the things they were able to buy. Once they went to visit our hometown, and when they were headed back to the U.S. I decided to join them. They helped me to find a place to stay and to apply for a job. (Ignacio)

Gateways were defined according to networks of support and sources of jobs.

All participants in this research decided to come to the Midwest because they already knew someone living in the small town where this study took place. Some came directly from their community of origin, while others moved from different states, where they gathered information about the local meatpacking plant. For example, Hector explains:

> You move where you have friends. If you have friends in San Antonio, for example, then you go there. If you have friends here, then you come all the way here. When I crossed the border, I had friends in Iowa. I stopped in Omaha, and then I took the bus to Iowa and found a job. Later on, I moved to this town because I had heard about these jobs.

Moving in a group, they were more confident and felt safer when with someone who already had the migrant experience and could support them with knowledge, skills, and strong words. Julia and her mom had the guidance of Julia's brother, who had earlier experience as migrant and crossed the border:

> My brother was already living in the U.S. with my father. He got married in Mexico; when he was going to come back and bring his wife here, my mother and I decided to come and travel with them. He knew how to do it. He brought us here. He had friends, and this made everything easier for us.

Clearly, making into the United States took courage, skill, luck, money, and someone with knowledge about how to do this. They crossed the border and entered "forbidden land".

Getting Into Forbidden Land

The Mexico-U.S. borderland was for them a forbidden land. There was no chance of getting a visa permit to enter the United States because, having none, they could not provide proof of a solid economic status. Because of a long history of Latino migration at the Mexico-U.S. border, there is a high security system that prevents the undocumented from trespassing by foot or car. Networks were relied on to find the safest plan for the border crossing. Finding a *Coyote* was crucial for the border crossing. *Coyotes* charge migrants to cross the border. The experience of friends and kinship networks help migrants find reliable and affordable smugglers:

I passed the border through the line; my son was the one coming ahead, and he prepared everything. My son found a *Coyote* who was recommended to him, and paid him two thousand dollars. *The Coyote* gave me a borrowed ID to show to the Border Patrol Officers. (Beto)

Coyotes guide migrants across the border, charging them significant amounts of money. Smugglers know the movements of the Border Patrol Officers and the terrain, as well. There are stories about crossing the U.S.-Mexico border with a smuggler 20 years ago:

I was 16; one brother and one sister were already living in the U.S. They attended my mother's funeral in Mexico. I decided to come with them. I did not have papers; they helped me to find the way to do it. We paid 200 dollars to a *Coyote,* and he walked me through the border. I walked through the desert all night long; the *Coyote* took me through unknown places, and I felt lost and scared. (Andrés)

Each *Coyote* has his modus operandi. For example, it is known that *Coyotes* take travelers through the border, and then friends or relatives come to pick them up and pay. Sometimes migrants are held until the *Coyotes* are paid. These migrants did not have negative experiences, as others, and said that the whole process was extremely stressful due to being full of unknowns. Ignacio, who had crossed the border with some friends and a cousin, guided by a smuggler, described his experience:

I crossed the border in Tijuana and arrived in California. We just followed their orders; we have to be ready all the time because everything was sudden and unpredictable. We waited 2 days in Los Angeles for friends who went there to pick us up and to pay to the smugglers.

Despite the resources and available networks supporting the border crossings as described earlier, crossing the border was exhausting and dangerous. Difficult terrain, the long journey, and the conditions under which migrants cross demand a lot of energy and determination. Felipe, one of the participants, recalled his journey:

I walked for two nights and half a day. The trip was exhausting. Everybody was very quiet. You travel with a group, but you don't know them, and it is better not to ask anything. I was carrying water and bread. It is something one can never forget.

Overall, independent of the methods participants chose to cross the border, it was consistently described as a dangerous and difficult event. Crossing the border represented many challenges that were life threatening and full of physical and emotional fatigue:

Sometimes people cross the border with *Coyotes;* sometimes they try by themselves or they cross the border with some others who have done it before. But it is difficult, believe me. You can lose your life in the desert. Don't think it is easy: the desert is so

dangerous; there are many snakes, ravines, and rivers you have to cross. It is

dangerous, let me tell you! (Hector)

After crossing the border, some headed directly to the Midwest and others started

their journey as meatpackers in different states. Their networks were the suppliers of

transportation, housing, and food:

I landed in Worthington, Minnesota. I heard about these jobs while I was working as

security in Las Vegas. I got in trouble there; I lost everything and wanted to start

over. I had a friend and stayed at his house for a while. (Andrés)

Despite the experience of living in the unknown and the forbidden, some participants

describe the Midwest as a good place to live; most after being in different states and

comparing the Midwest with "busy" cities:

I came here because my brother was already living here. I think it is a good place to

live, particularly for my children. A city like Chicago or Los Angeles would be too

difficult to live in, not only for me but because of my children. (Ignacio)

When entering into the forbidden land, all workers were able to make it because

of the network of support and encouragement. All of the workers had at least one contact

in the small Midwest town where they live and got a job at the meatpacking plant. Their

journey just begun, they kept relying on networks and headed to the Midwest where they

had to reach "the American dream".

Theme III: Reaching the American Dream, A Job at the Plant

It is important to remember that crossing the border was merely the beginning of

the challenges. From there immigrants had to find work and settle. The stressful border

crossing pushes migrants to rush forward in search of jobs in order to start their new lives

in the United States. After this stressful and exhausting experience, they had to look for ways to earn an income with which to pay their debts and sustain them. Their need rushed them into seeking employment immediately to pay back the cost of the expenses that were covered when they got involved in these agreements with friends and relatives.

This process begins by applying for a job, which seems to be a new experience for all new immigrants. In this they started their journey towards employment; then they realized how tough the routine was. "Reaching the American dream: a job at the plant" uncovers the tensions Latino immigrant workers overcame while performing meat packing jobs.

This theme is divided into the following subthemes: Starting from the beginning; Breaking the Law; My back is broken: I have no energy; One after the other: I even dreamed about it; Always an eye on you; Being at a place I do not like; Next could be a coworker or me; We have to live with it; and If you show you are weak, it is even worse.

Starting From the Beginning

After the stressful and exhausting experience of border crossing and upon their arrival in the new city, participants in this study had to find work to pay debts and to sustain them. These practical needs pushed them to find immediate employment:

You have to do whatever you can to get a job. You know times when you have no money to eat. You have to borrow some money from friends to cross [the border] and you need to get a job soon to pay it back. (Hector)

For most of the participants, information about work was disseminated through their networks. For some, the arrival point was directly to the Midwest; for others, it was

only after navigating through the "meatpacking circuit" that they ended up in this town. In one way or the other, all of them ended up at the meatpacking plant.

Overall, participants described the experience of working at the plant as tough. They have physically demanding jobs, and they reported feeling exhausted at the end of each workday. However, it is important to note that despite these negative realities, they viewed these types of jobs as economic opportunities to become stable income providers, and to fulfill family and personal needs. In this sense, their salary was acceptable and this seemed to counterbalance the negative aspects of the work. All experienced fatigue and pain as a result of the difficult work particularly when on the production line.

The application process was the easiest step in getting into the industry. As commonly happens, all participants learned how to do this from conational or relatives already working at the plant. The hardest parts of working in this industry were getting used to the tasks assigned to them, the grinding and mind-numbing routine of the tasks themselves, the harsh and unpleasant environments they were surrounded by every day, and the physical risks involved in this type of job.

Breaking the Law

Willingness to do whatever was needed to move ahead was a recurrent sub-theme that illustrates how eager they were to get jobs after crossing the border. Most already had a network helping them do this. Meat packing jobs are easy to get; particularly for those with friends or relatives already working in the meat industry. Experienced workers helped by providing information needed to apply for a job. Since they were unauthorized and lacked documents to work and live in the United States, the first they did after

crossing the border was get U.S. IDs through their networks. Gustavo gave an example of how he got help from a friend:

> My friend told me that what people are looking for is an ID card, no matter where you get it. People here know where to get them. My friend helped me to get mine.

Some of the participants also learned about what to write or not write on the application form; they were advised by their friends and relatives already at the plant. For example, if they didn't meet certain requirements, such as age or experience, they gave false answers:

> I was only 17 years old when I began working here. At that age you cannot get that type of job, but I got the job by telling them I was older. (Julia)

Most were in dire need of work and money. Accordingly, they tried really hard to get into the plant regardless of what they had to say and the validity of information they provided:

> I did not have any experience in these types of jobs. However, I really needed to start working. I told them I had experience because I needed a job. I was ready to do whatever, no matter what, because that was the only choice I had. (Andrés)

Applications were available at a well-known mall in town and also online. To fill out their applications, they relied on friends or relatives who helped them in different ways. All had filled out their applications out by hand, and were physically at the mall:

> The application form is in English, and it is difficult to fill out an application in a language you don't understand well, particularly if you don't have experience. It is difficult if you do not have anybody helping you. In my case, my uncle had done it previously and he helped me; otherwise, it would have been impossible. (Felipe)

Following the application process, they were called for interviews, either in Spanish or in English with an interpreter. They'd been guided through the process and received help from relatives and peers to apply, however at the interview, they went by themselves and language wasn't an issue:

> I didn't need to speak English to get the job: at the interview there was an interpreter from El Salvador, and the manager also spoke some Spanish. They asked a lot of questions. I didn't have previous experience, but they gave me the job. (Gustavo)

According to their stories, employers verify how healthy and strong workers are. They ask questions related to previous injuries, the ability to lift heavy things, and about previous injuries and physical conditions in general:

> On the application, they ask you how many pounds you can lift, about your physical condition, if you can move your arms, and so on. I think they focus on how strong you are to hire you. That's it. (Julia)

Some described how this application process had changed over time. In the past it was simpler, and there were no ID verifications:

> I started working at these plants years ago. At that time, it [the application process] was not a big deal. You only needed an ID and a fake social security number to get the job. Now it is different; they check your documents and so on. (Ignacio)

Despite the new challenges, they had a clear idea of the process. They'd get their IDs using their networks and were willing to overcome these simple obstacles. At work all is new, dangerous, and difficult.

My Back is Broken, I Have No Energy

There are many plant jobs: slaughtering, cutting, and packing. The work includes killing, dismembering, and packing the pieces. The work setting is on the plant floor.

The plant is very modern with automated machines, yet the work still requires the physical deftness of a butcher. The workforce is divided among machine operators, workers who use knives and tools, workers who use specialized machines to cut animal carcasses or trim fat, and those who grind pieces of meat that later will be turned into sausages or canned meat. Additionally, there are workers who perform a variety of maneuvers with their hands, such as weighing, sorting meat pieces, labeling, and assembling packages and boxes.

All described a demanding work place experience. It was harder for and on those on the disassembling line who have no control over the pace of the work. The nature of their jobs was inherently difficult. It took time, training, and experience to become skilled:

It was so hard for me. My body wasn't used to it. My neck was always in pain, and it was so difficult. I thought I was never going to get used to it. (Laura)

Every day, meatpacking workers are at risk from practices that harm them physically. This, they come to view as a normal part of their routine, and they commonly view the hardest part of their work to be what they went through at the beginning, growing accustomed to the daily routine:

When I started this job, it was horrible. It wasn't easy to get used to using the knives, gloves, and aprons, but this is all equipment that we have to use. Believe me, at the beginning, every night I had a terrible backache, and I was shuffling. Now I am used

to it, but it doesn't mean that the job is easy. I need to go home, have some rest, eat, and go to bed to recover every day. (Andrés)

Additional risks are everywhere: slipping and failing on wet floors and injuries from heavy lifting are two. Less visible is the strain resulting from the design of the equipment which does not fit them. Shorter workers, a description fitting most Latino workers, commonly injury their backs and arms by the requirement of continuously stretching at the machine. Additionally, long shifts worked while standing all of the time with few breaks are other risk-factors to their well-being:

When I started this job my hands got numb. I cried a lot because I didn't feel my hands. I needed to stretch to grab the pieces, because I am short. Let me tell you that all jobs here are exhausting. Your whole body hurts every single day. (Miriam)

They constantly feel pain and fatigue because of the physical exertion. They experienced themselves aging faster:

The first days, and even weeks, your hands are swelling. I was scared because of my hands; they [the nurses] gave you ointments, but that's it. Now I have been here for nine years at the plant; I am afraid I am turning old before my time. I am 40 years old, but I feel older. I have left my life here. (Gustavo)

As a result of this fatigue, some were too tired and had little time after work to take on anything else:

I have worked so hard! My back is broken. I have put much strength and work harder. I am young, but my hands and my body are worsening. I haven't learned English as I would like to, but my day is over when I leave the plant. Sometimes I have no energy even to play with my children. (Ignacio)

Julia also discussed the drain of energy out of her:

> You have to have a lot of strength to perform these jobs. I lack energy. When I get
> home, I have to get ready for the next day. That's all I can do. My husband helps me,
> but this job is draining my energy day by day.

Despite the discomfort and hard work, they spoke of being lucky to have a job and a stable income. Yet they hurt, are in pain and are exhausted. This has both short and long term consequences. Clearly, they have mixed feelings about their lives:

> These jobs are hard. As I emphasize, they are very difficult. The hardest part is to get
> used to them, but thanks to the company we all have jobs. (Andrés)

Gustavo asserted:

> It is hard, but I am happy with this job. I like to live here, to earn money to pay my
> bills, and to help my family in Mexico. I am satisfied with my job; otherwise, I
> wouldn't be here.

Felipe expressed:

> Hopefully, God allows me to keep working here because this is a good job- *está*
> *chungón*- I am thankful.

Miriam described:

> I and my friends are very happy to have a job. When we gather together, we talk
> about it, and all of us agree. There are some who get the job and quit because they
> don't like these jobs, but I am happy with mine.

Ambivalence? Possibly. More clearly, they are conflicted between the good or acceptable and the bad or miserable. This is the work they cannot escape.

One After the Other: I Even Dreamed About It

The challenges that meatpacking workers face at their job are many and onerous. A common theme was the line speed and how this pushes them to work very fast, often resulting in physical harm. Additionally, because the line runs so fast and the meat pieces come one after the other, workers often run out of space and the pieces accumulate, leaving them even less space to work. To become distracted only makes it all worst:

> No matter where you are on the killing floor or what you do, the speed of the line is very fast. All the meat pieces come in between very short intervals; you are finishing one, and you have many more coming. You cannot get distracted. If your knife runs out of edge, you cannot stop to sharpen it. When your knife is dull you force your muscles, and you work with your arm or your wrist, and this hurts you. (Andres)

In order to maximize the volume of slaughtering, the line speed consistently runs too quickly making each job more difficult:

> I was not used to pigs; I got desperate because the pigs come one after the other the whole day. It was something I had never done. I even dreamed about it; I had nightmares about the pigs! I never see the barns empty; there are pigs the entire time, one after the other. (Beto)

Their injuries are corporeal, marking and harming their bodies:

> The lines run too fast! You have to work so quickly, and this harms you. I have a knob in my hand, and I got it because of that. I use my hands eight hours a day. I have to work fast eight hours a day. (Ignacio)

The work is inscribed on them literally. And like a panoptic on, there is "always an eye on you."

Always An Eye On You

The line production jobs at the meat plant are designed to perform only one specific task. Workers have job assignments, and they mostly do the same task the whole shift. Supervisors are the ones who oversee the amount and quality of the product by close supervision over each worker. The workers management takes advantage of workers, pushing them by pushing the work line speed. Management is seen as manipulating workers who they believe will not quit or object because of their legal status and because they need the work:

> You have to deal with supervisors all the time. There is a lot of pressure from the supervisors, because they are the ones who operate the line. They adjust the line because they are told the amount of product required and they are in charge of getting it. Their job is to keep everything in place, including us. (Ignacio)

This close supervision was described as uncomfortable by some. They claimed that supervisors treated them as if they were slaves, and that they demanded from workers more than what workers can do. Supervisors too are under pressure to produce high quality large numbers. To achieve this, they implement strategies to meet the plant's goal. Supervisors are a difficult and troublesome element:

> Supervisors are free to assign you any kind of jobs. They are always there, and they are abusive. They insult workers, and they do whatever they want. If you are not sympathetic to them, they find the ways to let you know it. (Julia)

Most told about how supervisors mistreat employees using abusive language, exceeding their power, and creating tension amongst workers. There is a generalized tension expressed, showing the powerless position as opposed to the supervisor:

Supervisors are demanding, and you have to deal with them. The point here is that supervisors mistreat you and yell at you badly almost every day. (Daniel)

Supervisors also take advantage of the immigrant's powerless position in different ways. They use their power to assign worse or more demanding jobs to Mexicans. This was a generalized complaint about supervisor's practices, regardless of the supervisor's ethnicity. Supervision is challenging stressful and uncomfortable:

Supervisors demand more than what we can do. The job itself is hard; we have to slaughter 10 thousand pigs in 8 hours, and they make it harder. (Beto)

Language differences can be an additional stress and serves to keep supervisors and line workers apart. Most supervisors are Caucasian and English speakers; this contributes to misunderstandings and apparent negligence when judging workers' performance since either or both do not understand or communicate with each other. This raises tensions between workers and supervisors, and workers believe that they do what they can and language differences ads burden to their difficulties when they start their jobs.

It was hard when I started. I did not understand English, and I had a new job at the same time. Everything was new. I was not used to having someone constantly rushing me. That probably was one of my main challenges because there is always a supervisor behind you. Yelling and hurrying you. I didn't understand, but I was trying. (Felipe)

Considering that most come from agrarian communities in Mexico and Central America, their previous job experience was totally different from this plant. Commonly,

peasants work independently, outdoors, surrounded by nature. This shift to an indoor

machine driven environment with written rules was difficult:

> When you work on the line, there is a never ending job. What I don't like is that you
>
> always have someone telling you what to do. I wish I had a different type of job
>
> where there is nobody yelling and telling you what to do. I miss working outdoors by
>
> myself. (Gustavo)

The omnipresent eye, a tongue that does not speak your language, an ear that doesn't

understand being supervised, and the work and a place they do not want to be.

Being at a Place I Don't Like

The physical environment at the plant is miserable:

> Back in my home town, I worked on the fields. I used to walk, drink water, and enjoy
>
> fresh air. I felt free there. In contrast, here I am locked up, it is cold and too noisy, and
>
> I have to yell to talk to others. (Ignacio)

"Stressful, unpleasant, and unfriendly" were words used to describe their job site. The

term "stressful environment" was specifically mentioned when describing the use of

safety equipment, running the machinery, and manipulating the sharp tools for

slaughtering and packing products. The second cause of discomfort was the extreme air

temperatures. Participants in this study described two different areas at the plant: "*la*

caliente," or the hottest area, and "*la fria,*" the cold area.

La caliente is where slaughtering takes place. All year round, *la caliente* is

extremely hot, and workers complain about the high temperatures:

There is a section where the temperature is so high the whole year. It goes up to 110

or 115 degrees Fahrenheit. In summer, there are times when workers lose

consciousness from being exposed to those temperatures. (Andres)

La fria is where the meat is processed into boxed pork or products like sausages, bacon,

and ham. In order to avoid bacterial reproduction, temperatures are kept low, making this

as uncomfortable as the hotter area. Some workers more easily handle the cold:

In the cold area, there are only clean body parts. The benefit of being in this section is

that you do not have to deal with the hot temperatures you have to contend with in the

slaughterhouse. On the contrary, you have to protect yourself from the cold. But in

reality, this is not pleasant, either, because you are cold the whole day. There is not

much choice. (Felipe)

In combination with low or high temperatures are other impacts on the workers which are

beyond their control. For example, on Mondays pork corps have been in the freezers over

the weekend, and they are very frozen and stiff:

Mondays are very tough, because the pigs are stored in the coolers from Friday night

until Monday morning. They are very hard because they are so frozen, and yet we

have the same amount of pigs within the same schedule and at the same line speed.

Your fingers get frozen. (Daniel)

Another reality is noise. Live animals come in on a ramp and workers render them

unconscious. Then another worker shackles their rear hocks and lifts them so that they

are hanging upside down on a chain. The chain runs continuously through the plant, and

machines and belts are constantly running and pulling the carcasses to work lines.

Workers wear earplugs to keep out the sound and protect their ears. In this noisy environment verbal communication is impossible:

I feel stressed because of the noise, and I didn't like to be standing for 8 hours without talking to others. (Ignacio)

In addition to the noise, there is odor and live fearful animal emulsion. Thus, it is seen how the physical and emotional tone of the plant work floor works as stressor:

One of the many things we have to deal with here is that instead of grabbing a piece of meat, you can pierce a co–worker beside you. We are very close to each other, and accidents can happen easily. (Andres)

All light is artificial; it is a windowless closed environment, a prison to those who grew up working under the sky in the open fields doing agriculture:

You have to be locked in all year round in order to maintain the temperature. I don't like the sensation of being in a locked place. I used to work in the open fields, and I felt free under the sunlight. (Gustavo)

Too close to each other, too fast, too noisy, too smelly, and dangerous. It is a place workers do not like.

Next Could be a Coworker or Me, We Have to Live with This

Almost all were injured by "accident." This is a daily occurrence and their bodies show the injurious inscriptions—some scars showing where they had not been well treated:

I have an injured hand because of the hard work; see this "ball" here? I am not a doctor, but I am sure that if I went to a doctor, he would recommend surgery. But you

know what the consequences of the surgery would be: I would have to rest in order to recover. It is clear to me that if this happens, I'll be fired. (Ignacio)

Taken together, Andres pulls together life in the plant:

These types of jobs are tough—they kill you. Personally, let me tell you, when I arrived at this place, I used to like to dance, laugh, and mess around with my friends. I was able to spin, jump, and bend—you know those things. Now, after 14 years in this place, I cannot bend without my back aching, or feeling pain in my hips and knees.

Danger is everywhere exacerbated by the extensive use of knives and other hand tools which are very sharp and lethal:

I have never hurt myself, but I have seen many accidents at the plant. There was this American guy that had the habit of putting the knife by his mouth when the line stopped. One day he was caught off guard when the line started abruptly, and he badly lacerated his face. I also saw another guy get his shirt trapped by the hooks; those electric blades peeled him off! He came back after a month but never was able to do hard work again. (Daniel)

While Miriam hasn't suffered an injury yet, she talked about risks:

Not long ago, one guy got hurt very badly. He was using the saw—that one that works with pressure. It fell from his hands and landed on one of them. Now, he cannot work anymore because he lost his hand.

Beyond the knives which are notably sharp, often the equipment is heavy an unknown:

You are always in danger because even for those working with the machines—they can press a button accidentally and cause an accident that way! (Laura)

Knives and heavy equipment are used to cut flesh and these are unpredictable raising the risk to injury, so too the chemicals. Little training in their tools also raises risk:

> Some time ago, one guy died at the plant. The poor man had only been working at the plant for 5 weeks! Nobody knows the cause; he was in sanitation, working with the hose, where there is a lot of pressure and steam. Maybe it was because of that, or maybe it was the chemicals he was exposed to. (Julia)

Chemicals accumulate in improperly ventilated spaces and workers breathe the toxic air which presents a risk to their health and well-being:

> There was a very tough job, which consisted of taking the brain of the pigs out of their skulls. It was done with an air hose. The workers had this type of air compressor to remove the brains of the animals. Particles of the brains would blow in the air, and despite wearing masks, workers breathed in those particles. They got sick, and their hands or legs became paralyzed. (Gustavo)

Overtime, they master the world and become less afraid and somewhat less at risk to injury. To survive is to be and to act "tough and strong."

If You Show You Are Weak, It is Even Worse

A main complaint is the pervasive presence of racism. Discrimination based on ethnicity is painfully present and exerted by supervisors. Workers experience feelings that they have been "weak;" these challenges deplete their sense of self and competency leading to existential resignation and, for some, despair:

> What I have seen is that since they [the supervisors] know that many Latinos are illegal, they feel that they can take advantage of this. They yell at us and insult us.

Also, Americans don't get the hardest jobs. Latinos do. I think that is a form of

discrimination. Latinos get the worst jobs, and we have no right to complain. (Julia)

This despair is in part as a consequence of their unwillingness to raise complaints

with plant management, the Union, the Minnesota Departments of Labor or Human

Rights, or to any agency or individual who could respond. They fear retaliation and they

do not want to lose their jobs:

> I don't know the migration status of my coworkers, but I think they are afraid, and
>
> they just do not say anything. Supervisors insult them, yell at them, and assign the
>
> worst jobs to them to make their lives miserable. (Andres)

Latinos are not the only ethnic minority of the plat. Somali and Europeans also

work there. The plant professes equality on its online manual: [The plant] "is fully

committed to expanding the diversity of its force. We are an equal opportunity employer

and do not discriminate based on race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, sex,

age, disability or status as veteran."

Yet workers talked about racism against Mexicans. Typically they, the recent

immigrants, have limited English language skills and lack documents:

> They discriminate against us because we are Latinos. They know we don't have
>
> documents and that are we are here illegally, and this makes things harder for us.
>
> They know that most Latinos are illegal, so they take advantage of us. They insult us.
>
> They yell at us. They are rude. They do these things because they know they can get
>
> away with them. (Laura)

Their American coworkers also discriminated against them:

At the plant, it is said that we Latinos take away the jobs from Americans. Although

they know that we all sweat by working hard, they always complain and try to get the

easiest jobs. We do not take jobs away from them; they simply do not like our jobs.

On top of this, they treat us badly and they insult us for nothing all the time. (Miriam)

Many believe that Mexicans are taking away jobs from locals. This was feeding their

despair and existential dilemma of silence in the face of discriminatory abuse:

There is one American worker who calls us *wet-backs* every day, and says bad things

about Mexico. What happens is that he does not like hard jobs. As Mexicans, we have

to work hard, even if we don't like it, because we need to work. That is what we came

here to do. (Daniel)

Interestingly, workers are told that they can be fired if they hold and act on racist

sentiments; supervisors want workers to work together as a team and to respect other

workers. The words become meaningless; it is they who openly discriminate against the

workers:

There is a lot of racism at the plant. They do not like Mexicans even though racism is

prohibited to all workers. They [the supervisors] say that we all have to work

together, and that we cannot be selfish or racists, and if we are, we will be fired.

However, they mistreat Mexicans. It is clear that they do not like us. (Beto)

Racism is more than words in the plant. It is found in the way jobs are assigned; whatever

its forms, it feeds tension:

There is a lot of racism at the plant, and sometimes, you cannot bear it. I had a

coworker who was constantly mistreated by his supervisor. His supervisor always

yelled at him. One day, he ended up punching his supervisor out! (Ignacio)

Being a worker is a miserable, painful, debilitating, and demeaning way to earn living. But this is not living.

Theme IV: Living like a Machine

Compared to their lives in their communities of origin, their lives in the Midwest were profoundly different. Here they live at work, go home to rest, and again work in a routine with little variation. This is experienced as living like a machine: the same thing every day with no time for friendships and not being able to travel.

Same Thing Every Day

They work tedious, dangerous jobs, with unvarying routine breeding alienation, despair, anger, and frustration. But they work for the self, the family and those back home. Daniel, for example, reflected on his experiences as the following illustrates. This is not "back home," the place of sun, family, farm, and poverty. This is not life with friends. They live on and by a different clock. This is not life as they know it, but as mechanical, driven, and relentless. And they are powerless to change the clock. They are isolated and feel alienated and experience themselves as robotic. To contest this mode of being each develops ways of response:

I have had the same job for years. It is the same thing every day: I change my clothes, and I go downstairs to the same place every day. What I do to escape from my routine is to recall my memories—you know, silly things that make you laugh. I also think about my wife back in Mexico. She is so beautiful. (Daniel)

Imagination is a different country, so too memory. They travel there, disconnecting in this capacity so that they can disconnect from their work place as well:

My first job was packing trotters. It was really simple. I just needed to put them into

the boxes and weigh them. That was it. You don't think; you don't realize what

happens around you. (Julia)

In their minds, they can create, grow, make things whole, see their part in a bigger

process, unlike on the meat line where their work is mindless and lacking creativity,

imagination, and humanity. It is difficult to think about them making a concrete

contribution to anything. They give no value or pride to their work:

Here I became a living dead man. I felt like a robot. My whole life turned into that:

work, eat, sleep and again work, eat, sleep. I didn't feel like I was doing anything else

but that. (Andres)

Without a larger frame of reference about where to place their work and how to value it,

they are like the pieces of meat they produce:

I do not do anything but take notes and switch levers. I don't like it because it is so

boring working as a robot. (Laura)

Outside of work could be the space and time for renewal, happiness, family, and

play. But they are too tired:

My husband and I work at the same plant. We work the second shift; we start at three

in the afternoon, and we finish by midnight. We leave the plant and we go right to

bed. The next day I get up, prepare lunch, and we take off to work again.…

Sometimes I don't want to get up; I feel like my life is senseless. It is just the same

thing every day. (Miriam)

"The same thing every day" leaves little time for friendship because family comes first,

and then work.

No Time For Friendships

Workers assign a high value to friendships, but the plant is no place to socialize. The whole environment is designed toward working and production rather than promoting the humane personal interaction among workers. Most of the day, they are intensely absorbed in their demanding routine. However they grab others when they can:

I commonly have lunch with the same people. We bring our lunch and share the table every day. We have to eat fast because we don't have a long time for lunch. (Ignacio) There are only short breaks when you hardly can have your lunch or go to the bathroom. Depending on the speed of the line, and where you are in the process, you can only have a few minutes of time to talk with the workers besides you. (Julia)

Changing work sites makes it difficult to make buddies or friends as well:

Sometimes when we are working at the line we can speak a little, if there is time or if the noise allows it… What also happens is that there are many changes every day… sometimes you have these coworkers, sometimes you have these others. In some places, the same people are always there, but in others, there are always new workers. (Andrés)

The space and time for lunch and the common areas do not provide time for friends either:

All workers have lunch at the same time, and it is the only moment you kind of see each other. At the end of the day, you don't have time for friends either. Everybody leaves work quickly because there are obligations at home. (Laura)

Yet they want, even need colleagues in not friends:

We have to work together. We cannot be selfish. We have to teach the new workers,

because when they learn as we did, everything goes right. (Beto)

Supervisors are not, and cannot be, "friends" in any real sense. Nor are non-Spanish

speakers, or any other job categories. Segregation by race, status, or job title is reinforced

by their attitudes and actions:

I don't like to get into relationships with the *Mayordomos* [foremen]. It doesn't look

good. If I have to talk to them, I will, but I don't want to have any sort of relationship

with them. (Daniel)

Tired, alienated, with little time at and after work to socialize, their lot is dismal. Not

traveling makes it worse.

Not Being Able to Travel

Immigrant workers are mostly unable to travel. They cannot travel to visit family

and friends in their home communities because of their migration status. This means they

cannot spend holidays or attend important events with their families:

I have no documents and that's an inconvenience. I cannot travel to visit my family

but it is okay. I have been here for 6 years. My little brothers and sisters are getting

older. I miss them, of course. (Felipe)

Because of these familial, communal, and religious norms, practices, and obligations are

degraded which serves to make loneliness more pervasive:

I haven't seen my family for 8 years. I miss them so much! I have no documents to

travel, and it is dangerous. It doesn't make sense to put our lives in danger to go back

home, because it is not safe to travel. I don't have anyone here. I feel lonely, but what

can I do? (Beto)

The frustration of being unable to travel is linked directly to the fear of becoming detached from their families back home:

> I don't speak English, and I cannot easily find another job. I have to sacrifice myself and stay if I want to see my children finish school in Mexico. I have to be patient; I have been here for 9 years. I haven't been able to see them. I am afraid I am getting used to it. (Gustavo)

Their binds of wanting go home and not being able to be clear and poignant:

> I have been here for 4 years, and I would like to see my family. I miss them! I feel like leaving everything and going back for a while, but one has needs and has no choice. I am scared to travel because I don't have papers. It is sad sometimes. In the long run, my children are the ones who suffer because they have no father to raise them. (Hector)

All though they experience physical and emotional discrimination, they made it and are now stuck in it unless they want to leave the United States. This is their existential dilemma.

Theme V: Becoming the Desired Unwanted

All of the participants were foreign born, coming from Mexico and Central America. They moved into this small Midwest to get a job, earn money, and to find a better life for their families. They ended up in the Midwest either because they knew someone already there, or because they were told by their social networks that there were jobs available. Cultural and socioeconomic differences among local residents and newcomers were described by participants. The causes of these tensions—language barriers, cultural practices, and anti-foreign sentiments—applied as racial markers. They

emphasized the cold attitude held by locals towards immigrants, who also described their feelings of isolation. Thematically, this provided some examples.

This section is divided in the following subthemes: Chilly welcome; Carrying the stigma limits places to go; Feeling isolated; and Those Güeros are racist and isolate us. These capture the lived realities of getting to, and living in small U.S. Midwest towns. It is not a wholesome or pretty story.

Chilly Welcome

They made it! They arrived in the United States and made their way to the small Midwest town using predecessors as informants and guides. They had a trail and took it, they brought their biographies—their personal, familial, and cultural selves—and they were not welcomed.

Given language and cultural differences, they could not easily integrate into the local mainstream. Shunned by locals, and for positive reasons, they came to associate with others like themselves—other economic migrants from Mexico or Central America. Getting support, comfort, and advice they used and transformed local resources to meet their needs according to their culture to function as social beings.

They received and experienced a "cold "reception and experienced strong barriers dividing them from the American population:

I want to be sincere: When I came to this community, I did not feel welcome. It is not easy. I feel rejected by all people. There will be always a cold reception for foreigners. (Andrés)

Meeting local resistance, they modified their hopes and dreams about being "good neighbors" as they had been while back home:

> When I came here, I felt it wasn't going to be easy. They haven't bothered me yet, but
>
> what I can say is that I don't feel at home here. (Beto)

Here, working and isolated into ghettos of others like themselves, they are isolated from

American friendships or realities, finding themselves pushed toward others like

themselves. Participants explained that as a result of the locals' lack of interest in

interrelating, they did not feel an attachment to the community or its residents. Instead

they tried to cultivate friendships with Latinos to find support and overcome hard times.

Miriam expressed her sentiment about this issue:

> We feel we don't belong to this community. Where we live now, our neighbors don't
>
> talk to us, and it is like we don't exist. What makes me feel content here is that I have
>
> Latino friends; if it weren't for them, I don't know what I would do.

Locals have completely different experiences, beliefs, and values from the recent

immigrants. They are shocked by their ways:

> There is always someone who turns to see you like you are a weird object here. This
>
> happens even when you are just out walking! I like to walk, and I have seen adults
>
> and youth stop their cars to see me. (Gustavo)

Locals do not engage them or try to bring them into their local worlds:

> There are some locals who don't like us. For example, last summer, there was a group
>
> of elders saying bad things about us. I think they don't have anything else to do then
>
> bother people. (Ignacio)

Unsurprisingly, they experience themselves as "outsiders" and feel unwelcome:

> I don't feel at home. This is a cold house. In our country, we feel at home. It is our
>
> land, and we feel free. We are just here temporarily. We do not belong here. (Laura)

Having chosen to leave home, itself a momentous and wrenching decision, they braved danger to reach the United States. Once here, the people were as cold as the weather. They became isolated into a ghetto.

Carrying the Stigma Limits Places to Go

Locals believe immigrants are job-thieves:

I feel the rejection from many Americans here. Many have told me, 'You Mexicans take away our jobs! Go back home.' (Andrés)

Immigrants are stigmatized by this label. This trope works to isolate, marginalize, and demonize them:

There is always a fear. It has been a long time since the rumors started to spread about immigration officers coming to raid the plant. Last year, they came to the Mexican stores. They were there, and sometimes they come to the apartment buildings and they knock on the doors. They are always looking for Latinos. (Julia)

These negative reactions lead to feelings of being unsafe:

We don't feel welcome, but we have to stay here. Here, we have our jobs. I was watching the TV news, and some people were saying that they want to bring the immigration officers and all that. There is fear that you can be stopped by a policeman, or that immigration officers can come to your home. I think we are not safe. (Julia)

Feeling victimized and unsafe, never sure if they will be deported, they live day-to-day insecure:

At least all of us who have no documents are aware that we might not be here for long. We are always in danger because within seconds, they can catch and kick us out. That's the way it is. (Beto)

They develop personal strategies for dealing with these social and psychological tensions:

There is always fear. I have my family in Mexico and I have no documents. I don't bring my wife here because what if they [the Immigration officers] catch me or catch her? Then she'll be here and I'll be deported, or she'll be deported and I'll be here. I am afraid of having my whole family here. You end up saying she'll stay and I'll go. (Hector)

All of this is made worse by their lack of "papers"—legal U.S. documents. At any moment, they can be caught and deported. Especially important is a driver's license, which they cannot get without other legal documents. They must drive but legally "cannot" drive. Places are far apart and there is no transportation system in small Midwest towns. Someone must drive, even if illegally.

Neither my husband nor I have a driver's license. He has been driving for 10 years and thank God he hasn't had any problem and the same for me. It is not possible to have a driver's license without documents. (Julia)

No papers, no car registration, and no car insurance: to survive they must live illegally:

I only have an ID, and I don't have a driver's license. I only have God's [driver's] license, and he goes with me and protects me. (Hector)

One form of illegality is car insurance under the name of someone they do not know:

I have not been able to have a driver's license. I bought my truck and had to register it under somebody's name. I had to do the same thing with the insurance. (Felipe)

That illegal act raises their socio-legal risk of arrest and deportation:

> Because the papers we have, you don't know, sometimes you even have to pay for other things that are under that name; I have friends who even pay child support because the owner of the papers is charged with child support. (Beto)

Nearly grounded because of lack of transportation, living and socializing in ghettos of those like themselves, in a small town without much public space, they reproduce their home country in the Midwest:

> We get together often with our friends. We gather with our partners and make *tamales,* and as I told you, it is among friends. We buy a young cow and roast it; we buy a pig and cook it. We like *carnitas and chicharrones*, and we drink some beers. We drink socially and have a good time. (Andrés)

One local and universal space they do use is the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is not only a religious place, but is also a space where they share food and spend time with similar others:

> We have only Latino friends; we visit each other particularly in summer. We have barbecues at home or at the park. We also go to the Catholic Church. We go to mass. The church serves Latinos, and also Americans on a different schedule. Sometimes, we have activities after mass and bring traditional food. It is fun! (Miriam)

Other public spaces are little used. Felipe goes to the public library for books and tapes to learn English:

I go to the Catholic Church. I also go to the library sometimes on my own. I check out books to learn English, and I spend some free time there.

They also most eat, buy clothes, and "stuff" for their children. Without legal transport, this too is difficult and dangerous:

> When I go out, I go to the stores to buy food. I mainly go shopping at the stores or spend time outside in my back yard, having barbecues and playing with my children. (Hector)

Julia also spoke about the few places she goes:

> We go shopping at Wal-Mart or at the Super-Value. Those are the places I go. It is not like being in Mexico. There, you go all over the place; you feel that you are in your own land. Here we could, but we do not do that.

She added:

> There are not many places where people meet in this community. Maybe the parks and the stores are the only places. There, you meet Americans because we go to the same places. Just recently, there are new Mexican stores; otherwise, we go to the same places.

Similarly, Gustavo said:

> When the weather allows, we go to the stores or to the park. There are some birthday parties or celebrations with our relatives, and we also go to those. But the place I like to go most during the summer is to the soccer field. We meet to play during the summer. There are a few teams and I meet my friends there.

Their dream life in America turns out to be difficult and dangerous. They are at risk to injury and firing at work, and isolated by racism at home.

Those *Güeros* are Racists and Isolate Us

The Midwest in particular has been settled by European migrants who formed new farm communities and peaceful neighborhoods. This generation is not welcoming to these Latino workers who then experience racism:

> I personally think we will never be accepted in the community, Americans do not
>
> trust Latinos, there is always a question about the legal status, and there is not trust.
>
> (Andrés)

They sense a generalized racist attitude toward them, which occasionally gets specific and concrete:

> There are people here that don't like us; for example last summer there were some
>
> people protesting with signs because we live here, they don't like immigrants. When I
>
> see those people on the streets I ignore them; they say bad things about us. (Ignacio)

Specific concrete racist acts can be experienced anywhere in town, for example by store clerks:

> I have been discriminated a number of times at the local stores and let me tell you we
>
> don't pay too much attention but the truth is that we feel very bad because of that.
>
> Many of those Güeros are racist; you can see it at the stores, at the streets wherever.
>
> (Laura)

Ignacio described his experiences at a local store:

> I remember once I went to the store and was waiting in line. I touched the band where
>
> you place your items and then the cashier told me not to touch there. Immediately,
>
> she sprayed it and started to clean the band as if I had rabies or I was poisonous or
>
> something.

Local stores are not only places where participants experience discrimination. The

Catholic Church where most of the participants go on Sundays is perceived as a place to

meet but also a place where immigrants experience discrimination:

> I don't have any American friends, even at the Catholic Church. There is mass for
>
> Latinos in Spanish and there is mass in English for Americans. (Julia)

Daniel has mixed feelings about all of this:

> I think Americans don't like us. I don't like this town either but I like my job.
>
> Americans greet you but they think you take away jobs from them. I think none of us
>
> feel welcome in this community but what can we do? We are not free to go
>
> everywhere any time.

But his is not the only view; Beto describes his belief that if they follow the rules, behave

themselves, and stay out of trouble they will be fine:

> In this community there are some residents that are racist. But I think not all are
>
> racist; even the police officers greet us. I think you are OK once you behave yourself.

Isolated into ghettos of migrants by racism, their illegal status, and their lack of

proper papers, the workers survive. In their minds and in their actions this survival is

made a bit easier by their living at once in two places—home and here.

Theme VI: Life in Two Places

Most have relatives and belongings in their home country which they feel

attached to. They are transnationally embedded, keeping ethnic and kin relations across

time and distance, and starting a new life in the new U.S. community where they work,

raise children, and are in new social networks, mainly with conationals. Their life here is

about: Hoping they'll do better here; Becoming the long distance provider; Enduring

attachments; and Dreaming of a better life.

Hoping They'll Do Better Here

Most of those having children try to provide them opportunities such as in

engaging in schools so they can learn English and becoming integrated into the local

community even if their parents cannot:

> All these years my wife has been a stay home mom. She takes care of our 3 children;
>
> they are 10, 6, and 4 years old. My wife also studies English; now she writes very
>
> well in English; she doesn't speak too much but she knows how to write. She plans to
>
> take classes to be a nurse. She says she is going to be sure our kids go to school and
>
> get a good life. (Ignacio)

Immigrants everywhere, and likely always, dream for the future of their children. This

provides inspiration to work to provide for their needs in order to realize these dreams:

> My wife goes to school; she is learning English. We have 2 daughters and she takes
>
> care of them. Our daughters were born here; they are Americans. There is a Child
>
> Care Center and she takes them there while she studies. We want our daughters to go
>
> to school and have a career; that is why my wife is learning English. (Gustavo)

Their dreams and expectations for their children are present starting when they are still

little:

> I moved from Mexico and after living here for two years I met my husband; we now
>
> have a 2 and a half year old daughter. I see an opportunity for her to learn another
>
> language, to go to school, and learn more than children do in Mexico. We plan to
>
> send her to school soon. (Laura)

They want their kids to become integrated with local children:

> I think is harder to bring your children here when they are grown, it would be harder for them to adapt to the culture. We want our daughters to go to school. Now they are learning English, they like to go to Head Start [a pre-school age program]. There they meet with other children and have a good time, like all children here. (Gustavo)

Parenting brings the workers closer to the community:

> As parents we have to help our children to revise their homework, and to organize everything for school. It is through the school that we also have the opportunity to send them to sport programs. My oldest son plays soccer; I take him for practices and games. On his team they are all Americans, he is the only Mexican. (Ignacio)

Childrearing in the United States is hectic, given their work, lives, and family schedule:

> I work at the plant, and have to run in the afternoon to pick up my children, and then go home to feed them, and start preparing everything for the following day. One has to pack everything they need when they are young: diapers, bottles, milk and all that. Sometimes I work Saturdays too; it means I only have Sunday to buy food and do the laundry. I also have to cook and take care of my husband. In this country there is no time to rest; you work and work and work. That's all that you do. (Julia)

Parenting in a busy life-schedule is made easier by relatives who help; showing again how family and network support their plans, efforts, and hopes:

> I met my husband at the plant; we are from the same town. We got together and now we have two children. When I had my children my mom took care of them; it allowed me to keep my job. I was lucky because I trust her; it is not good to leave your children with someone you don't know. (Julia)

Some others use their local networks as strategies to raise their children. This is the case

of one worker who separated from his American wife. He raised their children himself.

He, as the rest of participants, worked hard to educate them and to get them ahead:

I had a night shift but my ex-wife left and left my daughter and son and I took care of

them. I moved to a day shift so that I was able to stay with them after school. I raised

them; one school teacher rented a room for me at her house. She used to babysit my

children while I was working. I needed to work hard to pay my bills, to sustain my

children. Now they both are grown; my son is in the army and soon he'll go to Iraq.

(Daniel)

These networks become a school and knowledge bank about raising kids in the United

States:

I spend a lot of time with my family; we often meet with my brothers and sisters, and

my brothers and sisters in law. We cook and eat together, we visit each other, and I

can say it is my circle. (Ignacio)

If adults have a hard time integrating into local worlds, their children do better

because the parental efforts help them. Kids are one focus of their passion and work, as

they are for those that left them "behind."

Becoming the Long Distance Provider

Some of the workers followed the traditional pattern of the father migrating, and

leaving wife and children in the care of extended family and friends at the community of

origin. This is what a provider does, to work and send money home—remittances that

reduce hardship. Family separation is difficult for all; and to work hard, earn much, send

money home, and find ways to come together becomes an inspiration:

When I moved here, my youngest daughter cried and cried over the phone. She

wanted me to go back soon; she missed me a lot. (Beto)

This social structural and cultural pattern of the father leaving to work in the United

States can bring about complex issues and troubles to their children. As children grow

they tend to become "disobedient". The dad is missing and the mothers' parents help out.

Both sides, dad, mom and kids and grandparent, are lonely and life can be more difficult.

All are hurt and suffer in this arrangement:

I think that children are the ones that suffer when you are away; they turn rebels

because you are not with them. They do not obey their mother the same because one

is stronger with them. (Hector)

He continues:

My children want to come here but I don't bring them first because I don't have

money to pay their trip, and second because it is too liberal they'll be spoiled here.

(Hector)

Family relations and feelings and thoughts about each other can get confused:

I wanted to come here to pay for my children's education. First it was elementary

school, then middle school, and now it is college. I hope they'll understand my

sacrifice. I think I will not recognize them; they have to understand I left to get a job.

Sometimes I think about the time that had passed, I miss them but the encounter will

be difficult. (Gustavo)

So too communications among them. However, absent fathers can use phones to

communicate to remote villages. Pre-paid phone cards at low cost have shortened the

distances:

> I call my children often because it is easier to stay in touch now, I explain them that I it is better for them to stay with their mom. I provide money; they take care of their mom. We have long conversations. (Hector)

Daniel also takes care of his wife and his wife's children; they go to school, and he participates actively in the family:

> I remarried with a Mexican woman. She has three children. Their dad left them without any place to live; they are good children; they call me dad and I call them my children. Now they are doing better, they will graduate from high school soon. We'll throw a party and I'll be there to celebrate with them.

Phone calls can be about the most mundane realities of everyday life:

> I speak with my children each Saturday, we talk about what they do, how they are doing at school, everything. (Gustavo)

Beyond one's children, are the others; family, relatives and friends:

> I am in contact with my family. We talk over the phone weekly. They have a cell phone as I have here; it is more costly there than here. I don't fail on calling them every week and sending their little money. (Felipe)

A simple phone call, easily taken for granted, can keep family bonds alive, as can money sent home. These work to maintain enduring relationships.

Enduring Attachments

The workers' stories about their enduring attachments are in large part about the people and belongings left behind in their home country. Some have close relatives, property, and strong relationships back home, while others do not, but all have something waiting for them "back home". Those with close family "back home" tell how their lives

are centered on fulfilling their own and the others' needs, maximizing income while staying healthy through hard work. Many do not want material belongings in the United States—living in a rented room and sending most of their earnings "home".

Beto and his close family back home are strongly attached; he is not able to visit them because does not have papers. They support and encourage him to stay as long as he can. He lives with some in laws and rents a room in the basement. His wife wants to open a grocery store back home, and he thinks that he might help her to do that:

My wife and my children are there (Mexico). They are happy because now I am used to be here and I sustain them. So far my son lives here and I have sent 4 brand new cars back home. They are doing better now because of the money we sent them.

Gustavo too sends money for his children's education in Mexico. He is saving money to buy a truck to bring to Mexico for his retirement:

My wife and three children are in Mexico; my children are at school and she takes care of them. She doesn't work. I work overtime to pay all the bills. I work from sunrise to sunset to pay the bills and to save some money to buy a truck to take on my way back to Mexico.

Hector also spoke about his home town attachments:

I have my wife and my 4 children back in Mexico. I was able to build my house as I am able to send money down there; I have a small piece of land too. My mother is also alive. She is old; we have helped her to have a comfortable life.

Daniel has many attachments in Mexico, a new family, is building a new house and already bought a house for his parents. He travels to his home town constantly to supervise the construction and to deal with family affairs:

I have my wife and her 3 children back in Mexico [step children]. I also have my

parents, 3 brothers, and one sister. I have all I own back in Mexico. Here I don't have

anything but my car. There I have my houses, my animals, and my piece of land.

Some workers started families in the United States, and left their parents and

relatives back home. However, they still experience attachments there. Julia lives with

her husband and two children in the United States while her parents who brought her to

the Midwest went back to Mexico:

My parents are in Mexico now; they went back after 9 years here. There have a small

grocery store. They own a house; my father is also growing some crops. My

grandparents and the rest of my family, my uncles and cousins, are also there. They

work in the fields; there are not companies like these here.

Miriam has her close family in the United States as well—her husband and her

youngest son. She also has ties with her country of origin where she has siblings and

property. She travels home whenever she can to see her sisters and check on her property:

I have my sisters back there, they helped me when I was raising my children, now I

send them a little money whenever I can; they also took care of my mom before she

died. I am in debt with them. I own two houses in Mexico and was able to get them

because of my job here. I travel once a year.

Andrés remarried in the United States; he has two independent daughters that left home.

He has relatives and some property back in his home town. He visits at least once a year

to check in there:

In Mexico I have two brothers and one sister with her whole family; regularly I go

once or twice a year, and spend a week there. I own a house there, and have some

milk cows, meat cows, turkeys, and chickens on my ranch.

So too, Gustavo, who migrated while very young to the United States, where he started a

family. He now owns a house in Mexico which his parents take care of:

I have my parents back in Mexico; they are old. They are retired. My parents haven't

come to the U.S. I wanted to bring them but they didn't want to come. My father has

his land there and he likes to live there and to work in the fields. I own a house there

where my parents live.

In violation of the law of physics which says that one cannot be in two places at once,

these workers exist and live simultaneously in different mental and physical spaces. They

build a "nest egg" back home and plan for retirement there. Meanwhile they live and

work here-and dream of a better life.

Dreaming of a Better Life

Some participants think about their future and their retirement. They are planning

and living so as to have a secure retirement back home:

My dreams are to retire in Mexico. I am a hundred percent sure. I think I am going to

retire earlier, and then I think I'll have something solid for me and my family. I have

thought to establish some businesses in Mexico and leave for good. (Andres)

Gustavo works hard to send money to his family in Mexico; he has been in United States

for ten years:

If it were not because of the expenses of my children's education I would be in

Mexico owning any kind of business. I think I'll keep working for a while at least

until my children are done with school. For me in the future I would like to buy a truck to move around in Mexico. That is my dream.

Daniel started a new family five years ago; he has two grown children. He remarried and now also takes care of his stepchildren. He is committed to supporting his wife and her children's education. He dreams of working less; he is tired:

I'll pay for their education, the oldest want to be a teacher; she is very responsible and has good grades. I am very happy because of that, it is why I am still here…I am so tired; I want to be in Mexico sitting there doing nothing. That is my dream.

Miriam works hard for her future. She owns property, both in Mexico and the United States and she plans to retire with her husband in Mexico:

I think when we are old we'll sell everything and head off to Mexico, if my children want to stay here they can. Meanwhile if God wants; we want to buy a Duplex to rent here. We have to work hard to be independent and have enough money for whatever comes.

Gustavo thinks differently. He has three daughters to take care of:

I see myself working I don't know if at the same place but I have to work hard for many more years. I would like my daughters to go to school and to be someone. I want a career for them. I don't want them to be like me.

Finally, Ignacio thinks about his future:

I have told my wife if our children are going to do their life here or elsewhere I don't know, but we have to build our future. You and I will be alone and need something for the future either here or in Mexico. Old people here, no offense, I don't think we will stay here because then we will be inside at home all the time. On the contrary, if

we go to our country we will buy a *rancho* or something else, and we will be busy

with our cows, and then our children will visit us when they have time.

Living here, now. Thinking about there and them and when. Migration's payoff is in its

futurity and in the future for the workers and their families.

Theme VII: The Payoff

The payoff of the migration move was a persistent theme among the participants.

Despite many difficulties, and their uncertain future, these workers somehow manage to

live in the present, with their eyes on the future. Their present is surrounded by

conationals similar to them who see their bounding connections as instrumental tools to

achieving their dreams. The Payoff is about present and future, both; it is about Families

getting ahead; Vacations never had; and Celebrating *Quinceañeras*.

Families Getting Ahead

Upon arrival, Latino immigrants want to find a job, make money, pay their debts,

and send money back to their families and relatives in their home country. This means in

part that both they here and their families there are in new, typically better economic

conditions. This has consequences for them, as shown, and also for the people back

home. The latter now have money, have improved their living standards, and acquired

technology, houses, and gone to school. These economic changes can bring changes in

self-perception:

At the time of my arrival to the US my life changed dramatically. I could say from

being poor to being rich. I started to feel like I was somebody. (Andres)

The concept of families ahead differs among workers, according to their status on the social scale, as well as their level of education and types of needs. Education was highly appreciated among some and they see it as an investment that will pay off later:

> My wife does not work; she takes care of my children in Mexico. I provide money and my children go to a private school. The oldest will be an Environmental Engineer, the second one a Criminal Psychologist, and the youngest hasn't decided yet. (Gustavo)

Education is valued not only for children but also for siblings Their achievements are a source of deep satisfaction, despite the fact that sometimes they do not receive anything more than the pride of being the agent of it:

> I supported my brothers to go to school; the 3 of them already graduated from college in Mexico, where all of them live with their families. I built a house for my parents; it was my mothers' desire and I pleased her. I raised my children, and recently started a new family. Now they are doing well, that is the reason why I keep working. (Daniel)

For other participants education wasn't a priority, the well-being of family was measured in terms of material possessions and enough income to raise children:

> When my children were young I worked hard to feed them; now is different. My children can find a way of living by themselves. I am done; I own a house in Mexico, a house here, and want to buy a duplex with my husband just as investment. Now I can start thinking about some savings for the future. (Miriam)

For very poor families, remittances are used to improve quality of life and there is less investment. They use money for food and very basic items. However it also represents satisfaction:

I decided to come to the US to have a better life for my family; when the first

paycheck came I was very happy because I was able to send a little money to them;

they really needed it. When the second check came I was even happier because my

salary was raised. I will not disappoint my parents; now they can buy things with the

money I send, they can buy food, furniture, and things money can buy. (Felipe)

Money for parents and children are the most common pattern. It is interesting to

notice that some are working hard to get ahead for their own family and despite that they

are still concerned about their parents' well-being, and stretch their income to send

remittances for their benefit as well:

If I had a job in Mexico I wouldn't come here. Because of my job I have been able to

earn money to sustain my family, to have food, to build a house. A house I couldn't

afford if I weren't here; I also had helped my mom, sending her money to buy food,

to make her life comfortable, they are not rich but at least they are doing better.

(Hector)

For those having families in the United States, their priority is to sustain their families

here and now, and their payoff is more tangible:

I have a family here and I am in charge of everything. I have money to pay the bills. I

would like to buy a house but maybe later, I cannot make it now. I have to sustain my

wife, and my two daughters. They are young and are going to start school soon.

(Gustavo)

Ignacio started a family in the United States, and describes the payoff of his migration

here and now:

> My main satisfaction is to bring my salary to my family. I have been able to buy a
> house, to get enough money and buy things for my family, to help my parents back in
> Mexico, and to build a house there too.

Similarly, Andrés has had more years working at the plant and has been able to use his
income not only to cover needs, but also to have a wealthier life style:

> So far I have bought 4 brand new trucks, here where we are it is my second house; I
> own another house that is fully paid. When you own the house where you live, your
> family does better. I live very happy here and own many things I never dreamed of.

Women also contribute with their income to sustain their families. Back in their
home country there are not many opportunities for them to make money. Their life has
changed and they are experiencing satisfaction by being economically active. Some
women help their husbands to sustain their families; but most importantly they are also
able to have some savings:

> Now I make money; back in Mexico I wasn't able to make money; my family either.
> The idea is to cover our children's expenses and to have some savings as well. You
> know things to make our life easier. (Julia)

Laura is a young mother too and she described the payoff of her sacrifices:

Here one works to earn money and then if one likes something it is possible to buy it, in
Mexico it is not the same, because there is no money. Even if you want something there
is no way to buy it, here is different. Here I earn money; I can have a better life.

The contradictions and the conflicts originated in part from the unwelcome
reception in the small Midwest town, and by the difficult and miserable work
environment which too are compensated by a positive economic impact on workers and

workers' families. This economic improvement provides satisfaction and also allows new experiences, even to enjoy vacations they never had.

Vacations I Never Had

In general, vacation is seen by some workers as a social right, while for others vacations are a basic psychological need for human beings, to get away from routine and mainly from the work place. Planning for and taking vacations to the home country is part of the payment for one's hard work. For a few, vacations are possible—only for those settled and stable individuals that possess legal papers:

We have vacations every year; we try to go to Mexico very often. We have to have some money because when we visit we have to bring at list a present for each one. When we are in Mexico we go here and there, we visit family, friends; and also visit the Virgin of Guadalupe. Since we are Catholic, we must go and visit our *Virgencita*. The city is far away and we spend our savings here and there and we feel great because we can bring some happiness to my sisters that once took care of my mother's illness until the last hour. We have vacations for a couple of weeks. Lots of fun. When we come back everything is over, we go back to our routine to our hard work to save some pesos again. (Miriam)

Vacations are an opportunity to express gratitude to close families who have limited resources:

I have two brothers, one sister, and more relatives in Mexico. I travel there once or twice a year; I stay one or two weeks; depends. I have my house and a ranch. There we have a good time with our family. Last year we went in a cruise. We spend some money but we have to enjoy life somehow. (Andres)

Vacations also an opportunity to regain membership in the community of origin:

I go to Mexico 3 or 4 times a year, I like to go to spend time with my wife and her

children. Many people know me at my town; there I can rest, I eat well, like a king,

you never eat well here, I am always welcome and people care about me. I also spend

some time looking at the construction I still have there, it is almost done. (Daniel)

Vacations back home are a tangible "payoff" for living in the United States as well as a

time to celebrate *Quinceañeras* in Mexico.

Celebrating *Quinceañeras*

Among the payoffs of work, is the possibility to enjoy traditions transnationally.

Through transnational rites such as *Quinceañeras*, migrants make culture and family real

and maternal. This allows them to be and to live like they should, as if they were back

home—this means that they are "just like they lived at home".

Celebrating *Quinceañeras* back in Mexico is a modern transnational ritual that

metaphorically makes statements about ongoing membership in one's community of

origin. *Quinceañeras* also represent a onetime great expense, like a wedding, which can

take years of savings. *Quinceañeras* are the celebration of a daughter's 15th birthday and

their family's rewards:

I have been here for 8 years; I miss my family. Only three years ago my youngest

daughter turned 15 years. We celebrated it with a *Quinceañera*; it was very pretty. I

sent the money to have a very good party; I spent around $10,000. I couldn't go

because I don't have papers to come back; I just sent the money, my wife and

relatives took care of everything. They sent me the pictures, and she looks beautiful,

she is a *Señorita* now. (Beto)

I threw a *Quinceañera* party for my step daughter, but before this one I had one for my niece, and one for my daughter. It was the third one. We had more than eight hundred guests. I was there of course I was dressed up; I looked very elegant welcoming our guests. We rented a very pretty car to take her to the church. We fed all people; you have to be generous with your neighbors, friends, and relatives. We had a huge fest; we bought cows, pigs, and chickens. We also bought liquor and beverages for everybody, and the cake was sent from here. People celebrate Quinceañeras in a very fancy style. That is why I am still here. I spent a lot of money; the celebration was very special I felt very important hosting our guests. (Daniel)

This event, the last described here, ends the presentation of findings on a happy note, one which gives a different tone to the difficult and painful work and lives that these workers experience in the United States.

The reader has met these ten workers through quotes, grounding the themes of their lives, as found by phenomenological analysis of long face-to-face interviews. Theirs is a difficult, painful, dangerous life, as they tell it, less enjoyable than they hoped, but one which is economically profitable in their here and now, for them and those back home, and for their futures back home when they retire.

All of this must be kept in mind when you look at, select, buy, and eat meat, at home and in restaurants. This is not abstract or intangible. Rather, it is grizzly and real—smelly, noisy, and bloody.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of this research was to understand the lived experiences of Latino workers in the meat processing industry in the rural Midwest. The research questions of this study were: What are the experiences of workers in the meat processing industry in a small Midwest town? How does their work in this industry impact their personal lives, their families, and their community? This research addressed the working conditions at the meatpacking plant, and the lives of Latino immigrants in the rural Midwest while paying particular attention to the personal development and the family and community life of the participants.

This chapter presents an interpretation of the experiences of 10 Latino immigrant meatpacking workers living in a small Midwest town from in depth interviews which were reworked into reconstructed life stories (van Manen, 2007).

The first section of the chapter provides a summary of emergent themes and relates them to the theoretical framework supporting this research. The second section presents the discussion and the implications of the study. The third section offers the limitations of the research, and lastly, the fourth section suggests implications for practice and further research.

Summary of Emergent Themes

The stories of 10 Latino meat packing workers constituted the examined text to understand the meaning of what it is like to be a Latino meatpacking worker living in a Midwest rural community. I did this by relating their experiences to their lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived experience to each other; which constituted the

lifeworld suggested by van Manen (2007, p. 105). The hope was to promote a discussion of the topic, to examine the phenomenon as a single case, to relate it to its universal qualities, and then come back to its particularities to understand the meaning of the experience of Latino immigrants working in the meat industry in a small Midwest town, here and now.

I grouped and analyzed emergent themes from the interviews to understand the experience. To describe the phenomenon I grouped the themes using what are for me significant elements, moments or facts of participants' lived-experiences organized as follows:

1. Feeling Forced to Make the Decision

2. Willing to Make it "No Matter What"

3. Reaching the American Dream—a Job at the Plant

4. Living like a Machine

5. Becoming the "Desired Unwanted"

6. Life in Two Places

7. The "Payoff"

Feeling Forced to Make the Decision

Consistent with the literature, participants in this study represented low-income immigrant populations who come from high- poverty communities with limited social and economic resources (Grey and Goodrick, 2002; Portes, 1991). Accordingly, they responded to the international flows of migration influenced by wage differences (Portes & Wallton, 1981; Castells, 1989) and influence of previous migrants who facilitated the move (Aguilera & Massey). Migration, for participants in this study, seemed to be related

to a typical survival process, similar to how monarch butterflies fly south in the fall to protect themselves from severe winter, with a new wave of descendants returning north in the spring. Monarch butterflies fly thousands of miles across countries to find a place to procure food and shelter as a natural survival process. Likewise, participants in this research moved to find jobs and resources (McGovern, 2007) to survive; in contrast to the butterflies that do not have a choice, these workers experienced being forced to make a decision. They left by choice.

The experience of being forced to make their migration decision influenced participants' lives deeply. This decision was described as central and marked their lives and those of their families and network as they choose to look at other places than their home community for opportunities to improve their living conditions and lives. Immigration had very important consequences as it affects the lives of family members who migrate as well as those who remind behind (Clark et al, 2009).The essential themes from the experience of being forced to make the decision to move and the tensions from a moral fatigue resulting from the lack of opportunities to "get ahead" are in tension with the responsibility to look for and earn an income to sustain a family, for capital to build a house, repay a loan, or fund a medical procedure (Orrenius, 2010), and in some cases the need for reunification with family members already in the U.S., facing separation and profound transformations (Orozco et al., 2010;Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). This decision widens their spaces, removes borders, and brings them to prohibited land where they trespass and become undocumented aliens and then start their new life. This decision also forces them to move from a safe to an unsettled space, a place where they are not and do not feel at home. Their community of origin was a place with limited social or economic

opportunities and it became a space where they were not able to meet their and their family's needs and desires. For sure it was a place of safety, which nourished their roots. Yet this very home became a pushing space, directing them away so that they could "move ahead" "making a living". At home there was no employment, access to quality housing, or access to health care services among others. Living under these conditions required physical and emotional energy just to meet every day realities. At their new community thy have to cope loss and family changes (Perreira et al, 2006; Clark et al, 2009,) that add burden to their everyday lives.

With few exceptions, participants had very low incomes and because of this had to put their children in some type of economically productive activity. They also experienced this themselves; all had paid and unpaid jobs from childhood. They, as their children also, worked alongside their parents from childhood to survive. Participants experienced their biography, their past, and limitation because of the humble contexts in which they grew up. As children they were, and saw themselves as, poor—lacking resources—and realized that working was a way to escape this poverty. They worked hard, but did not have steady jobs. They were dissatisfied and frustrated. These feelings are described variously and can be heard as a moral fatigue and as a desire to live in dignity. These were the engines of individual migration.

As with earlier migrants, the participants followed a similar path in the search for resources where the economy was stronger—there were more jobs and larger social and economic opportunities as lower rent or housing costs, lack of crime and better quality of life (Marrow, 2005). The decision process to migrate that they thought out was both individual and collective. It was for self, family, and even for those staying. A good

example is their sending "remittances" to family "back home" Sending remittances are one of the most common practices of Latino immigrants impacting households and economy (Page & Plaza, 2006). The literature explains that in most cases are consumed more than invested (Taylor, 1999). One example is remittances for education; another, remittances to sustain parents and children back home. Raising economic capital to buy land and properties back home is less common. Regardless of the use, there is irony here: this self-sacrifice became a "trade-off" because it subtracted from their own ability to move up in economic status, their own upward mobility. Working hard to help family "back home" took time and energy away from their own education, as well as from other opportunities in their new town. To them, migration was for opportunities; they moved to maximize household earnings. For others, migration was family reunification so as to mitigate feelings of separation, sadness, or loss. In all of these ways, these individuals were like those reported in the literature, as were their stories (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010; Conley & Glauber, 2007; Massey, 1990).

Moreover, most participants in this study come from family networks and cultures which offer a wide supportive net to those "left behind". It is not surprising that these individuals and their families felt empty and became depressed and anxious because they were alone in their new place and had emotionally "abandoned" their home and family back home. They felt "incomplete" and this in part limited their involvement in their new home, as it also reminded them of what "home" was like in its ordinary mundane routines. Many experienced an existential emptiness before they moved and when they arrived and were settled in the United States.

In their imagination, their home communities are the place where life begins, where their roots are set, and where their family and friends live. They are not "at home" in the United States (Chavez, 1994). This is their experience of being unwelcome and they find difficulties in most every day aspects of life in this country. They are existentially detached from family and their place of origin. The difficulties of an empty life make them nostalgic for home, despite the lack of opportunities. They are in existential and emotional conflict. This contradictory situation makes them proud because they are able to get a job to meet their material needs, regardless of the status of the job (McGovern, 2007), and to have surplus to send home, but they are always detached from their real home, their original primordial home "back in my country". This decision was made balancing family needs and opportunities and as an adaptive response to the social and economic circumstances (Ayon & Nadi, 2013), changing family patterns and raising risks. Migration for these workers is a contested good, a perpetual conflict of push and pull, seemingly unsolvable.

Willing to Make it No Matter What

Almost all of the participants crossed the border without documents; this turned them instantaneously into lawbreakers. They experienced this undocumented status bodily and mentally; their socio legal status is embedded. Once they decided to try to make it "no matter what" they were stigmatized into the world of stereotypes about migrants, "illegals", and Latinos. They became devalued objects; this led to feelings of depersonalization by the local community (Padilla, 2008). This worked to label them in the eyes of others and *in their own eyes,* and served to organize and segment their U.S. lens—where they can go—with whom they can hangout and become friends, the types of

jobs they can get, and where they feel safe. As Crockett et al. (2011) indicates, the amount of quality of benefits of their networks impacts them directly, and consequently, they became "ghettoized" (Fennelly, 2005a).

This segregation is supported by their need and desire to rely on conationals—all sharing similar experiences as law-breakers, living like criminals, and reinforcing their fear of arrest. This feeling of existential daily fear shapes them and their everyday lives. They become vulnerable and live as hyper attentive to their risk of arrest and deportation. This wears on them and wears them down, making them tense and nervous. In turn, this results in changed family relationship dynamics (Perreira et al., 2006; Clark et al., 2009). They are stressed and live in stress. They have to "watch their backs" all the time. They cannot easily interact and integrate with the others that see them as the "illegals" and opportunists that take advantage of the easy life here. It also limits their opportunities to grow personally and gain technical and social skills that would qualify them to move into other types of jobs and economic scales.

This constant stress can "make you crazy" and has physical and many other consequences on them, their families, and their lives, as Padilla (2008) claims. Stress also changes space—their spatiality—in their now truncated worlds and will impact the way they manage their new position as immigrant aliens. "Crossing the border" took place "somewhere"—a dangerous place—a place forbidden and they "crossed" voluntarily. This feeling of transcending into forbidden space for them can be comparable to the experience of leaving home, if home is a place that is private, intimate, forgiving, predictable, and safe (Martinez & Slack, 2013); they now live homeless. At the border

crossing, these individuals transcended to the "other side" which became demanding, open, unpredictable, and consequently dangerous.

When these workers "left home" (and their home country), they began to imagine and also experience all of the danger and risks present in the other side "out there". They became vulnerable and this experience was primordial, corporeal. Without noticing, they became members of the peripheral segment of the community as Yamamoto (2007) describes. They experienced fear, fatigue, and disorientation. They talked about this disorientation of body and space which demands energy for the increased awareness needed to survive and keep from arrest and deportation. It is a heightened alertness.

This stress demands great physical and emotional energy. And there is more once across the border as law-breakers; they had to improvise to survive, often doing new things for the first time. Some of the participants in this study, the undocumented, entered into new experiences by voluntarily breaking the law, by getting new identities, giving up their names, and acting like criminals. This is something that most of them have experienced; not all of this was passed to them through family and town networks but much is—they are on a well-worn trail.

Likewise, many of these workers knew about "migration" from others in their family or in networks—they developed meanings of migration. They developed the reciprocity, obligations, and norms to ensure success for them and those who will follow these "others" as previously indicated in the literature (Aguilera & Massey, 2003; Boyd, 1989). Similarly, they learned the history and culture of migration, from those who had lived it—the how to do it and how to survive. Sometimes this was learned from family (Caceres et al., 1985) and sometimes from friends and relatives visiting their

communities and sharing their experiences, offering a hand if they were willing to do the same. As indicated in the literature by Chaves (1994) the border crossing represented many challenges that were life threatening and full of physical and emotional fatigue for undocumented participants. This journey is described as very difficult, as challenging, as risky. Moving in a group made them feel more confident and safe; the whole process requires energy and determination.

Once decided, their leaving with documents or without them, these workers were separated from linear time and space where everything has place and order. Now there was liminality, the transitional experiencing of being in unknown places and living in unfamiliar ways under unfamiliar conditions. They had to rely on those helping them through their journey—some providing funds and gathering information for them to plan their move, others guiding them through their departure and beyond (Portes and Vickstrom,2011; Ayon & Naddy, 2012) .

From their experience, it is clear it was not difficult for them to get a job, with the help of the friends, relatives, and a network already working in the small Midwest town, as Aguilera (2002), Hardwick (2003), and Portes & Landlot (2000) explain. But this safety was in tension with the language and culture surrounding their safe niche in the Latino enclave. There is unknown space, space demanding and threatening, powerful and full of laws and regulations new to them, spaces where they had to act "as if" they "belonged" with ordinary others—not illegal, undocumented immigrants.

Achieving the American Dream: A Job at the Plant

Participants in this research were able to fill open jobs at the meatpacking plant which not many locals want, as Piore (1986) claims. They also experienced many issues

at their workplace, facing unfair treatment due to the disproportion of balance of power,

leading to an unpleasant environment (de Castro et al., 2006). They needed and

procured these positions; acquired fake IDs and filled-out applications, and were

incorporated into the new routine. For the undocumented, the border crossing pushed

them to rush to seek employment immediately in order to pay back the cost and expenses

of their move. They encountered processes that were new to them, they learned through

their peers as explained in the literature by Garcia (2005), they were advised by their

networks on where to find applications and how to fill them out. They were also guided

through for the interview process. They were willing to fulfill these requirements, even to

get IDs, which commonly are not used back home. For them this became simple

paperwork without meaning, as most of them did not understand the formal procedure

and legal implications; they were just looking for a job.

Although accustomed to hard work back home, these jobs were different, difficult

and harder (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Nebraska Appleseed, 2009; Midwest Coalition

for Human Rights, 2012). Their bodies were not used to this and reacted to the physical

efforts with sore backs, and pain from head to toe. This work shaped their body as pain.

At work all is new, dangerous, and difficult. As described by participants in this research,

the nature of their jobs was difficult, as it is for low skills Latino immigrant workers in

the United States as described by Sanchez et al., (2011). It took time, training, and

experience to become skilled. Working on a piece of meat, one after the other brought

about stress, tension, and anxiety. At first there was little time for breaks and none for

socializing, a big element in agricultural and other work back home. Lunch breaks were

short, again making socialization almost impossible, and making it difficult to meet others and to learn from them.

However, the challenges are more and many. The line production speed pushes them to work very fast, often resulting in physical harm. The close supervision was described as uncomfortable by some; supervisors are difficult and troublesome in Latino workers' lives, particularly the undocumented. Some supervisors mistreat workers using abusive language exceeding their power and creating tension amongst workers. Life at the plant was experienced as racist, as documented and undocumented workers face different realities in terms of treatment and job assignments (Dalla, Ellis, & Cramer, 2005).

Most of the workers participating in this study described that they felt powerless, not only because of their language and cultural barriers, but also because the plant becomes a huge structure that swallows them. Racism is more than words in the plant, it is also found in the way that workers are promoted; this leads to segregation as those that are documented and bilingual are able to do better than undocumented, Spanish-speaking individuals.

The physical environment at the plant is described as miserable, stressful, unpleasant, and unfriendly. Extreme air temperatures and noise make it harder. On top of this, there is odor and live animal emulsions. Workers are too close to each other; it is too noisy, smelly and dangerous; it is a place workers do not like. The challenges of their new job environment raised the relative risk of accidents, which are common for workers. The speed of the line demands them to work fast and mechanically (Stull et al., 1994Gorsche et al., 1999; Human Rights Watch, 2004; Nebraska Appleseed, 2009;

Midwest Coalition for Human Rights, 2012). Almost all participants experienced injuries by accident; some show these injurious inscriptions in scars here and there. Knives and heavy equipment are used to cut flesh and these are unpredictable, raising the risk of injury. So too are the chemicals. Chemicals sometimes accumulate in improperly ventilated spaces and workers experience air as toxic, and a risk to their health and wellbeing (Midwest Coalition for Human Rights, 2012).

Workers participating in this study constantly feel pain and fatigue because of the physical exertion, and they experience themselves as aging faster. As a result of this fatigue they feel too tired and have little time after work to take on anything else. They become machine-like robots. Despite all this negativity, participants in this study feel thankful to have a job. Clearly, they have mixed feelings about their lives.

Regardless of the discomfort and hard work, participants on this study are able to find meaning in their jobs, and this turns into the internal force that helps them to go back to the plant every day. They have internal values and motivations that assign to work the centrality of their lives (Chalofsky, 2010). In their minds they can create and dream big. Participants find a strong motivator to provide meaning to their jobs in their relation to others; family here or there is critical to finding a broader meaning to the types of jobs these Latino meatpacking workers perform, as Rosso et al. (2010) and Oldham (1976) claim.

Living Like A Machine

As described by previous research on job alienation (Shepard, 1977, Miraftab, 2012), participants in this study described their job routines as living like a machine. Living as a machine for these meat packing workers is, in their own words, when one

performs same actions in repetitive way every day, every week, month after month. The lives of these meatpacking workers, as described in their own words, are very different than their lives back in their country of origin. Here they live at work, go home to rest and again work; they live routine with little variation. Back in their communities of origin they were able to work outdoors, to enjoy the sun and freedom that a job in agriculture provides, for example. However good their earnings are, this work, in participants' words, is experienced as "same thing every day".

They described feeling alienated, dissatisfied, and tired—always worn. They have no control over the pace of the work; they work with unvarying routine breeding alienation, despair, anger, and frustration. They live on and by the clock, a mechanically driven endless clock. These individuals experienced being alone and lonely at work as well, as a result of the plant production process. These exceptionally physically demanding jobs make it difficult to be social, as participants in this study grew up to be, and as they crave as central to their being. The whole environment is designed to work and produce rather than promote humane personal interaction among workers. Latino workers as described in the literature are seeing as reliable and able to work nights, weekends, and overtime when asked (Ciscel et al., 2003; Guerrero et al., 2014) therefore they are ideal for these unwanted jobs. They work hard, and willing to work any time they are asked. Most of the days at the plant are intensely absorbed into the workers' demanding routine. They experience no time for camaraderie or friendships.

Their sense of loneliness is not only at the plant; it is also associated with their limitations on travel as well. For the undocumented, U.S. border control policies exist which would make it very difficult to leave easily. They cannot think about going home

to take a break, as in the past it probably was possible (Harrison & Lloyd, 2011). In the present it would be a one way trip for them, and they want to keep their jobs to sustain their families, which is another deprivation. To think about this reality makes it worse. For some, it was linked directly to the fear of becoming detached from their families back home. For others, the frustration of their need is what forces them to follow the plant's rules in regards to time off and vacations. However, they described that in their imagination they travel while working, dis-connecting from their work place. They live from memories and bring them back to make their day more pleasant. They think about holidays, special occasions, and their loved ones; they think about happy times.

Becoming the "Desired Unwanted"

Participants in this study experience their bodies and themselves as "strangers, outsiders, and aliens" (Yamamoto, 2007). Clearly, they note that others see them these ways, a threat to the wellbeing of their new community (Chavez, 1994). Here they use and transform local resources to meet their needs, the way they learned to back at their community of origin; they try to survive. However they received and experienced a chilly reception by locals as demonstrated in the literature by Fennelly & Federico (2007), Dalla & Christensen (2005), Fennelly (2005b).

This perceived chilly reception fed their isolation, which was created by their migration status and language and cultural differences. Their lack of legal documents was a basic barrier to their full integration into the new U.S. community. They could not get a driver's license or car insurance and they could not easily move around. Moreover, without a driver's license, every day errands became difficult; they did not have a valid ID. They fear always and deeply that at any moment immigration officers could stop

them. They live in existential fear, even terror. All of this aligns with earlier research (Gouveia & Stull, 1997; Broadway, 1999; Grey, 1999; Dalla et al., 2005; Fennelly, 2005b; Gabriel, 2006) reporting the barriers of Latino undocumented immigrants living in nontraditional gateways.

Participants in this research also described the local population as being as cold as the weather. Accordingly, they find barriers to stop their integration into the larger local community. The stereotypes (Dovidio & Gluzek, 2010) locals have of them limited actual contact in public spaces. Xenophobia and discrimination by native-born locals results, or at least is made worse, often leading to negative sentiments against them. All of this is racism and all experienced this as described in their own words. Yet they are not robots and the do "get out", if only a little. They meet locals at the park, the local department store, the Catholic Church, and at schools. Otherwise they spend their limited leisure time at home, either by themselves or with their conational friends or relatives. There is an unaware, and in some cases aware, isolation which is described through their routine and activities within their own community.

Participants in this study have experienced racism not only at their work place, as described by Espino and Franz (2002), but also in town. Store clerks, people in the street, neighbors, and even people at the Catholic Church have been racist, probably more than perceived. In general, participants also described that they know locals discriminate against them but they do not give too much attention to this. They tend to ignore it and let it go because they feel they are not hurting anybody and they came here to have a decent job and raise a family and children. However they struggle with generalized anxiety and struggle trying to find out ways to adapt to their new living environment (Perreira et al.,

2006). Their hopes and dreams keep them resilient and trying hard. They are aware of the perceived sentiments of locals regarding the jobs they take, but they claim that locals do not take those jobs.

On a positive note, Latino workers participating in this study perceive themselves as active contributors to the local economy, as they earn and spend locally, and explicitly mention that they do not receive public benefits and services as do others in the community, which is very common among the immigrant population, as Capps et al. (2005) claimed. Few described personal encounters with locals, and those that did described them as positive.

It seems to be that at the individual level there is a perceived openness and opportunity to "get to know" the local population. The experienced rejection limits the use of resources, lowers the involvement in community matters, and reduces the opportunities these workers have to improve their lives here and now. All this contributes to the strengthening of community of origin ties—the community in which they feel welcome and valued. Here too is a source of tension between locals and newcomers; there is a great solitude between these groups, with "integration" into the U.S. seemingly neither sought nor easily attained or granted. The groups live side by side in parallel lives, the dreams of both unknown (and uncared about) by the other.

Life in Two Places

Participants in this study, like many immigrants, maintain important affiliations with their country of origin and become transnational migrants (Castles, 2002; Roberts et al., 1999). Here they described their strategies for remaining connected and for continuing to participate as decision-makers in their homeland. This also helps them to

move up in the social structure despite the geographic distance and their physical absence. They live with one foot here and one foot there.

Despite the hard environment these workers are starting to develop some ties within their new community. Among these are school and church, as well as the economic system through their job in their new community in the United States. For those raising families and children it becomes a need because they want a better life, and education and religion are important for their families. Everyone raising families in this study connected with their children's school while all hoped for their children to become bilingual (Bacallao and Smokoski, 2006). For those having children at school, as commonly is for Latino immigrants, the school was their first institutional contact in the United States, and there they had both positive and negative experiences (Perreira et al, 2006). This experience has real benefits for both child and parent at their new community where they find intergenerational conflicts due to a dissonant acculturation process in parents and their children (idem). In their narratives, participants described that women were more involved in child-rearing here, as in Mexico and Latin America, including mentoring their schooling. Men work hard and provide financially for the family, protect them, and make decisions. Women take care of the family, cook, clean, and care for the children (Galanti, 2003; Dreby, 2006; Dreby & Stutz, 2012).

This is true here and in the life there. These role distinctions hold even when both parents work. This work at home is more difficult for women who also worked at the plant because they too were tired and worn by day's end with consequences for parental, familial, and parent-child relations. For those fewer women staying home, they experienced being the breach between their family and their community. They were

relatively active, as described by their husbands, constantly seeking resources and attending English classes to more effectively perform their role. They took their life and their role as care givers at their new community seriously.

For those having lives in two places and no documents to travel, they try to keep in touch with "home" constantly; the use of cell phones and calling cards allows them to be almost co-present in both places, simultaneously. Television, news, and community-based friendships cut the distance and strengthen ties too. This detail has also been linked in the literature by Schiller, et al. (1995), Chavez (1994), and Rodriguez et al. (2007).

Life is different for those that become the long distance providers. Few of the participants followed the traditional pattern of the father migrating and leaving wife and children at the community of origin. The rationale for these mothers was found in the notions of fatherhood and motherhood that still remain across borders for Mexicans, as Dreby (2006) has asserted. For fathers, their ability to fulfill monetary family needs contributes to having a stable relationship with their children while mothers back in their community take care of, feed, and raise children (Dreby, 2006). Despite the results of these arrangements, family separation is difficult.

Participant workers in this situation described that they work hard, earn, and send money home, and find ways to come together, and all these become an inspiration. The experiences vary; some indicated that this brings complex issues and troubles to their children, as sadness and illnesses because of the father's absence (Schmeer, 2009). Here and again, they described mixed feelings about their role as remote providers. Despite their opportunity to send monetary remittances, all sides—dad, mom and kids—are lonely and life turns more difficult. All are hurt and suffer because feelings about each

other can sometimes get confused, and communication is difficult. Even though most have cellphones at low cost that can shorten the distance and allow them talk to their children and wives constantly, there is a fear of raising their children remotely and losing authority. So, this distance between them is both positive and negative because of their economical needs. In part, a simple taken-for-granted phone call can keep family bonds alive the same as money sent home. But also the loneliness hurts more to the remote provider who never develops attachments to the community in which he lives.

Some of the participants that became remote providers had experienced not wanting material belongings, and survived renting a place to stay and sending money home. This makes their life harder, as they live in very limited conditions, dreaming about a better life in the future. They work harder and do not think about their own personal development; they tend to work overtime and make more money for those back in their home country. Their desire is that if their children would distinguish themselves from the rest by the benefits that the remittances provide, then the sacrifice is worthwhile. Those raising families in the United States also dream about a better future here and there. Here for their children and there for themselves having a secure retirement.

The fortunate ones with "papers" go back and forth to "home" whenever possible, where they use their U.S. salaries to buy land and build a house, which improves their family's quality of life. Influenced by assimilation and transnationalism explained by Aguilera (2004), some intend to participate in more than one economic system. They do this by enjoying the benefits of working in the United States, while thinking about their retirement back in their country.

As reported in previous studies, workers develop transnational ties and also aspire to become transnational retirees, not only in the case of retirees from rich countries seeking a better life in developing countries (Smith & Guarnizo, 2009) it also applies here. Participants in this study had developed solidarity with both nations. However, this is true only for those with U.S. residence or citizenship who feel they are living in two places, holding their individual desire to retire back home. Then and there they imagine themselves enjoying their investments and possessions, and their right to do whatever they like to in a safe place—home.

In a sense, they never fully "leave home," co-present in place and time, defying the laws of physics and geography. Therefore, they need to provide meaning to their situation and try to find ways to stay connected to home. There are different ways to do it. One is by sponsoring important events for their families and communities, either sports, festivals, or starting a business (Bryan et al., 1999), even when they are not able to participate. Examples of this are Quinceañeras, (a very special party for girls when they turn 15 years old), high school graduations, and weddings. This, in their imagination, is their reward for their hard work at the plant. This is one "payoff" for suffering in body, soul, and psyche and with others.

The Payoff

Consistent with the literature, the core elements of collectivism and family within the Latino culture lead to develop strong identification and attachments of individuals; as well as strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity and solidarity within the members of the same family (Ariza, 2000; Landale & Oropesa, 2007). The payoff for the risks and sacrifices that participants in this study overcome is found in opportunities to make a

difference for others here or back home now and for themselves later. In this way they are like other Latin (and other) migrants who come to the U.S. to "make it" for their families.

The concept of families ahead differs among workers participating in this study according to their social scale, as well as their level of education and types of needs. Education was highly appreciated among some and they see their children's education as an investment that will payoff later. Education was valued not only for children but also for young siblings. For some, family obligations were not only with parents but also with siblings (Kumar, 2011). Their achievements are a source of deep satisfaction despite the fact that sometimes remote providers do not receive any more than pride. For some others the wellbeing of families was measured in terms of material possessions and they are interested in building houses and buying land and animals.

For very poor families remittances are used to improve quality of life and there is less investment, but a lot of pride. Almost all experienced sending money for their parents, alongside working hard for their own families. They stretch their income in order to send remittances to their parents because they care about their wellbeing so contribute to cover their needs. Planning and taking vacations to their home country was part of the payoff for few of the participants, specifically for those that are more settled. Their economic improvement provides satisfactions and allows them new experiences they didn't have while living with economic limitations. They can compensate for past sacrifices of parents, siblings, and relatives as well. They can promote times of happiness, organizing visits to specific destinations and going places they haven't gone. In general, the payoff for the difficult work and miserable environment in which they

work is the positive economic impact for workers and workers' families that permits

satisfactions and new experiences.

Discussion of Themes

Despite its modernization and worker force diversification, the U.S. meatpacking

industry remains one of the industries that attract Latino work forces. When arriving in

the U.S., Latino immigrant workers face personal and sociological struggles derived from

their migratory status, their lack of information and skills to look for better opportunities,

and their needs to fulfill commitments and loyalties.   As long as Latino immigrants

answer the call to fill these jobs and move without legal documents, they will be

vulnerable to the job market, to law enforcement, and harassment at work and in the

community. Because of this vulnerability, Latino workers are less able and less likely to

challenge their harsh working conditions and their status as "exploited" workers. Their

economic wants and needs drive them past a light over the injustice done to them, at least

as far as collective action against them is concerned—so too does their sociological and

political vulnerabilities.

The Latinos compare poorly to other recent immigrant workers such as the Somali

and Hmong whose migratory status is different, leading to more socio legal security and

less difficult tasks, leaving the least easy and desirable to the Latinos. The individuals in

this study know, understand, and resent this. They hold mixed and ambivalent feelings

about the work and their jobs. The literature and others notice that these jobs are

miserable, unwanted, and with a very high attributable risk of injury. These jobs are filled

by an immigrant work force with the hope that it will be for a short period of time

because of their energy draining repetitiveness. But in the end it is not true. In contrast to

previous studies, these workers seem to be more determined to stay and achieve family and personal goals.

Most of the workers balanced this dissatisfaction with their jobs because they were able to earn an adequate, steady income. Despite the unpleasant environment, the risk, and they humiliation by supervisors, this work is to them a life opportunity. The jobs are good enough to earn monies for basic needs, and pay well enough to make it possible to send remittances home, to build houses, and start small businesses. They do not want to move here only to work, send money home, and retire. They move here to raise families and children, they are resilient and members of a vibrant community. Their view is instrumental, and they evaluate their experience from this angle. These workers are survivors, in the short and for the longer term, for self, family, and family "back home". However this is how they see themselves. The locals, the others do not. This creates a huge gap among the local community and the increasing Latino community.

The majority of Latino immigrants in rural Midwest communities are in low skills workers, with low or none education; it prevents them to speak about, and claim workers' rights and worker organization, despite the long history of worker organization in some small Midwest towns. Either this is not an essential interest for them or it is too "political" a topic to talk about, but above all, most of them are undocumented and subject to deportation, therefore they choose to remain invisible.

There is moral and societal call to policy makers to understand the motivation that drives Latinos from poor communities in Latin America to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, and to investigate and stop the exploitation and discrimination they face at work and in their new communities.

At the community level, this migration cannot be observed in isolation. It fits well into worldwide economic patterns, within and across nations. Since it is a practice which works to sustain poor sending communities south of the U.S. border, it needs to be understood in that way. There are 11 million Latinos at the bottom of the U.S. economic system, and they have no or a low chance of influencing policies despite their contribution to the economic development and lifestyle in this country. This is in contradiction to the number of resources and services available to them in rural communities where they raise families and age as any citizen does regardless of nationality. Additionally, they find societal and systemic discrimination in forms of rejection, limitations, and reduced opportunities to grow and learn how to incorporate into the demanding society.

At an individual level, immigrant Latinos in small Midwest towns live isolated, segregated, under-served lives without the language and cultural skills to intertwine into the local politics. Yet the workers in this study remain optimistic, vibrant, and active with family and friends. How come? The answer lies in their bonds with conational and family networks, in the work and family centrality of their lives. They are willing to make it, yet limited to integrate with their communities.

The discrimination and segregation surrounding them, and commonly accentuated by the skin color, constitute a great if not the most difficult barrier they have to overcome. They talk openly about their migratory status and their border-crossing. This they have in common with most of the others at work and this serves to bond them with friends and relatives. This bonding may also have the effect of sustaining their ethnic relations, but also keeping them from integration in the local mainstream community.

This also works to harden stereotypes and distance-lived-distance between migrants and locals: there are two solitudes here.

These Latino workers have strong intra-ethnic relationships and these relationships are social networks, social capital. These nourishing networks, the safe niche, may take the place of organizations, or be an alternative in which they find and earn respect from those who discriminate against them.

This migration of Latino workers is changing the population landscape in Midwest small towns. Newcomers bring their cultural baggage and contribute to local transformations. This is seen in the use of Spanish language, cultural-type groceries, and the services needed to facilitate a transnational lifestyle, such as shops that transfer funds. New ethnic grocery stores and restaurants fill the once flat Midwest landscape, contributing to an economic dynamic of revitalization. Local populations in these small Midwest towns of moribund spaces and places do not take easily these to changes and often react by differentiating themselves from newcomers, resulting in obstacles to the integration of the recent arrivals.

Once these immigrant workers become stigmatized, isolated, and discriminated against, there is no way for them to claim full incorporation into this society. They are and cannot be judged with the same measurements as previous immigrants' waves. They live an existential and emotional conflict of migration. This is the reality of the conflicted spaces, wherein both locals and Latino immigrants live apart, suspicious, inhabiting a more or less common space, but as strangers: two solitudes not in search of the common. An Existential and Emotional Conflict of Migration.

Limitations of this Research

Phenomenological studies judged by Neopositivist criteria are always found wanting, due to epistemological differences and surface, methodological disagreements—so too here. The positivist could critique sample size, method and the like, disagreeing with the Phenomenologist who claims not universality but "essence and essential", so it goes in general, and here too. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that these themes correspond only to the experiences of participants in this study.

These participants are limited to a single small Midwest town, and one meatpacking plant. Additionally, due to the complex lives of meat packing workers, and the difficulty to recruit participants I possibly do not have a representation of all experiences. Most of those who participated in the study seem to be stable, have a number of years living in the same community and dealing with their jobs and the community environment. The identification of participants meeting the criteria stated in the research design, depended on the community member who acted as a gatekeeper between me and the participants who are restricted to their network.

The text used for analysis depended on the quality of the interviews and the quality of the narrative; those significant themes analyzed here are significant for me because the knowledge and expertise I have.

And finally, despite my knowledge I have to remind the readers that this study is my interpretation of the stories of 10 Latino meatpacking workers which was guided not only by my academic, but also my personal experiences which situate me in a privileged position as Latina international scholar, with different background and experiences from the participants in this research. However, I made myself aware of my assumptions and

focused on participants' perspectives and point of view, openly interest in describing the meaning of the experiences of what is to be a Latino meatpacking worker living and working in rural Midwest.

Implications of this Study

The knowledge generated by this phenomenological study furthers our understanding of the complexities of being an immigrant Latino meat packing worker. It provided a unique opportunity to understand the meaning of the experience of being a Latino immigrant meatpacking worker in a small Midwest town. It was done with a holistic perspective. In contrast to previous literature showing how Latinos join a highly-formalized work process and perform almost robotically, and the consequences of this on them—their bodies, feelings and minds—with this study, I have added in their life-experiences and their souls.

Although this study supports earlier literature, which describes how the arrival of the workforce has resisted a variety of social and economic changes in the Heartland of the Midwest, how Latino immigrant workers hope to settle in the arrival community for the economically productive period of their lives, it clearly affirms that Latinos are no longer birds of passage, due to migratory regulation and border enforcement (Massey & Riosmena, 2010). Most no longer cross and recross the Mexico-U.S. border.

This study shows that despite language and culture barriers, the Latino enclave in this town is growing and now constitutes a strong network that ties the immigrant community to their community of origin. These workers are transnational, living in both worlds—back home and here—simultaneously. This has ramifications for international relations between the U.S. and Latin America. The migration of Latinos in general and

Mexicans in particular to the U.S. will remain active despite border enforcement regulations. The settled networks will continue promoting migratory movements that will endure, not only because of the gap between the economies of both countries, but also because of the geographic proximity of Mexico to the U.S. border. This provides opportunity for immigrants to remain connected to their communities of origin, and to strengthen social and economic ties.

The implications of this study are divided into implications for policy and practice and implications for further research. Thus the implications of the current study can be summarized as follows:

Implications for Policy and Practice

1. Community organizations offering services locally could provide a significant support by considering programs to engage immigrants into educational activities and social dynamics of their community, while opening spaces for dialogue and mutual understanding with the local population. These dialogues would provide space to educate and inform local populations of stereotypes about new immigrants, which will not change until they have the opportunity to know and establish positive relationships with each other.

2. Cultural and economic exchanges among communities of origin and community of destination could be an option to help authorities and local government, as well as the local population to expand their horizons and learn more about newcomers.

3. More information about the migratory waves and details about the migration policies and regulations are themes that can be discussed publicly to identify the factors influencing these trends for a better understanding of the reasons these

populations choose to come to this small Midwest town. This information could be integrated into the local school content.

4. Latino organizations could also be capable of educating both the local and immigrant populations about their rights and responsibilities, as well as to developing and delivering citizenship education appropriate to the newcomers, since they lacked access to education at their communities of origin.

5. Education and family are core values for Latino immigrants; community organizations can guide programs on behalf of the new generations, engaging immigrant and local parents in intercultural exchanges and mentoring programs for the benefit of the community.

6. Community participation and civic engagement to promote local policies would be one of the further steps, after opening the dialogue and promoting mutual understanding among newcomers and locals, hostility and xenophobic sentiments also have to be redirected by local organizations through school and church to avoid serious challenges for the community.

7. Meatpacking workers show appreciation for their jobs despite the difficulties they face by the physically demanding tasks they perform. Therefore, there is a great opportunity to train and promote this workforce in order to promote positive rewards and the value of work. One of the dissatisfactions at the plant described by participants in this research is the poor relationship with management because of the unequal conditions due to power, and fear of retaliation from supervisors. A Human Resources educator can provide training opportunities for meatpacking workers so they would be able to move up within the structure of the plant. This

training could be also an incentive to promote respect and recognition to improve

attitudes toward their employees and to promote job satisfaction and stability.

However, as the migratory status of Latino meat packing workers remains

unsolved, they will face difficulties in becoming active members of the community where

they live and work.

Implications for Further Research

1. The phenomenological approach used here encouraged, and required as a research method, these workers to tell their stories and allowed me take their descriptions of their stories as is, as presented and not have to speculate or impute. This study was focused by its research questions and others could and should be asked about their migratory experience.

2. New research could include important Latino work in different parts of the meatpacking industry, in different industries, at different worker levels, of women and of their children, of the working parents, and specifically looking at meaning of work—how work meaning changes after the migratory experience, when entering into the secondary type jobs in the U.S., and dealing with unwanted jobs.

3. Especially important in a humane sense as in a social justice frame is attention to intergroup relations in the host community between "old timers" and "newcomers"; this could be a clear and useful contribution to both research with a moral purpose and practical consequence. That could be a way of thanking the workers who gave themselves.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus	*Research Subjects' Protection Programs (RSPP)*	*D-528 Mayo Memorial Building 420 Delaware Street S.E.*
01/13/2009	*Office of the Vice President for Research*	*Minneapolis, MN 55455*

Office: 612-626-5654
Fax: 612-626-6061
www.research.umn.edu/subjects
Email: irb@umn.edu or
iacuc@umn.edu or ibc@umn.edu

Silvia Alvarez de Davila
Spanish and Portuguese
51 FolH
Minneapolis Campus

RE: "Lived experiences of Latino Meat Packing Workers in Austin, Minnesota"
IRB Code Number: **0811P52743**

Dear Ms. Alvarez de Davila

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) received your response to its stipulations. Since this information satisfies the federal criteria for approval at 45CFR46.111 and the requirements set by the IRB, final approval for the project is noted in our files. Upon receipt of this letter, you may begin your research.

IRB approval of this study includes the consent forms dated December 12, 2008 and recruitment materials received January 8, 2009.
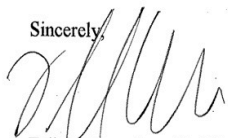
The IRB would like to stress that subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the total number of subjects, even if they have no further participation in the study. Please keep this in mind when calculating the number of subjects you request. This study is currently approved for 10 subjects. If you desire an increase in the number of approved subjects, you will need to make a formal request to the IRB.

For your records and for grant certification purposes, the approval date for the referenced project is November 24, 2008 and the Assurance of Compliance number is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003). Research projects are subject to continuing review and renewal; approval will expire one year from that date. You will receive a report form two months before the expiration date. If you would like us to send certification of approval to a funding agency, please tell us the name and address of your contact person at the agency.

As Principal Investigator of this project, you are required by federal regulations to inform the IRB of any proposed changes in your research that will affect human subjects. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Unanticipated problems or serious unexpected adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur.

The IRB wishes you success with this research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at 612-626-5654.

Sincerely,

Felicia Mroczkowski, CIP
Research Compliance Supervisor
FM/egk
CC: Theodore Lewis

Driven to Discover℠

Appendix B

Consent Form

LAS EXPERIENCIAS DE VIDA DE LOS TRABAJADORES LATINOS

TRABAJANDO EN LA INDUSTRIA DE CARNE EN EL MEDIO-OESTE DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS

Usted ha sido invitado (a) a participar en un estudio de las experiencias de vida de los trabajadores Latinos trabajando en la industria de carne que viven en un pueblo del Medio Oeste de los Estados Unidos. Usted ha sido seleccionado(a) porque ha sido identificado (a) por medio de una organización comunitaria local. Le solicito que lea este formulario y haga preguntas que pudiera tener antes de dar su consentimiento para participar.

Antecedentes. Este estudio es conducido por Silvia Alvarez de Davila, estudiante de doctorado de la Universidad de Minnesota. El propósito es comprender cuál es el significado de las experiencias de vida de los trabajadores en la industria de la carne y como su trabajo en esa industria impacta su vida personal y familiar así como la comunidad donde viven.

Procedimiento. Si usted acepta participar en este estudio, me gustaría pedirle que reflexionara en su experiencia como inmigrante Latino trabajando en la industria de la carne y que me contara su historia dando ejemplos de su experiencia en una entrevista que podría durar entre 1 y 3 horas. En esta entrevista le hare algunas preguntas y la entrevista será grabada.

Riesgos y beneficios al participar en este estudio. El estudio tiene riesgos mínimos. Usted podría experimentar algún tipo de incomodidad cuando recuerde experiencias personales. No hay beneficios directos por participar en esta investigación. A futuro podría beneficiar a otros Latinos que viven en su comunidad, puesto que este estudio pretende contribuir al entendimiento de las experiencias de esta población.

Compensación. Al completar la entrevista usted recibirá un certificado de $30.00 de una tienda local (o $30 en efectivo) para compensar su tiempo. Se dará una compensación prorrateada si la entrevista finaliza antes por decisión del participante.

Confidencialidad. Los registros de este estudio se guardaran en un lugar privado. En cualquier forma de reporte que podría publicarse como resultado de esta investigación, no se incluirá ninguna información que permita identificar a los participantes. Los registros serán archivados apropiadamente y solo tendrá acceso a ellos la investigadora. Los datos serán utilizados únicamente con propósitos académicos y serán destruidos cinco años después de concluir el estudio.

Naturaleza voluntaria del Estudio

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Su decisión de participar o no, no afectara su relación con Universidad de Minnesota o alguna organización comunitaria. Si decide participar siéntase en la libertad de no responder preguntas o interrumpir la entrevista, lo cual no tendrá ninguna consecuencia que le afecte a usted.

Contactos y preguntas

Usted puede hacer las preguntas si las tiene, ahora. Si tiene preguntas más adelante se le motiva contactar a Silvia Alvarez en 1296 Fifield Place Saint Paul, MN 55108 o al teléfono (651) 603 8786 correo electrónico alva0059@umn.edu. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta o duda adicional relacionada con este studio podría comunicarse a Research Subjects' Advocate Line, 528D Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; teléfono (612) 625-1650.

Se le dará una copia de este formulario para sus archivos

Consentimiento

He leído la información anterior, he tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y estoy de acuerdo en participar en este estudio.

Firma _____

Fecha_____

Firma de la investigadora_____

Fecha_____

Appendix C

Información Demográfica

LAS EXPERIENCIAS DE VIDA DE LOS TRABAJADORES LATINOS

TRABAJANDO EN LA INDUSTRIA DE CARNE EN EL MEDIO-OESTE DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS

Información Demográfica

La siguiente información será útil para conocer más a las personas participando en este estudio. Las respuestas son anónimas y no se asociaran a ninguna persona en especial.

1. Genero

   Masculino_____

   Femenino_____

2. Edad_____

3. País en que nació_____

4. Número de años viviendo en los Estados Unidos_____

5. Número de años viviendo en Minnesota_____

6. El grado más alto que curso en la escuela_____

7. Idiomas que habla usted:

   Solamente Español_____

   Español más que Ingles_____

   Ambos igualmente_____

   Otro_____

8. Número de años trabajando en la planta_____

9. Pertenece al sindicato_____

10. Ingreso anual aproximado

   Menos de $10,000_____

   $10,000- 19,999_____

   $20,000-29,999 _____

   $30,000-39,999_____

   $40,000-49,999_____

   Mas_____

   No se_____

11. Familiares (o personas) que viven con usted en Estados Unidos

   _____
   _____

12. Describa a qué se dedican

   _____
   _____

13. Familiares que viven en su país de origen

   _____
   _____
   _____

14. Describa a sus familiares en su país de origen, qué hacen

   _____
   _____
   _____

15. Frecuencia con la que viaja a su país de origen

   _____

16. Cuenta con licencia de conducir en los Estados Unidos

   _____

17. Cuenta con una cuenta de banco en los Estados Unidos

   _____

18. Notas adicionales

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