The American Dream:
An Illusion or Reality for Latino Immigrants

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Abstract

Many Latinos from Mexico, Central America, and South America have made the decision to immigrate to the United States in recent years—whether legally or illegally. In the literature, stories of immigration and hopes for the American Dream proliferated; however, varying degrees of racism and anti-immigration sentiment were also revealed. Interviews of first-generation Latino immigrants and American citizens that were both attendees of a local Hispanic church in southcentral Virginia showed that Latino immigrants had hopes of achieving what they believed to be the American Dream, while realizing they had a long journey ahead. American citizens were more certain of having achieved at least some portion of the American Dream, and also had hopes of fully attaining what they believed to be the American Dream.

The American Dream:
An Illusion or Reality for Latino Immigrants

Latin American immigration is a political, economic, and social issue that has captured the attention of popular news media and its consumers in both the United States and Latin American markets. Latino immigrants come from Mexico, Central America, South America, and islands in the Caribbean. A few of the motivating factors that bring Hispanic immigrants to the United States include a lack of resources and opportunities in their home countries, abuses of their government, extreme poverty, and even the search for adventure (Garni, 2010). Each individual might have different circumstances leading to his/her immigration to the United States, but most immigrants have the same general purpose—to make better lives for themselves and their families.

Through television, news, friends, and even church, immigrants from all over the world have been enchanted by what they believe to be the American Dream (Stoll, 2009). Whether the American Dream is a myth or reality, Latino immigrants come in great numbers to embark on a new life in an unfamiliar country. This research intends to discover how attainable or elusive the American Dream can be for Latino immigrants, and to follow, how those results compare to how attainable the American Dream can be for American citizens.

Statistics and Motivations of Latino Immigration

Latino peoples living in the United States are considered immigrants due to their fairly recent migration. As Garni (2010) explained, immigration from Central America to the United States took off in the late 1970s and has grown exponentially in the past three decades. Hill and Torres (2010) went further to say that the Latino population will be the

largest ethnic minority group in the U.S. by 2050 or even sooner. The sheer number of Latino immigrants has contributed to controversial perspectives on Latino immigration today.

Guatemala, Mexico, and El Salvador represent the three largest national origin groups among the undocumented population of the United States (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010). Accessibility plays a major role for immigrants, as countries that are geographically close in proximity to the U.S., as those previously mentioned, tend to have higher immigration rates than those countries that are separated by bodies of water or have closed border policies. In addition, Latino immigrants to the U.S. help to develop networks and institutions that promote additional migration from that same region of origin. For instance, the more often immigrants come from a certain country and have met with success in this nation, the more likely friends and family from those countries will begin to immigrate as well, especially to the same areas of the United States.

Additional motivating factors include deterioration in the economic, political, and social conditions of Latin American countries. Hill and Torres (2010) claimed that hopes of a better life, greater opportunities, employment, and education drive Latinos to migrate to the United States. This migration is not always easy or legal due to the exclusive immigration laws of the U.S. and the lack of opportunity for certain countries to obtain legal access. Each immigrant status has varying degrees of rights and expectations and includes naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, nonimmigrant visa holders, and undocumented immigrants (McConnell & Marcelli, 2007). The immigrant status that includes most Latinos in the United States is the illegal or undocumented status.

Pervasive Negative Images of Latinos

Many Latinos living in the United States have circumvented the legal system, and this often serves to cast them in a negative light. Marietta (2006) stated that some Americans believe illegal immigrants should be denied all social service benefits because they do not pay federal taxes and are a drain on government services and the economy. However, Porter (2005) explained that while it has been evident that illegal immigrants pay various taxes, their contributions to Social Security were much greater—the money amounted to ten percent of the surpluses from 2004, and has been growing even more with the higher number of illegal immigrants in past years. Although many illegal immigrants have been paying Social Security and other taxes with fake identification numbers, they will not receive any type of public pension in retirement and are not eligible for Medicare at age 65, as are American citizens (Porter, 2005). Therefore, illegal immigrants are actually bolstering Social Security. In addition, Heyer (2008) pointed out a moral perspective in quoting Bishop DiMarzio, "Those who constitute our neighbors do not depend on birthplace or possession of documents" (p. 433). There are many competing perspectives on Latino immigrants, but there continues to be a general negative image in the minds of many Americans of Latinos who live in the United States, whether the immigrants are here illegally or not (Marietta, 2006).

Kilty and Haymes (2000) explained that Latinos are often portrayed as attracted to public assistance programs and more likely to take advantage of public welfare, which paints a negative picture of Latinos, just as in past images. Although there exists a multitude of research studies supporting immigration, there are also many critics, such as Mead (2009), who agreed with the idea that Latinos come maliciously to take American

jobs and enjoy the benefits of the country without paying taxes. Representative Luis Guiterrez (D-IL) explained differently, that Latino immigrants desire a pathway to their legalization so that they can "come out of the shadows of darkness, of discrimination, of bigotry, of exploitation, and join us fully" (Tichenor, 2009, p. 3). Latino immigrants are also often blamed for the issues that come about at certain periods in America's history. For example, Tichenor (2009) explained that the idea that illegal immigrants have anything to do with the nation's health care challenges is merely the latest fad in a long tradition of blaming them for "everything from unemployment in the Great Depression, to disease and criminality in the 1950s, to an overtaxed welfare state in the 1980s and 1990s, to terror threats before and after 9/11" (p. 1).

American Contradictions

Not only are Latino immigrants who have come to the United States greatly affected by the negative image that American society casts on them, but they are also affected by the various contradictions between what actions the law allows or restricts, and how the laws are enforced or ignored. Abrego and Gonzales (2010) explained that young undocumented immigrants can legally attend school, but they do not have the opportunity to work, vote, receive financial aid, or even drive in most states. This makes the few opportunities that they do have difficult to achieve. In addition, the contradictions between law and enforcement practices have allowed for undocumented immigrants to live in the United States for most of their lives (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010). The issue is not fixed for the benefit of the American citizens or the Latino immigrants, who have both been affected by inconsistent law enforcement practices.

Latino immigrants have been struggling to achieve their original goals in coming to the United States due to the political unrest and debt of this nation. As Gassoumis, Wilber, Baker, and Torres-Gil (2010) explained, the expanding federal deficit, which is over $1 trillion for 2010, will greatly impact the ability and willingness of Congress to provide new programs and financing to alleviate vulnerabilities facing Latinos. Recent reforms in immigration policy served to restrict legal entry into the United States for many people; therefore, many Latino immigrants come by their own illegal means. However, the U.S. government cannot seem to decide if Latino immigrants are a positive or negative addition to the nation. One of the many issues is the paradoxical desire of the United States for sealed borders that instills national identity and the desire for a "cheap and submissive workforce," which has helped the economies of both the exit and entry countries (Manzanas, 2006, p. 759).

The United States often desires immigrants from advanced, wealthy, and well-educated nations, and drives out those immigrants from poverty-stricken countries with little emphasis on the importance of education; thus, the U.S. has become discriminatory toward the immigrants' nationalities. For example, although the southern border of the United States is half as long as the U.S.-Canadian border and has the equivalent of an army division patrolling it, many U.S. citizens think the southern border should be watched and controlled even more, while the northern border of the United States is barely defended at all by relatively few fire trucks (Manzanas, 2006). This structural inequality creates an environment where poorer immigrants who are more personally motivated to improve the lives of their families have become, paradoxically, less empowered to do so. Odem (2008) stated that Latino immigrants are an integral part of

the U.S. labor force, but exist on the margins of the nation's political and social life; they are accepted as hard workers, but not desired as permanent citizens. These overt contradictions permeate the American culture and perspectives on Latino immigrants.

In addition to these contradictions, there are several major policies, such as tighter border control, which have had unanticipated outcomes. Odem (2008) explained that the tightening of the border has actually encouraged immigrants to remain in the U.S. for longer periods because circular migration is more difficult and expensive. There are also policies that encourage collaboration with other nations, and at the same time exclude the people of these nations from immigrating, such as the United States' open border for trade (NAFTA) and a closed border for immigration, which develops a predictable illegal "migration bridge" between the U.S. and Mexico (Organista, 2007, p. 189).

In addition, the United States is regarded as a place with the potential for upward mobility in socioeconomic status (SES) for anyone and everyone; however, certain statistics reveal different conclusions. For example, according to Pillai, Basham, and Jayasundara (2009), the top one percent of Americans makes more money than the bottom 40 percent. Social classes are beginning to reach the extremes of the economic spectrum. However, the overall American economy has greatly benefited from immigrants in the past, such as in the period after the Great Depression, and is expected to benefit in the future with new waves of immigrants. Pollina (2003) stated, "The growth and success of the U.S. economy would not have occurred had it not been for the mass immigration by people seeking the American Dream" (p. 54).

The American Dream and Idealistic Values of Americans

There are several competing ideas about the American Dream and for whom it is intended. Hill and Torres (2010) explained that the American Dream is being able to achieve success and prosperity through such qualities as determination, hard work, and courage. Stoll (2009) defined the American Dream as the assumption that no matter how poor one starts, he/she can build a better life for himself/herself and his/her children. This is the dream of many Latino peoples living in poverty who want a better future for their children than the one that awaits them. Pollina (2003) explained that the American Dream is represented by two main components—freedom and opportunity. Both of these essential aspects of American life appear to be greatly lacking in Latin America and make the United States an attractive solution to the problems of the immigrants' native countries.

The American Dream for Latino Immigrants

Issues in native countries. There are several issues in Latin American countries, a few of which include poverty, institutional corruption, and abuses of the government. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Shipler explained that poverty essentially becomes a lack of protection and security for those it affects (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010). Poverty is rampant in these Spanish-speaking nations, and most of the time, these people have to fend for themselves—often not succeeding. In Guatemala, institutionalized corruption affects social and health services, causing a lack of access to health care, safe drinking water, and adequate education (Chumil, 2009). Such seemingly elemental aspects of life kill millions of people around the world, but especially in Latin America. The United States has become so advanced that its government is concerned with less basic needs,

such as animal rights. As one Guatemalan immigrant explained it, "in the United States there are laws that protect animals, but in Guatemala there aren't even laws that protect people" (Garni, 2010, p. 332). This is the reality of life for many Latinos living in their native countries.

Beliefs about America and the American Dream. The American Dream is globally acknowledged due to media forms such as television and the Internet. Stoll (2009) explained that the television's portrayal of the United States and the American Dream now attracts people from all over the world. This American Dream attracts people who want an opportunity to climb the social ladder and achieve the life that the United States promises to anyone who is willing to work hard. According to Pillai et al. (2009), America is considered a "land of opportunity" where many Americans believe in liberty, equality, hard work, and eventual prosperity (p. 18). Such values are thought to have contributed to the success of the U.S. as a world economic power.

Shih (2002) completed a study of employers' attitudes toward their Latino immigrant workers. In this study, employers attributed a strong work ethic to Latino workers because they were immigrants and believed in the American Dream of meritocracy, where mobility is possible through hard work and persistence. Other comments about Latino workers by employers who participated in this same research study included: not afraid of work and willing to work hard, not too proud to do anything, ready to follow orders, and do not complain about anything. These positive qualities are often attributed to first-generation Latino immigrant workers in the United States. However, employers also noted that work ethic declined as they became *Americanized*, such as in second generation Latino immigrants. Shih further concluded that

Americanized Latino immigrants were often more cocky and less willing to work hard, which seems to implicate the presence of negative impacts stemming from the American system. Many American citizens are born into a nation of opportunity and feel entitled to their money and social status, whereas many Latino immigrants come humbly, seeking to do any type of work in order to improve their lives little by little.

In seeking this American Dream, owning one's own house was one of the most tangible results. Chanderasekhar (2004) stated that owning a home represented the achievement of the American Dream for many immigrants. Homeownership has great benefits, but it is not easy, especially for the immigrant, to achieve. Although homeownership might be more difficult for immigrants to achieve, they have not given up on their hopes and plans. McConnell and Marcelli (2007) found in their study that legal status does not keep illegal immigrants from buying into the American Dream of homeownership.

Not all Latino immigrants feel as if they have achieved the American Dream. Shobe, Coffman, and Dmochowski (2009) explained that the ability of immigrants to achieve the American Dream "is directly associated with their ability to build social networks, assimilate into the workforce, and meet their basic economic needs" (p. 93). Therefore, the American Dream is not easily achieved, but requires certain sets of social and personal skills.

Difficulties in immigrating. While traveling from native countries to the United States many dangers and violations of human rights await the immigrants. For example, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Indian-looking Latinos are insulted and beaten up by other Latinos, and abusive coyotes (guides) use crossers as slaves and traffic them as

indentured servants (Manzanas, 2006). This is considered to be the necessary evil that Latino immigrants must experience if they really want to make better lives for themselves and their families in the United States. Manzanas also noted that the Border Patrol has shifted migrant routes away from urban area and pushed them into inhospitable areas such as deserts and rivers. However, this does not keep the illegal immigrants from making the journey to the United States—it simply causes more injuries and deaths due to the unbearable climates and potential for drowning.

Realities of living in America. Undocumented status often keeps families living in fear and avoiding many resources that have been known to benefit immigrant families. Abrego and Gonzales (2010) detailed the limited options that most illegal immigrants have while living in the United States.

> Many stay in occupations that provide a stable, albeit low, income and at least minimal protection from immigration officials. Others hold out, waiting for possible changes in their immigration status… [which] leaves them in a state of limbo, whereby they wait in one place, not planning for their futures and not gaining anything while they wait. Still others engage in illicit activity as a means to circumvent the system, earn money, avoid exploitative work environments, and have some autonomy. Each of these choices has negative consequences (p. 152).

Therefore, it seems that no matter what illegal immigrants try to do in making better lives for themselves, they are not able to choose a positive outcome for their own lives. In sharing one immigrant's story, Chumil (2009) explained that he had visions of achieving the American Dream, but was faced with the realities of discrimination and other obstacles he would have to encounter first. Although there are immigrants who try

to cheat the system in order to make money or move forward, there are others who obey the laws and are content with simply having a dangerous, but paying job—even when the pay is less than minimum wage. One study of the U.S. day-labor sector called "On the Corner" as detailed by Heyer (2008) revealed a day labor market full of violations of workers' rights, including wage theft, workplace injuries, and hazardous job locations. In addition, Latinos were also found to be less likely to have savings accounts, which makes them vulnerable to economic fluctuations and unforeseen expenses (Gassoumis et al., 2010). The minimal pay that Latino immigrants do receive is often not even enough to pay housing and food bills, and saving any of it is simply impossible for many.

There is a large gap between what Latinos earn and what other racial/ethnic groups are earning. A recent report detailed in an article by Gassoumis et al. (2010) showed median Latino yearly earnings of about $20,000 compared with $23,000 for Blacks, $30,000 for Whites, and $31,000 for Asians. This statistic shows the large variance based upon cultural ethnicity and race; however, there could be other implications not discussed in this study because they did not control for other contributing factors. Kilty and Haymes (2000) explained that racial and ethnic position is much like social class—it defines the "haves" from the "have-nots" (p. 22). This appears to be the same issue that the United States has been dealing with since the start of this nation. With the "chronically low socioeconomic standing" of Latino immigrants (Livingston & Kahn, 2002, p. 1003), the question is if they are really achieving the desired upward mobility, and therefore, the American Dream, that they came to the United States to achieve.

Hope and resilient spirit among Latinos. Latino immigrants have shown and continue to show incredible endurance and resilience under some of the most adverse circumstances. Abrego and Gonzales (2010) explained that stories of Latinos and their hard work and civic engagement are similar to stories that Americans like to tell of the country's previous immigrants and their desire to succeed. Therefore, Latino immigrants today are much like the first immigrants who established themselves in the United States and were considered to be hardworking and worthy of their accomplishments.

Latino immigrants are often more willing to hold labor-intensive jobs than American citizens such as painting walls, building homes, clearing debris, moving furniture, weeding, and mowing lawns (Odem, 2008). However, Latino immigrants push on to meet their goals despite the menial jobs and intensive labor required of them. Tulud (2006) stated that Latino immigrants have several saving qualities that include courageous hope, creative resistance, and a steadfast faith, which she detailed extensively. Pollina (2003) explained the immigrants seeking the American Dream have traditionally been some of the most highly motivated and hardest working groups of the American population. Through their motivation and hard work, Latino immigrants have shown they are capable of being strong individuals worthy of integration into American society.

With or without the government's endorsement, Latino immigrants have pushed their way into the American culture and community. Odem (2008) stated that immigrants have rented apartments and bought homes, enrolled their children in public schools and become active members of Catholic and evangelical churches, sought medical care and other health services, set up bank accounts and established small businesses, joined

unions, participated in labor protests, and used legal aid services to assist with immigration, labor, and housing problems. Latino immigrants are demonstrably integrated into the everyday fabric of American life, yet they remain marginalized based on their country of origin, rather than their character and contributions to the community.

Focusing Questions of the Research

This research intends to discover the answers to the following questions: How attainable or elusive is the American Dream for Latino immigrants? And to follow, how do those results compare to the attainability of the American Dream for American citizens?

Method

Subjects

This study explored the world of first-generation Latino immigrants and their ideas about the American Dream, as compared to their American citizen counterparts. The participants in this study included a combination of Latino immigrants and American citizens that attended a local Spanish-speaking church in southcentral Virginia. This church was a small congregation that held its services in a large classroom with folding chairs and a small stage. Most of the attendees were Latino persons, although some Americans were also in attendance. Of those Latino church members, most of them (and all of them that participated in the study) were first-generation immigrants to the United States of America. A first-generation immigrant is one who has lived in their native Latin American countries for much of their lives, but came to live in the United States, either temporarily or permanently. Many of the American citizens were wives of the

Latino men or young college students who desired to learn Spanish and participate in the Latino cultural experience.

Convenience sampling was the method of choice due to personal access to several first-generation Latino immigrants through this church. Therefore, although there were many limitations due to this type of sampling, there were also great benefits in that the participants already knew and were comfortable with the researcher. This rapport encouraged the participants to share their personal experiences openly.

Apparatus

The researcher developed an interview consisting of eight open-ended questions and their appropriate probes when necessary (see Appendix A). Although the interview included simple, straightforward questions, they incurred much thought and lengthy responses in many of the participants. The researcher developed the eight questions after reviewing several scholarly articles detailing immigration, legal and illegal, and differing perspectives on the American Dream. Due to the researcher's prior knowledge of immigration, including illegal immigration, several probes were added to aid the participant in further detailing his/her experience when necessary.

The researcher first gathered minimal preliminary information from the participant due to the different questions that the interview would follow based on the interviewee's identity as a first-generation Latino immigrant or American citizen. The preliminary questions included such basic information as, if the participant was an American citizen and what state or other country the participant was from. These basic questions helped to gather information about which country each immigrant was from and what part of the United States and its territories the American citizen was from in

order to complete more specific research and reveal the in-group differences within Latino and American groups.

The questions for the first-generation Latino included inquiring about the story of how he/she came to the United States, what his/her expectations of and actual experiences were in living in the United States, and what kinds of experiences he/she had in returning to his/her native country, if applicable (Chumil, 2009; Cifuentes, 2004; Garni, 2010; Heyer, 2008; Hill & Torres, 2010; Livingston & Kahn, 2002; Manzanas, 2006; Odem, 2008; Organista, 2007; Shih, 2002). The questions for the American citizens included inquiring about his/her cultural background, experiences in living in other countries, if applicable, and beliefs about immigration and Latino immigrants, in particular. Finally, the interview included four questions that were answered by both the first-generation Latino immigrants and the American citizens. These questions included inquiring about current situations and experiences, goals for the future, people/things most important to the person, and beliefs about the American Dream.

The researcher utilized a laptop and requested the assistance of a collaborator in using a video camera. The laptop was employed to record answers and the video camera was used for all interviews; however, the participant was able to choose whether or not to appear in the video. The interview session was recorded in this manner in order to obtain live footage of the interview and to help record any responses after the interview that may have been missed during the session.

Procedures

The objectives of this research study were two-fold: to combine and connect previous research on Latino immigration and the American Dream, while also conducting

interviews with first-generation Latino immigrants and American citizens. The advantages of both basic and applied research were intended for the benefit of many, including Latino immigrants, researchers, government officials, and those interested in the matter of Latino immigration and the American Dream.

Once the Institutional Review Board granted approval to interview people, the researcher conducted interviews with first-generation Latino immigrants to America and American citizens, both of which attended a Spanish-speaking church located in southcentral Virginia. The researcher made an announcement in this church detailing the study that she was to conduct, and participants were chosen based on the fact that they were either Latino immigrants or American citizens that were willing to participate and available to complete an interview. Volunteers did not receive compensation for their inclusion in the study, but because of the nature of the study and the friendship that the researcher had developed with many of the participants, several people volunteered and were able to participate.

The participants read and signed a consent form (see Appendices B & C) before participating in the study. They were told that they could skip any question or stop the interview at any time with no obligation to continue or finish the interview. They were also informed that they would be provided a pseudonym when discussed in the research, and only their native country would appear as a possible identifying characteristic. These interviews were conducted in various atmospheres depending upon the interviewee's choice, as it was discovered that the participants were much more willing to share their experiences in a relaxed and familiar atmosphere. Some of those places included the

church building, the researcher's home (again, the participants were already familiar with her), the participants' homes, and a local coffee shop.

After the researcher set up her laptop and notes and the assistant set up the video camera, she gave a signal for the interview to begin. Preliminary information was gathered and the eight interview questions along with their probes when necessary were asked. Responses were recorded and reviewed on the video camera and the researcher took notes while helping the interviewee feel comfortable and understood. After the interview questions and responses were completed, the video camera was turned off and the volunteer was thanked for his/her participation in the study.

Results

Background of Latino Immigrants Interviewed

Many of the Latino immigrants had similar stories of how they came to the United States, which are detailed here using pseudonyms. Vicentio (from Honduras), Armando (from Honduras), and Jaime (from Mexico) reported that their decision to come to the United States was made impulsively—they each made the decision to come approximately one to two days before they actually left for the United States. Although not requested, three of the six Latino immigrants reported the exact dates of departure from their countries and entrance into the United States.

Five of the six immigrants from Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico openly explained that they were illegal in the country. They shared their stories of traveling through other countries and crossing the U.S.—Mexican border. Vicentio, Armando, Minor, and Byron shared how they came with *coyotes*, or guides, that led them through deserts, rivers, and mountains on buses, trains, trailer trucks, walking, and at times, even

in cars. The immigrants paid these coyotes large sums of money through family members already waiting in the United States. Once the coyote received his payment from the family members of the immigrants through banks, such as Western Union, he led the immigrants on to their next waiting place. Jaime shared how he simply came in a car, as he already lived close to the U.S.—Mexican border.

The trips to the United States were of varied lengths. Byron (from El Salvador), who came in 1999, said it only took him nine days, which is a very short trip for illegal immigrants who have come in more recent years. Armando said it took him about five weeks, Vicentio, who came in 2006, reported that it took him three months, and the rest did not report the length of their trips. The price of a coyote also varied greatly and only three of the immigrants shared how much their trip cost them. Byron, who came in nine days, reported paying $5,000 to the coyote; Armando, who came in five weeks, reported paying $6,000 in travel expenses; and Vicentio, who came in three months, reported paying $3,200. They did not pay this money out of their pockets, but instead borrowed from family members who were already living in the United States and who could send the money to coyotes through international banks.

Most immigrants did not discuss the actual experiences they had while coming to the United States, but Minor did share his experiences. He reported going through hunger for days at a time, watching people get killed, and seeing women raped on the train. He also reported "bad animals" that he had to run from and getting lost in Mexico without his coyote and nowhere else to go. The other immigrants explained that they had to look at the trip as an adventure to keep from thinking about the horrors of what went on around them.

All of the six Latino immigrants shared that they believed America would be the solution to their problems of debt, poverty, and/or lack of opportunities. The motivating factors for each of the immigrants were to help their families back in their home countries to come out of debt and poverty, and to find better lives and job opportunities for themselves in the United States. Most of these immigrants were not planning on remaining in the country for any long length of time, but instead returning to their home countries whenever they would get the chance. Jaime stated in the interview, "I thought I was just coming to work, earn money, and go back to Mexico." This statement was representative of every immigrant interviewed, although only two of the immigrants actually returned to their home countries after leaving for the first time, and both returned to live in the United States.

The majority of the immigrants interviewed arrived in Texas after crossing the border, although one arrived in Arizona, and the others did not explain where they arrived. All illegal immigrants, except for Armando, had male family members in the United States who were there to meet them—mostly brothers, uncles, or cousins. They all reported feelings of guilt for having left their families at home without saying good-bye and/or for knowing that their mothers would be worried until the day they would return home. One immigrant, Vicentio, explained, "My mom and dad suffered a lot… I made the decision to hurt my family because I came to the United States at a very young age." He was 15 years old when he immigrated to the U.S. However, one immigrant interviewed came legally and reported different travel circumstances. He came with a work VISA along with a company that met him when he arrived, gave him a place to

stay, and gave him a paying job. This is a rare circumstance among Latino immigrants and is a coveted position.

Background of American Citizens Interviewed

Three of the five American citizens were born in the United States; of the other two, one was born in Puerto Rico (American territory), and the other in Bolivia, South America, and their accounts are likewise detailed here under pseudonyms. All American citizens spoke English and Spanish; three of the participants learned Spanish as a second language, while Alicia from Bolivia grew up bilingual, and Carmen from Puerto Rico spoke Spanish as a first language and later learned English. Jenny, Pilar, and Carla, the study participants born in the United States, had all lived in Latin American countries for a short period of time. Pilar lived in Mexico for three months; Jenny lived in Guatemala for a year; and Carla lived in Guatemala for four years. Carmen from Puerto Rico and Alicia from Bolivia lived in their respective countries until they came to college in the United States in their late teen years.

All of the American citizens had substantial contact with Latinos and the Hispanic culture and described their experiences openly. Carla, who had lived in Guatemala for four years, described her experience as living in "a poor town, but the love of the people was overwhelming… it was just a different way of life." Carmen, from Puerto Rico, emphasized that Puerto Rico was more Americanized than other Latin American countries; she first realized this when she went on a mission trip to Ecuador and saw true poverty and a different way of life. In addition, all the women were married to Latino immigrants from Honduras, Mexico, and Guatemala—some of whom were included in the interviews of immigrants.

Experiences of Latino Immigrants in the United States

There were several recurring themes in the interviews with Latino immigrants. All of the six Latinos described how difficult it was to be in the United States because everything was different from what they were accustomed to in their home countries and because they missed their families. Vicentio, Armando, Minor, Byron, and Rafael explained how sad and alone they felt without family or even friends. All of the illegal immigrants described the difficulties they had in finding work and how they started out doing anything to get by. Vicentio started out cleaning windows in a local Italian restaurant; Armando started working by planting trees; Minor started in a construction company; and Byron began working in a restaurant. Their need for work included paying back the debts they owed from coming to the United States and sending money home to their families with debts of their own and sicknesses needing expensive medication. Armando described himself as a work machine with no friends because he worked two shifts, six days a week. Minor described his work similarly—everyday he would leave for work in the dark and come back home in the dark. Jaime summed it up with the statement, "O trabajas o te vas," meaning, "You either work or you leave."

Rafael, the only legal immigrant interviewed, explained that he did not really experience the United States; he said, "You just go to work, go to sleep, and do it all over again. Everything's the same. The language is the hardest part of all." This statement was true of all the other immigrants interviewed; they spent their time working and struggling to learn English. Jaime tried to be more positive in saying that the United States had more work and opportunities than in Mexico, but he admitted that there was a lot more stress in daily living. Vicentio described the United States as beautiful and clean

as he expected, but that he was not expecting all the racism that he faced. Armando discussed his misconception that the United States would be a country with human rights. He stated, "Even though it's a country with rights, the rights are only for the Americans, and the rights of the illegal are violated." However, there were also positive aspects of living in the United States. Vicentio and Jaime both reported that one of the best things they had done while in the United States was to start going to church and accepting Jesus as Lord of their lives.

Two of the six immigrants had returned to their countries after coming to the United States for the first time. Armando explained how his mom became sick with diabetes after he left, and how he felt alone being in the United States without any family or friends, so he went back to Honduras. He stayed there for a very short period before once again taking the trip back to the United States illegally. Rafael also returned to Mexico every year according to the stipulations of his work VISA. He reported feeling happy to return to Mexico every year because it was his home where they spoke his language.

American Citizens' Beliefs about Immigration and Latino Immigrants

All five of the American citizens supported immigration from all countries with such statements as, "The U.S. is a place made up of immigrants," "Every country should have a chance to come in," and "Immigration is a great thing—I don't think I would be here if we didn't have immigration." Jenny, Carla, and Pilar also commented on how much they appreciated the cultural diversity of the United States. Pilar stated, "I love the fact that the U.S. is so culturally diverse… it's a wonderful opportunity to get to know other cultures and peoples without leaving the country."

When asked to discuss their thoughts on Latino immigrants, the prevailing statement of most of the women was, "We definitely need reform." Carla thought that it should still be "the same as in the past" when immigration legislation was less developed and considerably less rigid. Jenny commented on how it seemed harder for Latinos to immigrate legally compared with other groups of people. Alicia made the comment referring to Latino immigrants who come to the U.S., "I think there are people who want to do things the right way, and given the opportunity, they would do the right thing." She said that she understood that the U.S. needed to give Americans the jobs, but that not everyone understands the difficulties that Latinos experience in their countries. Alicia said, "Some people are crossing over illegally because of the desperate situation they are in. However, they have no rights here, they aren't paid fairly, and it's a lose-lose situation for them. The only upside is that they can send money back to their families."

The American Dream for Latino Immigrants

Current situations, values, and goals. When asked to describe their current experiences, some similar themes emerged from the immigrants' interviews. Most stated that they were happily married, working in construction or restaurants, and going to church. Jaime described his getting married as a positive experience—"I got married and the meaning of life has completely changed." Most immigrants had positive responses about their current situations, but Minor noted the difficulty in working in construction and how the seasons greatly affected his job. He explained, "The past few months have been hard because there's no work, but now summer is coming and there will be work—everything will return to normal again."

Many of goals of the Latinos interviewed were also similar. Most immigrants described how they wanted to become legal in the United States, learn English, become better Christians, take care of their families, and one day return to their countries with the ability to come back to the United States legally. When asked to discuss their values—what was most important to them—Byron, Jaime, and Rafael reported that their families were most important. Vicentio, and Minor also included their families among other things such as God and their jobs. Armando stated that the most important thing was to be in God's Word everyday. He said, "If you are faithful to God, he will give you the strength to face any difficulty in life."

Beliefs about the American Dream. Each Latino immigrant interviewed had very different ideas about what the American Dream meant. Four of the immigrants did agree that the American Dream was for immigrants and anyone who wanted to give their family a better life. They also agreed that they had not yet achieved it, but were positive about the prospects of achieving what they each thought to be the American Dream in the future. Vicentio described the American Dream as consisting of goals that he had for himself, such as speaking English, having a good job, helping family, living well economically, and having his own company. With that definition in mind, he explained that he has achieved about 40 percent of it stating, "You have to be optimistic and keep moving forward knowing you can do it. This country is a country of opportunities—you just have to look for them and fight for them." Armando described the American Dream as having economic stability and equal rights. Jaime described it as simply living better than one did before. Byron stated, "The American Dream has always been having legal

documents, having a 40 hour/week job, having a house, and having an established family."

Rafael and Minor had very different perspectives from the other immigrants on the American Dream. Rafael believed that the American Dream was all about money and that he did not like it or want to achieve it. He explained that so many people think they are living the American Dream while they are really just slaves to their debt and are going to live short lives because of the stress. Rafael said that the only one actually benefiting from that person's hard work is the government. He concluded with the idea that one might enjoy the so-called American Dream for 10 to 20 years, but that one would come to the point where he realizes that everything has passed him by. Minor explained how he felt that everyone else saw the American Dream as such a great thing, but that he just wanted to go home. He was quite disillusioned with the United States and stated, "Some believe it's like a dream to come here, but I just want to wake up again."

The American Dream for American Citizens

Current situations, values and goals. When asked about their current situations, the American citizens all explained that they were married and involved in church. Four of the five were working full-time and the remaining participant was a stay-at-home mother. They also shared many of the same goals such as being good wives and mothers and serving the Lord. Carmen, Alicia, and Pilar discussed the positive prospects of returning to school and getting a Master's degree and/or licensures to teach and do translation work. Jenny shared how she desired to be a good friend, be able to travel, and possibly even live where it is warm. Carla discussed how she would like to see her husband get legal documentation and have his own business one day. The priorities of all

the American citizens were their relationships with God, their husbands, and their children. Alicia included church and her students at school as priorities and Jenny expressed her desire to be a good employee.

Beliefs about the American Dream. The American citizens, like the Latino immigrants, also had very different ideas about what the American Dream was. Jenny explained that it was having the freedom and opportunities to be whoever one wants to be, while Carmen described it as being well off economically and having "the beautiful house like they show in the movies." Pilar described it similarly in saying that it is being successful, having all that you need and want, and living comfortably. Carla described it more from an immigrant's perspective saying that it is for people to come and help their families, which could include having a nice home and being successful. Alicia, the participant that grew up in Bolivia, described it from the Latino's and the American's perspective. For the Latino, she described the American Dream as being "able to provide a life where your family has food, a house, and a stable job," whereas she described it from the American's perspective as "a wealthier thing where you have a house, a boat, and expensive things."

Most of the American citizens said that the American Dream was for anyone who wanted it. Four of the five agreed that they had already achieved some degree of it. Jenny described her successful experiences in getting a job right out of college and moving up in her job since then. Alicia shared how she and her family are not rich, but that God has blessed them and that she would like to share that blessing with others instead of wasting it on herself. Carla explained, "We keep achieving new things, then we have more goals—so it's a process, but it's definitely achievable!" Pilar felt that she

had achieved it already, but she still wanted to do more with her life; however, she also commented that at the end of the day this ideal is not everything and that she was not going to kill herself to be successful. Carmen explained that the American Dream was possible, but that she and her family still had not achieved it yet. Jenny stated how incredible it was to be able to come to the United States with a couple of dollars in one's pocket and own one's own business someday. The final statement she made was prevalent through most of the interviews with the American citizens—"As long as you work hard and continue to improve, I feel like you are living the American Dream."

Discussion

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this research study. Eleven volunteers participated and the countries of Honduras, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Mexico, Bolivia, and the United States were represented. Therefore, the sample size was small with a small range of Latin American countries represented, while there are actually sixteen other countries from which Latino immigrants living in the U.S. have immigrated. In addition, all participants attended a small church in a small city of southcentral Virginia; therefore, the sample of participants had religious motivations and lived in more of a small town atmosphere rather than a metropolitan area, which affected the results.

Six of the participants were men and five were women. All of the women were American citizens married to Latino immigrants, so their understanding and appreciation of Latino culture affected the results. No female Latino immigrants were represented. In addition, all but one participant were married, and this lifestyle was not necessarily representative of all Latino immigrants, as there are many single and cohabitating

immigrants living in the United States. Finally, two of the American citizens lived the majority of their lives outside of the United States—in Puerto Rico and Bolivia, which affected the results. Further research would be of great benefit to the field of research on Latino immigrants and immigration in general.

Is the American Dream Just an Illusion or can it be a Reality?

For Latino immigrants. Four of the six Latino immigrants mentioned in their interviews that they desired to achieve the American Dream, as was defined by each individual. Two of the participants expressed that they did not find the American Dream to be a positive aspect or underlying goal of their lives here in the United States. Minor saw the American Dream as just an illusion that he was unsuccessful in grasping and he desired to return to his country. Rafael saw the American Dream as an unpleasant force of American life that was deceiving many Americans into becoming slaves to debt and always wanting more success and money. However, Vicentio, Armando, Byron, and Jaime explained that the American Dream was the driving force for their immigration to the United States. They saw the American Dream as always improving, having economic stability, and giving their families better futures. Because each immigrant defined the American Dream differently, not all the immigrants were in agreement about desiring to achieve this kind of life. However, for those immigrants who did desire to achieve it, they believed it was possible. Most of the Latino immigrants felt that they had still not achieved it, but they believed that they would achieve it in the future.

For American citizens. Three of the five American citizens described positive aspects about the American Dream and felt that they had already achieved some measure of it. Jenny discussed her feelings of success in life so far; Carla felt that she was

continually improving; and Alicia explained that God had really blessed her family with a house, cars, and stable jobs. Carmen felt that it was possible, but that she and her family still had not achieved it. Pilar expressed how she did not want to obsess over being successful and living comfortably; therefore, she did not think much of the American Dream. It was interesting to note how the different ideas about the American Dream really affected its value in the opinion of each participant. The American citizens were generally more confident than the Latino immigrants of having achieved at least some portion of the American Dream already.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Preliminary Information

- American citizen or Latino immigrant?
- If American citizen, where from and what is current residence?
- If Latino immigrant, what is native country?

Survey Questions

If Latino Immigrant…

1. Could you tell me the story about you coming to the United States? / ¿Me puede contar la historia de cómo vino a los Estados Unidos?

   If necessary these probes will be used… / Si es necesario, pediré esta información…

   - What led to your decision to come? / ¿Qué le llevó a tomar la decisión de venir?
   - What did you think it would be like when you arrived? / ¿Qué pensaba de cómo sería cuando llegara?
   - Did you already have family in the United States? / ¿Ya tenía familia en los Estados Unidos?
   - What role did your family and friends play in the decision to come and in getting you to the U.S.? / ¿Qué papel tuvo su familia y sus amigos en la decisión de venir y entrar a los Estados Unidos?

- What method of travel did you use and how long did it take? / ¿Qué forma de viajar usó y cuánto tiempo tomó para llegar?
- Where did you arrive and who greeted you upon arrival to the United States? / ¿A dónde llegó y quién lo recibió cuando llegó a los Estados Unidos?

2. Please describe your experience in the first few days of being in the United States. Was the U.S. as you expected it to be? / Por favor cuente sus experiencias en los primeros días de estar en los Estados Unidos. ¿Los E.U. era cómo esperaba?
3. Please describe your experience during the first year of being in the United States. / Por favor cuente sus experiencias del primer año de estar en los Estados Unidos.
4. Have you ever gone back to your native country since coming to the United States? If so, please describe that experience. / ¿Ha regresado a su país de origen desde que vino a los Estados Unidos? Si es así, por favor cuente sus experiencias.

If American Citizen…

1. Could you describe to me your cultural background?
2. Have you ever lived in another country or around a non-American culture? If so, please describe that experience.
3. What do you believe about immigration to the United States?
4. How do you feel about immigrants from all nations in the United States? Please describe your feelings toward Latino immigrants in particular.

Both Latino Immigrants and American Citizens…

5. Could you describe to me your current situation and experiences? / ¿Me puede contar su situación y experiencias actuales?

6. Please describe your goals for the future. / Por favor cuente sus metas para el futuro.

   If necessary, these probes will be used… / Si es necesario, pediré esta información…

   - Where do you plan to live? / ¿A dónde piensa vivir?
   - What do you see happening in regards to family, education, and/or work? / ¿Qué piensa que va a pasar en cuanto a la familia, la educación, y/o el trabajo?
7. What is most important to you? / ¿Qué es lo más importante para usted?
8. Please explain your beliefs about the "American Dream." / Por favor cuente sus pensamientos sobre el "Sueño Americano."

   If necessary, these probes will be used… / Si es necesario, pediré esta información…

   - Who do you believe the American Dream is for? / ¿Para quién cree usted que es el sueño americano?
   - Is the American Dream something you want for yourself? / ¿Es el sueño americano algo que usted quiere?
   - Is the American Dream something you believe you can achieve, have achieved, or will achieve? / ¿Es el sueño americano algo que usted cree que puede lograr, ha logrado, o va a lograr?

Appendix B

Consent From in English

CONSENT FORM
Latino Immigrants and the American Dream
Jessica Del Cid
Liberty University
Psychology

You are invited to participate in a research study of Latino immigrants and their experiences/views of the American Dream and its attainability. You were selected as a potential participant because you are a first generation Latino immigrant to the United States currently attending Iglesia de las Americas OR an American citizen who has lived within the United States for most of your life, also attending Iglesia de las Americas. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Jessica Del Cid, Liberty University, Department of Psychology

Background Information

The purpose of this study is:
To research the motivations of first generation Latino immigrants in coming to the United States, their experiences in emigrating, their experiences at present in the United States (such as involvement in school, work, church, and any other community activities), and their future goals and expectations.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Be prepared to answer all questions you feel comfortable answering and not to answer anything you feel hesitant to discuss.
2. Understand that video taping may take place; however, there are options in choosing to be seen (face, part of body, back of head, not at all).
3. Participate in one interview session of anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour, depending on your decision to continue with the interview and your length of responses.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has several risks:

First, you may be reminded of some painful memories in recounting experiences; however, you will not be required to answer any question you do not feel completely comfortable answering.

Second, you may worry that your identity will appear in the research; however, the investigator will not report you, and will provide you with an alternate name when discussed in the research, in addition to blurring your face on the videotape, if you choose to be recorded showing your face.

Third, if you provide any information pertaining to child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse or intent to harm self or others, your pertinent information will no longer be confidential, as it is mandatory for the investigator to report this to any and all protective service agencies necessary.

The benefits to participation are:

You will be a part of research where you can voice your experiences in coming to and living in the United States and promote more research on the subject, potentially even promoting changes in immigration laws.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report the researcher might publish, she will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely for a period of 36 months, which will then be promptly destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University and/or Iglesia de las Americas. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any time with out affecting those relationships.

Permission to Videotape:

_____ Yes, I give permission to be videotaped. I understand my image will be blurred if necessary to protect my confidentiality. I will choose whether to be recorded in the fact, a part of the body, the back of the head, or even not showing any part of the body at all.

_____ No, I do not give permission to be videotaped.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Jessica Del Cid. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 57 Lake Court Avenue, Lynchburg, VA 24502, (434) 213-7180, jrosey@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

If you would like to process any painful memories that arise as a result of the interview, **you are encouraged** to call the Crisis Line of Central Virginia at (434) 947-HELP and/or the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK.

If you would like to learn more about the behavioral mental healthcare available in Central Virginia, **you are encouraged** to contact the Central Virginia Community Services Board at 2241 Langhorne Road, Lynchburg, VA 24501, (434) 847-8050.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant:_____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Consent Form in Spanish

AUTORIZACIÓN
Los Inmigrantes Latinos y el Sueño Americano
Jessica Del Cid
La Universidad de Liberty
Psicología

Está invitado a participar en una investigación de los inmigrantes latinos y sus experiencias y pensamientos sobre el Sueño Americano y la posibilidad de lograrlo. Fue escogido como un posible participante porque es un inmigrante latino de la primera generación a los Estados Unidos y asiste a la Iglesia de las Américas o es un ciudadano americano que ha vivido dentro de los Estados Unidos por la mayor parte de su vida y también asiste a la Iglesia de las Américas. Pedimos que lea este informe y si tiene alguna pregunta puede hacerla antes de dar su consentimiento para participar en esta investigación.

Esta investigación es organizada por: Jessica Del Cid, La Universidad de Liberty, Departamento de Psicología.

Información Preliminar

El propósito de esta investigación es:
Investigar las motivaciones de los inmigrantes latinos de la primera generación en venir a los Estados Unidos, sus experiencias en inmigrar, sus experiencias ahora en los Estados Unidos (como participar en la escuela, el trabajo, la iglesia, y otras actividades de la comunidad), y sus metas y esperanzas para el futuro.

Procedimiento:
Si da su consentimiento para participar en esta investigación, le pedimos que haga las siguientes cosas:

1. Esté preparado para contestar todas las preguntas que usted se siente bien en contestar y si desea no contestar algo que le puede hacer daño, sólo déjelo saber.
2. Entienda que la investigadora toma video de las entrevistas; sin embargo, hay opciones en escoger mostrar lo siguiente: la cara, una parte del cuerpo, atrás de la cabeza, o ninguna parte del cuerpo.
3. Participe en una entrevista de más o menos 15 minutos hasta una hora, lo cual depende de su decisión de continuar con la entrevistas y la duración de sus respuestas.

Los Riesgos y Beneficios de Ser Parte de la Investigación

Esta investigación tiene unos riesgos:

Primero, puede recordarse de momentos malos en su vida cuando usted cuenta las experiencias. Sin embargo, no tendrá que contestar ninguna pregunta de que no se siente bien de contestar.

Segundo, puede ser que se preocupe de que su identidad aparezca en la investigación; sin embargo, la investigadora no le entregará, y le dará otro nombre cuando lo pone en el estudio. Además, si usted escoge mostrar su cara en el video, la investigadora hará borrosa la cara si dice algo en cuanto a su estado ilegal.

Tercero, si usted provee información que se trata de abuso de niños, descuidar a niños, abuso de ancianos, o intención de lastimar a si mismo o a alguien más, su información pertinente ya no será confidencial porque es obligatorio entregar esta información a las agencias de servicio de protección.

Los beneficios de participar incluyen:

Será parte de una investigación donde tendrá la oportunidad de hablar de sus experiencias en venir a y vivir en los Estados Unidos; además, puede promover más estudios de este tema, y así será posible que hagan cambios a las leyes de inmigración.

Confidencialidad:

Los archivos de este estudio serán privados. En cualquier tipo de informe que la investigadora publique, ella no incluirá información que identifique a un individuo. Los archivos estarán bien guardados por un período de 36 meses, los cuales serán destruidos en ese tiempo.

La Clase Voluntaria de Esta Investigación:

La participación de esta investigación es voluntaria. Su decisión de participar o no participar no le afectará en sus relaciones actuales o futuras con la Universidad de Liberty y/o con la Iglesia de las Américas. Si decide participar, será libre de negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta o retirarse en cualquier momento sin afectar a esas relaciones.

Autorización de Grabar en Video:

_____Sí, le doy mi permiso de ser grabado por video. Entiendo de que mi imagen la hará borrosa si es necesario para proteger mi confidencialidad. Escogeré si quiero ser grabado por la cara, una parte del cuerpo, atrás de la cabeza, o sin mostrar ninguna parte del cuerpo.

_____No, no le doy mi permiso de ser grabado en video.

Contactos y Preguntas:

La investigadora organizando este estudio es: Jessica Del Cid. En este momento puede preguntar cualquier pregunta que tiene. Si tiene preguntas después, **le pedimos** que se ponga en contacto con ella a 57 Lake Court Avenue, Lynchburg, VA 24502, (434) 213-7180, jrosey@liberty.edu.

Si tiene preguntas o asuntos en cuanto a la investigación y le gustaría hablar con alguien más que no sea la investigadora, **le pedimos** que se ponga en contacto con Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Presidente, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502, fgarzon@liberty.edu.

Si quiere hablar con alguien de recuerdos dolorosos que vienen por causa de la entrevista, **le pedimos** que llame al Crisis Line of Central Virginia a (434) 947-HELP y/o el National Suicide Prevention Hotline a 1-800-273-TALK.

Si quiere aprender más de la asistencia sanitaria de la mente disponible en el centro de Virginia, **le pedimos** que se ponga en contacto con el Central Virginia Community Services Board a 2241 Langhorne Road, Lynchburg, VA 24501, (434) 847-8050.

Afirmación de Consentimiento:

He leído y entiendo la información anterior. He preguntado sobre mis asuntos y recibido respuestas. Doy mi consentimiento para participar en esta investigación.

Firma del Participante:_____ Fecha: _____

Firma de la Investigadora:_____ Fecha: _____