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May 11, 2015

ANTH492

The Barriers to Immigrant Youth Achievement:
An Examination into Prince George's County Immigrant Adolescents

I. Introduction

The term “immigrant” is one that is commonly heard and understood in the context of political debates and commentary from media outlets however, this understanding does not encompass the complexity and varying identities associated with immigrants. Immigrants are a politically superimposed identity on a group of individuals who do not primarily perceive themselves that way. The result in this political labeling is the connotation surrounding the words “immigrants”, “aliens”, or “foreign-born” which causes native citizens to perceive immigrants at “the other”. This way of thinking causes native citizens to distance themselves from immigrants’ problems in America today and pretend that the issue does not affect them. Anti-immigration arguments fail to consider the consequences of the social issue affecting 12.9% (the foreign born portion of the population) of the 2010 total population (Census, 2010).

There needs to be a mental shift in the way people understand immigrants currently in America today. Instead of viewing them as a homogenous group of people from somewhere that’s not America, people need to realize that while these people come from assorted backgrounds, and they are mothers, brothers, and neighbors too. Immigrants are difficult to study because the range of stories and experiences from each immigrant vary in a way that illustrates the complexity of the immigrant narrative.

In order to attempt to capture the dynamic picture of immigrant life in America, there must be an examination of both primary as well as secondary sources. Secondary sources are able to illustrate the statistics and resulting theories regarding immigration as well as the historical information, providing the foundation of the immigrant experience. However, the multidimensional view and understanding has to be seen through the complimentary use of primary sources. The use of both is able to provide the context for nuances associated within each immigrant's narrative. Through this exploration there was a more specific focus on the immigrant youth narrative. There needs to be programs and services offered to immigrants including their children. These resources can be instrumental in helping these families specifically students overcome the obstacles they face in terms of their future success.

II. Study Site

I was able to explore the barriers immigrant youth face through my service learning organization, the Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) more specifically its Youth Empowered Towards Success (YETS) Gang Prevention Program. The Latin American Youth Center describes the program as a “gang prevention program for at-risk youth in Prince George’s County, Maryland. The program offers afterschool classroom instruction and recreational activities for students at High Point and Northwestern High Schools. The program engages the students in positive youth development activities including enrichments, educational workshops and education outings” (LAYC, 2014).

Northwestern and High Point High School both have a significant proportion of Latino students, many of which are first or second generation immigrants as well as 35-40% African Americans attending both schools (Prince George’s County Public Schools, 2015). The demographic composition of Prince George’s County can be attributed to “rapid growth in the

Latino population in the Washington and its Maryland suburbs in the 1980s, which led to the emergence of Spanish language media” (Ready, 1991, pg. 15). This is seen very clearly throughout the community with Hispanic cultural influences weaved throughout the neighborhood and its residents. My supervisor for the program, Gabriela Gonzalez, as well as the staff members of the LAYC had mostly Latino/Hispanic backgrounds themselves. This resulted in a work environment in the LAYC office in Riverdale, MD echoing the cultural and linguistic commonality seen throughout the community of both high schools.

Although the neighborhoods surrounding the high schools are only several minutes from the University of Maryland, I was completely unaware of the large immigrant community established within these regions before my service learning. Furthermore, through my service learning I was able to observe and learn that students in those neighborhoods where the YETS program takes place, have challenges in education obtainment and having successful futures. Finally, my service learning experience showed me the integral role nonprofits like Latin American Youth Center have in overcoming those challenges immigrant youth face. I was able to recognize these findings through the practice of ethnographic observations and documentation of my fieldnotes.

III. Methods: Primary Data Collection and Analysis

Through my fieldnotes I was able to identify certain trends and patterns based on my observations and conversations during my service learning experience. One of the most common observations throughout my fieldnotes was the role language played in the students’ lives. With a majority of the students’ families coming from Central and Latin American countries, Spanish was a linguistic commonality amongst the students in the program and throughout the organizational structures of the neighborhood. Throughout many workshops held at both schools,

it was a common occurrence when a speaker came to speak to the students to offer a Spanish translation of what was being said. Furthermore, when filing and organizing students' documents, I noticed many forms designated for parents and students to fill out were commonly in Spanish (both the questions being asked as well as the ones being answered). The language alternatives provided to the students illustrates the pervasiveness of bilingualism (speaks English and Spanish) and monolingualism (speaks solely Spanish) within the program. The Latin American Youth Center is able to recognize this linguistic norm amongst the students it works with and as result the majority of employees working with them must have a Spanish language proficiency in order to effectively communicate and engage with the students. Gabriela, my supervisor, interchangeably spoke to students in English and Spanish, not only helping students understand more effectively but also to connect with students on a cultural and personal level that they can respond well to. The linguistic commonality shared amongst the Spanish speaking students especially students of immigrant families, establishes a strong sense of cultural connection amongst the residents of the associated community. Community, another theme prevalent throughout my fieldnotes, is important to define in the context of my observations. This cultural community I observed throughout the areas I studied, is the established ethnic/immigrant enclave created as result of the residents linguistic commonalities and shared cultural experiences. The nature of the enclave and its associated institutions help ease the communication of many solely Spanish speaking residents as well as promote relevant social networks for residents. Speaking the Spanish language as a shared trait can be beneficial to many immigrant families with few English skills when transitioning to America as well as first and second generation immigrants identifying with a familiar culture. However, the residents/students that are struggling with English typically have hindered success.

First generation immigrants and individuals who solely speak Spanish create a language barrier with individuals in the community having no Spanish language background, stifling the social and economic growth of these non-English speakers and contributing to construing them as “others”. Throughout my service learning, one of my duties was to call students or students’ parents in order to ascertain varying information needed by Latin American Youth Center. As someone with marginal experience speaking Spanish, interacting and communicating with non-English speakers posed quite a challenge for me. In response to the language barrier I often relied on Gabriela to help provide a translation. While the students are fortunate that a large part of the community speaks Spanish, without having the linguistic support, students would have immense trouble on a day to day basis with basic communication. Many of the students in the program attend ESOL classes, with High Point High School having the largest English Language Learner program of any school in Prince George's County (Prince George’s County Public Schools, 2013). According to Gabriela, many of the students fall behind in their classes and get discouraged with themselves if they cannot speak English. As a result they disengage themselves and tend to drop out. According to the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, 28% of students in Maryland that drop out are Prince George’s County students (Russ, 2013). Furthermore, for the schools of the neighborhoods of Langley Park and Riverdale, MD “the total number of Hispanic American children in middle school grades is about double those in the 12th grade”(Hanna, 2013, p. 65). The language barrier not only affects the students but also their parents, as it is difficult to find higher paying jobs without speaking English. Forced to work in low-wage jobs, many of these families, as a result, have lower socio-economic statuses.

Students being from lower income families was also a theme throughout my fieldnotes. According to US News, for the 2012-2013 school year approximately 72% of High Point

students and 65% of Northwestern students are considered economically disadvantaged (US News, 2013). The Youth Empowered Towards Success program also provides meals for students during the program as Gabriela explained many of the students come from low-income families. Gabriela also told me that is not uncommon for student's parents to pull them out of school in order to work and help contribute to the family. This can result in a high number of absences for students and consequently cause them to fall behind in their coursework. Furthermore, several conversations with students revealed that many do not see college as a viable option for their futures. Gabriela explained that many recognize their parents' lack of ability to afford an expensive four-year university. As a result, students have lower motivation to do well in school and become disengaged. Parents having a lower income also forces them to work more and, as a result, affects the time spent with their children.

Family involvement is also a prevalent theme throughout the context of my fieldnotes and service learning. As it is necessary for many of the students' parents to work long hours to make ends meet, parents have a restricted amount of time spent at home and with their children. A common issue throughout the program was a lack of transportation available for many students. Gabriela often would drive students home after the program if parents could not do so. Gabriela also relayed to me that several students miss school out of lack of transport some days. Furthermore, parents' lack of involvement attributed to being away from their children a large portion of time, results in a disconnect between parents and teachers/program staff as they struggle to find to meet and discuss the progress of their child. Being out of the home a majority of the time, leaves students unsupervised which can result in risky behavior such as teen pregnancy and gang involvement. Teen pregnancy is so pervasive within the area that Northwestern High School has a daycare within their school designed for teen mothers attending.

Furthermore, gangs in the region/school not only identify with the students culturally, Gabriela explained, but also provide a support system that many of the students feel they are missing. Risky behaviors, low accountability for the student and lack of parental engagement with the school, leads to the hindrance of students' grades and attendance.

Many of the effects felt from lack of family involvement can be seen in both Northwestern and High Point High Schools' school environment. Conversations with several students reveal that some teachers are apathetic about students' success in their classrooms. Teachers' frustration and consequential disengagement stem from the continued trends of risk associated behaviors and high absences. Furthermore, the school systems lack substantial funding to make a change which reinforces teachers' frustrated mentality. According to Prince George's County Public Schools, the county has a budget of \$1.725 Billion, while neighboring Montgomery County Public Schools has a 2014-2015 budget of \$2.39 Billion (PGCPS, MCPS, 2014). As a response to high absences and risk associated behavior, both schools enforce a uniform students must wear as well as have a heavy security presence throughout the school. The regimented environment the schools attempt to create, assumes and relays a message that students will misbehave or fail to students, teachers and parents. The attitudes of many teachers and parents become to accept this behavior as the norm since it so pervasive to the schools and surrounding community. The perception others have on the students' identities can have a profound effect on how they see themselves.

The internalization of these negative perceptions results in students having lower self-esteem and low expectations for their futures. Without parents or teachers providing encouragement and support to the students, their consequent academic and future success is significantly impacted. For example, many students' views regarding attending college have been shaped by their belief

in what administrators and teachers say, believing they would never have the opportunity or skills to be able to attend. Never being told to aspire to higher education creates a self-fulfilling prophecy where students' attitudes towards their schoolwork and futures are negative as a result. Many of the Youth Empowered Towards Success program's lessons emphasize student self-worth/value and the students' futures. A mandatory initial step of a student entering the program is a pre-test. This test asks questions such as students selecting an agreement level of "I do whatever I feel like doing" and "I like everything about myself". The final step of the program is to take the post-test which models the same questions as before in the hope that the students improve their score on the test after going through the program. Organizations like the Latin American Youth Center recognize the importance of emphasizing a student's ability to see their futures and self-worth in order to have higher motivation and desire to do better in school and consequently stay away from risk associated behaviors affecting their future success. Throughout the observations seen in my service learning, I was able to identify several themes that were also echoed throughout library research.

IV. Methods: Secondary Data Collection and Analysis

Through the research and literature search process, I was able to uncover salient issues affecting immigrant youth in America today. In transitioning from my fieldnotes/primary sources to secondary sources and research, I was able to use keywords pertinent to the themes found throughout my fieldnotes. Ultimately, I was able to uncover that language, economic status, family involvement, school environment, and perception of self are all determinants of immigrant youth success.

Childhood and adolescence are an integral part of an individual's formative development and socialization. With parents who are immigrants or if students are immigrants themselves,

immigrant youth grow up balancing two cultural identities causing added stressors on to that child because their primary socialization within their family/ethnic community is different than the socialization in schools controlled by the dominant culture. Language for immigrant youths can be seen as a manifestation of this struggle in balancing cultural identities. Specifically examining Latino adolescents, it is clear the cultural communities and connections established when living in a new environment strengthen one's cultural identity to their home country. According to a study conducted on Latino immigrant adolescents in California, "Latino youth showed that adolescents who maintained strong ethnic identification commonly bonded together as a way to cope with acculturation stress and discrimination experiences" (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005, p. 71). As the authors, Veronica Benet-Martinez and Jana Haritatos, continue to explain "according to nearly all of the immigrant adolescents, their American friends did not interact well with their Latino family and friends. This disconnection compartmentalized the adolescents' worlds of family and friends" (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005, p. 71). John Myles and Feng Hou in their 2003 study, reveal "ethnic composition of the immediate neighborhood plays an important role in influencing how immigrants acculturate (Myles & Hou, 2003, p. 126). However, they go on to explain that homogenous ethnic neighborhoods tend to impede the way one balances both cultures noting, "individuals with the problematic diffused or marginalized cultural adaptation style did not tend to live in ethnically mixed neighborhoods" (Myles & Hou, 2003, p. 127). The problem typically associated with the struggle to have a bicultural adaptation in a homogenous ethnic enclave is that English is used significantly less often. Monolingualism poses a serious challenge to school success for immigrant youth. According to the book, *Becoming Bicultural: Risk, Resilience, and Latino Youth*, "the language barrier not only required students to put forth extra effort but also made the female adolescents susceptible to growing

feelings of isolation and depression. Males countered discrimination by physically fighting back” (Smokowksi & Bacallao, 2011, p. 34). With few school resources, Paul Smokowksi and Martica Bacallao found that students who struggled with English established “a system of mutual self-help in which assist one another with language difficulties in the classroom. They formed small networks of informal cultural guides who usually shared the same country-of-origin. These cultural self-help networks were especially helpful for newcomers” (Smokowksi & Bacallao, 2011, p. 34). The solution purposed in helping immigrant youth obtain English skills is placing them in ESOL (English as a Second Language) classes or LEP (Limited English Proficiency). Harriett D. Romo and Toni Falbo examined the effects of these classes on immigrant youth finding “the problem with such ESL classes is that they emphasize oral language and does not address the students’ academic needs such as learning the social studies or science content provided solely to them in English” (Romo & Falbo, 2000, p. 28). Examining graduation rates of students who received LEP services Romo and Falbo found “16.5% of high school students who received LEP service dropped out, compared to a districtwide rate of 9.2%” (Romo & Falbo, 2000, p. 29). They attributed this finding to the idea that “students who cannot pass the standardized English tests or function in a regular classroom often give up on school because they realize that they will not be able to achieve the high school diploma” (Romo & Falbo, 2000, p. 29). LEP and ESOL programs/classes operate on the idea that students have a deficit rather than a potential to be bilingual. The frustrations associated with being grouped into these programs and the consequential discrimination erodes positive attitudes students have towards their school and education. A noted education policy researcher and Stanford professor, Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, highlights this claiming “monolingualism and discrimination may prove so problematic that immigrant adolescents disengage from school, and perceive dropping out of

school as a viable means of maintaining their personal dignity. For many immigrant students, school does not seem to be a place they feel welcomed or have a sense of belonging” (Ruiz-de-Velasco, 2000, p. 71). The themes of language barriers deterring students’ motivation and achievement in school are similar to those voiced by immigrant parents in their work. Through several hundred interviews, Smokowksi and Bacallao found that “immigrant parents were willing to take low-paying, low-status jobs” with monolingualism being “the greatest obstacle to advancement and recognition” (Smokowksi & Bacallao, 2013, p. 39). The barriers to professional advancement result in many immigrant families having a lower socio-economic status as well as parents being forced to work many hours.

Parents’ involvement or lack of involvement in an immigrant youth’s upbringing is a large determinant of academic achievement and future success for their children. Work schedules for both parents and children can substantially reduce the amount of time spent together as a family. In a 1994 study conducted on Latino adolescents with immigrant status, found “because the Latino family is the crucible for maintaining enculturation, some adolescents said decreased family time undermined their culture-of-origin-involvement” (Brindis, Wolfe, Ball, 1994, p. 103). As a result, the cultural conflict between “new ideologies and preserving established cultural beliefs is likely to fuel adolescent rebellion, alienate adolescents from parents, and contribute to the development of adolescent behavioral problems” (Brindis, Wolfe, Ball, 1994, p. 103). The psychological impact described can be seen in the study conducted by Delores James who reveals “Some adolescents in our sample described feeling isolated, lonely, and depressed even when their family home. Such feelings of sadness seemed to stem from grieving the loss of time and sense of intimacy with their parents and family that the teens had known prior to immigration” (James, 1997, p. 100). Furthermore, this new parent-child conflict, as well as long

periods going unsupervised causes, risk associated behavior and delinquency. For example researchers, Carmen Velez and Jane Ungenack found “immigrant children and those born to immigrant parents often experience more problems in the new society than in the country of origin. Velez and Ungenack’s study of drug use among Puerto Rican adolescents found higher rates of drug use among those born in New York City (81%) and those who emigrated from Puerto Rico (63%) than those who still lived in Puerto Rico (52%)” (Velez and Ungenack, 1995, p. 92). Another study was able to find that “family cohesion and communication problems is one of the mediating factors within a social ecology specific to the Latino immigrant community that is a major contributor to (mediating factor for) youth violence” (Edberg, Clearly, Anadrade, 2010, p. 230). Parental involvement is also key in strengthening teacher-student relationships. An examination of Latino immigrant youth in Austin, Texas found “Latino parents instructed their children to listen to their teachers because the parents’ ability was limited due to their language barrier and difficult time understanding the American school system. This dependency on the teacher, rather than parents, became problematic when tension occurred between adolescents and teachers. Because of these limitations, many of the parents were unable to do the kinds of things that the school expected them to do in order to keep their “at risk” children in school” (Guyl, Madon, Prieto, 2010, p. 117). The lack of communication between teachers and parents impacts the way many teachers communicate with their students.

Teachers’ attitudes, as well as the general school environment, can be seen as large determinants of academic achievement of immigrant youth. Nilda Flores-Gonzalez studied the identities constructed of immigrant youth in schools in Chicago. She found that “street kids were unable to form school kid identities and took on non-school-kid roles and identities” (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002, p. 239). Flores-Gonzalez concluded that these adolescents “have this identity

thrust upon them and maintain it for lack of access to other roles” (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002, p. 239). Flores-Gonzalez continues by suggesting “among the adolescents we interviewed, the effects of monolingualism and discrimination in the school setting alienated and isolated immigrant adolescents from the larger school environment, and blocked some of them from participating in valued roles” (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002, p. 240). These results are echoed in Smokowksi and Bacallao’s study conducted on immigrant youth where the “adolescents corroborated that teachers often had lower expectations for Latino students, and regularly gave them extra time or the answers for assignments. Many of the students found the extra time and lower expectations they perceived from teachers to be condescending” (Smokowksi & Bacallao, 2006, p. 657). Grouping and labeling students, whether by their language, nationality or intelligence levels, has a significant effect on how a student consequently performs in the future. A study conducted by Suzanne Oboler found “the effects of labeling extend for long periods of time because labeling changes the way teachers, counselors, and peers treat the students. Teachers and counselors behave differently around students labeled as “not college material”. They expect less from them in terms of intellectual performance, and students generally meet their expectations. Over time, this treatment and labeling itself affect the way the students think of themselves. Students labeled as “not college material” become less confident about their academic potential and, therefore, pay less attention and participate less in class” (Oboler, 1992, p. 24). The way in which immigrant youth perceive themselves is large contributing factor to their future success.

Perceived discrimination and negative perceptions of themselves have a large potential to influence behavior and engagement of immigrant youth. According to another article by Smokowksi and Bacallao, “perceived discrimination and acculturation conflicts were

significantly related to aggressive behavior at baseline. This heightened aggressive behavior led to lower levels of adolescent self-esteem and familism, and higher internalizing of problems (e.g., anxiety and depression), more parent-adolescent conflict and more relationships with delinquent peers six months later” (Smokowski and Bacallao, 2006, p. 667). Furthermore, another study conducted on children of immigrants found “experiences/perceptions of exclusion and rejection on racial-ethnic grounds - on ascribed rather than achieved statuses - undercut the prospect of identificational assimilation into the mainstream. They are also associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms and greater parent-child conflict” (Rumbaut, 1994, p. 751). Guyll, Madon, and Prieto’s study also found that “acculturation and ethnic identity are associated with Latino/as’ educational outcomes are relevant to their lower levels of academic achievement. This relationship is mediated by several empirically supported and theory-based social psychological processes—the self-fulfilling prophecy, stigma consciousness, and stereotype threat” (Guyll, et al., 2010, p. 127). The internalization of these negative perceptions that many immigrant youths believe others have towards them affect how they see themselves and consequently how they see their futures. According to Timothy Ready’s *Latino Immigrant Youth*, “although youths may recognize that their future status in the wider society largely depends on their success in school and subsequent development of a respectable career, a more immediate basis upon which they may evaluate their social status is the esteem of their peers. If that esteem depends on the development of a persona and pattern of behavior that is inconsistent with achievement in the wider society, then the chance that one will become trapped in persistent poverty may greatly increase. If, on the other hand, schools and community organizations effectively provide them with necessary skills, opportunities, and resources, their chances of becoming mired in long-term poverty should be greatly diminished” (Ready, 1991, p. 101).

Without sufficient resources to help immigrant youth adapt to their new environment appropriately, the cyclical process of low social and economic mobility continues.

V. Interpretation, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The barriers faced by immigrant youth clearly impede their future success and educational attainment levels. Through both my examination of primary sources and first-hand observations of these barriers as well as my findings throughout my secondary source research, I was able to see these barriers faced by immigrant youth are insidious and thus result in the perpetuation of hindered success within the community. Institutions and programs like the Latin American Youth Center look to help educate and support these students. Ultimately the cultural understanding/ linguistic commonality deeply rooted in these non-profits and institutions help provide the resources and support through their ability to connect with their students. Without supportive adults/role models, a commonality in a shared culture, or encouragement of the students' self-worth, immigrant youth face experiences of isolation and low self-esteem resulting in low academic achievement and low economic/social mobility. The perceptions specifically pertaining to Prince George's County tend to be negative. A Washington Post article noting the effect the perception has on housing in the region suggests "that homeowners try to help turn around negative perceptions of Prince George's by reaching out to the faith community and, for parents, becoming more involved in public schools. Improving the county's reputation could lead to higher property assessments. We're going to have to be twice as good in our public schools" (Hernández, 2015). With 44% of Americans believing immigration weakens the U.S., this also demonstrates the negative perception many Americans still have on immigrants today. (Public Opinion Strategies, 2013). The media, as well as other institutions, reproduce these perceptions

as the cyclical nature of poverty and low academic achievement continues this negative image that many of the students internalize.

In order to help improve and diminish the barriers immigrant youth are facing in America today, programs like Youth Empowered Towards Success need to be common institutions with easy access throughout the country. The program is doing a great job of working with students to view themselves in a positive light and to look forward to their futures and healthy alternatives to risk-associated behaviors. According to the article *Safer Latinos: A Community Partnership to Address Contributing Factors for Latino Youth Violence*, “the commitment to community program participation, as indexed by higher attendance rates, would be significantly associated with proximal outcomes such as lower levels of adolescent problems and parent-adolescent conflict” (Edberg, 2010, p. 222). These programs should also be a vehicle for exposing students to affordable higher education options as well as different occupations that will help motivate them to perform better in school and focus less on risk-associated behaviors. Furthermore, schools need a systematic change where there is recognition of an immigrant student’s unique cultural and linguistic needs. Teachers need to be properly educated of this and consequently, help those students at the pace they need rather than fail to give them any hope of succeeding in school. Specifically pertaining to where I conducted my service learning, large educational institutions such as the University of Maryland should be more involved in helping the surrounding community. According to an article on university community engagement, “the University of Maryland has long enjoyed a relatively peaceful relationship with its home county, and fortunately, the university does not have to overcome a legacy of community antagonism that many other, particularly urban, institutions have faced. Nonetheless, the university is not widely seen as deeply connected with or available to the vast majority of county residents.

Indeed, many see it as distant and disengaged” (Alperovitz & Howard, 2005, p. 154). This perception was highlighted in a 2002 issue of *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, in which author Paul Ruffins wrote, “The question of how or how much a college or university or should make its presence felt in a local community is an ongoing issue in higher education across the nation. But it has particular relevance in Prince George’s County, a largely African American and Hispanic jurisdiction bordering Washington, DC. All three of its public universities [Bowie State University, Prince George’s Community College, and the University of at College Park] . . . have been accused of somehow being missing in action” (Ruffins, 2002). The University of Maryland, only a few minutes from both schools I worked with, seemed to be a foreign concept to most students. There needs to be an engagement with the university and its community to help foster growth as well as inspire an educational reality for many of its neighboring high schools.

As a student of the University of Maryland myself, I found myself to be in shock of the conditions that was happening down the road for the youth in the community as well as the large immigrant population that resided there. The bubble surrounding not only the university but the minds of most Americans who had the privilege to be born here needs to be burst in order for there to be an effective change. When people are typically approached with ideas they are uncomfortable with, such as the idea of the “other”, they tend to gravitate towards a response that either avoids the topic entirely or become instantly defensive in an effort to diffuse any critical thought about the subject. When humans are confronted with the unknown, whether it be something as simple as darkness in the middle of the night or a social issue that one has never been exposed to, people become fearful and thus avoid these things. This mental distance that people tend to create as a response to their fear and unawareness of the topic itself only perpetuates the misunderstanding. Instead of Americans viewing immigrants as this “other”

group, they need to see them as people and humanize the context the situation many immigrants and refugees are going through. It is necessary to expose people to a comprehensive understanding that the categorization of an immigrant is not one experience, rather a spectrum of varying identities and narratives that make America a country filled with international perspectives and diversity.

VI. Appendix

Coding:

Dark Blue: Parent involvement

Red: Risk-associated behaviors

Yellow: Economic status

Light Blue: Linguistic/cultural commonality

Teal: Perceptions of self

Pink: School Environment

Green: language barrier

Fieldnotes 1

- Went to Northwestern High School in Hyattsville, MD
- Although only down the road from the University of Maryland there was a visible difference in the **quality of the area** as I got closer and closer to the school
- When I walked in one of the first things I noticed was the large number of minority students at the school
- Approximately 50% African American students and 45% Hispanic students
- Met with Gabriela Gonzalez and discussed important goals of the program. Also discussed backgrounds of many of kids in the program – difficult upbringing or had an **economic disadvantage**
- Let me listen in on a lesson and YETs program
- Very chaotic at first but seemed to calm down as time progressed
- Primarily males in the group

- Many students from immigrant families in the student body specifically within the YETS program
- **There are definitely communities created as a result of the cultural as well as language familiarities within the neighborhoods surrounding the school**
- The sense of community is a good thing but also is worry in **the creation of gangs for younger members as gangs** also can provide a sense of belonging and community with ones of the same culture/background.
- **It is difficult for many parents to be constantly involved** with the students attending the high school as the **lower socioeconomic status forces most parents to work a lot**. Furthermore, the **language barrier can also be an obstacle of most parents in dealing with teachers or school staff**.

Fieldnotes 2

- Went to multicultural youth center in east Riverdale, Md
- Many offices located at the center including counseling services and AmeriCorps
- Focused primarily on discussing goals of the programs and assisted in administrative work(filing various case files)
- Was able to see large difference in attendance from students from Northwestern High School and High Point High School
- Looked at the upcoming lesson plans for YETS program with Gabriela including **personal goal setting worksheets and academic accountability reports**
- Each student in the program is assigned to read The Distance Between Us, a memoir by a first generation immigrant from Mexico and her experiences in America as an immigrant

- I was able to see the community that was created at the multicultural youth center which provided children and families a safe place full of resources
- Many of the forms **filled out by the students were sometimes completely in Spanish,** Gabriela explained this because many of the students especially students from High Point, are first generation immigrants themselves
- Questionnaires students had to fill out showed many **had a lack of family support.** **Gabriela told me only six parents came to an orientation regarding the program the students were in.** This is a result of many of the families having **an economic disadvantage and consequently having to work majority of the time.**
- The book was selected for the students to show them that their immigrant experience in America is not an **isolated one and to help establish a connection to the storyline and their own narratives.**

Fieldnotes 3

-low attendance at northwestern, 8-9 kids

- all sit in different areas of classroom; clear groups

-talking to one student he told me had a girlfriend who lives in Guatemala (where his family is from)

-watched movie *Sin Nombre* (a realistic depiction of the life in MS or the Mara Salvatrucha gang and immigrants journey from Honduras)

-showed the horrors of being in a gang and the what's expected to be given up by the gang members

-Gabriela seemed to **have a very good relationship with the kids in the program**

- after the film she had a discussion with the students about the film asking certain aspects of what it means to be in a gang, what happens if you do something to disrespect your gang, and the social and political climate of where the movie took place and the immigrants' journey

- kids seemed fairly engaged in discussion relating their own experiences to the movie

-It was clear to see by the different seating arrangements of the students that people of the **same cultural/ethnic background tended to sit together.**

This ties into the strength the immigrant/ ethnic group community has when established.

-the Hispanic students **definitely spoke a lot of Spanish in combination with their English when speaking to each other as well to Gabriela.** This showed many students still have strong ties to their culture

-many students discussed their family still in various countries including El Salvador and Guatemala. One student specifically talked about the guilt he felt for his family still living there illustrating Foner's depiction of the strain transnational family relations can have on immigrant families.

-the movie showcased an immigrant family's journey and struggles faced in crossing the border. It helped show the conflicts and daily struggles of recently immigrants in adjusting to **the culture shock and differences.**

Fieldnotes 4

-went to High Point High School located in Beltsville, MD

-attendance was much higher than Northwestern High School with approximately 14-16 students

-predominately Hispanic students in attendance whereas Northwestern has a fairly proportional mix of African American and Hispanic students

-began lesson on subject How to avoid/Get Away from Danger

-Gabriela discussed constructive ways to prevent violence for example avoid confrontations, tell an adult if you feel threatened, avoid drug use

-students seemed very engaged in discussion talking about many situation they themselves felt threatened by potential criminal or gang activity in their neighborhoods

-discussed positive ways students should spend their time (sports, recreational and after school programs) all things that should give students a purpose

-initially felt apprehensive going into the program as I was the only white person in the room

-students seemed significantly more engaged and interested in the discussion than Northwestern High School. Seemed that many of them had interests such as sports or clubs that led them to look at the situation of gang prevalence as a social issue in their community where Northwestern High School students seemed to have an apathetic attitude towards the program

-many of the students spoke predominately Spanish to one another and to Gabriela. Only having limited knowledge of the Spanish language myself, it was difficult to understand what was being said. However, it did seem to illustrate the sense of community being created within the room as they all had come from some sort of common cultural background which was united by their language commonality

Fieldnotes 5

- Went to the Multicultural Youth Center (Center for Educational Partnership) in Riverdale, MD
- Assisted Gabriela with various administrative tasks including filing and organizing the different case files for the students
- Many of the students needed to be called in order to fill out paperwork they had not turned in yet.
After calling many students I found myself having a language barrier with many of them who only spoke Spanish and relied on Gabriela when this happened
- One of the forms questions was country of birth and parents' country of birth. Many answers included El Salvador, Bolivia, and Guatemala
- Many people in the office speak Spanish to one another which poses a challenge when trying to understand
- In organizing the students' case files I saw many students who had been "dismissed". Gabriela explained that many people drop out of school entirely so they stop showing up or they skip the program entirely.

- It seems that while the students and people I work with at the center are from many different parts of Latin America, they seem to find commonality in their language establishing a linguistic community
- I did not realize the amount of students who were first generation immigrants themselves. The language barrier is definitely a challenge in asking them a few basic questions about themselves so their struggle must be immense in school. However, since there are so many first and second generation immigrants going to Northwestern and High Point High School, with almost everyone in that community/neighborhood speaking primarily Spanish, they've been able to illustrate a new gateway to immigrant settlement in smaller cities and suburbs, with established relevant social networks and employment opportunities.

Fieldnotes 6

- Went to Northwestern High School. A guest speaker from the Community Clinic- Teen and Young Adult Health Connection (TAYA) came to talk to the students. According to one of the TAYA pamphlets passed around TAYA is a “non-profit clinic providing affordable, bilingual, quality healthcare to people ages 12-35. Their goal is to reduce the rates of teen and unplanned pregnancies, as well as sexually transmitted infections (STIs)”
- Laura, the speaker from TAYA, offered to present any information in Spanish if needed
- The presentation engaged students throughout with questions, which many did not seem to know the answer to- for example not knowing how many of the STIs are contracted
- There was a demonstration of how to put on a condom and different forms of birth control were passed around to see the varying options
- One girl informed that Northwestern had a daycare in it. One student noted if a teen gets pregnant you won't be able to carry “a baby and books”
- Many seemed to have personal experience with teen pregnancy (knowing someone).

- Laura from TAYA directly addressed the students showing the larger chance of the Hispanic population getting pregnant or contracting an STI when they are a teenager. I think many of the students were surprised how different these numbers were from the rest of the population.
- When listening to the presentation, many students were actively engaged, trying to find out as much information as possible on the subject. I was shocked to see the maturity many of the students had in discussing the subject. Many asked questions regarding real life applications of what they were learning “how do I ask someone to get tested” demonstrating their understanding that STIs and teen pregnancy is a social issue.
- Based on the conversations I had with students, it seemed that either their parent, sister or friends had become pregnant as a teenager showing the pervasiveness of this within their community.

Fieldnotes 7

- Went to Multicultural Youth Center to assist Gabriela in managing case files and paperwork of the students
- Went through each student of both High Point High School and Northwestern High School using their online grade website, in order to print out the students grades for the quarter as well as number of absences
- Many of the students **had low grades and several absences in their classes** and I called these students encouraging them to attend class more and utilize their resources. Many students had situational circumstances that resulted in their high absences and poor grades for the quarter
- I also called the students who had a low percentage of attendance to the programs. I discussed with them that they need to attend regularly in order to stay in the program. Many of the students not attending regularly echoed the concerns of the students with high school absences as transport and family issues seemed to be justification.
- **Gabriela needed to call several students for me as I could not communicate with them only speaking English**
- Gabriela spoke to me about many students who have many **family problems** including abuse, **students who are already in gangs or peers/siblings in gang, and drug use.**

- Once again, **the language barrier seems to be consistent when dealing with student or parents.** However, while a linguistic barrier to me, **the language commonality illustrates the established immigrant/ethnic enclave established in Prince George's county for the Hispanic community.**
- The high absences and poor grades were fairly common for the students in the program. Many of these students are coming **from difficult home situations and thus cannot devote their time to schoolwork** (some parents pull their kids of school to help them work).
- While all the students may not come from troubled homes, what does seem to be pervasive is the **lack of support families are able to provide for their students** which can be **attributed to the language barrier when dealing with teachers/supervisors or parents working a majority of the time.** As a result many students can be **left without transport to school** or the program perpetuating the hindrance on their futures/success as students.

Fieldnotes 8

- Went to Northwestern High School
- Outside the school as I was entering, there were many students standing at the Prince George's County Public Bus system's bus stop across the school. One girl I noticed looked around the year of freshman or sophomore, was holding a young infant on her lap she had picked up from the school daycare at the end of her own school day.
- In celebration of Cesar Chavez Day, the Latin American Youth Center/Multicultural Youth Center AmeriCorps Program is having a Cesar Chavez Day of Service event offering students community service hours for activities such as building picnic tables, planting a garden, and making art projects.
- The students were instructed to work in groups of four to five and design/create a poster in honor of the Cesar Chavez event. The student's posters will be entered into a competition at the event with a pizza party as a prize.
- Students watched an informational video clip about Cesar Chavez's significant role advocating for laborer and civil rights
- When I was talking to one student while making the posters I asked how he liked attending school. He responded that he felt the teachers didn't give them a chance and didn't seem to care about them.

- A trend that I keep noticing at both schools is the pervasiveness of teen pregnancy within their communities. After several different conversations with students it appears that many of them have a friend or relative, including their own parents, who was a pregnant when they were teenagers. There seems to be a normalization of it in the community for example students are seen often holding their own children as they wait for rides home from school.
- The celebration of Cesar Chavez is a community and family oriented event that is not just for students but for the neighborhood is interesting as it shows the importance of the Hispanic/Latino culture and history in the community.
- Cesar Chavez is also a large figure within the immigrant community. His celebration is able to share a common identity and tradition with the student's heritage.
- I think the comment regarding the teacher's treatment towards the students illustrates the struggle many of the students having a successful future

- Went to High Point High School
- I went to the program earlier that day, when I initially entered the school was just letting out so many students were in the hallways. As I walked to the designated classroom several male students said something to me or whistled making feel like an outsider because of my general appearance.
- There is always a heavy security presence at both Northwestern High School and High Point High School
- In the beginning of each program the students receive a “supper” which is a packaged meal with usually includes a sandwich, some carrot or fruit, a drink, and chips. Gabby explained the supper is a large motivation for the students attend as many have to wait for transport home afterschool and Gabby encourages them to take the leftovers home to family.
- Many students inquired about the varying components of college and what college life is like. When I asked where they wanted to college/what they wanted to do when they get older. Several students mentioned Community College as though they had accepted a decision they did not make themselves. When I questioned them about UMD the majority of the group brushed it off for “smart” people even though they attend high school less than 10 minutes away.

- My distinction from the rest of the school is very evident as result of not only my skin color but general appearance as the school is required to wear uniforms. My minority status as a Caucasian within the school made very aware of my difference in the community formed.
- The required uniforms and heavy security presence is a large indication of the tendency of the students to misbehave and the necessary regimented school environment as result. I think the attitudes of many teachers and parents become to accept this behavior as the norm as well since it so pervasive to the school and surrounding community. The perception other have on the students’ identities can have a significant impact of how they perceive themselves.
- The supper provided by the program also is illustrative of the socioeconomic status of many of the students attending as well as their families.
- The responses regarding college showed me that many of them were never told to aspire to higher education as many of them cannot afford it or simply don’t have the access and as result reflects on the attitudes of many of the students towards their schoolwork and general futures.

- Students of both High Point and Northwestern High School went on a fieldtrip to the University of Maryland Art Gallery (in Art Soc).
- While some of the students were clearly disinterested in the museum tour and painting analysis, many students were enamored by certain paintings. One in particular stood out in my mind was a student who is typically rambunctious during the lessons, stared at one painting, which was a collage of the map with different parts of the world overlapping one another. The collage was shaped into one person representing the different backgrounds all of us come from. The student stayed looking at the painting after we all went to the next painting located across the gallery, he even approached another staff member to inquire more about the painting.
- The students were then taken down to one of the art classrooms and given a collaborative art project to work on. Many of the students took the project seriously wanting to echo what they had learned from the themes of the paintings they had just seen.
- A co-worker who had attended UMD himself, commented on the “bubble” UMD is in and how many of the kids have never even seen the campus before although they live so close.
- Many of the students were telling me that their art classes they took at their school were nothing like the field trip they had experienced. Many of them had never been exposed to art in a way like that and I was so happy that a few of them walked away considering study and pursuing it themselves.
- The student staring at that painting looked almost like a work of art itself. He was so taken with this painting and the meaning it had that essentially we are all people no matter where we are from. The fact that he gravitated to this one made me assume he identified with the painting himself – especially being an immigrant.
- **The exposure to the real college classroom and general setting of the college excited many of the students.** The bubble my coworker referred to is so evident in their surprised reactions when looking around the campus and their bewilderment of it all
- One thing I find to be a pattern is that when students engage “too much” in the lesson compared to other students or say

- One girl discussed with me how she is interested in working in the medical/technology field and her friends behind her shouted “nerd” in response
- When we went to Stamp while waiting for the van to pick us up, many of them started pointing at their different flags hanging around the main room as they pointed to their flags ranging from Djibouti to El Salvador

- something like the student who was talking about going into the medical field the other students respond by making fun of them using words like “nerd”. I’m not sure if this them being teenagers or if in their peer environment it is not “cool” to be smart or be interested in schoolwork.
- I thought it was interesting that the students that did point to the flags at stamp would say look that’s “my flag”. They seem to identify with many of their countries although many of them have been living in America the majority of the time.

- . The closing ceremony for the all of the programs associated with the Latin American Youth Center took place in the main office in Riverdale, MD.
- Students were provided with **transportation** as many of them could not attend otherwise.
- The students performed a dance that they had been working on throughout the entire semester. Using outlets such as dance helped many of the students have fun during the program/ encourage attendance.
- The ceremony had large amounts food for the students and parents. Gabby informed me the food was a **representation of the students' diverse backgrounds** with various types of food from all over the world
- While the ending ceremony is also for **parents to attend, there were a marginal number there** relative to the amount of students.
- Gabby revealed to me that a majority of the students did much better on their **post test scores- evaluating their self-worth and risk potential**
- **Students' pride** in their dance and artwork, which is displayed throughout the office, was very apparent

- **Lack of transportation is a common issue amongst students within the program.** The Latin American Youth Center can only afford a van and thus are limited to taking several students at a time and taking second or third trips to transport the rest.
- Activities such as practicing for the dance not only helps students have fun, but helps building team working skills and **provides an alternative to risk associated behaviors**
- The international representation of food is demonstrative of the **spectrum of backgrounds the students come from. It's illustrative immigrant experience not being one category but a diverse range of perspectives.**
- **Low parental attendance** was not a surprise to the students or program staff as it is a norm within the students' lives and community
- The increased scores and pride students were taking in their work shows the **improvement in their self-worth and confidence**