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THE CAPTIVITY OF OPPORTUNITY: THE CONVERSATION SURROUNDING
CHURCH-GOING HISPANIC IMMIGRANTS

by

Nicolet Louise Hopper Bell

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of Communication Studies
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

THE CAPTIVITY OF OPPORTUNITY: THE CONVERSATION SURROUNDING CHURCH-GOING HISPANIC IMMIGRANTS

by Nicolet Louise Hopper Bell

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Immigration is a long-standing topic of discussion in the United States. Hispanic immigrants, or families of Hispanic immigrants, living in America face unique challenges. Through focus group interviews, participants from a predominantly Hispanic Protestant church narrated their experience of living in the United States. Guided grounded theory data analysis revealed three categories and 14 subcategories, or themes of conversation, surrounding this hot topic. Participants shed light on the distinctive challenges they faced, how these challenges affected them, and how they attempted to overcome these difficulties. By exploring these results through the lens of social stigma theory (Goffman, 2009) and intergroup contact theory (Berg, 2009; Pettigrew, 1998), the current research illuminated the marginalization of this population. Ultimately, participants narrated that the challenges that they face are far outweighed by the opportunities they are given, showing potential for how communication can help to overcome the marginalization of the Latino population.

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Preston, for your countless hours of editing and listening to me talk about this project. It is my greatest privilege to be your bride. Thank you for supporting my dreams.

To my Mom, for always encouraging me to do my best in my academic journeys and for being my constant voice of reason.

To the families represented in this study, thank you for entrusting me with your stories. I am thankful for your kindness and the faith in Jesus that we share.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

There are approximately 11.7 million undocumented migrants living in the U.S. (Passel & Cohn, 2012). Additionally, there are currently 16 million Hispanic children in the U.S.; 52% of these children are “second generation” meaning they were born to undocumented migrant parents but they themselves are U.S. citizens because they were born in the United States. While 37% of these children are third generation or higher, meaning they are the U.S. born children of parents who are both U.S. citizens, only 11% of Hispanic children are actually foreign-born (Kogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2016). These children, especially the second and third generation children, often grow up with confusing immigration statuses within their families. This is defined as a mix-status family, where at least one parent or close immediate relative is an unauthorized immigrant (Brabeck, Lykes, & Hunter, 2014). A sum of 16.6 million people currently lives in mixed-status families (Dreby, 2012). Because some of the family members receive the rights of U.S. citizens and some do not, it creates a very complicated family structure and way of life (Brabeck et al., 2014). The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that “by 2025, nearly three-in-ten children” will be of Latino ancestry (Kogstad et al., 2016). Although in most cases the children are citizens, they constantly live in the fear of their undocumented family members being taken away.

There were 392,000 documented and undocumented migrants deported in 2011. Out of these, 205,000 of these migrants claimed to have at least one U.S. citizen child between July 2010 and September 2012. In New York City alone, between 2005 and 2010, the deportation rate of processed request cases for immigrants with citizen children was 87% (NYU School of Law, 2012). Similarly, over 46,000 parents of U.S. citizen

children were deported in the first six months of 2011 (Dreby, 2012). It is important to note that these migrants are not exclusively from the bordering nation of Mexico. Many are from Honduras, Cuba, Haiti, El Salvador, or Columbia and many are “over-stayers,” or immigrants who had a visa and continue to stay once their visa expires (Berg, 2009). Additionally, “70% of Americans believe that the majority of new immigrants are illegal immigrants” even though evidence suggests that is false (Berg, 2009, p. 51). Anguiano and Castaneda (2014) argued for greater research within Latina/o critical race theory, which addresses issues suggested by the statistics previously listed. They propose the framework for the creation of a Latina/o critical communication theory which would have “the distinct effect of centering the topic of citizenship as rooted in a legacy of White supremacy and laced in the dominant language of racist nativism” (Anguiano & Castañeda, 2014, p. 115).

Social perceptions of these migrants are studied to understand how these perceptions influence their lives. Research into communication with and about such migrants is worthwhile to enhance understanding of such complex lives. Previous communication research conducted within the realm of the Hispanic population has mostly focused on apprehension associated with language or functions of language within the healthcare arena. Applbaum (1986) conducted a study on communication apprehension within Hispanic college students. He found that communication apprehension was higher with English, their second language, rather than Spanish, their first language. Overall, the majority of Hispanic communication research focuses within the healthcare realm. From increasing participatory communication during cancer screenings, patient perception of cultural competence during healthcare interactions, and

family health communication in disease prevention, a significant amount of literature focuses on the health disparities that plague a majority of the Latin American population (Benavides, Bonazzo, & Torres, 2006; Johnson, Saha, Arbelaez, Beach, & Cooper, 2004; Ramirez et al., 1999). Communication literature has neglected to uncover the causes behind the apprehension associated with English as a second language. One might also ask what is it that is causing the bias and struggle with health disparities that are being studied in the interpersonal/intercultural communication arena. The root of these issues could begin at a deeper, more basic, level of social interaction. Research efforts should be increased on the basic communication functions that are happening within the Latina/o population.

Literature Review

Media Effects on Latina/o Culture

Latinos are currently the largest ethnic minority in the United States, encompassing 15% of the United States population (Stewart, Pitts, & Osborne, 2011). With the United States' historical background consumed by hosts of immigrants, it should be considered why the preference for some seems greater than others. Scholars have revealed that media depictions of Hispanics affect our understanding towards them (Stewart, Pitts, & Osborne, 2011). For example, Stewart et al. (2011) tracked a Virginia newspaper to study the rhetoric used in regards to undocumented migrants. Specifically, scholars examined the ways in which this media outlet used the term “illegal immigrant” and the communicative responses evoked. This is an example of how loosely the term “illegal immigrant” is associated with the entire Hispanic population. They concluded that the communicative responses to perceived threats varied between the minority and

majority groups. For example, Latinos desired to dialogue openly about immigration, but whites preferred to avoid these conversations (Stewart et al., 2011). They also found that not only are real intergroup threats influenced by media discourse, but also that media discourse can also shape perceived intergroup threat. This threat, either real or perceived, can work both ways: the out-group, or illegal immigrants, to the in-group, majority, or vice versa. It is important to understand how media influence perceptions and attitudes of the Hispanic population in order to gain a complete picture of marginalization this population faces.

Marginalization

In his study on the marginalization of minority groups, Orbe (1998) presented the “muted group” as one who does not have a voice in society. He described the “muted group theory” in the context of co-cultural communication theory. He argued that it is essential to study muted groups in the context of co-cultural communication because it “reflects a theoretical advance where those traditionally without societal power describe the ways in which they communicate within oppressive dominant structures” (Orbe, 1998, p. 1). Orbe also argued that current communication theory is situated in the dominant world-view and that looking at communication theory from a co-cultural perspective will allow for greater understanding of those marginalized in society. The reality of the Latina/o voice as marginalized within the white majority U.S. society is greater reason for further research to be conducted that is specific to Latinos.

Research conducted in this realm should be different from that of historical research on the topic of immigration. Ono and Sloop (2002) discussed how challenges faced by current migrants differ from those found in historical accounts of immigration in

the United States such as the great European migration. He claimed that they differ because of the unique set of challenges, circumstances, and stigmatization that the current immigrants face. He contended that there are four different areas of conflict that immigrants face in the U.S. today: “civil and human rights, legal and social memory, race and gender relations, citizenship and membership in communities” (p. 2). He claimed that each of these areas impact current migrants differently from those from the past because of the vast amount of rhetoric in the media related to the topic, and the widened range of the reach of such media. Specifically, Ono and Sloop (2002) studied the rhetoric surrounding California’s Proposition 187, an anti-Mexican immigration piece of legislation, claiming that this proposition created marginalization for the Hispanic population by its nature and by the way it was presented in the media. The areas of conflict that they identified were each affected by Proposition 187 rhetoric by creating more conflict and different conflicts for contemporary immigrants than that faced by past immigrants. For example, they argued that European immigrants did not face conflicts of citizenship in the same way that Hispanic immigrants do. Citizenship for European immigrants was an expedited process, while today Hispanic immigrants face increased difficulties to applying and gaining citizenship. Another example is the difference between race relations faced by European immigrants and those faced by Hispanic immigrants. Hispanic immigrants currently are faced with unique race relation challenges that are specific to their culture. Ono and Sloop (2002) argue that this rhetoric will impact the public’s view on immigration for years to come.

Anguiano and Castaneda (2014) argued that there is a need for centralization, or “to bring together lived experiences” (p. 108). Currently, Latina/o research exists in

disciplinary silos and there is an urgent need to disrupt these silos. They proposed that their goal is not only to create a Latina/o critical communication theory but to formulate it in a way that helps the silo problem by providing “cross-functional bridges” that construct common grounds for an interdisciplinary understanding (Anguiano & Castañeda, 2014, p. 109). Their aim was to study how ethnicity and race function within communication, resulting in the expansion of existing theoretical frameworks. The current study answered their call for greater research on immigration discourse within the discipline of communication.

Intergroup Contact Theory

Berg (2009) presented the conversation surrounding undocumented migrants as unique to other discussions of minority and majority issues because the two parties involved have a different level of citizenship. When studying white perspectives of undocumented immigrants, Berg (2009) considered the theory of group threat, defined as when “dominant group members form their attitudes in response to the real or perceived threat population size of a racial or ethnic minority group” (p. 42). Further, Berg (2009) considered the theory of intergroup contact which “suggests that an increase in the size of the racial or ethnic minority group is likely to have a positive effect on the attitudes of the dominant group” due to the possibility of “more opportunities to interact” (Berg, 2009, p. 43). Supporting the intergroup contact perspective, the research concluded that a greater population of undocumented immigrants influenced whites’ positive attitudes towards immigration. Additionally, Seate, Joyce, Harwood, and Arroyo (2015) argued that within the fog of separatism and prejudice, “getting people from both sides of the table to talk is often a good first step” (p. 136). Their research used the framework of the intergroup

contact theory in an effort to reduce prejudice and increase positive attitudes towards illegal immigrants.

Pettigrew and Tropp (2011) suggested through a meta-analysis of over 700 participants that intergroup contact does reduce prejudice, and that lower levels of prejudice are related to greater intergroup contact. They also found that the positive effects of intergroup contact usually “generalize beyond participants in the immediate contact situation” (p. 766). They expanded the realm of intergroup contact to include not only “the attitudes toward the immediate participants” but also the “attitudes toward the entire outgroup” that become more favorable. This reveals the power of this theory as its effects can expand beyond participants directly involved.

Social Stigma Theory

It is important to consider the concept of the “stranger” in U.S. society. Goffman (2009) discussed the “stranger” in context of a stigma, or “a special relationship between attribute and stereotype” (p. 4). Goffman (2009) outlined three types of stigmas: physical deformities, blemishes of individual character and tribal based. Blemishes of individual character are identified as unnatural passions and examples include mental disorders, addiction and homosexuality. However, the one that relates to the study of undocumented migrants is the tribal stigma, which focuses on race, nation and religion. Goffman (2009) argued that this stigma in particular can be passed down through lineages and “equally contaminate all members of a family” (p. 4). In regard to majority opinion of undocumented migrants, a stigma is when a person is “reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (p. 3). Goffman (2009) argued that the majority, or those considered “normals,” crafts a stigma-theory, or an ideology in

which they rationalize their thoughts and actions of discrimination by revealing the minority's inferiority and perceived threat. Stangor and Crandall (2000) argued that social exchange and communication can influence stigma. Stereotypes are relayed through communication, and people's opinions most often conform to the opinions of those around them. An example of this is Pettigrew's (1959) study of anti-Black and pro-apartheid beliefs of South Africans which found that these beliefs were most often a result of cultural norms about the acceptability of racism towards blacks, and the level to which the individual conformed to such perceived norms. Overall, Pettigrew (1959) suggested that stigmatization is more of a result of a problem in social contexts instead of a problem with the individual perceiver--therefore proving the importance of the role of communication in the generation and functionality of stigmatization. Further, Stangor and Crandall (2000) described that the consensus approach explained how although shared beliefs about social stigma are initially "developed and amplified through interactions with *outgroup* members," they are ultimately "accentuated and socially consensualized" by communication with *ingroup* members (p. 70).

In congruence, the stigmatized can also view the normals through the lens of a stigma because they view themselves as a "full-fledged normal human being, and that we (the marginalized) are the ones who are not quite human" (Goffman, 2009, p. 6). This interesting reverse in roles has been studied previously in the context of people groups like the Mennonites or Gypsies (Goffman, 2009). These ideas could also exist within the Hispanic people group, where they view the majority, whites, as the stigmatized, which could create a larger conflict. Further, he terms the contact between normals and stigmatized as "mixed contacts" (Goffman, 2009, p. 14). Goffman (2009) asserted the

less the “normals” view themselves on equal ground with the stigmatized, the more likely it is for the stigmatized “to agree that he does indeed fall short of what he really ought to be” (p. 7). When characterized as a stigmatized person, Goffman argued that people can respond in two ways: they can try to directly fix the problem or they can make an effort to fix the problem or condition indirectly.

Rationale

Anguiano and Castaneda (2014) argued that it is important to “acknowledge and address the racism faced by the Latina/o community” (p. 114). The majority of research on the topic of undocumented migrants is situated in the disciplines of psychology and sociology. A slight development of this topic within the discipline of communication has been conducted in the context of rhetorical theory. A call by rhetorical scholars for a Latina/o Critical Race Communication Theory is currently being developed. However, qualitative or quantitative research on the topic within the communication discipline is rare. There is a significant gap in the literature for research focused on the conversations and messages surrounding illegal immigration. The current study sought to begin filling this gap with the goal of identifying themes specifically surrounding conversations of undocumented migrants.

Based on the findings reviewed of Latina/o scholars across disciplines, it is important to understand the dialogue that takes place within this marginalized population. Anguiano and Castaneda (2014) provided a strong argument for researchers to look at the Latina/o population from the way they view themselves. Likewise, Orbe’s (1998) research on co-cultural communication theory suggests the benefit of deserting research situated in a dominant world-view. Instead, he argued that the use of a co-cultural

approach is what will truly open the door for greater understanding of the marginalized population. Therefore, this research revealed the importance of garnering how the Hispanic population discusses illegal immigration amongst themselves, suggesting the question:

RQ1: How do Hispanics living in the United States talk about illegal immigration?

Goffman's (2009) research on social stigma theory added understanding of this theory in relation to the Hispanic population. Further, Pettigrew's (1959) study on South African apartheid racism showed the imperative function of communication within the origination and operation of stigmatization. In addition, Stangor and Crandall (2000) outlined how communication relays stereotypes in social exchange. However, because these findings are absent of any research combining social stigma theory to the Hispanic population, they suggested the question:

RQ2: How does social stigma affect how Hispanic people view themselves?

Adding an emphasis on the family is not only fitting because of the family-oriented culture of the Hispanic population (Anguiano and Castaneda, 2014), but also because of the family-oriented atmosphere of the Hispanic church where the research was conducted. This, combined with the suggested importance of communication in social stigma development and functionality (Pettigrew, 1959; Stangor & Crandall, 2000) to gain a broader understanding of the topic, suggested the current research question:

RQ3: How is Hispanic family communication affected by social stigma?

CHAPTER II - METHODS

The current study sought to assess emerging themes or theories of communication within the conversation of undocumented migrants, which alludes to its qualitative and inductive nature. The need for open coding in the emergence of themes and the generation of theory was the rationale for employing the grounded theory qualitative method of constant comparison in the analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, because of the breadth of the similar research conducted on other populations in neighboring disciplines, the researcher used existing theories as a guideline for coding. For example, Goffman's (2009) Social Stigma theory was employed to glean theoretical direction. The theories reviewed above were used to influence the way the research was conducted, but because of the uniqueness of this project it was also important to not be limited to the theories outlined above to ensure the possibility of new and emerging themes.

This study gained approval from the Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. Names and responses of participants were kept strictly confidential. Additionally, in quoting participant comments, pseudonyms are employed to protect the identity of participants. The geographic area for the study was based solely upon the unique access available to illegal immigrants as potential participants. Gaining access to the participant population was extremely difficult because of the legal risk pertaining to their current situation. This sensitivity meant not only difficulty in gaining physical access, but also emotional access. The researcher had to create trust with participants in order for meaningful results to be collected. This was accomplished by small talk before interviews and the pastor and his wife would share their trust in the researcher with

participants. This created a bridge of trust and an overall more comfortable environment for participants. Although the participants were chosen based on access, they are representative of the illegal immigrant population because their experiences are reflective of general, or typical, experiences of others in this population.

Participants

With support from the pastor of a Southeastern Hispanic protestant church, 15 Hispanic participants were recruited for focus group discussion. Participants were randomly assigned to focus groups. Each participant attended 1 of 4 focus groups. There were 10 women participants and 5 men participants. These participants could either be an undocumented migrant currently living in the United States or have an immediate relative who holds an undocumented migrant status. The participants recruited could range from ages 18 to 60 years. This age range is ideal because it would allow the results to focus on family units and reflected the typical age group of the church being studied. The age of the current sample ranged from 18-56. Nine of the participants were currently undocumented migrants, two were legal immigrants possessing U.S. citizenship, three were legally here by green cards or work visas, and one woman was a Caucasian American citizen since birth married to an illegal immigrant. Although her experiences were different than those of Hispanics, she met the criteria for this study because her immediate family members, her husband and children, are Hispanic. She provided unique insight into a differing but related experience. The participants' time living in the United States ranged from six months to 43 years. Where most participants averaged living in the U.S. between 6-10 years, several had just crossed the border within the last three years. Participants' reported the number of their family members ranging between two to

six family members. Participants' had been members of the church ranging from six months to four years, since the forming of the church.

Access to this sample was granted due to the relationship the researcher has with the selected church. The researcher volunteers with the children of these proposed participants, and have done so for four years now. The researcher has interacted with a large number of families through this volunteer work. Having an ongoing relationship with this community allowed the researcher to gain access to the participants. The researcher plans to continue volunteering and perhaps increase efforts to gain further access. Despite the researcher's relationship to the church, she had no previous contact with the selected participants, which could increase the credibility of the results, since her volunteering is with children.

Table 1

Key Participant Characteristics

<i>Immigration Status</i>	Currently Undocumented	9
	Legal Immigrants with U.S. Citizenship	2
	Legal by green cards or work visas	3
	Caucasian native citizen	1

<i>Time living in the U.S.</i>	Less than 1 year	2
	> 1 year < 3 years	3
	> 3 years < 6 years	2
	> 6 years < 10 years	5
	Greater than 10 years	3

<i>Size of Families</i>	1-2 members	2
	3-4 members	8
	5-6 members	5

<i>Length of Church Membership</i>	0 – 6 months	3
	6 months – 1 year	3
	1 – 2 years	4
	2 – 4 years	5

Focus Group Procedures

Focus groups have been more effective in marginalized populations because literacy rates and high school completion rates are low (Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). The Hispanic population is more likely to disclose more accurately and in detail in an in-person focus group versus a survey or other measure that would require higher literacy (Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). Based on this conclusion, the researcher conducted and facilitated three one hour-long focus groups with 12 participants, four in each group, and

one focus group with three participants, totaling 15 participants. The group of three was an all-female group; two groups had two males and two females and the final group had one male and three females. Age range varied among the four groups. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide attached in Appendix A. The interviews were held at the church building. Two of the interviews were conducted on Sunday afternoon directly after church services and two interviews were on Wednesday night directly before the church services. These times and the location were selected by the recommendation of the pastor with the goal of being convenient for the participants. The audio of the focus groups was digitally recorded and the researcher took additional observation notes.

Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the focus group sessions were transcribed and analyzed by the researcher, which resulted in four focus group interview transcripts totaling 22 pages of transcription text and 12 pages of observation notes. The current study sought to assess emerging themes or theories of communication to understand the conversation of undocumented migrants. Using the grounded theory method, the researcher and an additional coder read through the entire transcript twice to gain an overall understanding. The two coders completed the first round of open coding independently. They coded for emerging themes within the data. This initial coding allowed for the categories to be data-driven and encouraged the emergence of new themes (Boeije, 2002). Upon category emersion, the researcher and additional coder looked specifically for quotes relating to social stigma theory as understood by Goffman (2009). For example, the quote “the bad thing is when I feel discriminated because of being from Central America or for being

Hispanic,” clearly reflected social stigma by the key words, “I feel discriminated.”

Guided by existing theory, the researcher and additional coder coded for key words that could indicate stigma.

The researcher employed constant comparative analysis. Each focus group transcript was initially coded the day following the interview by the researcher and additional coder independently. This allowed going back and forth between data analysis and field research, adjusting data collection techniques as necessary, such as figuring out how to best phrase interview questions, to ensure participant understanding and the best results. Once this first round of coding was completed and each of the four focus group transcripts were initially analyzed, the researcher and coder compared the initial findings and identified themes within the codes. Upon identification, these themes were combined and reduced where overlap existed. Within the 14 themes identified, major themes or overarching themes emerged from the initial identified themes. The researcher and additional coder grouped themes based on commonalities. This resulted in five groups, or categories, which were titled to represent the overarching theme. The 14 individual themes became subcategories based on their relation the main theme, or category. The data were then re-coded for these identified categories and subcategories by the researcher and additional coder independently. Through the identification of specific categories to use for coding, the initial coding was refined in this step. Through this process, it became evident that the five categories could be further reduced or combined to three overarching categories. This modification allowed for a more clear division that best represented the data collected. Codable units were divided into participants’ responses to questions. However, some of the responses were lengthy and complex and

required multiple codes to a single response. In this case, responses were broken down into smaller quotes to be placed into multiple categories or subcategories as appropriate. Additionally, as a final step, the researcher read back through all transcripts to pull examples of each category and subcategory from coded material.

When disagreements about the coding emerged, they were resolved between the two coders through discussion. All discrepancies were talked through and resolved, none were left on the table, and all had an appropriate, obvious, and desirable solution. For instance, there was a discrepancy regarding whether the subcategory, lack of value of family in American culture, should be grouped with the overarching category of attitudes towards America or family. The researcher and additional coder came to the conclusion that although the subject matter was related to family, the true message was an attitude felt about America and therefore was placed in the latter category. Upon the coding of the fourth focus group interview transcript, no new themes emerged from data collected and analyzed. All of the participant responses fit into the existing identified categories from the first three interviews. Therefore, theoretical saturation was reached within the identified population.

CHAPTER III - RESULTS

The initial data were categorized into seven themes. However, after further combining and coding, the data revealed three main areas of conversation surrounding the topic of undocumented migrants. These three overarching themes--family, attitudes toward America, and attitudes toward personal situation--were further broken down into 14 sub-categories including: travel restrictions, education within the family, church members as family, lack of value of family in American culture, fear of deportation, hardships, cultural ignorance, opportunity, helpful Americans, depression, identity confusion, faith/spirituality, quest for citizenship, and helping others. The division of these subcategories is outlined in Table 2. The first category, family, is divided into travel restrictions, education within the family and church members as family. The topic of family recurred frequently throughout the focus groups, and education was the most talked about subcategory. The next category focused on attitudes toward America that revealed five subcategories including: lack of value in American culture, fear of deportation/hardships, cultural ignorance, opportunity, helpful Americans. This was the most frequently mentioned of the three categories; fear of deportation and cultural ignorance were the most frequently discussed subcategories. Likewise, attitudes toward personal situation was divided into five subcategories: depression and identity confusion, faith/spirituality, quest for citizenship, and helping others. This category had the least elaboration, but was still very frequent. Instead of long drawn out explanations, these subcategories were typically mentioned quickly as an afterthought to a story or narrative. Positive and negative dialectics created a tension in conversation. Within each category, it was apparent that subcategories either expressed positive or negative feelings. This is

reflected by the separation of subcategories by negative and positive dialectical tensions in Table 2. The following section will narrate rich examples of each of these divisions to achieve a holistic report of Hispanic immigration in the United States.

Table 2

Categories and Subcategories

		<i>Categories</i>		
		<i>Family</i>	<i>Attitudes Toward America</i>	<i>Attitudes Toward Personal Situation</i>
<i>Dialectical Tension</i>	<i>Negative</i>	Travel Restrictions Education Within the Family	Lack of value of family in American Culture Fear of Deportation/ Hardships Cultural Ignorance	Depression Identity Confusion
	<i>Positive</i>	Church members as family	Opportunity Helpful Americans	Faith/Spirituality Quest for Citizenship Helping Others

Family

Family was a common thread throughout conversation. This is expected with the strong argument of importance of family within the Latin American culture (Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). Two of the participants described themselves as “family oriented” and the majority of participants alluded to their view of family as the central point of their identity. Conversation within the family was heavily influenced by the topic of illegal

immigration. This creates a unique challenge for Hispanic families to navigate these difficult topics of conversation within their family units. Reported conversations within the family revealed a dialectical tension between negative conversations about travel restrictions and struggles family units face about education, and their positive feelings surrounding their perception of their church members as family.

Travel Restrictions

When asked if their children ever ask questions about immigration, several parents answered that their children ask about their inability to travel. This proved to be a key topic of conversation surrounding illegal immigration within their families that was reported. For example, one of the women took the children of another woman in the church with her to Mexico this summer. The first woman is legal, the second is illegal but her children are legal citizens. Her girls have a hard time understanding why they can travel to see Mexico but their mother cannot. Thus, this becomes a frequent topic of discussion within their family units. Another mother recounted an interaction with her young son that asked her why she cannot travel, and she explained that she cannot travel because she only has a passport from El Salvador, where he has one from the U.S. He replied, “Is it because my passport is prettier than yours that I get to travel?” The mother chuckled as she remembered this story, but the reality of her son and husband traveling to El Salvador without her clearly had an effect on her. These results revealed that travel restrictions due to illegal immigration are a repeated struggle frequently discussed within Hispanic family units.

Additionally, many families had conversations surrounding the fear of their immigration status. For example, one woman explained that when talking about what

would happen if they “had to go back to Mexico” or were deported, her children ask, “could we ever come back?” She answered, “we could never come back,” but “you could come back when you are an adult,” because her children are legal U.S. citizens. A majority of the participants described this topic as a source of difficult conversations within their family units. When describing her middle-school-aged son, one woman remarked, “He is smart. He knows we could be deported, but he says that one day, when he gets older, he is going to make a way to make us legal.”

Education within the Family

Parents of school-aged children also commented on their children’s experiences with school and how this affects their conversations as a family. When asked what their children hear at school about the topic of immigration, one woman commented, “My oldest son, Juan, will come home and say that the kids at school tell him he was born in Mexico, but the kids at school don’t understand that he was born here.” Further, she comments that “it makes him feel bad.” Another mother recounts a story of her young daughter’s experience at school:

Arianna, my daughter, had a little friend at school that had seen a rumor on the TV about someone who was going to kill all of the Mexicans. Her friend told her about this rumor and asked her where she and her parents were going to go and hide so they wouldn’t get killed. Arianna responded that we weren’t going anywhere, that she hadn’t heard anything about that. As a parent, it is hard to explain to your daughter why kids at school come up to her and say things like that.

When asked what problems, if any, have their children faced in school with the language barrier, the narratives varied; one woman replied that “with my oldest daughter, there was a language barrier and I felt like it was a hardship” while another claims, “My children never had problems because they learned how to speak English early.” One mother explained that she “felt very strongly” that the way her son is treated in school “is very different from the way the black children are treated” in a predominantly black school. While another noted that “the way you dress, the way you conduct yourself, if you are neatly and nicely dressed” has an impact on the way her daughters are treated at school. “If they (teachers) see you aren’t dressed very nice then you aren’t treated very well,” and she goes on to explain that she keeps her girls neatly and nicely dressed to ensure they are treated well at school. When asked if they ever felt a struggle trying to understand what their children were learning in school, one mother answered that her son is really smart and “sometimes I don’t understand, but he is very good about walking me through it to help me understand it and explain it to me.”

Church Members as Family

Also relating to family communication, the participants expressed the necessary role their church played in providing the “family feel” when so many of the members are so far away from their real families. Martin described the church as “it feels like family” and provides a “sense of community.” Later, he explained it as “when you feel as if you are family, you feel a little softer, which is a great thing.” Esmeralda described this as, “I like that there are people from all different countries” and that the atmosphere “of everyone participating” makes her feel “at home.” Another woman described “being in a church to have people that are willing to be in friendships with you” makes “things

easier.” She continued: “It’s a lot like family.” Several other participants agreed that they “liked the family environment” and the love they feel at church.

Attitudes toward America

Participants’ attitudes towards America varied throughout conversation. Attitudes towards America were divided into five subcategories: lack of value of family in American culture, fear of deportation/hardships, cultural ignorance, opportunity, and helpful Americans. Like their conversation surrounding family, these subcategories reflect a dialectical tension that was present when narrating a conflict or frustration. Many participants directly followed a negative statement with a positive one, which revealed a dialectical tension between negative and positive attitudes. This was a pattern of conversation topics, bouncing back and forth between negative and positive, in an effort to justify their negative reports with the positive feelings they also felt. The clash of negative and positive thoughts seemed to be an area of struggle for the participants and is reflected in the division of subcategories. It was hard for them to narrate negative feelings because simultaneously they felt positive feelings toward the same population. This interesting dynamic generated reports that fell into categories reflecting both negative and positive attitudes. Participants expressed discontented views of America and Americans through narrating rich examples of the frustration felt as immigrants in the United States. Their stories will be explored by five differing themes, or subcategories, of conversation including: lack of value of American culture, fear of deportation/hardship, cultural ignorance, opportunity and helpful Americans.

Lack of Value of Family in American Culture

The participants expressed their frustration with the American culture in regards to family, as in the “United States’ society” the “family is very disrupt because of the amount of media involvement that kids have.” The participants expressed the concern that American children have “so many toys and video games that they don’t want to play sports” or to participate in outside activity. One participant remembered, “When we were kids, we would get a piece of rock and play all afternoon” and expressed that American “kids have a ball and like half an hour later, they just want to go back to their games.” The participants also discussed the disruption of American families due to adults, or parents, “being a slave to work.” A stark contrast exists in perceptions between the Hispanic culture’s reality of how a family should interact and the interactions of American families.

Fear of Deportation/Hardships

In addition to the expressed discontent with the American family structure, the conversation repeatedly revealed the fear of deportation felt by the participants. When asked to recall how they or current church members talk about their life in the United States, Emmanuel remarked that, “right now, you are going to hear people everywhere, inside the church and outside the church are worried because of the presidential election.”

In further response to this question, Martin said:

For some of us, it wouldn’t be that hard to go back because our families are there (in our countries of origin) but for our children, it would be hard because this is their life. This is their country and they wouldn’t have the same opportunities if we left. For me, I worry about it all the time. All the people say the same thing.

We don't want to go back because we don't want to take our little children over there to be the same where we were before."

Additionally, Elena commented, "If our countries were safe, each one of us would still be there.

Other participants additionally narrated this fear of deportation, and in response to the prompting to describe their life in the U.S., a participant narrated the fear of being arrested,

Sometimes I'll be going to work in the morning and I'll get stopped by police and they ask 'where is your driver's license?' and they know I don't have one because there is no way I can have one.

Fear of imprisonment was rooted in fear for their families "the first time I went to jail, my wife was with me." When he was arrested and put in jail, "my wife was just stranded. I was so worried about it and that makes you feel like you just want to give up."

Participants continually outlined feelings of fear and hardships faced. For example, Maria said that, "in my country I feel safe because I know that's where I feel freedom. Here, I feel safe, but I know I am not safe." Additionally, Francisco described that when he is at work each day, "I fear that I am not going to be able to come home." Mandy narrated her fear of driving home from church on Wednesday nights as her husband, who is an illegal immigrant, drives them home from church, she feels fear because, "it's later and we live a little ways away." She described her heart pounding every week in fear of seeing a police car on their way home. She described her fear: "what are we supposed to do? They are automatically going to give him a ticket or deport him."

Another woman described her struggle with not being able to drive: “my husband works far away and we live way out and I can never get a ride.” Many participants described the hardship of overcoming the language barrier. Francisco said, “It’s hard learning a new language with work.” A majority of the women participants also described the difficulty of the language barrier. Other participants named the hardships of not having family in the U. S., the major differences in cultures, having to work so hard and missing their country of origin.

Cultural Ignorance

An additional source of frustration with the American culture that the participants expressed was the overwhelming cultural ignorance they encounter. For example, Martin explained:

I took a class of history here (United States) in college and it’s hard to see that people forget where they are coming from. You know, I mean, they were immigrants, their (Americans) parents or their grandparents were immigrants the same way we are right now.

Isabella further expressed that Americans lack knowledge of the geographic locations of the Latino countries. This is a continued source of frustration as Emmanuel commented that most Americans refer to all Latinos as “Mexicans.” He specifically tells stories of his coworkers who repeatedly call him “Mexican” even after he continually tells them he is from El Salvador.

Multiple participants also commented on Americans referring to their language making comments like, “you speak Mexican.” The participants reported that they continually explained that, “Mexican is not a language. We speak Spanish.” Isabella asks

Martin “how can you ignore the criticism?” He responds, “I have learned that it is ignorance, you know” and asks “Why would I put myself on the same level?” He expressed his shock that college-educated U.S. citizens do not have knowledge of his native country, “it’s people who are educated, you know, but they are ignorant.” He concludes that his perceived ignorance of the American people “just tells me that you can have papers, but you are no better than me.”

Some of the participants did not respond with as much grace as Martin. When asked to describe how they feel in relationship to the U.S., Mandy, a white American who is married to a Hispanic man, explained her frustration that “there are way more countries that speak Spanish besides Mexico. There are tons of them.” She continued to describe her feelings:

One thing I don’t like is having to deal with racism. Not just with blacks, mainly towards Hispanics, about being legal. Because they (Americans) look at anybody and say “Oh, she’s Mexican. Oh, she’s illegal. You need to deport her. Take her kids with her. They’re all on food stamps, they’re all on Medicaid” They (Americans) automatically assume one thing about one race. And that’s like the hardest thing for me. I’ve been with my husband six and a half years now, we’ve been married a year, but it is one of the hardest things to have to bring my children up in that. Because people know that they are half Latino and they speak Spanish and they understand it. And I don’t know how to explain to a child that kind of ugliness from somebody. People saying, “you’re unequal because of your color.” I don’t hate much, but I can say I hate that about America.

Here, she outlines many stereotypes that she relates to her perceived ignorance of the American population toward the topic of immigration as she continued,

And it's hard for me too, just because I'm married to him and we too are going through the legal processes. And the stereotype of "Oh, you married a Latino, so he's now legal." It's not that simple. We have to pay \$8,000 to get him legal.

There's just so many things that Americans don't know. They just automatically assume stuff and it drives me crazy. It is just a lack of intelligence on Americans sometimes. And I'm American. I'm American and I didn't know all of these things and now that my eyes are opened, I'm like people are dumb.

Mandy held a clear frustration with the cultural ignorance she perceived in Americans.

Opportunity

Despite the frustration felt by Hispanics towards America, participants equally reported stories that revealed their positive feelings towards America and Americans. As noted above, participants often followed a negative statement with a positive one. This interesting dynamic generated a significant portion of conversation revolved around the topic of opportunity. Emmanuel said, "This country gave me a lot of opportunities." After discussing a difficulty she faced as an undocumented migrant in the U.S., Christina stated, "the same opportunities that we have here, we won't have in our countries." Emmanuel echoed this after he described a terrible hardship that he faced in the United States,

We have so much opportunity. We are building a house now. If I would have stayed in my country, I never would have been able to build a house or give to my family what I have given to them.

Opportunity was most often talked about in contrast to the hardships that the participants faced. Some of the opportunities reported include freedom from poverty, as Veronica described, “in my country, people are dying of hunger,” and further, “some of my family members do not have food.” Others talked about the future as one participant described it as “for me, being here is living better. Living a better life.”

The greatest opportunity continually outlined by the participants is that their children will be U.S. citizens. Martin remarked that despite the fear of deportation, “the beauty of it is that they are going to be American citizens so at some point they can return.” Veronica described it as, “the future means a better life for my children that in my country I would never be able to give them.” The participants’ tendency to follow a narrative of hardship with a statement of opportunity reveals that the gratefulness that they feel towards the opportunities outweighs the hardships that they face. This is also evident in their determination to stay in the country as opposed to returning to their country of origin as a result of adversity.

When asked to tell about how they or other church members talk about their life in the U.S., many participants described how they valued the safety they feel in America. Lydia described it as,

I like the peace that I have here. Just walking down the street. We don’t have that in Peru, where we are from. You can’t just walk out and have peace, especially not wearing a purse.

Ruben chimed in and said, “Yeah, I couldn’t carry my wallet there. It would disappear.” Congruently, another woman described, “having law enforcement here is good.” Other participants answered this question with their feelings of sentiment towards America. For

example, Ruben described his experience as coming here as a student, “not knowing that I would fall in love with this country.” Mandy, an American married to a Hispanic man, described it as “I just know it’s a lot easier to make a living here than over there.”

When asked what they felt their relationship was to the United States, Daniel described his feelings, “You know, I love to be here. I love the United States.”

Admittedly, he would like to return to his country of origin but he believes,

God put us here for a purpose because there is freedom. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion. I mean if you go to another country, like China, there is no freedom of religion. Iran. All of those countries. But I just thank God that I am here in the United States.

Helpful Americans

Despite the numerous narratives surrounding frustration with American people, each of the participants commented multiple times about an American that helped them and influenced them in a positive way. When asked about the most difficult part of living in the United States and commenting on being arrested for driving without a license, Emmanuel contrasted his anger with the officer to his gratitude for the kindness of his boss,

But on the other hand, there is my boss man. Whenever he found out I was in jail, he went to get his lawyer and he went to the jail to the court and said ‘This is my worker, I represent him.’ I had to pay like \$2,000 just to get out and then other tickets and he (my boss) paid for everything.

When Emanuel offered to pay him back and work off his debt, his boss replied, “Don’t worry about it” and “I like you. I like how you work.” Most reassuring to Emmanuel was

his boss' comment, "I understand that this is not your fault and you don't have to pay my money back." Emmanuel reported that his boss bailed him out of jail four additional times for the same offense, driving without a license. He comments, "sometimes people get mad, but he has a good heart when he doesn't have to because he is a very rich man."

The participants talked about the kindness of Americans in contrast to the harsh encounters they had faced. They reported that there is a duality of types of American people that they encounter. "You find a lot of different people" Christina commented. Additionally, Martin remarked, "So, you see, you have two different kinds of people. That's good I think. It doesn't let your heart get hardened because you see the good people as well as the bad people." The participants reported that this duality of personalities allowed them to view Americans through two different lenses. Martha described her feelings that living here, "there is a lot of help we receive from organizations for my children." In conclusion, Emmanuel expressed his desire to, "see more of the good things, you know, because if you only see the bad things... If I go back over there, there is bad people too." The other participants echoed this desire for a positive outlook and it appeared to be a theme for the group.

Attitudes toward Personal Situation

Not only did participants narrate negative and positive attitudes towards America, they also reported negative and positive attitudes toward their personal situation. Their stories revealed five major subthemes, or subcategories: depression, identity confusion, faith/ spirituality, quest for citizenship and helping others. Some of these narratives are optimistic and full of hope, while others express hopelessness and despair felt by participants at the stigmatization they feel. Participants reported how the hardships and

struggles reported above in negative attitudes towards Americans led to feelings of depression and identity confusion. The dialectic tension remains as participants not only narrated negatives, but counteracted their negative reports with positive ones as explored below.

Depression

Participants related their expressed frustration with American culture to feelings of depression. When discussing the fear surrounding illegal immigration, Emmanuel described it as “sometimes you feel depressed” and “sometimes you just want to give up.” This was a recurring topic of conversation, especially when participants were recalling ridicule that they received from the white population. In light of describing difficult experiences, Martin commented, “I just want to go back. I don’t care if I have to live in the street, I want to go back to my country where at least I can be free.” The participants also relayed excessive worry or fear of deportation as related to feelings of depression, “for me, I worry about it every day.” The participants described this worry as a part of their daily conversation with fellow Hispanics and their families.

Additionally, participants narrated fear of the upcoming presidential election as part of the worry and feelings of hopelessness they experience. Ruben described his feelings about the election as,

To be very honest, right now you are going to hear people everywhere, inside the church and outside the church are worried because of the presidential election. It’s hard. For some of us, like us, it wouldn’t be that hard to go back because our families are there you know but for our children, it would be hard because this is their life. This is their country and they wouldn’t have the same opportunities if

we left. For me, I worry about it all the time. All the people say the same thing.

We don't want to go back because we don't want to take our little children over there to be the same as we were before, and it sometimes make you feel depressed or sometimes you just want to give up and go back.

Feelings of worry and fear were discussed in relation to feelings of depression or desire to give up. These feelings were repeated in every focus group, and revealed a very sensitive area of discussion within this subject.

Identity Confusion

When asked to describe their relationship to their country of origin, Martin narrated his struggle of feeling like he doesn't fit in in his country of origin, or his new country the U.S. He described his desire to get his citizenship,

When I get it, I will be a citizen here by paper, and they (Peruvians) will feel like I'm a traitor, but I'm Peruvian. They (Peruvians) think I'm from here now, but I think I'm from there still. So if I wanted to fit somewhere, I would say that, I'm from somewhere else: heaven. Because if I try to fit somewhere else there will always be things that question me.

Similarly, Daniel stated that, "over here, it depends on who you are. It all depends on the color of your skin." He proceeded to describe his struggle as in America, his skin is too dark, he is judged for the dark pigmentation of his skin. Contrastingly, when he returns to Mexico, his country of origin, the people in his country think his skin is too light and he feels stigmatized because of that. He says, "Over here, I am called a 'Mexican' and in Mexico, I am called a 'Gringo,' which is the Spanish slang word for white man." He echoes Martin's struggle of uncertainty of identity and where he truly fits in.

Faith/Spirituality

Finally, participants narrated the positive views they had towards themselves, their situation and their culture as a whole. These stood in stark contrast to the negative self-views narrated by participants and reported above. The hopelessness expressed by the negative self-views was replaced by stories of hope and determination. Comments expressing positive attitudes toward their personal situation fell into three subcategories: faith/spirituality, quest for citizenship, and helping others. This offered a nice conclusion by revealing the participants' determination to live with a positive mindset, despite the difficulties they face.

Perhaps as a precursor to the positive attitudes discussed above, participants narrated how their faith acted as a uniting factor between themselves and the American population. Isabella remarked, "at the end of the day, we all follow the same God" and explained how this made her feel connected to Christian believers in the American culture. Christina added that despite the many differences that exist, "we sit down at the same table and share love." They also discussed the role their church played in nurturing their spirituality and helping them to maintain a positive outlook despite the adversity they face.

Likewise, the current participants also discussed faith as a coping mechanism or sense-making device. When describing the difficult situations and challenges they faced as undocumented migrants, they would acknowledge the faith they possessed that allowed them to look positively at the situations. For example, Martin outlined, "things

happen for a reason. The darkest it is, you finally see the light.” Another example is Daniel’s reasoning that, “God put me here for a purpose,” and “God saved me over here and I just love the United States.” He also remarked, “I have three citizenships, you know that right?” Puzzled, one of the women replied, “How can you have three citizenships?” His answer, “I have a citizenship in Mexico, the United States, and heaven.” Laughs filled the room and the lightheartedness of his answer brought a mutual agreement and peace among the church members in the focus group. It was as if they all felt that way, but had never been able to put it into words the way Daniel just had.

When asked how their family, friends or church members typically talk about the topic of immigration, the majority of participants responded that they don’t talk about it very much at church. One participant explains, “We try to focus on the positive by filling this place with Christian principles.” Another participant explains that as Christians, “we are not to live in fear,” but instead, “are called to love those that are illegal.” One of the church leaders explained, “We just try to encourage them to trust in God,” believing that, “if it is God’s will for them to be legal, he will make a way.” When asked if they felt like attitudes toward this topic differed with friends and family outside of the church verses inside the church, the majority of the participants answered yes. For example, one woman described her friends outside of the church feeling “mad,” “furious,” and “angry,” but described her friends at church as “we don’t really think that way here, it doesn’t even cross our minds.”

Quest for Citizenship

Almost all of the participants, who are currently illegal immigrants, expressed their desire to become legal citizens at some point within the interview. Ruben describes this quest as,

That's what I'm going through right now, through the citizenship, because this is the place I want to live. I relate, it's like a mirror, like I reflect, my personality, I want to be strong and I want to live in a strong country. That's what I want.

Mandy, who is legal, but her husband is illegal, despite misconceptions that marriage immediately makes someone a citizen, described their desire for her husband to become a legal citizen of the U.S. "We want him to be legal. That is our desire. Another man noted, "When I came here, I wanted to get my citizenship." A theme throughout the focus groups was the participants' overwhelming desire to become legal citizens, despite the obstacles that stand in their way of making this desire a reality.

Helping Others

When asked how they would describe themselves, a majority of the participants made a comment about their desire to help others. When asked to describe herself, Christina replied, "I really like sharing with people and helping people," further as "I love to help others," and finally "I like giving love." Daniel described that "serving and helping people" was his "heartbeat." Natalia described her desire as, "sometimes people ask me to do something and I think I can't but I still do it because I love to help others." Participants desired to help both those of their own culture and those who are not in their culture.

The participants specifically reflected upon how they help their families and friends who live back in their country of origin. Emmanuel explained, "my family (in my

country of origin) is not the same now because they have more than what we had before because I've been helping them." Each participant expressed the desire to help those who were in their countries of origin and did not have the same opportunities that they have in the United States. Additionally, they noted how they serve each other within the church through cooking meals, acting as baby sitters, and giving rides to each other. They narrated that their desire to help others stemmed from their desire to love and serve others. For example, Elena stated "I see myself as a friendly person" and "It's about supporting each other."

Not only did they like to help others of their own cultural identity, but they also discussed their desire to help those of other cultures, specifically Americans. For example, Isabella commented, "you can love them (Americans) and see how they help you, how they love you and receive you." Martin described how the suffering their population has faced makes them more willing to help those around them. He explained his desire to help Americans as,

That's one of the things that grabs our attention over here (United States), for me that makes a difference when you have people that have lived a comfortable life and then you have people who have suffered really hard and all of us are here and we sit down at the same table and share love.

Finally, the participants pointed out how Americans have helped them. Emmanuel commented, "My boss man, who I work for, he's been helping me like my own Dad would." A statement of their gratitude for the help they received always followed their description of being helped. This seemed to boost their overall outlook toward the

situation because being offered help by Americans was related to more favorable attitudes.

CHAPTER IV – DISCUSSION

The categories and subcategories in the present data show similarities to the four areas of conflict as identified by Ono and Sloop (2002), but are proof that additional categories are necessary to gain a complete understanding of the challenges modern Hispanic immigrants face. Ono and Sloop's (2002) research not only focused on Hispanic immigrants, but discussed the current state of immigration in the United States as a whole. Some of the current categories in the present research fit well with Ono and Sloop's (2002) conflict categories. For example, the fourth conflict they outlined was "citizenship and membership in communities." The subcategories of quest for citizenship and faith/spirituality could fit well into this overarching category because they are related to gaining a sense of belonging. However, some of the categories did not fit as well and additional category division and identification is needed to specifically organize the challenges faced by current Hispanic immigrants. For example, the second conflict outlined by Ono and Sloop (2002) was legal and social memory. It could be argued that the subcategory of identity confusion in the present data could fit in this legal and social memory conflict, but it could also be argued that it could fit in the third conflict outlined by Ono and Sloop (2002), race and gender relations. This shows how the present data overlapped the categories of conflicts outlined by Ono and Sloop (2002). Not only was their overlap, there are several categories in the present data that do not fit into the categories outlined by Ono and Sloop. For example, the current data revealed subcategories of opportunity and helping others that do not have a place in Ono and Sloop's (2002) categories. Some would argue that because Ono and Sloop's categories are focused on conflict, they don't have to have a place for positive or hopeful categories

to fit in to be complete. However, the current data showed that, to Hispanic immigrants, the positive and negative conflicts go hand in hand. The participants talked about these as if one couldn't exist without the other. This is further proof of the need for updated research specifically focused on Hispanic immigrants as studies that focus on immigration as a whole, or studies that are slightly outdated, could miss out on important details, understandings, and rapidly changing circumstances of this particular situation.

In answering the first research question of how do Hispanics talk about illegal immigration, it is evident that themes exist in the participants' topics of conversation. First, their communication reaffirmed the importance of family in the Latino population, the role it plays in the topic of immigration, the challenges they face within their family units and the friction that exists between family in the American culture versus the Hispanic culture. Next, participants narrated some of the hardships they have faced, and the fear they felt as illegal immigrants. The participants felt that the opportunities of living in the U.S. outweighed the hardships they faced. This is suggested by the dialectical tension that exists within each of the overarching categories. There was a constant tug of war in the participants' minds between negative and positive expressions. Finally, they reported how they used their faith to cope and make-sense of what they were going through. Often, they described how this conversation is important but they choose not to dwell on it at church, and they instead chose to focus on the positive. These findings reflect Orbe's (1998) research on co-cultural communication theory because participants discussed how they as the "muted group" described their communication. Orbe (1998) stressed the importance of a co-cultural approach to research, expressing the importance of allowing the "muted group" to speak. Instead of applying dominant world-

view restrictions to data collection, which Orbe (1998) cautioned against, participants in the current study appeared to be comfortable expressing their struggles which generated data out of a co-cultural, or shared perspective or view. This data provides a genuine look into the lives of the participants. Unlike Orbe (1998), these results are specific to the Hispanic population, which makes the current study unique within the discipline.

Additionally, Stewart et al. (2011) reported that Hispanics desire to dialogue openly about the topic of illegal immigration, while Caucasian Americans do not want to talk about it. In contrast to these findings, the participants in the current study reported that they don't talk about the topic much among themselves. They elaborated that the threat of illegal statuses remains a silent truth among them. They choose not to dwell on this negative and to instead focus on the positive. Ironically, their willingness to openly tell their stories within the focus groups as reported above is evidence that they do have a desire to dialogue openly about it as Stewart et al. (2011) reported. This reveals that the climate is right for intergroup contact to initiate and facilitate conversations that promote understanding.

Research question two asks how social stigma affects how Hispanic people view themselves, and the results suggest that this is absolutely true. Many participants reported feeling as if they were the subjects of racism and even cases of depression were reported. Fear of deportation reportedly made them feel inferior to the white American population, and in some instances even the African American population. As Goffman (2009) predicted, social stigmas were dually reported as Hispanics described feeling a stigma toward the White population. For example, participants reported the American family as "disrupt." Further, multiple accounts of frustration with Americans were reported and

negative attitudes were expressed. Participants expressed frustration with American ignorance towards the Latino population. Perhaps the best example of the frustration expressed is as follows, “that just tells me that even though you have papers, you are no better than me.” These findings suggest that social stigma does effect the Hispanic population.

The third research question asked how family communication is affected by social stigma, and researcher found that it places additional stress and fear on Hispanic families. The participants outlined the root of their fear in the disruption of their families. They feared the mix-status their families possessed with many families having at least one parent who was an illegal immigrant and their children or spouses are U.S. citizens. For example, these family issues expand beyond biological Hispanics through Mandy, a Caucasian woman married to a Hispanic man. Her narrative reveals the obstacles she has faced being married to an illegal immigrant and raising her citizen children in a mix-status family within a socially stigmatized environment. Families that blend races confront clashes of stigmas as they are exposed to stigmas expressed towards their loved ones from people of their own race, as well as themselves experience stigmatization due to their association with their loved one. This creates a unique struggle with identity as the person is not accepted by their own race and additionally not fully accepted by the race they are blended with. This is similar to the identity confusion reported by participants who were themselves immigrants, illegal or legal. As they don’t know with what group they identify with, it creates confusion for these migrants. However, participants reported how their faith played a role in satisfying the holes in their identity. Several participants described that their identity was a “citizen of heaven.” This revealed

how marginalization made them feel stigmatized and that they did not belong in either their country of origin or their new home in the U.S. Yet, they were able to identify with their fellow believers that they belonged within the church, and this understanding fueled their positive attitudes towards and conversations about the identity confusion they experienced.

Not surprisingly, the participants narrated a frustration with the lack of value Americans placed on family. Because of the Hispanic culture's dedication to family and the importance of family within their culture, it makes sense that a major source of their frustration with America would be a lack of value or emphasis most Americans place on family. Based on the participants' responses, conversations within families are frequently related to the topic of immigration. Examples of these conversations related to the struggle of explaining harsh stigmatization experienced by their children at school. The majority felt that their children experienced additional hardships as Latino children in their school systems.

Apart from the research questions, the data additionally revealed notable relations to intergroup contact theory. Pettigrew (1998) outlines four processes of change that can occur through intergroup contact, including: learning about the outgroup, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and ingroup reappraisal. The current study particularly is connected with the first process, learning about the outgroup. Pettigrew (1998) argued that by simply learning about the marginalized group, the attitudes of the ingroup would be softened. The cultural ignorance of the ingroup, Caucasian Americans, as reported by the outgroup, Hispanics, is reflective of the reverse of Pettigrew's argument. Hispanics in the current study reported continued frustration with the lack of knowledge the ingroup

possessed about their culture. Some reported feeling stigmatized as a result of this. The lack of knowledge of Americans on the Latino culture proved to be offensive to many participants. For example, Emmanuel narrated his frustration when Americans assume that all Latinos are “Mexicans” when he is actually from El Salvador.

Mandy reported that by dating and then marrying a Hispanic man, she as a Caucasian American woman became aware of the Hispanic culture and the unique struggles that the population faces. This could also reflect Pettigrew’s argument because it could be understood that she “learned” about the group she was not a part of, and as a result her story revealed how her attitude toward the population had completely been altered in a positive way. Not only did she narrate how this impacted her personally, she also expressed her frustration with Americans who refuse to take the time to learn or grow in knowledge about the Hispanic population. For example, she described how most Americans assume that because they were married, her husband automatically becomes a citizen. She concluded that this was not true, and expressed her desire for Americans to invest effort into learning about the difficulties of the citizenship process.

Additional intergroup contact is necessary to close the gap between the stigmas associated between these people groups. This study is significant because even by simply reading the narratives of the participants, an ingroup member could begin to learn about the outgroup, and hopefully garner a more positive outlook toward the population as a result. Pettigrew (1998) outlined recommendations for facilitating intergroup contact, which can sometimes prove to be very difficult when dealing with an ingroup or outgroup member that is especially prejudiced. He recommended finding a situation in which the ingroup has limited ability to choose not to participate. He also recommended

longitudinal interactions for the best chances of success in intergroup interaction.

Additionally, Pettigrew and Tropp (2011) suggest that contact reduces intergroup anxiety, or feelings about how members will be perceived and if they will be accepted by the outgroup. Efforts should be taken in research endeavors to reduce these feelings within the contact setting, and in turn, the contact itself should reduce the overall intergroup anxiety felt.

CHAPTER V – SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In sum, the themes uncovered in the Hispanic focus groups indicated that although the Hispanic population faces many unique and difficult challenges, they believe their opportunities in America outweigh the hardships they face. This reflects the strength of their dedication, determination to have a positive attitude, and to reach their ultimate desire to become citizens of the country in which they now reside. The current study reveals that the climate is right for increased research on this topic.

Limitations/Future Research

A limitation of the current study is the unequal representation of male and female participants. An unequal number of ten female and five male participants were interviewed because it proved to be difficult to recruit male participants. Hispanic males in the selected church usually work long hours. Their work hours interfered with the interview times, even though the times of the interview were suggested by the pastor for the convenience of the participants. Because recruiting four more women participants would further compromise the goal of attaining an equal number of male and female participants, and the researcher felt that saturation had been achieved with 15 participants, the researcher made the decision not to recruit any more participants.

Another limitation of the current study is that it only considered the narratives of church-going participants. Future research could expand using the snowball effect to find friends or connections of the current participants to grow the research beyond church-going immigrants. To include narratives of non-church-going Hispanic immigrants and compare them to the current findings could be an interesting research opportunity. The richness of the data collected in the current study is due in part to the intimacy of the

small focus group setting, which allowed a comfortable environment in which participants could share. This would be maintained in future research endeavors.

Additionally, in future research it could potentially be beneficial to divide groups by gender to see if participation varied in an all-female or all-male focus group versus mixed gender groups (Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). The scope of this study expands beyond the participants directly involved. According to Pettigrew and Tropp (2011), significant increase in favorable attitudes can expand beyond the immediate participants. This suggests the power of potential studies that exercise intergroup contact theory between Caucasian Americans and Hispanic immigrants. The current study suggests that the church may provide a unique arena for this intergroup contact to take place. For example, a protestant church whose congregation is prominently made up of ingroup Caucasian Americans could be encouraged by their pastor to interact with members of the Hispanic church in the current study, or a similar church. Because ingroup believers and outgroup believers share the same belief system as protestant Christians, this might increase likelihood of participation. Future research should further explore the possibilities of such a study getting these stigmatized groups together while closely adhering to the guidelines for successful intergroup contact as outlined by Pettigrew (1998). Additional research on intergroup contact theory would prove to be beneficial for both in and outgroup members. The opportunities are wide open for continued research on the current topic.

Conclusion

The current study is important to the communication field because it reveals the power of words. The very act of each focus group interview was an act of

communication. The participants selected what stories they would share, and their selection of words shared with the experience they desired to be narrated. Additionally, the subject matter of their stories reported their everyday communicative interactions. Participants told narratives revealing what they talk about amongst themselves, how they talk about it, in what context they talk about it and how often they talk about it. Because of the legal sensitivity of this topic, the participants showed a great amount of trust in the researcher by telling their stories. The power of words manifests also in that by simply reading the words of this study, a method of learning about the outgroup as Pettigrew (1998) argued, a reader's attitude can begin to be softened towards this population. This study is important because these people are important. They need to know that their stories matter, that their experiences are not unnoticed by society.

Emmanuel stated, "Sometimes I want to go back to my country where at least I can be free." Mandy put it this way:

I cannot fathom that. Going to the country that is supposed to be the land of the free, the home of the brave and to come here to want to make your life better and to pushed down every time you try to.

It is extremely ironic that in America, "the land of the free," these migrants feel as if they are in captivity due to stigma and fear. This has a significant effect on their communication. Not only are the conversations within their immediate, extended, and church families impacted, the messages they hear from others have a significant impact on how they view themselves. The data revealed that the messages of others can have a positive or negative impact on how Hispanic people view themselves and the country in which they reside. Additionally, it revealed varied emotions as expressed in

conversations that surround mixed-status families, the hardships they have faced and the opportunities that they feel have greater worth than their adversity. These themes shape their conversation as the participants narrated their choice to focus on the positive parts of their experiences instead of the negative. Further, it reveals the power of communication to influence the stigmatization perceived by outgroup members, or to communicate inclusion to the Hispanic population. The current study points to a need for further exploration of the messages that surround the topic of illegal immigration within the discipline of communication. These participants and other Latinos have stories to tell: they are simply waiting for someone to listen to them.

APPENDIX A – Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. How long have you been a member of this church?
2. What is your favorite part about being a member here?
3. Tell me about your family.
 - a. How many members are in your family?
 - b. What do your conversations typically include?
4. How would you describe yourself?
5. How long have you lived in the U.S.?
6. Tell me about your life in the U.S.
7. How do you or other church members talk about life in the U.S.?
 - a. What is the best thing about living in the U.S.?
 - b. What is the worst thing about living in the U.S.?
8. How do you or other church members talk about your country of origin (or country of your ancestors)?
9. How would you describe your relationship to the U.S.? To your country of origin?
10. How does your family typically talk about the topic of illegal immigration?
11. What do your children hear at school about this topic?
12. Do your children ever ask questions about your immigration status?

APPENDIX B – IRB Approval Letter



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
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NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 16071902
PROJECT TITLE: The Captivity of Opportunity: The Conversation Surrounding Church-going Immigrants
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Nicolet Louise Hopper
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Arts and Letters
DEPARTMENT: Communication Studies
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 07/25/2016 to 07/24/2017
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

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