

AN ABSTRACT OF THE  
DISSERTATION OF

Gwyneth Jones Tracy for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Education presented on November 15, 2004

Title: Bangladeshi and Mexican Immigrants Who Leave Early From Postsecondary Education in the United Kingdom and the United States

Abstract Approved:



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George Copa

The purpose of this cross-cultural study is to improve the understanding of the educational experiences of immigrant students who leave postsecondary education prior to completion of a program in two traditionally immigrant-magnet countries. This research focuses on Bangladeshi immigrants in the United Kingdom and Mexican immigrants in the United States, who are among the least successful students in higher education. These two groups have been shown to participate in higher education at lower numbers than other immigrant groups: lower than whites in each country and lower than their native-born counterparts. These students also have elevated early-leaving rates from postsecondary education and higher unemployment than other immigrant groups in the two countries.

The analyses of the interviews of Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants who

left early from postsecondary education showed that there were similarities and differences in their experiences in postsecondary education. Common experiences included family (psychological) support of college attendance and the positive experiences at the postsecondary educational institutions where students and faculty were friendly and supportive. The interviews of Mexican and Bangladeshi immigrants indicated that the two groups participated in postsecondary education for different reasons. The Bangladeshis enrolled to improve their English fluency for immediate job opportunities or as part of a designated college track assigned to them in secondary school, whereas the Mexicans attended college with career goals in mind. Institutional support, such as registration procedures and counseling availability, was satisfactory to the Bangladeshis, compared to the Mexican immigrants who perceived institutional support to be inadequate. The Bangladeshi immigrants left postsecondary education early due to family economic needs while the Mexican immigrants left for a variety of reasons including economic needs, cultural pressure, and inadequate counseling at the college.

The overarching themes of the importance of family and institutional support for immigrants were common to both the Bangladeshi the Mexican groups. The research suggests that institutions address methods to include families in the educational experience and increase institutional support in the areas of registration, financial assistance, and academic and career counseling.

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Bangladeshi and Mexican Immigrants Who Leave Early From Postsecondary  
Education in the United Kingdom and the United States

by  
Gwyneth Jones Tracy

A DISSERTATION

submitted to

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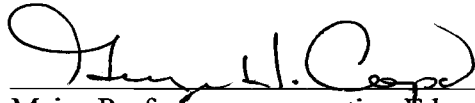
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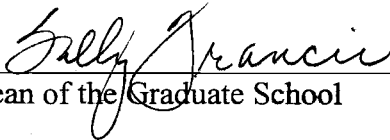
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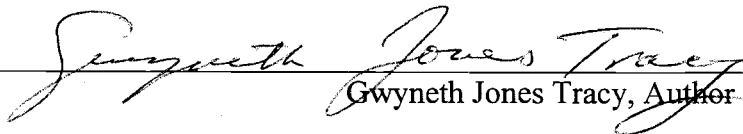


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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.



Gwyneth Jones Tracy, Author

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My young-adult children, Justin and Kristi, provided me with faithful encouragement and support. It was Justin who, when I initially described my topic of interest in why immigrants drop out, asked me why I didn't ask the drop outs themselves. Kristi enthusiastically listened to me ramble on about my classes and research, and asked pertinent questions that kept me focused. Justin's fiancée, Hollie Larsen was also an appreciated part of the home-front cheerleaders. They all chipped in with house cleaning, playing with the dog, and cooking me food.

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# BANGLADESHI AND MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS WHO LEAVE EARLY FROM POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES

## CHAPTER 1 - FOCUS AND SIGNIFICANCE

The education of immigrants is important to education administrators and policy makers in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) because educating immigrants and multicultural education in these two countries is considered a form of “nation building” (Davies & Guppy, 1997, p. 445; Ghuman, 2002, p. 53). The purpose of this study is to improve the understanding of the cross-cultural educational experiences of immigrant students who leave community college level education prior to completion of a program, in two countries, which are traditional migrant “magnets” (Driessen, 2000, p. 12).

This study focuses on two immigrant cultures, Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK and Mexican immigrants in the US, both of which are among the least successful in higher education (Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996; Modood, 1993). These two groups have been shown to participate in higher education at lower numbers than other immigrant groups: lower than whites in each country and lower than their native-born counterparts. These students also have higher early-leaving rates from early postsecondary education and higher unemployment than other immigrant groups in the two countries (Gray, et al., 1996; Modood, 1993).

The UK and the US were chosen for this study not only because they are both considered traditional magnet countries to immigrants (Driessen, 2000), but also because both countries “historically have exported their educational models worldwide” (Davies & Guppy, 1997, p. 437). This study therefore has findings and

implications of interest and use to a broad base of international educators.

In addition to “nation building,” both countries consider the mission and design of the community colleges and comparable institutions to be community building - that is, to address the critical needs and issues of a community and the integration of a diverse population (Chadha, 1996, p.1; Story, 1996, p. 82). Given the community colleges’ aim of educating immigrants as part of nation building and community support, if the least successful of the immigrants in higher education in these communities are not served, the institutions are not completely fulfilling their mission.

Examining two immigrant groups, and noting themes and patterns of commonalities between the two, is more useful to the international community than studying a selected immigrant group in only one country. The comparison of less successful immigrants in higher education in two countries should give added credibility to any common themes found in the two groups and thus could be applicable to immigrant cultures in other nations. If only one immigrant culture in a single country were studied, the findings would be more likely to be considered a phenomenon peculiar to that particular setting and group, and thus more easily dismissed by researchers in other countries as being applicable to only the country studied.

A phenomenological approach was important to understand the students’ experiences and their unique cultural perspective. In the words of Attinasi and Nora (1996), “The researcher needs to ground his or her understanding of what happens to

students in college in the students' own understanding of these events" (p. 552).

### Significance

There are several reasons why the focus of this study is important to the leadership policy and practice of community colleges in the US and equivalent postsecondary institutions in other countries such as the UK. These reasons were briefly described above; following is a more detailed case for the significance of the study.

#### ***Success of Immigrants in Postsecondary Education Leads to Economic Success***

Success of immigrants in postsecondary education is important for two reasons: (a) for immigrants - success in postsecondary education leads to "economic success" (Gray et al., 1996. p. xi) and "well-paid, higher-status occupations" (Shiner & Modood, 2002. p. 210); (b) for the new country - educated immigrants benefit the economy of the country (Gray et al., 1996. p. xi), contribute diversity to the culture, and mediate the concerns of "social and political liabilities" (Migration Policy Institute, 2003, p. 3) that immigrants are perceived to pose to receiving countries (The Economist, 2002). Thus, this study will make important contributions to the economic success of immigrants and countries that take in immigrants.

#### ***Early Postsecondary Education Leads to Higher Education and Social Mobility***

Success in the first stages of postsecondary education is critical in providing a bridge for immigrants to higher education through transfers to universities and



baccalaureate degrees, which in turn leads to more economic success and “social mobility” (Ghuman, 2002, p. 50; Shiner & Modood, 2002). Such institutions as community colleges in the US and further education institutions in the UK are the points of entry to higher education for many immigrants (Szelenyi & Chang, 2002; Shiner & Modood, 2002, p. 218). Therefore, this study focuses on community colleges and further education institutions.

### ***Improving the Educational Experience for Least Successful Immigrants***

By studying the experience of least successful immigrant cultures in postsecondary education, one can learn about some of the gaps in educational support services provided by higher education. The evidence of what is missing, in terms of support, and what is needed for success, is likely to be revealed in this study of the least successful immigrant groups. Therefore, this study focuses on the least successful immigrant cultures in postsecondary education, seeking knowledge and understanding of why these particular immigrant cultures generally are not successful in higher education. The findings provide insights that may be useful in improving educational services to other less successful immigrant groups.

### ***Cross-National Comparison of Historically Immigrant Magnet Countries Has International Significance***

The study of two countries that are historically immigrant magnets adds to the increasing international body of research in “cross-national comparisons of ethnic minority attainment” (Loury, Modood, & Teles, 2003, p. 3). Emerging research has begun to “compare the economic well-being of ethnic minorities across receiving

countries” (p. 3).

There is a paucity of comparative literature between the UK and the US of immigrant students in higher education. In the US there are studies that compare minority students to white students, but there are very few studies that compare differences among the various ethnic groups or ethnic groups within minority groups (Mow & Nettles, 1996, p. 602).

Institutions in the UK and US periodically reach out to one another for comparisons of educational methods and outcomes. The interest in “education diplomacy” (Johnston, 2000, p. 1) and sharing of educational strategies and school improvement between the UK and the US continues in both K-12 and higher education. As Burgos-Sasscer and Collins (1996) noted, “an increasing number of educators around the world are reaching out to each other” (p. 160) as they respond to the calls for reform in higher education.

### ***Phenomenological Research on Bangladeshi Immigrants in the UK and Mexican Immigrants in the US is Scarce***

A phenomenological study and comparison of the students’ perspectives reveals students’ insights and experiences in postsecondary education. Previous studies of Mexican students in higher education in the US have primarily used methods of data collection that “effectively strip away the context surrounding the student’s decision to persist or not to persist in college and exclude from consideration the student’s own perceptions of the process” (Attinasi, 1996, p. 191). Likewise, the

great majority of research on Bangladeshi students in the UK is quantitative and statistically driven (Shiner & Modood, 2002 p. 211). Common perceptions from the two immigrant cultures may emerge. Therefore, themes within the perspectives that may be pertinent to other less-than-successful immigrant cultures in higher education are uncovered. In the words of Attinasi and Nora (1996), “The findings of naturalistic approaches can both assist in the development of the conceptual frameworks from which quantitative models are drawn and illuminate our understanding” (p. 552).

### *Summary of Significance*

This study should be significant to educators, policy makers, and members of the particular immigrant cultures to be studied, the Bangladeshis in the UK and the Mexicans in the US. These two immigrant cultures, which are typically not successful in higher education in the two countries, respectively, generally are not able to qualify for high paying jobs, nor contribute to the economy of their chosen countries in a manner desirable to either the immigrant or the culture and economy of the new country. Although people from these immigrant cultures enter the postsecondary system at the further education or community college level, they are frequently less successful in completing their programs or transferring to later stages of higher education. The bulk of current research on this topic is quantitative and does not answer for educators or policy makers, why these students dropout. The cross-national comparison approach, with postsecondary education and least successful immigrants being the driving factors, adds to a growing body of international research in national

comparisons of immigrants. The UK and the US, as the traditional immigrant countries, are recognized as education exporting nations, freely sharing education models and research.

This study focuses on the phenomenological experience of the student early-leavers, seeking to understand why they leave the system prior to completion. The findings should be of use to both the UK and the US in improving their higher education programs and support services for the immigrant cultures being studied as well as immigrants from other cultures. The study results may also be useful to other countries adopting models from the UK and US.

### Guiding Question

As a phenomenological study, data was gathered through interviews of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants who were students but left further education institutions in the UK and community colleges in the US prior to completion, respectively. Efforts were made to focus this study so as to reveal an understanding of the students' decisions to not persist, and "the context of the decision and the student's perspective on the context" (Attinasi, 1996, p. 191).

Although these interviews were conversational, and exploratory in the sense of "gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding" (van Manen, 1990, p. 66), they had the focus of a fundamental question. Without this driving question, the possibility of confusion and poor information would have increased (van Manen, 1990). To this end, the

conversational interviews were guided by the following question:

*Why do Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants in the UK and the US, respectively, leave postsecondary education prior to completion?*

It was thought that the answers to this question might differ according to the culture and the country. However, in the common context of participation in higher education as students and as minority ethnic immigrants, there may be shared patterns or themes within the responses. This fundamental question guided me and kept me focused on the central purpose of this study as I conducted conversational interviews with students.

As the interviews proceeded, research sub-questions guided the data collection and analysis process. The research sub-questions addressed the cross-cultural nature of the study and were as follows:

- How are the experiences of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants similar or different?
- How are the institutional responses to the Bangladeshis and Mexicans, as portrayed by the participants, similar or different?
- What commonalities in the cultures of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants might lead to similar experiences in the postsecondary education systems?
- What commonalities in the UK and US postsecondary systems might result in similar experiences for the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants?

The conversations that unfolded were structured around these research sub-

questions, but were not limited to these topics. As the interviewees responded to interview questions their memories of their experiences led to their own insights as they tried to understand the effects of events and choices made. This, in turn, led to my greater understanding of the two cultures, the Bangladeshis and the Mexicans, which allowed me to compare the experiences of the two immigrant groups.

## CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is divided into three major sections. Each section influenced the proposed research in terms of its focus and design.

The first section of the literature review describes the findings that identify the UK and the US as magnets and traditional receiving countries to immigrants, and the current status of immigrant Bangladeshis and Mexicans in these countries. This section is intended to provide a description of the context and pressures on receiving countries and how the context may influence higher education and the response of higher education institutions to immigrant students.

The second section presents literature that portrays the experience of immigrant students in higher education, particularly Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants. I discuss the lack of success in higher education of these two immigrant populations. The current research on these immigrant groups in higher education and the limitations and voids in the research are also addressed. This literature provided a major influence on the new research that I conducted, a qualitative study of the immigrant students' experiences. This section includes an examination of the collected statistical data that shows a lack of success of the two groups and supports my finding in the review that there are few qualitative studies of immigrants students in postsecondary education.

Finally, the third section briefly examines the research that most affected my design. I analyze two qualitative studies of immigrant students in higher education,

and the limitations and strengths of the research that I considered in my own investigation. These studies proved helpful as I explored the actual process of obtaining experiential data from immigrant students. The literature not only recommends further qualitative studies of immigrant students, but also makes suggestions for the types of qualitative research that needs to be done.

### The UK and the US as Immigrant Magnets

The United States and Western Europe have long been magnets for immigrants, especially since World War II (Brinbaum & Werquin, 1998; Driessen, 2000). According to Driessen (2000), the UK and the US are the “traditional immigrant countries.” (p. 12). In the US in 1994, immigrant growth was at 8.5%, the greatest since the mid 1800’s (Szelenyi & Chang, 2002, p. 55; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996, p. 1). “Annual immigration to Europe is twice as high as annual immigration to the ‘New World’” (Loury et al., 2000, p. 3). Currently about 7% of the British population comprises immigrants (Commission on Racial Equality [CRE], 1998).

#### *The United States (US)*

In the US in 2000, the two top countries from which immigrants came were Mexico (first) and China (second) (Schwartz, 1996). In the 1980’s three-fourths of all immigrants to the US settled in six states, with California having the largest number (Schwartz, 1996). Immigrants in US community colleges continue to increase in numbers. Community colleges are key participants in the immigrants’ education due in large part to access, affordability, location, and the multitude of offerings of English



as a Second Language classes (Szelenyi & Chang, 2002). Nationally, 6% of high-school aged students are immigrants. However, in California, 22% of the high-school age students are immigrants (Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996, p.14), and one in three high school students are of Hispanic<sup>1</sup> origin (p.xv). These numbers represent potential community college students.

### *The United Kingdom (UK)*

The UK faces an influx of immigrants seeking residency and citizenship. The year 2000 showed an increase of migrants to England and Wales<sup>2</sup>, with 12% of the total population being migrants (National Statistics Online, 2003). In 2001, 14% of the minors in the UK were immigrants (The European Commission, 2001).

Growing demand for access to higher education by immigrants in the United Kingdom is driving the UK to examine its educational policy and access (Modood, 1993). The UK has, within the past ten years, revised their higher education system so it has become more accessible (Edwards, 1997, p. 223). In 1997, 25% of the men and women from ethnic minority groups studied further, beyond compulsory school, compared to the national average of 15% (Commission on Racial Equality [CRE], 1998). Recent changes in further education institutions have opened access to degree-

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<sup>1</sup> Hispanic, in most demographic research, refers to people from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central or South America and other Spanish origins, regardless of race (unless otherwise noted). Sixty-six percent of the Hispanics in the US are of Mexican decent (Llagas, 2003, p. 1).

<sup>2</sup> The figure for immigrants in England and Wales is different than that for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom comprises Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as England and Wales. Therefore the percentage of immigrants in England and Wales will likely be higher than the percentage for the UK as the latter is based on a larger population.

granting universities for those adults who may not have been appropriately or adequately prepared in secondary schools.

These various studies support the significance of studying immigrants in the UK and the US. The influx of immigrants in both countries is at an all-time high, and the demand for access to higher education is likewise apparent in both countries (Greene, 1997).

### Immigrants in Higher Education

Literature in both the UK and the US examines access, participation, and success of ethnic minorities and immigrants in higher education (Turner, Garcia, Nora, & Rendón, 1996; Szelenyi & Chang, 2002; Modood, 1993; Ghuman, 2002). In both countries the trend in the past has been towards analyzing statistical evidence of access and retention, with few studies of minority students' experiences (Shiner & Modood, 2002; Attinasi, 1996). There are complaints from both sides of the Atlantic about the complexity, ambiguity, and absence of theoretical models in the study of minorities in higher education in the US (Mow & Nettles, 1996, p. 608), and the lack of attention paid to "issues of racism and ethnicity in higher education" (Shiner & Modood, 2002, p. 210) in the UK.

The US community colleges and UK further education colleges<sup>3</sup> are most frequently the avenue immigrants take to complete vocational preparation or prepare

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<sup>3</sup> Further education colleges are the postsecondary institutions used by the UK to provide technical and vocational training, English as a Second Language, preparation for university entrance examinations, and courses transferable to universities.

for transfer to university (Szelenyi & Chang, 2002; Shiner & Modood, 2002). According to Szelenyi & Chang (2002), immigrants are 20% more likely than native-born students to begin at a community college and then transfer to a university. Hispanic and Asian immigrants are the most likely of all immigrants to begin their postsecondary education at a community college. Both the Bangladeshis and the Mexicans, in the UK and the US respectively, are the least likely to participate in any postsecondary education, and both groups have some of the highest poverty levels of all immigrant groups in their receiving countries (Shiner & Modood, 2002; National Statistics 2001; Sorensen, Brewer, Carroll, & Bryton, 1995, p. 1; Attinasi, 1996).

In the US the Hispanic immigrants are growing in number, yet decreasing in education participation and consequently in earning power. The concern is the impact of an inadequate education on a growing and significant portion of the population, limiting them to low-skill jobs and a life of poverty (Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). According to the 1999 US census, Mexicans had the lowest proportion of high school diplomas of all groups, at 50%. In 1990, of the Mexican immigrants aged 15-17, only 25% were in school, nearly 20% fewer than that of any other immigrant group, and 17% lower than natives of Mexican origin (Gray, et al., 1996). Only 7% of the Mexican population has baccalaureate degrees, as compared to about 26% of the foreign and native born (US Census, 2000). Thirty-one percent (31%) of Mexicans in the US live in poverty (US Census, 2000), and they are the least likely of all immigrants to work in managerial or professional occupations, at 11.9% (Rapid Immigration, 2002).

McCallum & Nash (1994) report that ethnic minorities in the UK are well represented in further education colleges, but many fail to advance to a university. The Bangladeshis in the UK have the lowest proportional participation rate in “Qualifications” (vocational certifications) (CRE, 1998) and in higher education in the UK (Modood, 1993). Sixty-nine percent (69%) of Bangladeshis were unemployed in 2000 (National Statistics Online, 2003), with 84% of the Bangladeshi households living well below half the national average income (Foreign and Commonwealth Office of London, 1999), compared to 28% of the majority ethnic households in the UK. Loury and Modood’s latest study (2003) of cross national comparisons shows that Bangladeshi male immigrants in both the UK and the US have the highest rate of unemployment of the six ethnic minorities studied: Black Caribbeans, Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Chinese, and Black Africans.

According to reports in the research literature, the Bangladeshis in the UK and the Mexicans in the US are underrepresented in any type of higher education and unemployed or employed in poor paying jobs at greater numbers than the general populations. They are also amongst the poorest population segments in the UK and US.

### *Access to Universities through Community Colleges in the US*

Szelenyi & Chang (2002) reviewed literature on the community colleges in the US and their role in educating immigrants. In the US, community colleges “play an essential role in educating America’s newcomers” (p.55), due in large part to the

affordability, proximity, variety of courses, particularly of English as second language classes, and open access policies. Community colleges are often the path of immigrants to prepare for university (Szelenyi & Chang, 2002; Attinasi, 1996; Nora & Rendón, 1996). However, access to and enrollment in community college does not necessarily mean completion of degrees or transfer to baccalaureate degree granting institutions (Llagas, 2003). According to Vernez and Abrahamse (1996), “Hispanics, both native and immigrant, are the most likely of any racial/ethnic group to go to a two-year college and no further” (p. 40).

#### *Access to Universities through Further Education Colleges in the UK*

The colleges of further education in England and Wales are the most used avenues by immigrants to prepare for university entrance, whether they prepare for university entrance examinations or take transferable university courses (Shiner & Modood, 2002; CRE, 1998). Much like the community colleges in the US, immigrants can also take classes in English as a second language at further education colleges, and prepare for vocation certificates. Both systems, further education colleges and the community colleges, are challenged in their efforts to transfer immigrant students of particular ethnicities into universities (Gray et al., 1996; Shiner & Modood, 2002).

In Britain it appears that there are increasing numbers of ethnic minority students entering higher and further education (Modood, 1993). Modood conducted a quantitative study using data collected by the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) and the Polytechnic Colleges Admissions Services (PCAS).

Modood segregated the various ethnicities and showed comparisons of their applications, rates of acceptance, and their course takings. Interestingly there were many similarities in the findings of Gray and Modood. The most unexpected discovery was that, although the ethnic minorities and immigrants were more likely to come from low-income families, they were also more likely to attend higher education institutions than their native counterparts, except for the Bangladeshi in the UK (Modood, 1993, p.7) and the Mexicans in the US (Gray et al., 1996, p. 25-26).

Literature shows that immigrants access postsecondary institutions, such as community colleges in the US and further education colleges in the UK, at higher rates than the general population. They use this access to enter universities and obtain baccalaureate degrees. However, unlike the other immigrant groups, the Mexican and Bangladeshi immigrants usually do not persist in postsecondary institutions long enough to obtain vocational certificates or transfer to universities.

### *Institutional Support for Immigrant Students in Higher Education*

The literature shows that support for immigrant students in higher education is unplanned and not generally recognized as a necessity in the US and in the UK (Gray et al., 1996; Ghuman, 2002, p. 53). However, in the few studies that exist, immigrant students report an appreciation of current faculty support and an interest in additional faculty assistance in their classrooms and on their campuses (Thomas, 2002; Kilbride & D'Arcangelo, 2000).

According to several studies, in both Europe and the United States, poor

language fluency is perceived by administrators and faculty to be the greatest barrier to success in postsecondary education (Overgaard, 1995; Gray et al., 1996; The European Commission, 2001; Ghuman, 2002). Financial assistance is noted as an important need for immigrant students in the US (Szelenyi & Chang, 2002). For those immigrants who participate in secondary education in their newly adopted countries, limited access due to inappropriate or inadequate preparation or insufficient support in secondary school appears to be a concern in both the UK and the US (Office for Standards in Education, 1995; Attinasi, 1996).

In both the UK and the US higher education institutions offer limited support to immigrant students. Some support is in the form of faculty one-on-one attention, whereas other forms include financial aid to students in the US and ESL to students in both countries. One of the challenges facing higher education in the UK and the US is how to assist immigrants who attended inferior secondary schools and are therefore inadequately prepared for postsecondary level courses.

### Qualitative Research on the Experience of Least Successful Immigrant Cultures in Higher Education

Researchers seek explanations for patterns of faltering in education (Mow & Nettles, 1996, p. 600). The research on minority students “offer(s) important insights that help explain the college experiences of minority students, and they may help the institutions address their own unique challenges” (p. 601). Qualitative research concerning the poor participation rates in higher education of the Bangladeshis in the

UK and Mexicans in the US (Attinasi, 1996) is scant. As yet, I have not found any qualitative research on Bangladeshis in higher education in the UK. In the US, a great deal of research has been done on the Hispanic students in elementary and secondary education, but little at the higher education level (Attinasi, 1996, p. 190; Immerwahr, 2003; Fry, 2002).

There is a growing interest in studying the experience of Mexican students in higher education. Nora (1996) asserts that a question of the community college role in Hispanic under-achievement justifies further research in analyzing the “complex factors, which may affect the differential progress of Hispanic students in community colleges” (p. 271). Attinasi (1996) concludes that research needs to be done on Mexican students in college that “are naturalistic, descriptive studies guided by research that emphasize the insider’s point of view” (p. 191).

Generally, it appears that in the UK the research on South Asians and ethnic minorities in higher education focuses on test scores, numbers of applicants, and rates of admission to various universities (Modood, 1993). Ghuman (2002) reviewed published research on the education of South Asian young people in the UK and found that they are achieving as well as or better than their white counterparts, except for the Bangladeshis who are the least successful. He identified only one study in which a selected number of migrant participants were interviewed on a “range of social and educational topics” (p. 51). Statistical evidence shows Bangladeshis are not successful in higher education (CRE, 2002; Modood, 1993; Ghuman, 2002).

As Gray et al. noted in regard to US research (1996, p. 105), no researcher “has



asked immigrant students about their needs and perceptions of the campus environment.” Shiner and Modood (2002) state that in the UK, “Relatively little attention has been given to issues of racism and ethnicity in higher education... a small number of studies have started to consider the experiences of ethnic minority students once they start to study at university” (p. 212). However, these qualitative studies seem to focus on bias and racism (Shiner & Modood, 2002), rather than achievement.

My research, on the experience of Mexican immigrants in the US and Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK in early postsecondary education, adds to the small amount of current qualitative research of the least successful immigrants in higher education. It increases institutional understanding in the UK and the US of how the least successful immigrants perceive higher education. This study differs from the more usual cross-national comparisons, which typically focus on labor market and economic outcomes of like immigrant groups (Loury et al., 2000). As an educational research study, it focuses on the experiences of immigrants who do not complete postsecondary education.

### Studies that Contribute to the Design of Research

The use of interviews of students and faculty in postsecondary education to research the experience of students regarding access and success is supported by two particular studies that provided me with specific insight. Both studies researched participation of immigrant or minority students in higher education. The first study examined instructor attitudes toward Russian immigrants in Israeli colleges and the

second considered Mexican American students in a US college. These two studies are qualitative in their approach, though quite different in their methodology. Even though one examined the instructor attitudes rather than the students, each has some particular aspects that helped me in the design of my research proposal.

*Models of Assimilation and Faculty Response to Russian Immigrants in Israeli Colleges*

“The attitude of faculty to Russian immigrant absorption in Israeli colleges for training of technicians and practical engineers” by Doron (1995) in the *European Journal of Engineering Education*, is a study of postsecondary Israeli faculty who teach in the engineering and technical areas. Doron observed the problem of “cross-cultural encounters” posed by the very large number of Russian immigrants attending engineering and technical colleges in Israel during 1989-93. Necessary reorganization of classes and reallocation of budgets, personnel, and equipment due to immigrant students’ needs impacted the organization of the colleges. At the same time the faculty were challenged to “induce the academic, cultural and social absorption and integration of their immigrant students” (p. 108). The purpose of the study was to determine the lecturers’ attitudes towards the absorption of immigrant students and whether special assistance should be offered towards the process of acculturation. Grounding the research in “pre-existing models of sociological attitude towards immigrant absorption distinguished by Eisikovitz and Beck (1991, *Studies in Education*, 55/56, pp. 33-50)” (p. 107), Doron surveyed 33 lecturers in four Israeli colleges.

The research was helpful to me in that it categorized the faculty responses into three pre-existing sociological models of immigrant absorption. I referred to these models of assimilation as I examined students' interview responses for themes. Doron looked at three pre-existing models in which: (1) immigrant students and natives were treated the same by faculty, (2) there was special coaching or preparation or other appropriate assistance to immigrant students, and (3) there was a continuum of heightened awareness of cultural differences and the faculty and college administration were given the freedom to act as they saw best to suit the immigrant students' needs and the environment.

Through survey responses Doron found that faculty supported immigrant students as defined by the three identified models. Using this finding, I used questions regarding support of faculty, as an aspect of institutional influence on student retention. I tried to be particularly cognizant of the impact of faculty attitudes on student success, and sought an understanding from the immigrants I interviewed as to what they perceived to be faculty response to them. (Interviews showed that faculty support in the acculturation process was not a significant factor in immigrant students' lack of success.) This was at least one facet of the conversations I undertook during the interviews. Knowledge and understanding of models used by Doron gave context to my understanding of the participants' replies regarding faculty and institutional support, and influenced my determination of themes and patterns of the data analysis.

### *Mexican American Freshmen Experiences in University*

The other study influencing my study is Attinasi's (1996) research on *Getting in: Mexican American's perceptions of university attendance and the implications for freshman year persistence*. Attinasi was interested in the behavior and attitudes of students prior to attending college, as well as during initial attendance. He was seeking to understand students' experiences and perceptions of applying for and attending college. The implications of his findings suggest strategies the institution should employ to improve the college experience for Mexican American students.

Attinasi (1996) targeted Mexican American students who enrolled in a four-year public Southwestern US university. The intent was to conduct an exploratory study "to collect and analyze qualitative data, describing, from Mexican American students' point of view, the context surrounding his or her decision to persist or not to persist in university" (p. 191). The study consisted of interviews with 18 current and former students from a single entering class. They were interviewed eight to eleven months following the end of their freshman year. Although the article was published in a 1996 text, the study actually took place in 1981. It seems since Attinasi chose a public university, that his population, by default, tended to be middle class Mexican Americans. They came from families where siblings and parents had attended college. Their high-school teachers expected them to attend college. Attinasi's population and background is very different from what I expected to find in the community colleges and the Mexican immigrant population.

The process used in Attinasi's (1996) interviews, using sites of the informants' choosing, obtaining a "modified' life history" (p. 192) and open-ended interviews, were the methods I incorporated in my data collection design. Likewise, his data analysis, using a "qualitative induction" (p. 192) procedure, where concepts and hypotheses emerge through the examination of the collected data, were also used as my methods of analysis.

From the two research studies described above, I extracted the conceptual models (Doron) and methods of data collection (Attinasi). Because my participants were immigrants, and those who left postsecondary education, my groups were older in age and economically poorer than students in the Doron and Attinasi studies. Through open interviews with the participants, such as Attinasi used, and keeping in mind the three conceptual models of assimilation when guiding the conversation, as in Doron's model, I sought to achieve a picture of the experiences of the former students, their impressions of the faculty responses to them, and their perceived institutional support.

Both Doron and Attinasi appeared to use a phenomenological framework for their research. Attinasi indicated that the methods he used were "symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology" (p. 191). His description of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology appear very similar to hermeneutic phenomenology. Ethnomethodology "seeks to understand how actors go about the task of seeing, describing, and explaining the world in which they live" (Attinasi, 1996, p. 191). Whereas van Manen (1990) states that the purpose of phenomenological

research is “to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience” (p. 41). Doron’s study was actually a survey, without reference to any research methodology. The interest in faculty perceptions and responses to immigrant students, and the open-ended surveys, which requested narrative responses to questions, are sometimes used in phenomenological studies. Both researchers interviewed or surveyed participants to understand an experience and perspective. Phenomenologists “are concerned with how social reality appears to individuals,” (Gall et al., 1996, p. 626) and phenomenological researchers are primarily interested in the “individual’s interpretations of reality” (p. 627). Phenomenology is an established research methodology (van Manen, 1990) that gave guidance to the procedures of inquiry that I used to collect and analyze data.

According to Mow & Nettles (1996) “...research literature on minority students is complex and ambiguous. The complexity relates to lack of agreement on definitions, variation in research methodology, and the absence of coherent theoretical models to guide the research” (p. 608). I avoided this pitfall of ambiguity and the criticism of “absence of coherent theoretical models” by using a phenomenological approach. Like Doron and Attinasi, I focused on voices, perceptions, and experiences. I understand the inductive process of phenomenology, and that it was important to go into this research with an open mind. I also believe that to maintain credibility and rigor of the study it was important that the theory of phenomenology be understood by the critics, and acknowledged as a theoretical model. I therefore reference the model in fair detail in the analysis of the data to follow.

## Summary of Literature Review

The literature review clearly shows the two countries, the UK and the US, to be “immigrant magnets” and consequently recipients of large numbers of migrants. Both countries have very large and growing immigrant populations. Mexicans in the US are the largest and poorest immigrant group. Bangladeshis in the UK, though not the largest immigrant population, are the poorest economically. Literature also shows that while immigrants attend postsecondary education at all levels, including baccalaureate institutions, the Mexican and Bangladeshi immigrants participate and succeed in higher education at lower levels than other immigrants and natives of the UK and the US, respectively. Qualitative studies of immigrants at any level of postsecondary education are few. Both the UK and the US have collected statistics on participation, retention, and completion by minority students in higher education. However, neither nation has done much to differentiate these statistics concerning immigrant students as opposed to native ethnic minorities. Nor has there been a significant attempt to listen to the students’ experiences to determine why the Bangladeshi and Mexican students start further education colleges and community colleges, but leave in high proportions compared to other immigrant students, prior to completion or transfer to university. Finally, a diligent search of the literature has not exposed a study such as I have conducted. However, there are studies that offered valuable models and methods that enhanced my understanding of responses to my guiding research question.

## CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH DESIGN

This section discusses the various aspects that constitute the design of the study. My epistemology and the influences on my choice of research methods are also described. The methodology used is described along with a brief background of the major tenets of the methodology. Finally, I describe how my data were obtained, the study participants, and the process used in analyzing the data. The schedule of the study concludes this section.

### Researcher's Epistemology and Personal Disclosure

The design of this study is reflective of my personal paradigm, which is that of a constructivist. Constructivism is both a “theory of learning” and “a theory of knowing” (Lambert et al., 1995, p. 1). Leading theorists of the emerging theory of constructivism include Von Glaserfield, Bruner, and Gardner (p. 9). Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences challenged traditional approaches to learning (Lambert et al., 1995), opening the door to appreciating the individuality of learning.

Basic tenets of constructivism include:

- People are active learners and use experiences to construct knowledge for themselves;
- The learner integrates newly presented knowledge with prior knowledge to synthesize it to new knowledge;
- The learning is based on active participation in problem solving and critical thinking.



The constructivist paradigm states that each individual has her or his own reality, and that it is based on her or his own experiences (Heppner, Kivlighan & Wampold, 1999).

The study was viewed through my own lens and experiences. Although I was not an immigrant, I was raised overseas receiving most of my elementary and secondary schooling from British institutions. I lived for ten years in Asia, returning to the U.S. for an American postsecondary education. My experiences in both British and American education systems provided a point of reference when examining the higher education systems of Britain and the US.

I remember clearly my own transition from British secondary schooling to a community college in the United States. I had spent nine years attending a British school in Thailand and two years in British schools in England. Thus, it was with some sense of empathy that I sought to understand the experiences of immigrants. I believe that each one of the immigrants I interviewed had a sense of reality based on individual experiences. Each experience was built on previous knowledge so there was, for each of them, a new reality and knowledge. My own experiences with education and multiple systems were different from my parents and siblings and put me into a different reality. As a constructivist, I constantly revise what the world around me means, based on new experiences. I construct new knowledge in this manner.

I realize, as a student, teacher, parent, and a former ex-patriot US citizen living abroad, that perceptions of reality are based on experiences and internal translations of those experiences. Individual experiences translate to individual realities that contain

possible benefit to the world at large when shared. As Lambert, et al. (1995) state, “Constructivism does possess a richness of thought, a different world view, that offers a sense of possibility rather than limitation to human growth and development” (p. 27).

A seeking of individual experiences through the hermeneutic phenomenological method allows participants to retain and share their own reality while enabling the researcher to record and document individual perceptions. The inclusion of hermeneutics supported the use of interpretation, which is part of the constructivist epistemology, wherein the researcher makes meaning of her or his experiences and in understanding the experiences of others, interprets them within the context of her or his own experiences.

### Methodology

This research was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research holds that interpretations of the social environment “tend to be transitory and situational” (Gall et al. 1996. p. 28). It is the study of *meanings* of individuals and human actions, rather than behaviors in artificial settings or simply observing behaviors. Qualitative research often generates verbal data, discovers concepts after the data have been collected, makes contextual observations, and may use analytical induction to scrutinize data (Gall et al., 1996). These points are in direct contrast to quantitative research, which tends to produce numerical data, uses preconceived concepts to decide data to be collected, “analyzes social reality into variables” (p. 30), and may use statistical

deductions to draw conclusions and make generalizations. Qualitative theory was most amenable to my focus on the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrant students' experiences in higher education in the UK and the US, respectively.

Within the qualitative research paradigm, I used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, seeking to understand, interpret, compare, and explain the experiences (van Manen, 1990) of immigrant students in two higher education institutions in two countries. I wanted to understand what the experience was and how it felt, rather than hearing a recitation of events. This is described by van Manen as "the whatness of things" (p. 177). A pure phenomenological approach would leave out the interpretation. By adding interpretation, I added the hermeneutic aspect. The complexity of the experience of immigrant students was better represented as it has been transmitted through as few filters as practicable. On the other hand, the experiences were obtained by more than simple transcription of interviews. While students were interviewed, I tried to understand their experiences as I observed their body language and asked probing questions to reach further into their interpretations. In this way I continuously interpreted data I was obtaining from the immigrants. As noted by Tuckman (1999), "While the study's observers record what people say and do, they attempt to do so through the perspective of the participants they observe. Hence, they try to capture the participative or felt aspect of the experience" (p. 397). The goal was to "construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 41). I wanted to understand how immigrant students experienced postsecondary education. It is acknowledged that I bring my own

perspective and values to the study, even while attempting to “bracket” (p. 175), or set aside my own reflections and related experiences.

By listening to the students describe their experiences in the institutions, there evolved a rich and thick description of the context and an “insider’s point of view” (Attinasi, 1996, p. 191). This description includes some interpretations and conclusions regarding the perceived failure of Bangladeshi students and Mexican students in postsecondary education the UK and the US, respectively.

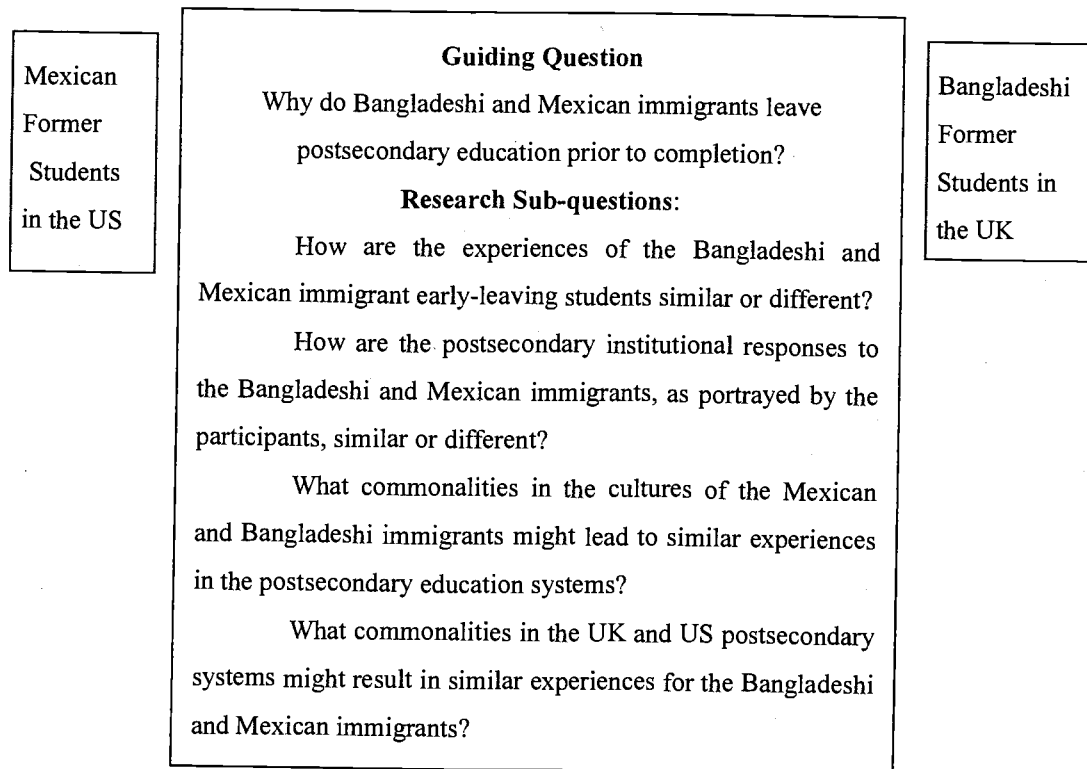


Figure 1. Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Immigrant Students

Figure 1 illustrates how the two groups in the two different countries were studied for similarities in experiences and system responses. The sub-questions guided

the interview conversations and the analysis of the data acquired. Although these were separate immigrant groups in separate countries, it was anticipated that there would be many commonalities in terms of experiences based on their roles as immigrants, their economic status, their language challenges, the educational systems, and cultural influences from the families. Differences between the experiences of the individuals in the two groups were also anticipated. The Asian and Western cultures, Muslim and Catholic religions, and social status in the host countries were expected to impact the two groups of immigrants in ways that were dissimilar.

### *Selection of Research Locations and Participants*

As previously noted, there is a history of various studies comparing the UK and the US in education, workforce, and economics. The many similarities between the two countries, including language, shared heritages, and shared status as immigrant havens make such cross-national comparisons increasingly popular (Davies & Guppy, 1997; Ghuman, 2002; Chadha, 1996; Loury et al., 2003; Story, 1996; Driessen, 2000). It was within this context that I chose to study immigrants in the UK and the US.

Selecting a smaller geographic location within each country, a place from which to seek a purposeful sampling of early-leaving students to interview, required some parameters and diligent search. Examining various locations in the UK, I discovered a recent (2003) press release that showed Welsh higher education institutions “lead the way (in the UK) in attracting students from underrepresented

backgrounds” (National Assembly for Wales, 2003, p. 1; Welsh Assembly Government, 2003). This appealed to my logic: a location that was apparently welcoming and attractive to immigrants. While researching the Bangladeshis in the UK, I located a website by, and for, British Bangladeshi Professionals. One of the contributors was a research assistant at the University of Wales in Cardiff. This ultimately led to selecting Southeastern Wales as the geographic location for the UK portions of the study.

Choosing California as a site for comparison was a much easier decision. Not only does California have one of the largest Mexican immigrant populations, over forty percent of the Mexican Hispanics in the United States live in California (Fry, 2002, p. 6), but as I live in California it was therefore convenient to me.

As I prepared to study early-leaving students who were recently enrolled in further education or community colleges, I thought it would be helpful to identify institutions where potential participants had likely attended previously. I believed the institutions would be key in helping me to find former immigrant students who left before completing programs of study. I hoped that if I started at the institution and publicized to both faculty and students that I was looking for early-leaving students who left before completing programs of study, I would find volunteers.

### Data Collection and Study Participants

Data acquired were comprised of descriptions of the experiences of the selected sample of Bangladeshi (UK) and Mexican (US) immigrants. Identification of

the participants was made with the assistance of the institutions, the community, and other resources. The definition of an immigrant student was provided to the institutions so participants were identified in accordance with my criteria (see below). A search was made seeking Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants who participated to some degree in the further education or a community college, but left the institution before completing a program of study. Finding the participants was accomplished through verbal inquiries with current students, faculty, staff, community resources, and word-of-mouth through early-leaving students.

For the purpose of this research, immigrant students were selected to meet the following criteria:

- English was not their first language; this limitation attempted to impose at least one common characteristic on the sample of early-leaving students who were immigrants,
- They were born outside of the host country; this criteria reinforced the importance that the sample be first-generation immigrants,
- They had attended postsecondary education in the host country, and
- They had left, (i.e., not registered for at least two consecutive terms in postsecondary education), and had not completed a program of study.

In California posters were displayed on the community college campus and in nearby community gathering places such as coffee shops, career centers, and the like, seeking volunteers who met the criteria. Poster displays were not necessary in Wales. Prior to interviews, each student confirmed that he or she was an immigrant student

who met the defining criteria. The research project was explained to them and compliance with the Oregon State University Institutional Research Board criteria of using human subjects was made. Eighteen early-leavers from various institutions in Wales and California were selected for extensive interviews. Each participant was appropriately oriented and protected, following Oregon State University's Human Subject Policy. The forms and letters did not need to be translated into Bangladeshi and Spanish, as the participants had a sufficient grasp of English to understand the policy when it was explained to them.

Students were interviewed on campus and at locations of their choice, which included their homes, restaurants, career centers, telephone, and e-mail. An interpreter was used only once, and that was a fellow student who was also included as a participant in the study. A single interview took place with each individual student. Some interviews lasted only 45 minutes, whereas others were two hours long. The length of the interview depended on the amount of time necessary to capture the experience of the participants relating to postsecondary education. The interviews were tape recorded for subsequent reference during the analysis stage. I maintained field notes to augment the interviews. Supporting information was gathered from the institutions through catalogs, materials, and conversations with administrators and faculty members regarding programs and services.

Interview questions were open-ended and expanded, according to the direction taken by the conversation. Direction was provided by me as the interviewer. Ortiz (1986) did his dissertation research on immigrant students at an East-coast US



community college. His study was phenomenological, based on interviews with 12 English as a Second Language students. The focus of his research was to examine the experience of Dominican students and the college experience for immigrant students. Borrowing a few questions and concepts from Ortiz' dissertation (1986, pp. 187- 190), some of the opening interview questions I used to start the conversations were as follows:

#### Historical Background

Why did you or your family come to the US?

How do you view yourself ethnically?

#### Academic History and College Experiences

Why did you decide to attend college?

What did your family think about your attending college?

What were your experiences in college?

What did you think of college (was it different than expected)?

What was the institutional response to you as a (Mexican/Bangladeshi) student?

Why did you leave college before completing a program?

#### ***Overview of Data Collection Procedures***

Data collection procedures followed my prior formulated plan and proceeded in a timely manner. I conducted a pilot study at San Joaquin Delta College in California in December 2003.

### *Pilot Study*

A pilot study was conducted to evaluate access to participants, the potential or necessary role of translators, the process of interviewing and recording data, and feasibility in general. Due to cost factors, the pilot was conducted in California, at San Joaquin Delta College, which is close to Sacramento. San Joaquin Delta College is in a farming community in Northern California. In fall, 2002, San Joaquin Delta College enrolled over 22,000 students of whom 26% were Hispanic.

The results of the pilot study suggested that communication with the people who were trying to help me find participants should be clear and explicit. I thought my e-mails and telephone conversations were to the point, but found I had to re-state the criteria for the study participants whom I sought. I learned that I needed to state clearly my criteria and not waiver from those specifications. My natural reaction tended to be gratitude for anybody referred to me as a participant. Soon I realized that I could spend a lot of time interviewing participants who, though they had interesting stories, would add little or nothing to my research. Networking was essential to find early-leaving students. I found the pilot participants while interviewing for a position at San Joaquin Delta College where I met the president and vice president, both of whom were Mexican American. Once I realized the position was not one I wanted to pursue, I decided to ask for help in obtaining participants for my pilot study. The vice president was extremely helpful, and very quick with his referrals to members of the college faculty who could help me. My pilot study focused on early-leaving students

of a federal program, College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), directed to migrant farm workers and their children. San Joaquin Delta College had received a five-year grant through CAMP to provide bi-lingual high school equivalency classes which might lead to English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes with the goal of students then transferring into regular community college classes.

The pilot research taught me several lessons:

- Make certain all the participants to be interviewed are legal residents, at the very least;
- Transportation may be difficult for ex-students;
- Little gifts for the participants for their time, and for the administrators who coordinated the visits, are appreciated by the recipients;
- Children or babies may attend the interview due to child care needs, so be prepared to provide some form of entertainment;
- Try to find early-leaving students who were enrolled in postsecondary education for college courses rather than General Education Diploma (GED) or high school equivalency diplomas.

### *Full Study*

The greatest obstacle, as expected, was finding the early-leaving students in both Wales and California. In both countries, privacy laws prevent educational institutions from sharing personal student information. Likewise, in both countries I was introduced to many second-generation immigrants who had left postsecondary

education early. In both cases, these early-leaving students told me they knew many more like themselves and there were more of them than first-generation dropouts. My research in Wales, limited to the two weeks my state job permitted me to be absent, was intense, with every waking hour filled with sleuthing and interviews. Had I been able to stay another week or two, it would have likely led to at least two more appropriate interviews. Because it was the season of Hajj, when devout Muslims visit Mecca, I was told that many of the people that might fit my criteria were out of the country. However, as this is more of a male excursion, and expensive, I am unsure how much it actually hampered my research. Of the many phone calls I made, only one person told me the candidate I sought was on Hajj.

My research of the Mexican immigrants was greatly slowed by my full-time job. I simply wasn't able to devote the intense focus to find my participants as I had in Wales. Thus, what took two weeks in Wales took four months in California. The major time-saving advantage in California was that I was familiar with the postsecondary education system so I did not have to interview staff and faculty just to understand the structure; rather, I focused on their experiences with the study population.

### *California*

In California, a community college was identified as one of the institutions from which the immigrant students left early. California has the largest postsecondary system in the world, with 109 community colleges, and is the state that "bear(s) the

bulk of responsibility to educate new immigrants” (Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996, p.13). Twenty-seven percent of the 18-21 year-olds in California are immigrants and thirty-one percent of the 22-24 year-olds, according to 1990 data (p.14). Additionally, in 1990, 59% of the immigrants to California were Hispanic, and those were predominantly Mexican. The largest minority group in the California community colleges system is the Hispanic, at 26% of the fall 2002 headcount. Hispanic is the identifier used in the data collected by the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office.

Although Los Angeles and many of the Central Valley cities and farming towns in California have large Mexican populations, Sacramento was chosen for this study for its close proximity to my residence. The population of the city of Sacramento is 17.4% Mexican according to the 2000 census. Sacramento City College (SCC), a community college, is known in the Sacramento area and Northern California for its great diversity of students. SCC enrolled over 23,000 students in the fall of 2002. Fifty-nine percent of the enrolled students represent “minority” populations, and fifteen percent are Hispanic. Almost 900 students transferred to a four-year university in 2001 (Chancellor’s Office website, retrieved April 26, 2003). An additional benefit to working with SCC was that I know several of the faculty and staff working there, including the Dean of Students. This helped in my search for participants in the California portion of the study.

I was surprised at how difficult it was to find first-generation Mexicans who had dropped out of community college in California. The research literature

(California Tomorrow, April 2002; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996) shows this to be a problem, but due again to privacy laws and a lack of follow-up on students who do not return to school, it was a challenge to find candidates. I posted fliers at coffee shops near Sacramento City College, and on the campus itself. I offered to pay for the interviews, which I had not had to do in Wales. I went to a Caesar Chavez Youth Leadership Conference at Sierra College and spoke with every vendor there and left fliers with my home telephone number. I called several campuses, including some in southern California, speaking with counselors and even the Mexican American president of a college who is in the same Community College Leadership Program at Oregon State University (OSU) as I. I also advertised at the California Department of Education and at the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. I found two referrals through the One Stop Career Center located at the LaFamilia Counseling Center. There the coordinator gave me full access to a list of applicants who were seeking jobs. As I was offering to pay for interviews, she could treat me as an employer. This led to two appropriate interviews. An ESOL instructor introduced me to her aide who fit my criteria, and an OSU colleague referred me to four potential candidates through his wife's contacts. Those four phone calls led to two interviews of inappropriate candidates, but subsequently led to another interview. The final outcome was 12 interviews, nine of whom were Mexican immigrants of which five met my criteria (the same criteria as used for the Bangladeshis).

## *Wales*

In the UK, the largest percentage of students from “low participation neighborhoods” attends further education in Wales (National Assembly for Wales, 2003). Low participation neighborhoods in England and Wales are identified as communities with high numbers of ethnic minorities, immigrants, and underrepresented populations. Seeking Bangladeshi students in further education in the UK, I traveled to Wales to visit the further education institution in the area of the highest minority population. Southeast Wales is a region that is small geographically, but contains nearly half the population of Wales, with about twice the average density of the rest of the UK (Booz, Allen &, Hamilton, 1999). In 2001, Cardiff, with 5.5% of the population being immigrants, had the largest numbers of immigrants in all cities in Wales (National Statistics, 2001).

The largest further education college in Wales, Coleg Gwent, is located in Southeast Wales, just outside of Cardiff. It is the fifth largest further education college in the UK. Coleg Gwent serves over 30,000 students, of which 24,238 are part-time (National Assembly of Wales, 2003). Coleg Gwent has six campuses spread throughout Southeast Wales, serving the communities of: Cross Keys, Newport, Cardiff, Usk, Pontypool, Ebbw Vale, Abergavenny, and Chepstow. Cardiff and Newport have the largest minority ethnic<sup>4</sup> population (National Statistics, 2001) in

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<sup>4</sup> The British authorities consider all students who have immigrated to the UK, as “domicile” (living in the country, not international students) students. Basically, everyone except international students are considered domicile. They do not distinguish immigrants separately. Additionally, they consider “minority ethnic” a reference to many of their immigrants.

Wales. The campus at Newport, one of Coleg Gwent's six campuses, has the greatest number of minority-ethnic students. This made it somewhat comparable to the California community colleges, which also have a strong tradition of serving minorities. Newport serves a large number of students who are taking vocational courses and basic-skills courses; some students are part-time, others attend full-time, similar to the California community colleges. I made e-mail contact with Rob Cummings who was a head researcher at Coleg Gwent, and with Nasfim Haque, a Bangladeshi woman who was a researcher at the University of Wales in Cardiff (currently working with British Broadcasting Company, BBC). I expected that these two initial contacts would lead to further networking and help to establish the necessary base for my data collection in Wales.

I traveled to Wales in January 2004. For two weeks, I sought and interviewed early-leaving students, further education (FE) college faculty, staff and administrators, as well as related professionals who were referred to me as possible leads to the study population I sought. The challenge, as expected, was to find people who had left postsecondary education early. The FE colleges could not give me names or phone numbers of previous students due to the British privacy laws, which are similar to those in the United States.

The first day in Cardiff I telephoned the Coleg Gwent receptionist who referred me to their Newport campus, which of the five campuses, registered the most ethnic minority students. I had originally thought the Cross Keys campus would be the best place to interview students, but I had not obtained a categorization of their



students by race and ethnicity. After an hour-long bus ride and a mile-and-a-half walk, I met the receptionist at the Newport campus who sent me to the director of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program at a satellite of the Newport campus, another two-mile walk. They would move to the Newport campus (which was under construction) in a few months. Mary Cousins, the ESOL director, was greatly interested in my research. She had just received that day my forwarded e-mail from Rob Cummings, the college researcher. It was several months old, so it seemed quite serendipitous that she would receive it the day I arrived in Cardiff. Ms. Cousins spent some hours explaining the Welsh FE system, the ESOL program, and describing her students. We stayed in close contact throughout my entire visit. The following day when two early-leaving students unexpectedly appeared on campus Ms. Cousins telephoned me to say she would keep them until I arrived. I had no car and was using buses, trains, and walking to get about. In this particular case, it took me an hour to get to the college (located in nearby Newport). However, it resulted in two interviews of early-leaving students. Further correspondence with Mary Cousins, four months later, indicated these two students had not returned, but remained “dropped out.”

Throughout my research in Wales I found that introducing myself as Gwyneth Jones Tracy was an icebreaker and seemed to remove barriers at once. People recognized my name as Welsh and were immediately interested in an apparently Welsh woman from the US researching Bangladeshis. The introduction worked equally well with the Bangladeshis who identified with the Welsh as their adopted

people.

My e-mail contact, Nasfim Haque, was extremely helpful and ultimately put me in contact with two interviewees whom her father knew. I also obtained an interview with her father through e-mail after I returned to the US. I spent many evenings eating at “curry houses” (Indian restaurants) at the suggestion of Nasfim Haque and Mary Cousins. Because many Bangladeshi immigrants work at the curry restaurants, it seemed a likely place to meet some candidates. This approach resulted in some delicious meals and interesting conversations, but no referrals to early-leaving students. Most of the servers with whom I spoke at the curry houses were second-generation immigrants. Nasfim Haque also recommended that I visit the sari shop and the coffee shops in the Bangladeshi part of town. Unfortunately, the women in the sari shop were very shy and unwilling to talk with me. I was also referred to Career Wales which operates like the One Stop Career Centers in the US, and the International Center which counsels international students for Coleg Glan Hafren (another FE college near Cardiff). The International Center staff, though not working with immigrant students, were especially helpful in clarifying issues immigrant students face and the process of citizenship and school grants. Mary Cousins and Nasfim Haque both suggested I also visit The Parade Community Center, which focuses on Asian immigrants (a category which includes Bangladeshis) and contracts with the FE colleges and high schools to provide ESOL classes and tutoring. Students going to The Parade for ESOL may be in FE or may not.

The Parade currently serves over 2000 students from some 101 countries in 17

outreach centers in the vicinity of Cardiff (The Parade, 2003). Their students are permanent residents, asylum seekers, or refugees, some married to British passport holders or were European Union-British passport holders. The students ranged in literacy in their own language from near-illiterate to post-graduate and professional levels.

The Parade turned out to be a gold mine of information. The faculty spent many hours with me describing ESOL, FE, Bangladeshi students, and immigrants and their needs. In all of my discussions throughout Cardiff and environs there was agreement that the Bangladeshi population does dropout of postsecondary education in high numbers. I spent an entire morning visiting one of The Parade ESOL sites specifically for Bangladeshi women and interviewed the teachers and a Bangladeshi translator in the program.

As I interviewed administrators of several FE colleges, I was told that they do not track student retention or progress by ethnicity, but by socio-economic status. I also learned that the UK generally did not (until 2003) collect census data by ethnicity or race. I now understand why the data on Bangladeshis were so difficult to extract from the numerous research data collections that I had examined. There is a similarity to the challenge of separating Mexican data from the Hispanic data in the US. Additionally, as in the US, the schools in the UK do not typically identify through registration who is a first-generation or second-generation immigrant.

The final outcome of my odyssey in Wales was 24 interviews, nine of which were with Bangladeshis. However, only five of the nine Bangladeshi interviews

explicitly met the criteria I had set for this study. The criteria were that the participant be born in Bangladesh, their first language would be Bangladeshi, they would have attended primary school in Bangladesh, and they would have attended postsecondary education in Wales but left before completing their educational goal or program course work. Initially, I had also thought I should require that they would not have completed primary school in the UK or Wales. However, that subsequently appeared to be too narrow of a criterion. Mary Cousins and Nasfim Haque encouraged me to broaden my scope as they were having difficulty finding referrals for me.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Data from the interviews of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants were transcribed, categorized, and analyzed for themes found among the early-leaving students in each of the two countries. The process for seeking themes included identifying key phrases, concepts, or issues raised by the participants and categorizing them into several larger themes. As suggested in the literature review, the themes were examined for any similarity to the models of absorption as identified by Doron (1995). Simultaneously, throughout the process, field notes were constantly reviewed, seeking additional information or areas that needed clarification in succeeding interviews with other participants and institutional staff. Analysis of the transcripts and notes showed both similarities and differences of ideas, responses, and experiences amongst the Bangladeshi immigrants, amongst the Mexican immigrants, and across both groups. The recurring experiences, reactions to and analyses of the experiences by the

immigrants, led to the themes that were studied. The data from the interviews were examined for themes in the responses to the questions, than in relationship to the sub-research questions, and finally in relationship to the overall guiding research question. As the themes were pulled out, first through analyses of the Bangladeshis' experiences and than the Mexicans' experiences, commonalities and differences between the two groups were identified.

### Ensuring Soundness of Data

Utilizing the resulting materials, notes, and interviews, an audit trail was established following the recommendation of Gall, Borg &, Gall, (1996). This "chain of evidence" (p. 576) strengthened the validity of the study. The "chain of evidence" refers to a method of validation in which data gathered later in the process are used to confirm earlier information. I used several methods to build a "chain of evidence" and establish the trustworthiness of my data. First, during the interviews I asked additional questions to clarify the responses, and I reiterated back what I thought I heard when unsure of an answer. Both questioning and repeating the responses encouraged the participant to verify my understanding of the conversation. Second, interviews with faculty and administrators tested impressions I had of the immigrants' experiences in the postsecondary educational institutions. Third, interviews with participants who did not meet my criteria for participation, but who were from Bangladeshi or Mexican immigrant families and had heard of postsecondary experiences from family or friends, provided comparisons for some of the themes I was seeing.

### *Strengths of Strategies Used*

The use of three different strategies to enhance trustworthiness of my interpretations of the interviews with the participants added to the reliability of the data. The input from multiple informants broadened my understanding of the immigrants' experiences, the impact of culture and other influences, and provided context and background for my interpretation of the interviews.

### *Weaknesses of Strategies Used*

There was not much opportunity to review interpretations of the interviews with the participants. Aside from the immediate feedback during the interview, time and, in the case of Wales, distance did not allow for follow-up with the interviewees to verify the identified themes.

### Protection of Human Subjects

All interviews with the immigrants were taped for subsequent reference. Notes were taken and observations were documented. Participants were notified of their protections and rights to confidentiality in accordance with the Human Subject Policy of the Oregon State University. Interviews took place in a variety of places, including the homes of the participants, restaurants, career centers, schools, telephone, and e-mail. All interviews were face-to-face, except for one on the telephone (Mexican) and one by e-mail (Bangladeshi).

### Analysis Format

As mentioned previously, I divided my research findings into three phases: the

responses to the interview questions, the sub-research questions, and the overall guiding question. A description of my analysis follows.

### *Phase One*

The first phase of analysis consisted of content analysis of the responses to the major interview questions. Each ethnic group was examined separately, question by question. Themes relating to each interview question were identified by listening to tapes, reading transcripts, and interpreting the responses while seeking understanding. Extensive quotations from the interviews were included in this phase, illustrating and supporting my interpretations of the responses and the theme definitions. In this phase, tables were used to summarize the themes in a visual manner. The interview questions used with both ethnic groups are as follows:

1. Why did you and/or your family immigrate to the UK (or US)?
2. How do you view yourself? British/Welsh/Bangladeshi/Bi-cultural?, or for the Mexican immigrants in the US, US/Mexican/B-cultural?
3. Why did you decide to attend college?
4. What did your family think of you attending college?
5. What was your experience at college?
6. What was the institutional response to you as a Bangladeshi (or Mexican)?
7. Why did you leave college before completion?

### *Phase Two*

The second phase in the analysis was an examination of the responses to the research sub-questions, which were mainly concerned with cross-cultural comparisons of Bangladeshi students in Wales and Mexican students in California. Discussion in this phase was focused on the comparisons, addressing both the similarities and differences between the experiences of the two immigrant groups. The themes developed in the first phase of the data analysis served as the basis for the comparisons. Brief excerpts from the larger quotations used in phase one were used in reporting the second phase of data analysis. Short quotations were used to give meaning to the major findings and served as a basis for my interpretations of the immigrants' experiences. The following are the research sub-questions used in the comparison of the two immigrant groups:

1. How are the experiences of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrant early-leaving students similar or different?
2. How are the postsecondary institutional responses to the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants, as portrayed by the participants, similar or different?
3. What commonalities in the cultures of the Mexican and Bangladeshi immigrants might lead to similar experiences in the postsecondary education systems?
4. What commonalities in the UK and US postsecondary systems might result in similar experiences for the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants?



### *Phase Three*

The overall guiding question, “Why do Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants leave postsecondary education prior to completion?” was discussed in the fullest sense in this phase. I looked across the analyzed themes by interview questions in phase one and the cross-cultural comparison addressing the research sub-questions in phase two. This third phase of data analysis provided insights and understanding as to why Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants leave postsecondary education early.

### Schedule

Contact with both Sacramento City College in California and Coleg Gwent in Wales was established in the winter and spring terms of 2004 (December 2003 through May 2004). Site visits, material collection, and introductory interviews occurred at that time. Dissertation writing and revision were primarily done in the late spring and summer 2004.

## Chapter 4 - RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter on research findings describes the essence of the interviews conducted with the participants in Wales and California and the analyses of the findings. The essence, as described by van Manen (1990) is the “whatness of things, as opposed to their thatness” (p. 177). To that end, I provided the conversations, the context, and subsequently an interpretation of the experiences and expressions of the immigrants. I included some numeric data and used numeric tables to clarify the picture for the reader, and to provide a scaffolding for the reader to better understand my thought processes and the reasons for the conclusions drawn. I hope for the reader to understand how the “transformed meanings and structural description(s)” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 57) were developed. The tables show how each immigrant group responded to the interview questions, by theme. The reader should be able to relate the immigrants’ quotations to the themes and to the tables, thereby achieving an understanding of my interpretations, which became the “transformed meanings.”

When I started this research my committee suggested that I should wait until after the data collection and initial analysis before considering whether or not to do a comparison of the two groups of immigrants and two host countries. The concern was that the cultural experiences of the two groups would be so different that one should not compare or contrast them. However, as I began to interview the Mexican immigrants, I noted many similarities to the Bangladeshis in their experiences as immigrants and as students in postsecondary education. Thus, I have gone forward

with a comparison where appropriate, and noted where the experiences were unique and therefore comparison was problematic.

### Description of Findings

In the section below, I will provide profiles of each of the participants. There were occasions when I repeat certain dialogue or references to experiences described by a participant as I discuss different interview questions. This was necessary as sometimes the same segment of conversation actually answered two or three of the interview questions. In other words, the conversations were not stilted and limited to the interview questions. Therefore, there was overlap where one response might answer two questions at once. I attempted to make the direct quotations of the participants more comprehensible to the reader by adding missing or clarifying words in appropriate spaces in prentices. I deleted confusing words or phrases and showed them to be missing by use of ellipses.

As described in Chapter 3, Research Design, I divided the description and discussion of the findings into three phases. Phase one is a thematic analysis of the answers to the interview questions for each immigrant group. The resulting themes were identified at the beginning of each question with the data analysis and supporting evidence presented in the following narrative. Extensive use of quotations from the immigrants' interviews was incorporated and numeric tables were presented here to enhance the summary of data. Phase two is an analysis and interpretation of responses to each of the research sub-questions, with excerpts from the quotations, as necessary,

for validation and illustration. Phase three of the analysis is my response to the overall guiding research question, “Why do Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants leave postsecondary education prior to completion?” This section brings together the major themes found through analysis, crossing over, and pulling together the interview question responses and the research sub-questions responses of both immigrant groups.

### Phase One Findings: Responses to Interview Questions

The following sections constitute a presentation of the findings of phase one of the data analyses. The first section of this phase was an examination of the Bangladeshi immigrants in Wales and their responses to the interview questions, with resulting themes and substantiating quotations and illustrative tables. The second section of phase one is the analysis of the Mexican immigrants in California and their responses to the interview questions, also with extensive quotations and descriptive tables.

#### *Wales and the Bangladeshi Immigrant Early Leavers*

Five Bangladeshis were interviewed who met the four criteria I had established for a consistent comparison:

1. Born in Bangladesh
2. First language is Bangladeshi
3. Attended postsecondary education in the UK
4. Left the postsecondary institution prior to completion of goals or

programs of study.

By chance, all of these participants were male. All except one had the very common Bangladeshi last name, Ali. For confidentiality purposes, I did not include their first names, but refer to them as Ali 1, Ali 2, Ali 3, Ali 4, and Ali 5. I interviewed four women who did not meet the criteria; I will discuss their interviews and those findings in the supplemental analyses presented later in this chapter. The five men ranged in age from 25 to 54 years. The immigrants I interviewed had attended a variety of postsecondary institutions, including further education colleges, polytechnic colleges that have since been transformed to universities, and universities. They had arrived in the UK between the ages of seven and 30 years. See Table 1, for a description of the Bangladeshi participants and their common characteristics. Listed in the table are the ages of the participants when I interviewed them; the age when they arrived in the UK; whether they were born in Bangladesh; if Bangladeshi was their first language; if they attended primary school in Bangladesh; if they attended postsecondary educational institutions in the UK (and if they were enrolled in an English as a Second Language –ESL– program); if they dropped out of postsecondary education in the UK (and if it were an ESL program); if they ever enrolled in an ESL program in the UK; if they completed postsecondary education in Bangladesh; if they attended primary school in the UK; if they attended secondary school in the UK; if they attended secondary school in Bangladesh; and if they attended postsecondary school in Bangladesh.

Table 1. Bangladeshi Interviews, January 2004

| Bangla-<br>deshis | Age | Age<br>in UK | Born<br>in<br>BL | 1st<br>lang<br>BL | Prim.<br>schl<br>BL | PS<br>college<br>UK | Dropped<br>out of<br>PS | ESL<br>UK | Complt<br>PS in<br>BL | Prim.<br>schl<br>UK | 2ndry<br>schl<br>UK | 2ndry<br>schl<br>BL | PS<br>BL |
|-------------------|-----|--------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Ali 1             | 37  | 30           | yes              | yes               | yes                 | yes/ESL             | yes/ESL                 | yes       |                       |                     |                     | yes                 |          |
| Ali 2             | 25  | 23           | yes              | yes               | yes                 | yes/ESL             | yes/ESL                 | yes       | yes                   |                     |                     | yes                 | yes      |
| Ali 3             | 35  | 12           | yes              | yes               | yes                 | yes                 | yes                     | yes       |                       |                     | yes                 |                     |          |
| Ali 4             | 39  | 7            | yes              | yes               | yes                 | yes                 | yes                     | yes       |                       | yes                 | yes                 |                     |          |
| Ali 5             | 54  | 23           | yes              | yes               | yes                 | yes                 | yes                     |           | yes                   |                     |                     | yes                 | yes      |

UK=United Kingdom; BL=Bangladeshi; lang=language; Prim=primary; schl=school; PS=postsecondary;  
ESL=English as a Second Language; Complt=completed; 2ndry=secondary

*Profiles of the Bangladeshi early leavers*

The three men, Ali 3, Ali 4, Ali 5, who had been in the UK the longest (each more than 23 years) were fully employed and economically middle-class. Two of them lived fairly close to each other in an upscale middle-class neighborhood of beautiful Edwardian style two-story brick single homes and row houses in Cardiff. There was a huge park around which the homes were built. They owned restaurants and rental properties. This was the same neighborhood in which one of the women whom I interviewed also lived. She, too, owned several properties with her husband. The third male interviewee lived in a modern home on a hill above a lake. He owned two curry restaurants in the nearby town of Barry. Ali 2's wife worked full-time as a bank loan officer while her husband studied English and was employed part-time at a curry restaurant. Ali 1 was unemployed with an unemployed wife, subsisting on welfare. All of the men were married. The youngest participant, Ali 2 (25 years old), had been married for only one year and did not have children, but the other four participants had families. Ali 1 and Ali 2 had been in Wales the least amount of time, seven years and two years respectively, and both had enrolled in ESOL classes at the Newport campus of Coleg Gwent.

All five Ali's discussed with me their reasons for leaving, whether ESOL, FE, or the university. Each had a goal for completion, including Ali 1, who wanted to complete the essential levels of ESOL so he could get full-time employment, and Ali 2 who wanted to reach the highest level of ESOL so he could take university entrance

examinations and seek a university degree.

Seven questions, as described in the previous chapter, guided the conversations with these five participants:

1. Why did you and/or your family immigrate to the UK?
2. How do you view yourself? British, Welsh, Bangladeshi, or bi-cultural?
3. Why did you decide to attend college?
4. What did your family think of you attending college?
5. What was your experience at college?
6. What was the institutional response to you as a Bangladeshi?
7. Why did you leave college before completion?

The responses to these questions showed patterns and themes common to the five Bangladeshi immigrants. The format of theme identification, quotations and discussion supporting the themes, my interpretation, and summary tables will be followed through the entire phase one analysis of the Bangladeshis experiences in Wales.

### *Reasons for Immigration*

Three themes were identified from the interviews with the Bangladeshis when they responded to question 1, *Why did you or your family immigrate to the UK?*. Table 2 illustrates the themes derived from the responses of the Alis. For clarity and focus, each theme is bulleted.



Table 2. Summary of Responses to Interview Question 1: Reasons for Immigration

| Question 1: Why did you and/or your family immigrate to the UK? |                        |                  |                   |
|---|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
|   | Economical opportunity | Historical sense | Arranged marriage |
| Ali 1   |                        |                  | yes               |
| Ali 2   |                        | yes              | yes               |
| Ali 3   | yes                    |                  |                   |
| Ali 4   | yes                    | yes              |                   |
| Ali 5   | yes                    |                  |                   |

Table 2 shows those participants who immigrated due to poor economical conditions in Bangladesh; those who immigrated to the UK, in part, because they felt a historical connection between Bangladesh and the UK; and those who immigrated because their arranged marriage in Bangladesh to a British-Bangladeshi required that they move to the homeland of their new spouse.

The first of these themes, economics, was not a surprise. Immigration generally occurs due to economic hardship in the native country, political or religious disagreement, or persecution of some type. As referenced in several places, Bangladesh is a poor country.

- *Economics motivated the Bangladeshis to immigrate to the UK.*

When asked why the families or individuals immigrated to the UK, the three Ali's who had been in the UK the longest said their families, or in the case of Ali 5 who came over alone as a young adult, immigrated to the UK for economic reasons.

They hoped to make a better living. In the boom years of the 1960's, Britain made it easy for the Bangladeshis (then East Pakistan) to obtain visas and immigrate to the UK. Ali 3 and Ali 4 came over as youngsters with their families. Both of them were taken to Sheffield, England, where their fathers worked in the British Steel Corporation. This would have been between 1972 and 1981 when Britain was in an economic upswing and needed more laborers.

The experiences of Ali 3 and Ali 4 were similar, as young boys who immigrated to the UK with their families: "I came with my parents. We have four brothers when we came. We are seven brothers and one sister. I am the third; Dad was a steel worker" (Ali 4). For all of them, the UK represented an economically better way of life; "basically living in the UK is a good life" (Ali 1). "I think he (Father) came here for economic reasons. I think that's what it was. He was working in the steel corporation," (Ali 3), and "the UK was seen to be the place to make a fortune" (Ali 5).

According to Ali 5's e-mail, many immigrants thought like Ali 5 who stated that the mentality in the early 1970's was "to earn money quickly in the UK and return back to Bangladesh with riches-most immigrants then saw being in the UK as a short term thing." Or, as Ali 3 said,

Our parents, they came to this country thinking, not just our parents...other immigrants as far as I can think of, we'll earn some money and go back home; we'll make some money and go back home and stay with the family (in Bangladesh). That was the idea when I spoke with my Dad. He said this is what he wanted to do. We came to this country and got into schools, into society, and we went back to Bangladesh. We saw over there the state of the country, the culture, and

the culture of the UK was different, so we didn't want to go back (to Bangladesh). We said well, this is where we were brought up; this is our country (UK). This is where we are going to stay.

Some of the immigrants found themselves to be in a quandary. Once they had their children in the UK and started them in schools, it was difficult to pull them out and return to Bangladesh. The family had become assimilated, or as Ali 1 said (translated by Ali 2) "his children and Bangladeshi children are the same. They speak Bengali (like Bangladeshi children) and English (like British children)." He appeared proud of his children whom he considered to be comfortable in both cultures.

"My children, when they think about home they think about here" (Ali 3). Ali 4 spoke of when he took his family back to Bangladesh for a holiday last year (2003) for the first time (his eldest child was 10),

I was talking to my uncles and I was saying, 'we have this and that back home.' So he (my uncle) was talking to me and he said, 'excuse me, you are back home.' I said to my uncle, 'no, my home is in Cardiff. This (Bangladesh) is the country I was born in, and this is my roots. But my home is Cardiff.' Last thirty years I have only been there (Bangladesh) twice. You can't call that home.

Ali 3 added that he thought the greatest pull to remain in the UK, besides the better life, was the children who once assimilated did not wish to leave. "Even other ladies I know (Bangladeshis)...(they have) no families (parents or siblings) in this country, but they've got their children. Their children are here." And so they remain in the UK. It seems that sometimes immigrants from poor countries initially believe that they will return to their native country once they have made enough money. However,

as illustrated by the interview with Ali 3, it is not easy to return “home” after settling in the new country and establishing a family.

- *Historical connections between Bangladesh and the UK were important factors.*

Additional influence on the Bangladeshi immigrants and their choice of immigrating to the UK was the shared history of the UK and Bangladesh. Ali 4 explains:

Bangladeshis in this country, we like to say we are the newest country, only been independent since '71 I think.... Only for the last 20 years the families have been coming over. Before that it was only my father's generation (mostly men, few families immigrated at that time), they came in the 60's. The history behind it, the Bangladeshis fought; the Indian subcontinent fought with the British, (and) the Americans ...in the World War (II), as part of Britain. The only upsetting thing is when the war remembrance (happens, British Memorial Day), somehow they (Bangladeshis) are forgotten because there are thousands over there (in Bangladesh) who fought with the...the grandfathers of my generation fought the same as war heroes here; and now...we all forget they're there and that's why whenever I have something like that I put up (mention) this because we should remember that as well. They fought for the freedom as well. And if we go back to present day Bangladeshi (immigrants), we have doctors, we have engineers, we have teachers, we have lawyers, magistrates, Lords, Barons all in the sector from the Bangladeshi communities; and some were born here, some were born over there. They are hard working people; they are peaceful people...most of them. It's like the family come over from nothing, from scratch...but they are building (society, traditions).

Even Ali 2, the most recent immigrant to the UK and one who came over as an adult rather than as a child, is heavily influenced by the long history between Bangladesh and Britain.

(For a) long time (the) Bangladesh and (the) British (had a connection)-

200 years ago. My relation, my grandfather, came to Britain 63 years ago. He is British. But my father is not British. My mind is British; I miss Bangladesh. I like the Bangladesh culture; I like British culture. I feel comfortable (in) both places. My grandfather was going to apply for...(immigration to this) country...60 years ago; this time (currently) not easy come here. My family is Bangladeshi...so (they) don't come here. My grandmother (did) not come to this country. My grandfather (was) living here (in the UK) 16 years non-stop...He returned to Bangladesh in 1952.

The common history between Bangladesh and the UK offered a level of comfort to the Bangladeshi immigrants. The UK was a country with which they were familiar. In a sense, immigration to the UK was like tracing ones ancestry.

- *Arranged marriages to Welsh Bangladeshis encouraged immigration.*

The other two Ali's immigrated to Wales when their wives returned to Bangladesh for their arranged marriages. The wives were Welsh Bangladeshis; both had been born, raised, and educated in Wales. Ali 1, in the words of Ali 2, came to Wales through an arranged marriage. "His wife was living here and he came here (through an arranged marriage). Wife was born in Bangladesh, but her father came here and she was brought up here. She is a citizen." Ali 2, also, was in an arranged marriage. "One year (ago)...I come here...my wife (was) born here (Wales)...(I) married her in Bangladesh. She brought (me) back. (It was) an arranged marriage. She speaks good English...(She) went to school here, (and was) born here." In fact, every one of the Alis was in an arranged marriage. However, the other three were already living in Wales when their marriages were arranged.

### *Discussion and Interpretation of Immigration Experiences*

The essence of the immigrant experience for these immigrants, whether recently arrived in the UK or settled citizens of many years, is a balance between two cultures, two languages, two worlds. This balance is one with which I am familiar. After spending all of my teenage years and some beyond in Thailand, my return to the US was as to a foreign country. It required adjustment and balance for many years before I felt comfortable in the country in which I was born. One participant insightfully stated that when a person immigrates, they leave their country in a specific year, which is frozen in their memory. Their native country becomes forever remembered in their minds in that particular condition. When they think of “going back home,” they are remembering the era they left, whether it was the 1960’s or 2001. In actuality, they can never return to that time or place. I interpreted this rendition of the experience to mean that an immigrant loses more than their native country; they lose a place and time to which they can never return. Somehow, this experience and leave taking seems more final to an immigrant than to a native who, though unable to return to a past time, does not feel so far from her or his birthplace. I, too, related to this experience of grieving and loss, both for the times I left each country in which I had lived (the US, Britain, and Thailand), and as I returned to each to find them dramatically changed and not as I remembered them.

### *Cultural Identity*

Two themes were identified as the participants responded to question 2, *How*

*do you view yourself? British/Welsh/Bangladeshi or Bi-cultural?* See Table 3, which illustrates the participants' responses to the cultural identity interview question.

Table 3. Summary of Responses to Interview Question 2: Cultural Identity

| Question 2: How do you view yourself?<br>British/Welsh/Bangladeshi/Bi-cultural? |            |
|---|------------|
|   | Bi-culture |
| Ali 1   | yes        |
| Ali 2   | yes        |
| Ali 3   |            |
| Ali 4   | yes        |
| Ali 5   | yes        |

Table 3 shows with which culture the Bangladeshi immigrants identified. The concept of a cultural identity and how one fits into the new country is often forefront in an immigrant's mind. In several cases the participants anticipated this question before I voiced it. The quotations set forth show the depth of their thoughts about this topic.

- *The Bangladeshi immigrants viewed themselves as bi-cultural.*

The bi-cultural self-described identity is enhanced by the intertwined history of Bangladesh and the UK. Four of the five Ali's felt they are bi-cultural, specifically, Welsh and Bangladeshi or British and Bangladeshi. Ali 3 felt completely British and that Wales was his home: "My children, when they think about home they think about

here... This is my home now.” Most of the Bangladeshis to whom I spoke referred to Bangladesh as “back home.” When pressed for clarification Ali 3 explained that his parents had always thought they would return “home.” However, once they were established, built a family and the children were in school, the parents felt they could not uproot everyone to return to Bangladesh. Ali 3 said he had gone back to Bangladesh once, to meet his wife for the arranged marriage I believe, and couldn’t wait to return to Wales. He doesn’t anticipate ever taking his children back to Bangladesh.

Ali 4 commented that although he loves Bangladesh, if Britain were ever to go to war, he would join in and fight in the British forces. He has been back to Bangladesh only twice in thirty years.

I grew up in this country (UK). I live in two cultures. I mean most of my (life); I’ve got fifty-fifty friends in both cultures. When I was younger I used to go out with friends, enjoy myself, come home, switch off cause I know Dad likes his roots. He’s got discipline at home.

As I mentioned earlier, he recently took his three children, ages ten, eight, and six, to Bangladesh for two months, which turned into six months. He said it would probably be the only time his children would get back there until they were adults and decided to return on their own. “Only last year I took my kids (for the) first time there (to Bangladesh). I wish I had taken them earlier. My oldest is 10, so they know their roots you see. They fit in quickly.”

Ali 2 had quite a story about his grandfather’s involvement with Britain during World War II and afterwards. He reminded me that Bangladesh, as part of the Indian



subcontinent, was ruled by the British Raj for over 200 years. It was sixty-three years ago (1941) that his grandfather immigrated to Britain and fought in the British Army. He lived in the UK then for 16 years, prior to returning to Bangladesh where he had left a wife and children. His wife did not want to go to Britain, so Ali 2's father never saw Britain. Ali 2's grandfather returned to Bangladesh where he retired. When he died and the family wanted to immigrate (Ali 2, his parents, and siblings) they could not find his grandfather's papers or records of service in the British Army. He said the difficulty of tracing his grandfather's enlistment through the British Army's records was magnified by the common last name of many of the Bangladeshi troops, Ali. Ali 2 and one of his sisters lived in Wales, but he had a brother and three more sisters besides his parents who would like to immigrate. He said it was due to this family history that he felt so British as well as Bangladeshi. "I grew up Bangladeshi; my mind is half Bengali. Not (all) British. I like British" (Ali 2).

Ali 1, as an immigrant who left an apparently satisfying life in Bangladesh where he operated a grocery store with his brother, suffered the most through an arranged marriage that disrupted his life. He was "confused" as to his cultural identity. Whereas the other participants confidently expressed feelings of bi-culturalism and appreciation for both worlds, Ali 1 did not seem to have achieved such a balance. He stays in the UK because, (translated by Ali 2) "his wife likes living here and basically living in the UK is a good life."

Ali 5, as a somewhat older immigrant than the other participants (age 54 years), although committed to the UK and a British citizen, seemed to retain a staunch

loyalty to Bangladesh. He had taken his family back to Bangladesh only once, yet founded the Bangladeshi Association in Cardiff as a non-profit organization to help Bangladeshi immigrants find resources as they settled into Wales. He was obviously well known in the community as a Bangladeshi leader. One of the Bangladeshi immigrants whom I interviewed remembered that he taught her English when she was a young girl, newly arrived from Bangladesh. According to his e-mail, Ali 5 sees himself “as British Bangladeshi, but probably more patriotic to Bangladesh than (the) UK and (now) more than ever as (I) disagree with the UK foreign policy (regarding the war in Iraq).”

- *The Bangladeshi culture, language, and Islamic religious values were important to the immigrants as they adapted to the UK.*

The question of cultural identification encompassed values that are peculiar to the native country of the immigrant, history, religion, language, and traditions. The Bangladeshi men who were interviewed referred to most of these aspects of culture. It was interesting that they did not discuss traditions. Traditions were acknowledged by both Bangladeshi and Mexican women as important parts of their native culture.

Ali 4 related his own priority of retaining the language of his forefathers to that of the Welsh movement. “Only the last ten years schools are pushing the Welsh language. The Welsh language has been concentrated on.” He was also very cognizant of raising his own children to be bi-cultural. He understood the implications and cultural impact of language.

I’ve got three kids. When they are talking to each other they speak

English all the time. I say that's good. OK, when you're home speaking to your elder, always speak your own language. The main reason is you don't forget it. At the same time I tell them speak your own when you are home, when you are in school you've got to speak English, you've got to speak the Welsh (a mandatory subject in the Welsh schools). At the same time, don't forget your roots. Language is very important to communicate with your own people, your own family, or whatever. At the same time, respect where you are and what you are. If we were all one language, one color, one people it would be boring... we can respect each other's (cultures). In 200 years time my kids' kids' kids, they might forget that (their own culture), but if I keep telling my kids and they do the same to theirs, that's the only way you will keep your roots.

For the most part, our conversations avoided politics. I was concerned that this would be a sensitive subject due to the American and the British government positions on the war in Iraq. However, the topics of religion and the education of the children as Muslims in the British culture were raised voluntarily by several of the participants. Ali 4 also raised the matter of alcohol, which is not allowed according to the Islamic beliefs.

All the (curry) houses (that he and his brothers own) in Barry, all are alcohol free. My grandfather was a religious person and his advice was: don't have anything to do with alcohol. Don't sell alcohol. Now we have the same thing. Always do without alcohol. I mean, it's a free country, free will. He (anyone) does what he wants. I have my own opinion and my opinion is, if I can stay away from alcohol, I'm 39 years old and so far have never touched the stuff. Sometimes my own local Welsh friends will go out, I'll have a glass of orange juice; they'll have a pint. Oh, why can't you enjoy your night out or party without a drink? I can.

Ali 3 described his children's religious upbringing:

The one thing I always try to keep going is they are Muslim. There are some different things (between Bangladeshi culture and Muslim religion). I take them to the mosque where they go (for religious

instruction). (His children are raised) with the Welsh or English culture, society, Islamic values...Islam is a social welfare...that's what Islam means. And we've got it here. So Islamic culture and British culture are not different. Not a lot of difference.

There was a sense that the children were being raised bi-culturally and that there was much in common between the two cultures.

### *Discussion and Interpretation of Cultural Identity*

Continuing to practice Islam and teaching the children the Bangladeshi language provides a continuity of the indigenous culture, even as the parents and children adapt to the new country. The parents encourage bi-culturalism in their children and value it in themselves. Even Ali 3, who considers himself to be British, wanted his children to retain the Islamic culture. I have often observed the practice by both immigrants and ex-patriots of teaching their children the language, religion, and traditions of their native country. As a young girl in Thailand attending a British school I noticed the multitude of European children who left school every day to go home and study their native language and the history of their native country. As a youngster in Berkeley, California, my Chinese friends had to go to Chinese school everyday after attending the public school with me. They learned to read and write Chinese there, and were required to speak Chinese at home. The interest the Bangladeshis showed in retaining their culture and passing it on to their children in some form seems a natural response to immigration.

### *College Attendance*

Analysis of the responses to question 3, *Why did you decide to attend college?*,

resulted in one theme. For those participants who could recall their decision to attend postsecondary education, the purpose was ultimately economic improvement. This coincides with the reason for immigration and the identified opportunities the immigrants hoped to find in their new country.

- *The Bangladeshis entered FE college to enhance employment opportunities through English fluency or job-related credentials.*

It was important to understand why the immigrants decided to attend postsecondary education, so as to understand the bigger picture of why they dropped out. For those who had enrolled twenty or more years ago, it was difficult for them to recall the precise reason for participation. As they pondered the decision they had made, they thought back and tried to understand what motivated them to attend college.

Under the main reason for college attendance, enhancement of economic opportunities, were a variety of driving factors that added impetus to enrolling in postsecondary education by the Bangladeshi participants. Ali 1 and Ali 2 attended FE specifically for ESOL. Ali 5 went to a polytechnic college (since converted to a university) to obtain a diploma in accounting. He had a Bachelor of Commerce from Dhaka University in Bangladesh but needed the British qualifications for credibility, and to establish himself as an accountant. His wife wanted him to complete the two-part, two-year course that would have qualified him as a chartered (certified) accountant. However, when she became pregnant with twins, he left school after only one year. This limited him career-wise. Ali 3 and Ali 4 attended secondary school in

the UK and were put into the college-prep track. The institution encouraged and expected them both to attend university; they enrolled when they passed their GCSE “A” level exams (UK college entrance requirements taken at age 18). Ali 3 did not remember what he planned to do with his university education. When asked why he had enrolled in college he responded: “It was through school. Other children were going to college, I was just following them. It was through the school. I didn’t even think about it. I didn’t even ask anyone, ‘why do I have to go there?’ ...It was just a natural thing. I think I was asked. I can’t remember...Definitely I was asked.”

Similarly, Ali 4 more or less drifted into postsecondary education: “So when you’re a kid it’s easy to catch everything (reference to learning English when he arrived). Mainstreamed (into the school system), after that, school, college, and then went to college, Sheffield, part-time (university) because Dad had this (heart attack), well, you know.” Ali 4 later stated that he had hoped to become an engineer.

Ali 1 had been attending ESOL classes through Coleg Gwent sporadically for three or four years. Ms. Mary Cousins (ESOL Director) said every time she was about to remove his name from the books, he showed up again for a month or two. His English was quite poor and I needed a translator. Most recently, when he went to Career Wales for an interview to find a job, they sent him back to Coleg Gwent for more ESOL, saying his English was too weak to place him. In the words of Ali 1’s translator: “He needed to learn English. To learn English. He was going to the job center and the job center (said) he wasn’t good (in) English and needed to go to college.” He apparently worked periodically at an Indian restaurant where speaking

English was not a necessity. Further communication with Mary Cousins indicated that Ali 1 had not returned to ESOL since January 2004. She considered him to have finally left.

Ali 2 had started attending ESOL classes at Coleg Gwent about a year ago. Ali 2 already had completed the equivalent of college preparatory course work in Bangladesh (similar to a FE program in the UK). He was taking classes two days a week until Ms. Cousins suggested he take them the full five days a week. His wife encouraged him to take ESOL full-time and work only part-time at an Indian restaurant (she had a job and was born and raised in Wales). Ali 2 said,

First I went to the community center (which teaches ESOL only three times a week in the evenings). They said to come to college (Coleg Gwent for ESOL in the day, four days a week). (If I miss class, some trouble (with the wife); (she) say, 'why you not go to class?' I think Ali (1) living here seven years, he come here if two to three years hard work he would be able to speak English. But he don't speak English good. So my wife says, you come (to English class), you now work hard (by) going...everyday (to) school. So (in) two to three years (after) hard work, so easy for you (to speak) English. I work now at the Indian restaurant. I come (to ESOL) full-time and I work part-time at night. Eighteen hours per week (he works). Two months ago I not come to school because I (was) work(ing) (full)-time. Full-time work, not come to school, not good for me. I (want to) finish English class at this college then go to another department for anything...and go to university. I hope to go.

For a couple of months he worked full-time at the restaurant and took ESOL only part-time, than he tried to reverse it. However, he apparently did not come to class for several months, according to Ms. Cousins and she considered he had dropped out. Ali 2, like Ali 1, had not returned to ESOL since January 2004. He, too, was considered to be off the books.

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### *Discussion and Interpretation of College Attendance*

Four of the five participants had full intention of obtaining a degree from a university in the UK. As mentioned earlier, the other participant, Ali 1, was attending FE solely for the purpose of ESOL to get a better job (see Table 4). The essence of the experiences of the Alis' decisions to attend postsecondary education is one of choices made due to outside influences. Ali 1, Ali 2 and Ali 5 enrolled for improvements that would lead to economic betterment. Ali 1 enrolled because Career Wales told him he needed to attend ESOL at the local college. Ali 2 was in ESOL, in part, because his wife insisted that he needed to become fluent in English before he could work full-time, even though he had dreams of continuing on, eventually, through university. Ali 5 enrolled because his career depended on British qualifications and his wife encouraged him to obtain more education. As reported by Ali 5's daughter, her father (Ali 5) "My mother actually wanted him to study more as her family are more educated and she says that because of her my Dad even managed to finish the first part of his ACCA." Ali 3 and Ali 4 attended university because that was what the other students were doing. The reader will see that question 4, *what did your family think of you attending college?*, is very much a part of question 3, *why did you decide to attend college?*, when the responses to both questions are analyzed.

Table 4 shows the theme of economic opportunity, which was the overall reason for college attendance, and the different driving factors as each Ali described exactly what instigated their enrollment in postsecondary education.

Table 4. Summary of Responses to Interview Question 3: College Attendance

| Question 3: Why did you decide to attend college? |                      |                               |           |                          |            |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|------------|
| Theme   |                      | Driving factors to enrollment |           |                          |            |
|   | Economic opportunity | Institutional expectation     | Only ESOL | FE for job or university | ESOL to FE |
| Ali 1   | yes                  |                               | yes       |                          |            |
| Ali 2   | yes                  |                               |           |                          | yes        |
| Ali 3   | yes                  | yes                           |           |                          |            |
| Ali 4   | yes                  | yes                           |           |                          |            |
| Ali 5   | yes                  |                               |           | yes                      |            |

ESOL=English Spoken as Other Language; FE= Further Education college

### *Family Influence*

A single theme was also discerned when question 4, *What did your family think of you attending college?*, was asked of the Alis. The quotations illustrate and support selection of the theme. Table 5 shows who supported the participants in college, and to what level. The answers to interview question seven, which ask why the participant left college, tell the reader why the family support, identified through responses to question 3, was insufficient to keep the participant in college until completion.

- *Family support influenced the participants' participation in postsecondary education*

The answers to Question 4 showed that the families of all five men were at

least neutral to the idea of college attendance, if not encouraging. Interestingly enough, the section on supplemental analyses will show that family support for women runs the opposite, with families at the most being neutral, otherwise opposed.

Two of the Ali's, Ali 2 and Ali 5, responded that their wives were very encouraging and valued education for their husbands as a way to improve their status and economic conditions. Ali 2's wife sincerely wanted her husband to get a grasp of the English language. As we heard in the previous section, she encouraged him to attend classes full time, "So my wife says, you come (to class), you now (do) hard work, you going to school every day. So two to three years hard work so easy for you English." And Ali 5, per the e-mail, discussed the pressure to achieve an education and the value his in-laws placed on education: "She (his wife) really values education and so does my mother's family (e-mail from Ali 5's daughter) as they are more educated than my Dad's family and so appreciated the fact that education in this country (UK) costs less than in Bangladesh." Ali 5's own parents though, had a different attitude towards postsecondary education than that of his in-laws. "My Dad's family weren't really interested in my Dad studying so (he had) little support from them; for them money talks and so for my Dad to be well settled with (a) nice house and car and good wage meant more, no matter how that was earned."

Ali 1 felt his wife and her family were supportive, but not encouraging: they "quietly support, not strong support, just quietly." If he missed class there were no repercussions. His children, aged 13, 10 and 3, really liked the fact that he was attending school (when he did attend). In addition, supporting the goal of learning

English, “at home his wife teaches him English.”

Ali 3 and Ali 4, who had attended secondary school in the UK and started university, said their parents were neutral on the subject. Ali 3 seemed regretful that he had not had a mentor to encourage him more strongly to continue in the university after his father’s heart attack. However, being the eldest in his family of five children it really was up to him to take over the financial support of his family. He has encouraged his four younger siblings to attend university and one of them is now a qualified solicitor (lawyer). “At the moment my brother is a qualified solicitor. And another one is in university as well.” He will also encourage his children when they get older: “I will definitely ask them (his children, if they are planning for college). I will tell them what to do. I will tell them, ‘you’ve got to go to college.’ Definitely. ‘You’ve got to try. Gotta try.’ After a couple of years of college they will decide (whether to continue and complete a degree).”

Ali 4, though the third child of seven, with two older brothers, said his brothers had moved to Cardiff, Wales, by the time his father had heart surgery. They had both opened restaurants so he moved to Cardiff to help them and enhance the family’s financial stability. None of them encouraged him to remain in school, though it doesn’t appear that they directly opposed him remaining in school. He spoke of the family support for his younger brother to obtain his law degree.

My younger brother, he is a lawyer. He don’t want to go into the restaurant business. He doesn’t have to; that’s the other thing. Because he’s got it all set up here. He’s got a house; he doesn’t have to buy things. He can work part-time and he can carry on if he wants to. He can look after himself, but he doesn’t have to support the family as we

other brothers did...He had a choice. (We say) 'If you want to go further, we are behind you, but you can always fall back on the family business.' We encourage him to go for further education and he did. We are proud of him and he is a lawyer.

Ali 4 said he would encourage his children to go into higher education, but not force them.

### *Discussion and Interpretation of Family Influence*

Family support, in the form of spouses, was more important than the attitude of parents to the participants and their college attendance. Ali 1 and 2 never mentioned what their parents' attitudes were towards education. It seemed irrelevant as they described their wives' encouragement. The three Alis, Ali 1, Ali 2 and Ali 5, who were supported by their wives did not have parents living in the UK and had immigrated as young men, not as children. Although the five participants may not all have been themselves the recipients of direct support to participate in postsecondary education, they encouraged their siblings to continue with further education. There was also an interest in directing their children to higher education when they came of age. Table 5 depicts the various degrees of family support described in responses to Question 4.

Table 5. Summary of Responses to Interview Question 4: Family Support

| Question 4: What did your family think of you attending college? |             |                     |                        |
|--|-------------|---------------------|------------------------|
|  | Encouraging | Supportive          | Neutral                |
| Ali 1  |             | yes (wife/children) |                        |
| Ali 2  | yes (wife)  |                     |                        |
| Ali 3  |             |                     | yes (parents)          |
| Ali 4  |             |                     | yes (parents/brothers) |
| Ali 5  | yes (wife)  |                     |                        |

### *College Experience*

Question 5, *what was your experience in college?*, revealed two themes that sum up the responses of the Alis. Four of the five Alis, Ali 1, Ali 2, Ali 3, Ali 4, had less than a year of continuous college attendance. However, all of them indicated that the experience was positive. The experiences of the Bangladeshis in college were surprisingly similar (see Table 6). The college experience was rather remotely removed for Ali 3, Ali 4, and Ali 5...at least 20 years ago. This meant they had to think back and try to remember a relatively brief experience (less than a year for both Ali 3 and Ali 4).

The subject of racism and discrimination became a part of the question on college experience as I interviewed the Bangladeshi participants. My first interview of the Bangladeshi participants was with Ali 1 who had both inadequate English and limited experience in postsecondary education. As I asked him (through an interpreter, Ali 2) about the students' responses to him in his ESOL classes, he seemed confused. I

tried to describe various responses he might have experienced, which included friendly, helpful, unfriendly. He could not understand why anybody would be unfriendly to him, so I used racism as an example. Adding the question of racism to the interviews of all the participants for both groups enhanced the descriptions of college experiences, particularly in California when I interviewed the Mexican immigrants.

- *The students and staff in college were friendly.*

Four of the five participants, Ali 1, Ali 2, Ali 3, and Ali 5, mentioned that they found the other students to be friendly. Ali 2 said the “students (were) very friendly. Some students (are) not all the time quiet; (they are) too friendly. Italian and Mexican and all kinds (are) good.” Ali 1, as interpreted by Ali 2, said: “Other students, many foreign students here (though few Bangladeshis in these classes). Every student is friendly.” Ali 5 reported through his daughter’s e-mail, “He enjoyed his student days though, as most foreign students do, his friends who he socialized and lived with were all foreigners, like from the subcontinent, Arabia, etc. He could relate to them more than the indigenous students (who drank alcohol, etc.).” Ali 3 said college was “Fine. Very nice. You know, friendly...friends.” Ali 4 did not mention friendliness of students or faculty as a particular aspect, but certainly indicated that the experience was enjoyable. For Ali 3 and Ali 4, who had transitioned smoothly from secondary school to college and university, there did not seem to be any major memory or event to hold the experience of attending college. The memorable event in both cases was

that their fathers had had heart attacks, which compelled these young men to drop out of school. Seeking an understanding of the college experience of Ali 3 and Ali 4 was difficult.

Ali 5 wasn't quite so challenging to gather data from because, though older and therefore chronologically further away from his college days, he had attended longer and was new to the UK educational system; which made it a contrast to his foundation of educational experiences and therefore memorable.

The same four participants (Ali 1, 2, 3, 5) responded specifically that the FE college and university staff were supportive and helpful. Ali 2 was very appreciative of his teachers: "Mary is a good teacher. (She is) very clear. And John; I miss John because (of what) John has done for me (taught me at the) community house (where ESOL is taught in the evenings in Newport). John is a good teacher at (the) community house." Ali 1 commented favorably as: "(the) teachers and staff understand problems."

Four of the five (Ali 2, Ali 3, Ali 4, Ali 5) also found the experience to be much as they expected, and not a difficult adjustment. This is probably because the two (Ali 3 and Ali 4) who had been in secondary education in the UK knew the system and what to expect, and the other two, Ali 2 and Ali 5, had attended postsecondary education in Bangladesh and were familiar with a postsecondary educational experience.

Only Ali 1 stated that the experience was difficult at first. He indicated "this school(ing) is faster in this country. Bangladeshis learn and go to school like when you



are children.” He had not gone to school as an adult in Bangladesh, so was only able to relate to his childhood experience of school. To him “fast” meant it was a challenge to keep up with the class at the beginning. In the words of his interpreter, Ali 2, Ali 1 said, “English class-first time was difficult, but now more easy.” When pressed more for his experience Ali 1 said, through Ali 2, “No other school has he gone to; he has only gone to Gwent Coleg. He don’t go to any other school,” and therefore has no point of comparison to understand his experience. This makes his experience in postsecondary education isolated. This could be a contributing factor to his “confusion” about his cultural identity. His experiences in the UK were so different from anything he has known in Bangladesh.

- *Racism and discrimination were not experienced by the participants in college.*

Four of the Ali’s (Ali 2, Ali 3, Ali 4, Ali 5) indicated that they had not experienced any discrimination from the students or the staff in the institutions. Ali 1 was emphatic that the students were friendly, and the faculty and staff were understanding, which would indicate he had not experienced any discrimination at school. Ali 2 responded to the question of racism: “Not here in Wales.” Both Ali 3 and Ali 4 stated clearly that they were treated the same as all of the other students.

As Ali 4 said, “I was just another student.” In secondary school he was held up as an example to the British students in his class, and did not feel resentment, nor experience any repercussions from the other students stemming from his ethnicity.

I was good in English and math. The English teacher used to say,

because we were new into the country then, used to praise us. 'Stand up Ali. He's an example. He's coming to you in this country and you are from here. Like spelling (a subject in which he excelled); it's not his language. He's brought into it and he can do better than you. Shame on yourselves.' So that was part of praise. Praise like that gives you encouragement. Even though maybe he (the teacher) did it to praise me, I'm not sure, only he knows; but it did help me. Good confidence, before you start (life in postsecondary education or the working world).

Ali 3 said that not only had he never experienced racism or discrimination in school or the community, but that it was illegal, and he didn't think there was any racism in Cardiff. His response to my question as to whether he had experienced racism:

Not at all. Especially this area that we live in; it's fantastic. It's an integrated society. These are the problems everywhere (racism), but the majority, mainly where we are, let's not talk about the rest of the country, we've got no problem where we are. You talk to the majority of the people...the majority of the cities in the country...I think mainly we are a peaceful society. The people are educated, as long as the country is strict (about racism), but less (strict) in other things. This is what comes to me you see. In Wales you don't have any racism; the local government, the Magistrates, the consulates, are very strict about it.

Ali 3's experience was different from that of one of the women I interviewed whose family had been seriously frightened by racism in their Welsh neighborhood in the late 1970's. The family and children were intimidated by "skinheads" for a year or so until the local authorities were able to get the perpetrators moved out of the community. Yet, the intolerance of racism by the Welsh was, as Ali 3 said: the local government, magistrates, and consulates did take the necessary action to stop any vestige of racism.

Table 6. Summary of Responses to Question 5: College Experience

| Question 5: What was your experience at college? |                             |                           |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
|  | Friendly students and staff | Absence of discrimination |
| Ali 1  | yes                         |                           |
| Ali 2  | yes                         | yes                       |
| Ali 3  | yes                         | yes                       |
| Ali 4  |                             | yes                       |
| Ali 5  | yes                         | yes                       |

### *Discussion and Interpretation of College Experience*

The actual experience of attending postsecondary education for all the participants was positive. As immigrants they brought their culture and personal history to the institution. The participants who immigrated to the UK as youngsters remembered less of their experience in college. The oldest immigrant, Ali 5, recalled his experience more as a foreign student than as an immigrant. Ali 1 and Ali 2, as the most recent immigrants, were sensitive to the teachers, the other students, the inconvenience of attending, and the delayed gratification of learning English. Ali 1 believed, "Some students (do) not finish go(ing) to school. Some have better (things) to do then (learn) English; (they) go for a job instead of learning English."

The comfort level in a UK postsecondary institution may be related to the level of cultural adaptation to the UK. This may also influence the description of the college

experience. In the words of Ali 3 as he described the Bangladeshi culture, “It’s a totally, totally different culture (from the Welsh culture); different society; different environment.” Ali 1 was, as noted earlier, the least adapted to the UK of all the participants whom I interviewed. He had the least formal education and the least English language fluency. Ali 1 claimed to have finished secondary school in Bangladesh, but given his apparent discomfort with using a pen to write his name, I am not sure he was telling me the entire truth. That lack of experience in any postsecondary educational institution might have influenced his comfort level at the FE college in Wales.

### *Institutional Response*

Question 6, *What was the institutional response to you as a Bangladeshi?*, responses overlap with the answers regarding the college experience. As the participants described their experiences with other students, they naturally included their interactions with the faculty and administration. There was unanimous agreement by all the participants that the institutions were supportive of them while attending school (see Table 7).

- *The UK postsecondary education institutions were supportive.*

Ali 5 observed that:

The institution was quite welcoming to foreign students though (the institution) probably saw it as more novel than now as (there were) few of them (foreign students) then and the UK was just starting to embrace other nationalities then-but the 1970’s was a time of racial hatred too (racial tension in the UK), so (the foreign students) had to be careful.

In other words, as he came over as a young adult and went straight to university, he felt like, and was treated more, as a foreign student than as an immigrant.

Ali 1 said they were “understanding of his situation.” There was only one suggestion for institutions to change. None of the participants thought there were any barriers to them specifically as Bangladeshis in British postsecondary education.

Ali 2 noted that not many Bangladeshis attended the Coleg Gwent ESOL program:

Some people go to other colleges. I don't know where. Bangladeshis go to the community center (the Newport evening ESOL program). Only three Bangladeshis here (at the ESOL satellite program of Coleg Gwent). They don't come here-too far. It's a problem. I come walking twenty-five minutes. That's (almost) one hour (round trip).

He thought that the institution should offer classes at locations that were more convenient to immigrants who had to rely on public transportation. To Ali 2, the location of the ESOL classes was an institutional barrier; although the faculty were supportive to him, he indicated that the location at the Coleg Gwent site was not supportive to him, or other Bangladeshi immigrants who did not attend classes there. Ali 2 thought the poor location needed to be addressed by the Coleg Gwent institution. This was Ali 2's second reference to the distance he must travel to attend the day-time ESOL program at Coleg Gwent. Location of programs could be construed as an institutional barrier. If the programs in which the new immigrants are most likely to participate, such as ESOL, are located too far from the immigrant communities, then participation will be low. Thus, location itself becomes a barrier. In this particular

situation, the ESOL program for Coleg Gwent was located at a satellite center called the Bizspace, a Newport business park. I had great difficulty even finding it with a map and walking the mile or so from the Coleg Gwent campus. The Coleg Gwent campus was on a more convenient bus route, unlike the Bizspace. When I asked several people at service stations and little shops for directions to the Bizspace most had not heard of the place. Fortunately, the ESOL program was moving to the main campus in a few months. This may alleviate the inconvenience of the location to which Ali 2 referred.

Ali 4 observed, "I came over here (at age 6 or 7)... (but if you came over ) at 15, 16, or 18 then you need help on (participating in postsecondary education)...but I was already here for 10 or 11 (years), and I was more fitting into the (mainstream). Some (who come to the UK at an older age) struggle." He saw the priorities of young immigrants as different then those who are 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation. He insinuated that institutions needed to reach out and provide additional support to the recent immigrants. On the other hand, as the off-spring of immigrants become a part of the society, Ali 4 said:

You'll find in the next twenty years in the Bangladeshi community the kids will be more educated. The kids will be going into the professional sector-doctors, lawyers, accountants-you name it, they will be going into it. Any Asian, always their parents (want their children to be) a doctor, lawyer, accountant. Something they all want their kids to be. But nowadays kids go into business.

### *Discussion and Interpretation of Institutional Responses*

Institutional support, according to the experiences and observations of the

participants, was present for them. Whether they were treated as foreign students, native students, or ESOL students, the institutional response was always supportive and positive. The only possible barrier mentioned was that of the location of the programs. One immigrant suggested that recent immigrants in their late teens, those who might attend further education colleges soon after entering the UK, might need additional support from the institution. However, exactly what that support may entail was not identified.

Table 7. Summary of Responses to Question 6: Institutional Response

| Question 6: What was Institutional response to you as a Bangladeshi? |            |
|--|------------|
|  | Supportive |
| Ali 1  | yes        |
| Ali 2  | yes        |
| Ali 3  | yes        |
| Ali 4  | yes        |
| Ali 5  | yes        |

### *Leaving College Prior to Completion of Program*

Question 7, *Why did you leave college before completion?*, is the crux of the study. I wanted to discover why certain immigrants do not complete postsecondary education, even though they enroll in it. It was surprisingly difficult to get a specific answer from the participants. During the course of the conversations, as they reflected on their lives as young immigrants, for some of them the cumulative experiences in

their new country seemed to dwarf this one decision of leaving postsecondary education early. Three of them had not thought very much about this choice since it was made twenty or thirty years ago. For a couple of the immigrants the recollection of leaving university or college gave them pause to think of what might have been, had they continued through to completion.

- *Lack of commitment to completion of an educational goal.*

The level of commitment to the goal of completing postsecondary education seemed low among all of the interviewees. Ali 1 and Ali 2, who were in the ESOL program at Coleg Gwent, had been erratic in their attendance for a long period of time. The likelihood of completion seemed like a distant promise. As Ali 2 stated, when asked what he hoped to do after completing the ESOL program he responded: "I'm not sure now. I am (must) pass the GCSE (college entrance examinations, which Mary Cousins said were not the only route available to Ali), than go to university. It's a long time. And I think I will be an old man, and satisfied (that he had obtained a university degree in the UK)." Ali 2 had already dropped out of Ms. Cousin's class for two or three months when he went to work full-time. It appeared that it was due to his wife's strong encouragement that he had returned to ESOL full-time.

Ali 1 said that the reason he repeatedly dropped out of ESOL was that he found the classes "boring." He frequently stayed home to sleep late and help take care of his children. His wife did not work but had "no problem" if he stayed home instead of attending school. He missed the grocery business that he and his brother had in



Bangladesh, and would have liked to find a similar job in Wales, but his lack of English was a barrier. He seemed caught in a tangle of confusion and frustration created by his immigration to Wales for an arranged marriage, yet without the skills or language to successfully transition to the new country. Ali 1, of all the participants interviewed, seemed the most displaced and least likely to succeed in adaptation. The others arrived with families, or came over for the specific purpose of economic improvement; with some education in their own country they appeared well adapted or on their way to such.

- *Economic needs of the family superseded the educational goals.*

In question 7, three of the Ali's indicated that economics was the reason they could not finish university or college (see Table 8). The family needed money in two of these cases and, as sons, the two Ali's (Ali 3 and Ali 4) had an obligation to help the family by leaving university or college and going to work. As mentioned previously, the fathers of both Ali 3 and Ali 4 coincidentally, suffered heart attacks when the boys were about 18 and already attending postsecondary education.

Ali 4 spoke about why he dropped out of university:

I had two brothers, and myself and (we) said, 'Dad, you need to look out for yourself now (after the heart attack); so you need to retire early.' So that's the reason I started part-time work and half-time study and then eventually didn't carry on with my education...

The main reason (was) because us (his brothers and himself), it's like we can't forget our culture at the same time...I'm proud of my roots. (I) try to do the same with the kids (teach the values of their roots), but it's hard(er) with kids these today than...it was us. So obviously, what I believe in, Dad looked after us from birth to grown-up and it's our turn to pay back. So us three brothers, the older ones, this is one of the

reasons I started full-time work (and) was supporting my parents fully.

He described how he and his brothers had to assist the family the way his father had helped the grandparents back in Bangladesh. The importance of putting parents first, before one's own desires, is a value of the Bangladeshi culture:

(At) that time (in the early 1970's) many people came (to the UK) and they were 15, 10, or 12 years old, whatever, and because they had to support their family those people, like myself, didn't do further education because I thought it was my duty to support my family. Also, my father left his parents and he was supporting his parents. But now we don't need to do (what) I'm doing... We sacrificed. I sacrificed my further education for the benefit of establishing my family (his parents). That's the main reason (I dropped out). I wish I had carried on.

Ali 4 spoke about his misgivings of dropping out:

Yes, I could have gone my way (to postsecondary education) and looked after myself. I'm happy either way. I could have done that, and I look back and I could have been something. But at the same time, what I didn't become I have a loss. But at the same time my intention was always to look after the family and at the same time look after myself.

Ali 4 was somewhat regretful as he recalled the experience of dropping out. He did not seem to have much choice as the cultural expectation was that he would join his brothers in helping support his parents since his father was in ill health. "He had a bypass in (19)80 or (19)81...He had the bypass in 1985 in Cardiff. Before that ...in '80 or '81 he had the heart attack."

Ali 3, as the eldest son, had a similar experience to Ali 4 as he had to take on the role of financial support to his parents and siblings:

My Dad had a by-pass operation when I was 17 or 18. And my education, we were five children in the family, so he wasn't able to support the family. Then when it came to me, well, I've got to go out

there and earn some money to support the family. So this is why my education ended.

Ali 3 also had regrets about dropping out early: "I probably would have stayed on. The other thing I don't think I had is sympathy, asking me, telling me, 'you know you need to carry on with your education.'" He values further education and speaks of providing that "sympathy" and encouragement to his children to participate in postsecondary education:

I'm asking my children every day, every minute, (what about your future) education. This is what you've got to do. Without that (higher education)... What I'm trying to say is, at the moment they (Bangladeshis) are into education. They want to do something; they don't want to go into small businesses, corner shops, restaurants, this and that. They want, the children want nine to five jobs. After maybe twenty years you won't see many (Bangladeshi) people in restaurants, corner shops. There are (currently) very successful British Bangladeshis in Newport.

In contrast to their experiences of dropping out of postsecondary education, both Ali 3 and 4 raised the subject of Mr. Anwar Choudhury, the recently appointed British High Commissioner to Bangladesh. Mr. Choudhury was born in Bangladesh and immigrated to the UK when he was about 10 years old. He went to university and received his Masters degree in business administration from Kings College of Durham University at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. Ali 3 and Ali 4 were impressed with Mr. Choudury's achievement and indicated that this was an example of the direction in which Bangladeshis were headed in the UK. As Ali 3 stated, "Now a British Bangladeshi born man is going to be the Commissioner. It is a very prestigious job."

*Discussion and Interpretation of Leaving College Prior to Completion of Program*

The experience of dropping out of FE was one of regret on the part of Ali 3, Ali 4, and Ali 5. Ali 1 and Ali 2, as ESOL students and fairly recent immigrants, have a ways to go before being in a position to voice an opinion about dropping out. At this time, one can even believe it possible that they both might return to ESOL classes and eventually succeed in their goals. Unlike Ali 3, Ali 4, and Ali 5 who had already determined that they would never return to any form of FE, Ali 1 and Ali 2, when interviewed, were still in a state of denial that they had completely dropped out. It is possible to interpret the early dropout of all five Ali's to be related to economics in one way or another. Ali 1 wanted a job rather than to spend time learning English; Ali 2 wanted to work full-time; Ali 3 and Ali 4 had to support their parents economically, and Ali 5 had a wife who was expecting twins.

Table 8. Summary of Responses to Question 7: Leaving College Prior to Completion of Program

| Question 7: Why did you leave college before completion? |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | Family economic needs supersede educational goals | Lacked commitment to postsecondary education |
| Ali 1  |   | yes  |
| Ali 2  |   | yes  |
| Ali 3  | yes   |  |
| Ali 4  | yes   |  |
| Ali 5  | yes   |  |

### *Other Common Experiences*

The conversations with the participants, stimulated by the interviews, revealed three other themes that don't quite fit into any of the interview questions. These themes involved hopes and dreams of the participants.

- *Further education for their children or younger siblings.*

The first theme is the dream for their children to attend further education. Three of the Bangladeshis supported education for their children or younger siblings. Two of them are already encouraging their children to get a college education. Ali 5 has already put his educational values into practice. One of his daughters, who was my initial contact in Cardiff, has her Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of Wales; she is only 27 years of age. Her twin sister is an established dentist in London, and her younger sister is currently attending medical school. Ali 4 and his brothers financed and supported their youngest brother to go to law school in the UK, from which he has already graduated. He said, "most Bangladeshis want their children to be doctors, lawyers, or accountants." Ali 3 stated, "I talk to my own children every day about going to college...I will encourage my daughters to go to university."

- *Regret for not finishing postsecondary education.*

Both Ali 4 and Ali 5 regretted dropping out of postsecondary education. They indicated that they would have been better off with more education. Ali 4 wondered where he would be and what he would be doing if he had stayed in postsecondary education. Ali 5 knew that if he had completed the second year of his course he would

have been able to be a Certified Public Accountant, with a wider range of employment opportunities and greater income potential.

- *Hope to finish their educational goals, despite a history of dropping out of further education.*

Ali 1 and Ali 2 still hoped to finish their ESOL courses and Ali 2 hoped to go on to university and get a bachelor’s degree. Ali 1 and 2 had not yet acknowledged that they were early leavers of further education. Since they had a history of returning to Coleg Gwent even after several months of absence, they appeared to still have hope that they might finish the ESOL courses. See Table 9 for a display of the themes.

Table 9. Other Common Experiences

| Other educational themes: |                       |                                    |  |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--|
|                           | FE for their children | Regret not finishing postsecondary | Still hope to finish educational goals |
| Ali 1                     |                       |                                    | yes                                    |
| Ali 2                     |                       |                                    | yes                                    |
| Ali 3                     | yes                   |                                    |  |
| Ali 4                     | yes                   | yes                                |  |
| Ali 5                     | yes                   | yes                                |  |

*Discussion and Interpretation of Other Common Experiences*

The hope for betterment for themselves, for their children, and younger siblings seems a natural reaction for an immigrant to experience. Immigration is often about optimism for a brighter future for the self and family. When the participants

spoke of the reasons for immigration they included economic opportunity. In a western country such as the UK, where education is visible, respected, and available to the masses, it is not surprising that the immigrants adopted the value of higher education and observed it to be one of the paths to economic success.

### *California and the Mexican Immigrant Early Leavers*

Five Mexicans were interviewed who met the four criteria I had established for a consistent comparison:

1. Born in Mexico
2. First language is Spanish
3. Attended postsecondary education in the US
4. Left the postsecondary institution prior to completion of goals or programs of study.

This group of Mexicans was, unlike the Bangladeshis, comprised of both men and women. I interviewed three women and two men who met the stated criteria. I dialogued with an additional four women who did not meet the criteria. I will discuss their experiences in the Supplemental Analyses later in this chapter. For common characteristics of the interviewees, refer to Table 10. Listed in Table 10 are the ages of the participants when I interviewed them, the age when they arrived in the US, whether they were born in Mexico, if Spanish was their first language, if they attended primary school in Mexico, if they attended postsecondary educational institutions in the US (and if they were enrolled in an English as a Second Language –ESL–

program), if they dropped out of postsecondary education in the US (and if it were an ESL program), if they ever enrolled in an ESL program in the US, if they completed postsecondary education in Bangladesh, if they attended primary school in the US, if they attended secondary school in the US, if they attended secondary school in Mexico, and if they attended postsecondary school in Mexico.

The Mexican participants ranged in age from 24 to 55, which is almost the exact range of the Bangladeshi participants. They came to the US at ages ranging from 12 to 17, which is a somewhat smaller range than that of the Bangladeshi participants. For confidentiality purposes, I refer to these participants using the common Mexican last name of Diaz. Thus, they will be identified simply as Diaz 1 through 5. The three women who were interviewed are identified as Diaz 2W, Diaz 4W, and Diaz 5W. Two of the participants had come to the US illegally, a common occurrence it seems, based on my conversations with the immigrants I interviewed in the pilot study and according to these participants. However, they have since become citizens of the US. Much like the Bangladeshis, they came for economic opportunity, jobs, and education. Both ethnic groups cited the cost and lack of educational opportunity in their birth countries as reasons to immigrate. Two of the Mexican participants had established families with children in the US. The other three were single and living with relatives. The three women had jobs, and the two men were looking for work. All had been out of school for at least a year.



Table 10. Mexican Interviews, Spring 2004

|          |     | Age   | Born | 1st     | Prim. | PS* AA    |     | Cmplt | Prim. | Dropout  | 2ndry |       |
|----------|-----|-------|------|---------|-------|-----------|-----|-------|-------|----------|-------|-------|
|          | Age | in US | Mex. | lang    | schl  | levels or | ESL | PS in | schl  | of PS in | schl  | PS    |
| Mexicans | Age | in US | Mex. | Spanish | Mex.  | US        | US  | Mex.  | US    | US       | US    | US    |
| Diaz 1   | 31  | 17    | yes  | yes     | yes   | yes       | yes |       |       | yes      |       | yes** |
| Diaz 2W  | 55  | 12    | yes  | yes     | yes   | yes       | yes |       | yes   | yes      | yes   |       |
| Diaz 3   | 24  | 14    | yes  | yes     | yes   | yes       | yes |       |       | yes      | yes   |       |
| Diaz 4W  | 27  | 21    | yes  | yes     | yes   | yes       | yes | yes   |       | yes      |       |       |
| Diaz 5W  | 40  | 27    | yes  | yes     | yes   | yes       | yes |       |       | yes      |       |       |

Mex=Mexico; lang=language; Prim.= primary; schl=school; PS=postsecondary; AA=Associate of Arts degree; ESL=English as a Second Language; Cmplt=completed; 2ndry=secondary;

\*\*CSU=California State University

The seven questions asked of the Mexican participants were analogous to those used for the Bangladeshi interviews. The following questions guided the conversations with the five Mexican participants:

1. Why did you and/or your family immigrate to the US?
2. How do you view yourself? American, Mexican, or bi-cultural?
3. Why did you decide to attend college?
4. What did your family think of you attending college?
5. What was your experience at college?
6. What was the institutional response to you as a Mexican?
7. Why did you leave college before completion?

The responses to these questions by the Mexican immigrants showed they had common experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of their encounters with postsecondary education as they transitioned to life in California. The identification of the participants' similar experiences and perceptions resulted in classification of themes of the Mexican experiences as immigrants. As with the Bangladeshi data, I will discuss each interview question response, identifying themes that were revealed through analysis of the responses by the interviewees. Extensive quotations will be used to substantiate the themes I discuss. I will conclude each interview question section with a discussion and interpretation of the themes that were developed.

### *Reasons for Immigration*

There was consistency in the answers of the participants to question 1, *Why*

*did you and/or your family immigrate to the US?*. As would be expected of immigrants from a poor country, economics was a driving force.

- *Economics motivated the Mexicans to immigrate to the US.*

Four of the five Mexicans, Diaz 1, 2W, 4W, 5W, said they immigrated for economic reasons. Diaz 1 came over as a young man to join his two brothers. He had been living in a small village in Mexico, the second youngest of ten children whose father grew vegetables for a living. His parents were heart broken when he left, but he saw no future for himself in Mexico. He had dropped out of high school there, and came to the US for jobs and opportunities. "I just wanted to make some money. I was looking for a better future...My parents were broken hearted for me to come here. I'm the next to the youngest."

Diaz 2W came over as a little girl, with her mother and three siblings. Her mother was actually a US citizen and had returned to Mexico to get married and have her children. She wanted to raise her children in the US, saying education was free (unlike Mexico where they pay for the uniforms, books, and the teacher-- similar to conditions in Bangladesh), and furthermore there was plenty of food and work in the US. She also knew that she could naturalize her children, once she returned to the US.

My mother was born in the United States, but lived in Mexico, married in Mexico, and had her children in Mexico; but worked in the United States, back and forth. There came a time when living that way, she just wasn't doing what she wanted to do, I guess, and decided to bring all of us, including my Dad, to live here permanently. But then things happened to them, I don't know what, that they didn't stay together, so she just brought us. There were four of us (children). She wanted to build interest for us to leave Mexico. She wanted for us to feel like we

wanted to go there (to the US). She said, "in the United States you can have the education that you want; there's food for the taking; there's work-all that you want." So she painted this really beautiful picture of the United States. I was 10 (or) 11 (years old). My older sister was 14 (or) 15, and then my two younger brothers were 10 (and) 6 (years old).

Diaz 3 came over to the US when he was 14 years old. His mother had moved to California without him when he was age three. He was raised in Mexico by his grandmother and aunt. His aunt immigrated to California when Diaz 3 was nine years of age, and left him in Mexico with his grandmother. When Diaz 3 arrived in California and joined his mother's family of a stepfather and half siblings, he lived with them for only six months before moving in with his aunt, whom he considered to be his mother.

My mom bring me over here (sent for him). I guess because it's a better opportunity over here than over there (Mexico). She came (to the US) way before I do, like before I came, when I was three years old. She was never there (when I was young in Mexico). My grandmother (raised me). So I was living with her (grandmother) until I got (to be) fourteen (years old). (My mom) sent for me. I never (had) lived with her (for) a long, long time. It was kind of scary though (moving to the US to live with his Mom and her husband and his half siblings). But still, I am here...Actually I live with (my aunt). I never live with my mom. Like I say, I just go there (to my mom's house for) six months and it doesn't work out and I start living with my aunt. Although she was the one who raised me since I was three years old. She (his mom) got her papers (for citizenship). She can't become a citizen because she's got problems with reading. My own application (for citizenship) is...not straight (paperwork). I'm still (working on the citizenship)...back in '90 my mom applied for me, but still there's no sign of it, so I have to look for it and I have to work to get a lawyer, so I don't know.

Diaz 4W came to California with her mother to join her father who had been in California for two years, and through an amnesty program had applied for citizenship

for himself and approbation to bring his family over. It was a little unclear as to the actual timing of Diaz 4W and her move to the US. Although she said she was seven when her parents moved to the US, she appeared to have been raised in Mexico for the most part and didn't move to the US until she was 21. Perhaps her father worked here and they maintained two homes while she and her mother lived in Mexico and she finished school. She did say they have continued to maintain their home in Nyarite and that her parents plan to retire there. Diaz 4W has since applied for her own citizenship which will be forthcoming shortly, but her mother is insecure about her English skills and does not want to apply for citizenship until they let her answer the questions in Spanish.

Well, my parents, they met in Tijuana (where she was born) and so they were there (working and living). The main reason for them to move to the center of the state, which is Nyarite, is because of health issues; because of me. So we moved up there and the job wasn't that good for my Dad like it was in Tijuana. So we decided to come over here. My mom and I stayed in Nyarite and since he (her Father) worked at the fields a long time (ago), it was probably just for a couple of months or so (that he worked in the fields); so he qualified in the amnesty so he got his citizenship and everything. I don't think he worked in the fields more than one month. He now has his own business of heating and air conditioning. So he got his residence and then he got his citizenship. When it was barely announced he said ...he went ...over there (to the Immigration and Naturalization Services offices), there was...nobody in line. As soon as he heard about it he went and did all that then got papers for my mom and I and we got our residence and I was seven. So I decided to come with my mom and dad to live with them. My Dad applied (for my citizenship) before I was 18.

Diaz 4W said that although her parents will likely return to Mexico when they retire, she did not plan to move back. She said that most of her friends in Mexico, though they had obtained college degrees, struggled to make a living.

Unfortunately, even with a minimum wage job here I'm going to be making (more than what I would be making over there). My friends (in Mexico), they went to college and they have their Masters (degrees) and everything now and they're not making near as what I am making. And (in Mexico) it's really about nepotism you can say, who has strings, and who can get a good job. Since it's over crowded of people, graduates, over there it's really difficult to find a job... you're either going to have to do your own thing. Like my boyfriend, he is an accountant and he worked for big companies and he was barely making a living so he's now in his own business because it's just not what he expected. And he went to private schools and all those years of paying that money. I feel bad for them. I feel really proud of them because they finished school and my friends and everything, but...they're not getting what they deserve.

Diaz 5W came over after her husband immigrated to the US. He was a veterinarian in Mexico and could not find a job there. In California he was working as a custodian, and she was working as a child-care provider in the school where she took ESL classes. She has applied for US citizenship. Her husband tried going to the community college in California but had to dropout because of his limited English skills.

I came because my husband was here for two years before I come... Our economical situation was really bad in Mexico. (My husband had trouble) finding jobs. My husband had a career but he couldn't work. He's a veterinarian. He's (now) working as a custodian. (He is) really frustrated. He tried to go to school (in the US for ESL), but because his English is not really good he couldn't go to school.

Immigration for economic opportunity was a common cause among all of the Mexican participants. The move was a thoughtful and determined act by each migrant, or the family of the migrant, specifically to improve the financial opportunities available to the immigrant.

*Discussion and Interpretation of the Immigration Experience*

The desire for better living conditions, more opportunity for jobs, and an education were the focus of the Mexican immigrants. As the interviews with these immigrants demonstrated, some Mexicans viewed California and the US as a convenient and plausible answer to their poverty in Mexico. It was easy for them to cross the border when they had residency documents or citizenship. This meant they could live between the two countries, or, at the very least, visit family and relatives frequently. They usually, like the Bangladeshis, sent money home to Mexico on a regular basis, supporting the family members who remained “back home.”

Even young Diaz 3, who was sent for by his mother, was brought over because his mother wanted him to have more opportunity. Educational choices, as well as job prospects drove these participants much as the Bangladeshis were driven to immigrate to the UK. See Table 11.

Table 11. Summary of Responses to Question 1: Reasons for Immigration

| Question 1: Why did you and/or your family immigrate to the US? |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
|   | Economic opportunity        |
| Diaz 1  | yes                         |
| Diaz 2W   | yes                         |
| Diaz 3  | yes (mother’s wish for him) |
| Diaz 4W   | yes                         |
| Diaz 5W   | yes                         |

### *Cultural Identity*

The responses to question 2, *How do you view yourself? American/Mexican/Bi-cultural?*, surprised me. As immigrants who had moved to a new country and applied for and received citizenship, I thought they would all feel bi-cultural. However, two of the participants stated that they identified themselves as Mexican, not even Mexican-American. My understanding of these statements is that they do not want to lose the traditions and the culture of Mexico, which they love. They referred to themselves as Mexicans in an effort to honor and hold on to their ethnic heritage.

- *The Mexican immigrants viewed themselves as bi-cultural.*

Diaz 2W and Diaz 4W viewed themselves as Mexican, whereas the other three participants, Diaz 1, Diaz 3, and Diaz 5W, viewed themselves as bi-cultural, straddling both countries and customs (see Table 12).

Table 12. Summary of Responses to Interview Question 2: Cultural Identity

| Question 2: How do you view yourself? US/Mexican/Bi-cultural? |             |
|---|-------------|
|   | Bi-cultural |
| Diaz 1  | yes         |
| Diaz 2W   |             |
| Diaz 3  | yes         |
| Diaz 4W   |             |
| Diaz 5W   | yes         |



Diaz 5W explained her bridge over both cultures:

It is hard for me. Sometimes I feel that my house (home) is Mexico, but since I came here than I saw how many things I can get different than in Mexico. I feel that this is my house (home) too. I share with my family both cultures. For example, when (there is) a chance (to celebrate) traditions from Mexico, I make my traditions here. For example, this Cinco De Mayo my two girls wear Mexican dress in the school.

Diaz 3, when asked with which culture he identified said: "I think half and half. Because you know I (have) been half my life over there and half my life over here; so it's half and half." Mexican traditions and holidays were celebrated by his aunt. "Pretty much like even (holidays from both Mexico and the US). I mean she (mom) doesn't practice those (Mexican holidays). The one who does is my aunt. My aunt (will say), 'Oh, today is this day.'"

Diaz 1 was committed to being a Mexican-American. He said, "I already got (my) citizenship. I did this so I could contribute and participate in political decisions. This is my adopted country." He doesn't want others to decide for him politically. "I want to choose...I wish my Hispanic community would get more involved in the political decisions. Education, for example, education is very important for my community. The community tends to be passive." Diaz 1 thought politicians should be focused on education and should be family oriented people. He said that the Mexican people sacrifice personal goals for the family. He experienced this for himself as he threw everything to the side to go take care of his father when his father was sick in Mexico.

Two of the participants (Diaz 2W and Diaz 4W) responded that they felt themselves to be Mexican, rather than American. They both indicated that this feeling had grown, the longer they stayed in the US. They both also spoke of how much they loved America and the opportunities it afforded, but their love of their Mexican culture and heritage was just as strong. Neither of these two participants had any intention of moving back to Mexico.

Diaz 2W: "I'm still Mexican. I think I'm more Mexican now. I think I pulled away from being Mexican for a little while, truly Mexican, then went back to it when I got more relaxed (about her culture and heritage)."

Diaz 4W tried to explain the pull of both cultures:

My culture is more stronger now that I am here. It is more. When you live over there (in Mexico)...you are bedazzled by all the American stuff, clothes and everything, but when you are over here you just love your country (Mexico) more. I just enjoy every single minute that I am over there. I love it over there.... And as far as my culture, I can't be there (return to Mexico to live). I tried it. I have my friends...unless I have my own business. I don't know. My parents are here, but (the link) here is really strong. I mean I'm Mexican; I love the United States and I love the opportunities, and I always liked it, but, I'm really proud of my culture, of who I am, where I come from and always find myself talking about all the wonderful things, the nature and all the things, especially where I'm from; it's really not Tijuana, I don't consider myself from Tijuana, I consider myself from Nyarite, where my mom is. You have the beach one hour a way and it's all forest...it's all green, and it's wonderful (near Puerto Vallarta)...I have everything (here). My parents are going to stay over here until they retire.

However, her bottom line, as she told her professor in her community college class when students were introducing themselves, was her identity as a Mexican:

He was surprised, because I was a blonde back then. (He said) “oh, people are surprised that you are not American?” And I’m like well, yeah. “What do they call you? Hispanic? Latino?” I’m like, “Oh, I’m Mexican. I’m not Hispanic or Latino. I like to call myself Mexican.”

Diaz 4W was proud to be called a Mexican.

- *Mexican traditions and holidays were important to the Mexican immigrants.*

The Mexican immigrants focused less than the Bangladeshis did on the principles or religion of their culture and more on the traditions and customs. As Diaz 3 said, “Pretty much like even (holidays from both Mexico and the US)” and Diaz 5W, “For example when (there is) a chance (to celebrate) traditions from Mexico, I make my traditions here. For example this Cinco De Mayo my two girls wear Mexican dress in the school.” Diaz 3 reported that his aunt made her living by creating piñatas for Mexican celebrations. My understanding of both Diaz 2W and 4W, who view themselves as Mexican was that they celebrate their Mexican traditions and holidays as they revel in their “culture.” The Mexican holidays, frequently celebrated in California and many parts of the US, perhaps make it easier for the Mexican immigrants to identify with and uphold holidays and traditions, than for the Bangladeshi immigrants to acknowledge and celebrate Bangladeshi holidays and traditions.

### *Discussion and Interpretation of Cultural Identity*

Cultural identity for the Mexicans seemed to be wrapped up in traditions and holidays, as described above by Diaz 5W. There was not the focus on language

retention or religion that the Bangladeshis discussed. How much of this is due to gender values as compared to ethnic values is unknown to me. It was the Mexican women whom I interviewed who felt most connected to their Mexican culture. The two men were more emotionally committed to the US, “My adopted country” (Diaz 1) or objectively distant from both nationalities: “None of them (neither Mexican nor US). Just myself and that’s it. Nothing like American, or like Mexican. Just be myself and that’s it.” Diaz 3 preferred to be identified as an individual, not with a nationality or ethnic heritage.

### *College Attendance*

All of the Mexicans whom I interviewed and asked question 3, *Why did you decide to attend college?*, said they had decided on their own to go to college. Nobody pressured them to enroll, and nobody “assumed” they would attend. Each wished for further education (see Table 13).

Table 13. Summary of Responses to Question 3: College Attendance

| Question 3: Why did you decide to attend college? |                       |  |   |
|---|-----------------------|--|---|
|   | Choice and aspiration | Ignored poor college guidance in high school | Improve job skills and employment opportunity |
| Diaz 1  | yes                   |  | yes   |
| Diaz 2W   | yes                   | yes  | yes   |
| Diaz 3  | yes                   | yes  |   |
| Diaz 4W   | yes                   |  |   |
| Diaz 5W   | yes                   |  | yes   |

- *The Mexican immigrants attended community college by choice and aspiration.*

The immigrants' individual initiative to enroll in community college appeared as a theme in a way that I did not notice in the Bangladeshi interviews. The interest in a college education was found in each of the individual responses to question 3.

Diaz 1 said he had "always dreamed about getting an education." Although he dropped out of high school in Mexico, he read about far away places and adventure. He decided he had better learn English since, "this is my new adopted country." He started going to adult school in the evenings after work. He "Wanted to study, but also help my parents. I was torn between my personal goals and my parents." After he worked at many labor jobs to help his family and send money home, he decided it was time to achieve personal goals. He recalled that when he was young he read geography and history books. "I was dreaming about all of it. I had a fantasy to become a business man. Then I said, 'why not?'" It was this ambition for an easier and more interesting life that drove him to college.

Diaz 5W was motivated to enroll in college by her interest in a career in child care and elementary school.

I...started taking my ESL classes the 2nd year that I came- I started taking ESL classes. In the ESL program like Ms. Din is working. I went in the Cosumnes River College then I took ESL classes, ECE classes, child development. (It was) good...I decide to go (to college) because (ever) since I came to the United States I (had been) doing volunteer hours in my...children's (school, for) four years. It is for that reason I decide to get these ECE classes. So than I was working in kindergarten for 3 years (paid by the district), but since the district... started cutting employees, I was cut. Probably I have more than 40

units (of community college classes). It was my last schedule and I couldn't finish. I got two certificates now in child development but I couldn't finish my degree.

Diaz 4W had an educational goal in Mexico which seemed to get thwarted with her move to the US. She was not aware of the educational opportunities in the US right away. She seemed to realize as we spoke that her English was quite fluent even from the beginning. She possibly could have skipped the ESL classes and enrolled directly into academic classes.

I didn't study after high school over in Nyarite because I wanted to pick a career which wasn't available (in the) really small city (where I lived). I wanted to study psychology...(but) I (would) have (had) to move out of state (to go to a university). (It wasn't possible) being an only child and I'm so close to my parents. So time passed by, so when I came here I really didn't know that...there was classes in a community college. I was barely adapting to living here. We lived in LA; we lived in Chatsworth and it was different because it wasn't the same liberty that I had in Mexico, you know friends and everything. It just, it wasn't the same environment. So I started going to the ESL classes, but I never knew that I (could have) gone straight to (academic) classes. I never knew that (they) were available. I didn't even get a job because my Dad was, just like 'just go to school.' I started then they told me you can just go and do an assessment test and you can take classes and you don't have to (have a goal), you can just go take classes. All kinds of classes are available. You don't have to get a career. I started going, but it was kind of difficult because I was working 8 to 5 and then I was going in the afternoons and the parking (was difficult at Sacramento City College). I took one class and then I just did one semester; I didn't do (any more).

The ambition for further education wasn't idealistic, but connected with career interests and job goals.

- *Experienced poor college guidance in California high schools.*

A second theme among the Mexican immigrants study participants was the

experience of poor college guidance at the high school level. The immigrants who attended high school in California were not given appropriate counseling, or were actually discouraged from attending college.

Diaz 3 was not counseled to prepare for college, but believed he was put into a few college preparation classes without much thought on either his or the counselor's part. Apparently, his interest in attending college came later.

Actually my (high school) counselor, she never give me advice like ...you need this to graduate or go to college whatever. She was kind of busy all the time. And she always like have problems too, because she forget things some times too. I was like, I don't know what (classes) I need for college or whatever but she give me a couple college classes and I pass it so it was OK. She just gave it to me (the college prep classes) I never ask(ed) (for) them, like I need this or that; she just give me my classes and that's it.

Diaz 3, as one of the two Mexican participants who graduated from a high school in the US had expectations: "I went to Sacramento High school and I graduated from there and I went for like half a year at Sac(ramento) City College. ... I was expecting to ...graduate from junior college in something." It was his aunt who really encouraged him to attend college. "(My aunt) always wants (me) to keep going but I say I have...no money. She's the only one who (is) pushing me to go back to school but I say I got no money. If I got the money I go for it, but I don't got the money."

Diaz 2W experienced much the same type of neglect from her high school counselor:

While I was in high school...you had to have counselors that advise you as to what to do. The only thing they could tell me was that I would do good in kitchen help, or labor of some sort. They... knew I had the grades, but they didn't think I had the money to do anything

other than high school. So they were sort of preparing us for that and I can tell you that they did that with my children too, so it's not just me and it wasn't just that generation. There is no encouragement at all.

While attending Merced Community College, Diaz 2W became interested in the medical field.

I went for the emergency medical technician program and I got that certificate. But I also took the anesthesiology classes because I really wanted to be a doctor. That is what I wanted to do. At one point at the job that I had then, which I was the family planning counselor and health educator for the county of Merced, they were offering opportunities for anyone that wanted to get into the PA (Physician's Assistant) program through Stanford University. They did an outreach. ...they had an outreach program. They went out to the clinics and, and you know, tried to entice people into getting into the program. They wanted minorities more than anything, women and minorities. The job where I was were offering the opportunity to go to school, get your degree, become a PA and then return to work for the community that you were in, to pay back; because they were going to pay your salary as you, while you were going to school and then you get a chance to do your internship with the doctors there so it was set up. That was really perfect. Two of my friends got in; I got in but couldn't attend, because, that's when the culture really stepped up to be a barrier I think.

Diaz 2W believed that her mother's pressure to stay close to her children, rather than leaving them in Merced for the duration of the program as she moved to Palo Alto and attended the Stanford program, was based on a cultural attitude. It is difficult to tell if this was a cultural response, or more of an era. It was the late 1960's when Diaz 2W was contemplating her options, and thinking of arrangements for her children to be taken care of by family members during the week while she was out of town in school. That was a time when young women were striving to be accepted in the male dominated world of careers and full-time work. Often the mothers of these



young women were not ready to see their daughters lead non-traditional lives so different from the wife, homemaker, and mother roles that were familiar. Without interviewing Diaz 2W's mother, we cannot know if this was a cultural or a generational response.

- *Attended college to improve their job skills and employment opportunities.*

As discussed briefly above, job betterment and career opportunities also motivated the participants to enroll in college. Diaz 1 said, "And I came to this country and saw opportunity. I worked in the fields and it was hell. I didn't want this. Not just to be another worker, but something better."

Diaz 2W wanted to pursue higher education to better herself and her job opportunities. "Then when life got to be a little too difficult and jobs didn't come very easy, I went for, tried to go for some training, some college. Merced Community College." She decided she needed to go to college so she could improve her skills and get a better job.

For each of the Mexican immigrants interviewed college was an aspiration and a path to improved employment and economic status. Except for Diaz 4W, each of the immigrants wished for more college education than they had obtained at the time I interviewed them.

### *Discussion and Interpretation of College Attendance*

The Mexican immigrants recalled what motivated them to enroll in postsecondary education. None of them entered community college by mistake,

without thought, or due to a sequence set by a secondary school, which they followed automatically. Although Diaz 4W did not have a career goal when she entered community college in California, she remembered an educational and career goal that she had in Mexico. She may have been intimidated a bit by her initial experience at Sacramento City College (which will be described under question 5), but I sensed her career ambition and her interest in languages might lead her back to the community college for a second try. Each of the participants indicated an interest in continuing or going back to postsecondary, if given the opportunity, money, and time.

### *Family Influence*

The Mexican participants, far more than the Bangladeshis, had mixed support for attending college (see Table 14).

Table 14. Summary of Responses to Question 4: Family Influence

| Question 4: What did your family think of you attending college? |                          |                           |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|
|  | Lack parental approval   | Sibling or family support |
| Diaz 1   |                          | yes (siblings)            |
| Diaz 2W  | yes (mother)             | yes (siblings)            |
| Diaz 3   | yes (mother-high school) | yes (aunt)                |
| Diaz 4W  |                          | yes                       |
| Diaz 5W  | yes (father)             | yes (mom)                 |

In their responses to question 4, *What did your family think of you attending*

*college?*, the participants identified opposition without malice, but in a rather detached reaction. However, there seemed to be a counterbalance to the opposition, whether it came from siblings, the other parent, or other relatives.

- *Lack of parental approval for college attendance.*

Actual resistance from parents who did not want these offspring to attend college was voiced in three cases. Diaz 2W said that, although her siblings supported her, once she had a child her mother believed she should stay home with the baby. She attributed this to a cultural influence.

My mother didn't think it was right that I would leave my kids to do that. Because I would have to go to Stanford and live there for a short while..., or commute if I could, but I really would not be able to, not with the intensity of the program. She held me back in a sense because she put a lot of guilt about me and my kids. They were so little.

She continued in college while working and raising her children, but was not able to take the opportunity offered to her through a minority recruitment program to go to Stanford University for Physician Assistant training. As mentioned previously, she had wanted to go to medical school, and had the grades, but the guilt imposed by her mother kept her from going that far.

Diaz 3's mother actually suggested that he dropout of high school and go to work. She never supported his education. His aunt encouraged him to finish high school and was supportive of his college experience.

I've got 2 (half) sisters and one (half) brother. One of them (is in) high school, another (in) junior high and another in elementary school. (There was) not support (from the family for college). I don't know, I never get support from my mom like to go to school. You know how I

mean. Actually (she did) not (encourage me) since high school, no. You know how we are when ... we are like young kids, always skipping school, sometimes, not all the time. But I was like, I don't (want to) go to this class today. I (will) go tomorrow. So I just skip the day, or whatever. And they (the school would) call ... my house and my mom says, 'if you don't go to the school just dropout and start working.' ... I am just the only one from my family right now who graduated from a higher level. I'm the first one in my whole family. Yeah, I'm the only one ... I always call her mom (my aunt). Pretty much everything I did I did myself and I did it for my aunt too. Like when I was in high school my mom say just dropout of school and start working, how could you ... And I was like no I want to graduate and that's it. And I never told anything else and my aunt she was kind of getting frustrated because always my mom was calling, you know, I never went to this class and they (the school) call because of this and that or whatever. And she was getting frustrated and I said "don't worry about it; I'm doing my thing. You gonna see when I graduate." And at graduation she was, "yeah." (My aunt) she always wants (me) to keep going but I say I have got no money. She's the only one who pushing me to go back to school but I say I got no money. If I got the money I go for it, but I don't got the money.

Diaz 5W said that in Mexico her father discouraged her from going to college, saying a woman's place was at home. Her mother, however, encouraged her to attend and to find a career. She did not finish college in Mexico because she got married. She felt that she broke ground for her younger sisters so that her father became more supportive of their attending college.

All my brothers have a career but they don't work in their careers. They have a different job in Mexico. Then my sisters, all they have a career too, and they work in their careers. Yes (all siblings went to college in Mexico). I was starting (college) in Mexico too, but I couldn't finish. I get married pretty early. Then my mom always told me 'go and finish your career (preparation through college)' but, I have my little one and I told her, I want to take care of her, ... my baby. (Father) No, he...he discourage(d) me. Because he always (said) (it's) not necessary (for a woman) to go to school. I (told) them (my sisters that it was) because I had a boyfriend who was really young and probably (that) was the

reason my Dad told him (her boyfriend), I (couldn't) go to... school. Then my sisters were brave (and) they (went to college).

Diaz 5W's mother was supportive for the children to go to college. She was the push for the children to attend.

Diaz 1 said his parents told him, "go for it (education), if you want it." But they could not offer any financial support.

- *Sibling or family support, other than that of parents, seemed important to the immigrants.*

Siblings, or in the case of Diaz 3, his aunt, were important influences on the participants as they enrolled in college. Diaz 3 was also very proud to be the first in his family to attempt postsecondary education, perhaps as a model to his half siblings.

Diaz 1 was the only one of the nine children in his family to go to postsecondary education. Most of his siblings didn't finish middle school. His siblings "are really happy for him. (They tell him) at least you are doing something we didn't do (getting a college education). They are amazed at how I can read for hours."

When Diaz 5W came to the US, and started college, her husband was very supportive of her college attendance. He took care of their youngest child while she attended classes.

Diaz 2W felt support from her siblings:

Well, we have to go back a little bit. I will tell you one thing, when my older sister found out I was pregnant and I was going to have to quit high school. Have to because in those days they didn't let you go to school when you were pregnant. She hit me over the head, just slightly, and said, "of all the people, I thought you going to be the one that would make it. That you wouldn't do something stupid like this." That

was her thought all the way through. And she still thinks that I could be anything that I want to be, and she would support it, you know. My younger brothers, they still look at me, and this is really hard to understand why because they are the ones that have gone on further to school, but they still think that I am the one who has the most knowledge. They always refer back to as their resource for what ever they are doing. So I think they would be very supportive. All of them, even, my mother had 2 other children, there are 7 of us, even the younger ones they were very, very supportive...In a sense,...if they could right now, they would push me to go on to school. But none of them have the resources to really financially help me out, so that would be the only thing now.

Diaz 4W seemed to have the least enthusiasm for attending postsecondary education. Whether this was due to the disappointing result in her first community college class (to be discussed under question 5), or due to the neutrality of her parents and lack of sibling support (she was an only child) is not known. Diaz 4W said: "They (her parents) were OK with it (attending community college). Unless they see me graduating, they really don't care, unless I finish through with it. They always wanted me to have a career, or to have something for me." Diaz 4W did not feel a lack of support from her parents, but they weren't specifically encouraging her to attend college. They would applaud her success if she graduated from college, but were noncommittal otherwise.

The participants consistently brought up the support they experienced from their siblings, or other relatives. They were proud of the encouragement and positive reaction of family members to their college attendance.

### *Discussion and Interpretation of Family Influence*

None of the Mexican immigrants cited family support as the motivation for them to attend postsecondary education. For each one it appeared to be a personal desire, whether based on a dream, as in Diaz 1, or on employment needs as in Diaz 2W and Diaz 5W. However, it was apparent that the sibling and spousal support were appreciated. Parental attitudes towards college attendance did not seem to influence the participants.

### *College Experience*

The responses to question 5, *What was your experience at college?*, (see Table 15), were somewhat disturbing to me, as a US citizen and fourth-generation Californian.

Table 15. Summary of Responses to Question 5: College Experience

| Question 5: What was your experience at college? |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  | Friendly students and supportive staff | Discrimination in educational institution |
| Diaz 1   | yes                                    | yes (college teachers)                    |
| Diaz 2W  |  | yes (high school)                         |
| Diaz 3   | yes                                    | no  |
| Diaz 4W  | yes                                    | no  |
| Diaz 5W  | yes                                    | yes (college students)                    |

The Mexican participants reported that, in at least one of the education

institutions each attended, if not all schools: elementary school, secondary school, and college, they had experienced either racism or discrimination at the hands of either teachers or other students. This was true for six of the nine Mexicans whom I interviewed, which led to a theme.

- *Mexican immigrants experienced racism and discrimination in California educational institutions.*

Regardless, the stories of racism and discrimination, though a concern to the participants, seemed not to stop them from pursuing their education, nor did it seem to engender animosity toward their new country.

Diaz 1 related that the teachers in the colleges were very mixed in their reactions to him as a Mexican immigrant. Some just thought he was a “regular” student and when they found out his story they thought what he had achieved was “wonderful.” Other teachers didn’t care and just wanted the students to do whatever was necessary to get the class work done. Some teachers, stated Diaz 1, “think you are stupid because of your accent” and treated him like a real “jerk.” “Some teachers have no empathy for people learning the language; they have arrogance, are discriminating and not fully accepting.” As he finally learned the language, he was “shocked” at what he then understood as degrading comments. He added that he finds discrimination everywhere. He thought people just don’t like Mexicans. This experience was also expressed by two of the other participants whom I interviewed but who did not meet my criteria. Diaz 1 went on to say that he found teachers who had never been out of the country to be insensitive to ESL students, and they did not care about the hardships



of immigrants who were learning another language. He said only the English teachers “are helpful and give you extra time.” He had received positive feedback and encouragement from the ESL teachers who told him not to let “bad teachers” discourage him. Diaz 1’s experiences were similar to two others interviewed who met the criteria for this study.

Diaz 2W did not report racism or discrimination at the college level. In high school, the counselors told her that since it appeared to them that colleges would be too expensive, part of the racial discrimination against Mexicans, that she should just get a job after graduation. She said her own children were given the same messages by the high school counselors. Fortunately, she ignored the discouragement, and counseled her children to ignore it also. She had a great deal of experience with racism while in elementary and secondary school where she said the children and teachers were “horrible” to her when she first arrived and started in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. She overcame those experiences, was a straight “A” student by 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and became the class president. She went on to tell the story of her brother’s experience with discrimination when he was a young teenager. I am reporting this story as I believe it influenced Diaz 2W and is an example of the struggle she and her siblings had to overcome as immigrants in California.

My brother who was an officer in the Navy, he was the one I think who had it hardest because he was darker skinned than I was. (As a child) they (the other children) wanted to touch him to see what he was made of. He was picked up by immigration one time, coming home from school. This was...a few years after we had been here some time, five or six (years). He was in high school...He was held in detention in another city and they didn’t even give him a chance to call home. The

reason they picked him was because he looked like a “wetback.” Lucky for us we had already gone through the process of becoming naturalized citizens and all that. But we didn’t carry our stuff around.

Her experiences in college took place over several years:

I went to a lot of certification (programs to) become...certified, natural family planning. I did training to become an AIDS counselor. I did blood testing. I did a lot of stuff, you know, as pregnancy consultations. All that I could within that program I was working in. So I felt that I was doing about as much (as) I could with my limitations. So it didn’t come up again, going back to school, didn’t come up again, until this job that I am in now, being a...we used to be called eligibility workers, now we’re called human services specialists. But to get that human services specialist title and the pay you have to have 24 units of social service classes, anything that’s psycho-social. And I didn’t have enough so I had to go back—took 24 units at American River College, did those while I worked, while getting paid, so that was easy, and that’s all I did....I did really good in school when I thought I couldn’t. Most of the time when I have gone to school I have been able to get straight A’s, without difficulty and without trying very hard. So I figure if I try very hard, I probably could do the work (required for medical school).

Diaz 5W thought her fellow students were a little discriminating and unfriendly because of her limited English.

Sometimes I (felt) a little discrimination from my classmates. (If) some of them (could) speak Spanish probably I could (have) talk(ed) with them a lot or share(d) ideas. (I was) probably (discriminated against) for the language. They never told me, but I feel a little discrimination.

Although racism was reported by three of the participants, only Diaz 1 found college teachers to be discriminating. Diaz 5 felt her fellow students were discriminating, but the rest of the racist experiences were in secondary school.

Despite the reports of racism in general, the immigrants felt their fellow students and the college faculty and staff were friendly and supportive of them. They

experienced understanding teachers who supported their success in college. It is not contradictory for the next theme to reflect these positive experiences.

- *College students and faculty were friendly and supportive.*

Diaz 3 was the only one who found everybody to be friendly and helpful both in secondary school and in college. He described his experience in the community college, "Yeah, everyone was friendly. They (were) friendly all the times. I got no problems. I (thought)...it's not going to be like high school. It has to be something serious. I was kind of afraid, but still I was there. It was a good experience." This could be, in part, to Diaz 3's easy-going attitude and personable nature. He, himself, was very friendly.

Diaz 2W's experience with the faculty at the community college was neutral:

They were not non-supportive. They just didn't go out of their way to guide you. And I think it was because I was an older student. They worked different with the younger student, the ones who were just starting out of high school, starting. Both my nieces and my sister are still going to (college); they have gone back to school and they find it completely different. They've gotten a lot of help.

Diaz 5W, On the other hand, found all of her teachers to be friendly and understanding of her situation and her English limitations.

I...started taking my ESL classes the 2nd year that I came...In the ESL program, like Ms. Din (a teacher we both know) is working. I went (to) the Cosumnes River College then I took ESL classes, ECE (Early Childhood Education) classes, child development. (It was a) good (experience). (It was) hard (for me). (With) my (limited) English, finally (I) could finish the classes...I got two certificates now in child development but I couldn't finish my degree...(College was) different (then expected). The language (was a challenge). They (the teachers) were always really nice with me. They always understood my situation,

my English (limitations).

Diaz 4W liked the class and the overall experience of attending college.

However, she pointed out some of the difficulties in maneuvering the different systems of education, Mexican and US:

I liked it. The teacher was really nice. Most of all the students were...working or they had other things to do. It was a good experience. Because of the class, I really liked it. We were learning about culture, about minorities, about a lot of things. It was a really good experience... Since I was just taking one class, I felt comfortable. I went there (for) the whole class. Sometimes we had a field trip. We had a class to go see a religion, the Sikh religion. And it was interesting and I did feel like part of the group and part of the class. It (was) just when it came time to do, not the test, the paper, it was like, I don't remember how it's called...in the little blue book. So I probably didn't know how to express myself. So I expressed myself (with) my point of view instead of just making (the answer) short...I wrote what I thought about what they asked, you know this is this. ...I (was) not used to studying. If I study I try to understand it and then I transmit it in my own words, I don't...copy it exactly the same (as on the) page...well that's easier. For me it's easier to copy it and learn it word for word, but then I won't understand it....So he didn't give me a good grade (she thought this was because she wrote about her own ideas rather than what the book said).

Diaz 4W indicated that her frustrations were as much about not understanding the teacher's expectations, as her lack of familiarity with the US postsecondary educational system.

### *Discussion and Interpretation of College Experiences*

For the most part the Mexican immigrants I interviewed had a positive experience in college. They were, as mentioned earlier, all interested in going back to college if the right circumstances presented themselves. There were some difficulties

such as the discrimination Diaz 5W sensed with her classmates, or as Diaz 4W described when she didn't understand the instructor's expectations for class assignments and tests. However, these somewhat negative experiences did not deter the immigrants too much from thoughts of returning to college.

### *Institutional Response*

The experiences of the Mexicans reported as they answered question 6, *What was the institutional response to you as a Mexican?*, were included support and disregard (see Table 16).

Table 16. Summary of Responses to Question 6: Institutional Response

| Question 6: What was the institutional response to you as a Mexican? |                                     |                                |  |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
|  | Inconsistent institutional response |                                |  |
|  | Active support                      | Disregard from the institution | Poor counseling or academic advisement |
| Diaz 1   |                                     |                                |  |
| Diaz 2W  |                                     | yes                            | yes                                    |
| Diaz 3   |                                     | yes                            | yes                                    |
| Diaz 4W  | yes                                 |                                | yes                                    |
| Diaz 5W  | yes                                 |                                |  |

Each participant had a unique experience with the community college where he or she enrolled. The perception of whether the administration and institution were supportive or otherwise depended on the comfort level of the student in the culture,

with the US educational system and her or his personal characteristics. One theme in this section is the wide range of experiences the participants reported, from active support to disregard, from the postsecondary educational institutions.

- *Institutional responses were inconsistent.*

Diaz 4W and Diaz 5 claimed the institutions were actually helpful and supportive. Diaz 4W had the benefit of enrolling with an American-born cousin who was familiar with the American education system.

Well...I had help because I didn't go by myself. My cousin went with me and we got an assessment test at the same time and we went to a counselor and she enrolled me in the classes; she told me which classes to take and I just went and paid for them. And now with the computer...you can go and have access to. It is easier. But when you first do it and you're...just asking (it can be confusing). But it is fine. I think they are helpful as long as...they have counselors available so they just tell you what to enroll (in) and you just check the hours...it's pretty easy and cheap, too.

She did point out some of the challenges though: "You come here then...you have so many options that you don't know how the system works."

Diaz 5W was recently in the California welfare to work program, CalWORKs. She said that CalWORKs on the community college campus helped her to obtain financial aid and gave her counseling to take the classes she needed for various child-care certificates. Prior to CalWORKs she had enrolled in community college on her own (as mentioned in question 3) to get her Associate degree in Early Childhood Development. Diaz 5W also found the counselors and registrars very helpful.

(The administration was) very helpful. Yes, I got financial aid (from the college) and child care (through CalWORKs). They (the welfare office)

called me (about CalWORKs). Before CalWORKs (I was) in another school. I paid (for) my classes (myself) and I start(ed) DQ University in Woodland. I start(ed) there because a teacher that I knew there had a big group for...women to prepare us for child development (child care). Then I start(ed) my first class over there, but after that I was in (the) CalWORKs program and they sent me to Consumnes (River College). I was (attending) on Saturdays only (at D-Q University-a tribal college in California). I start(ed) my class (at) 8:00 a. m. to 4:00 p.m.

Diaz 1 did not single out the administration for his comments about discrimination. It appeared that he viewed the administration as neutral. He received financial aid and transferred successfully to a state university before he had to dropout of postsecondary education.

Institutional support or disinterest in the Mexican immigrants was of minor impact. The most difficult aspect of institutional response seemed to be either getting good counseling, or finding a counselor, as experienced by Diaz 2W and 3.

- *Poor counseling or academic guidance was a hindrance.*

The lack of administrative guidance to the first time college students, the immigrants was demonstrated primarily through the interviews with Diaz 2W and Diaz 3. Diaz 1 and Diaz 2 found the institutions and institutional processes difficult to navigate. Diaz 2W said she thinks she would have been better off without the counselors. "Supposedly they had a woman's center. (It was) supposed to...give you an orientation as to the ins and outs of getting back to school. They were not very helpful. I think I was a lot better off just doing it on my own." As mentioned in question 5, she reported that the staff did not go out of their way to help her; neither

were they unsupportive, just neutral. "They (the faculty) were not non-supportive. They just didn't go out of their way to guide you." She chose not to apply for financial aid, believing it to be too much paper work, despite her need. "But it is the expense that holds me back. I know they say oh, there's lots of programs that could help you, but it's like, again it's that thing that you have to turn this form in, or that form in, the money doesn't come in; I'd rather work for my dollar."

Diaz 2W also reported that she thought the counselors gave the younger people more help when she was going to community college; but her daughters have found that counselors on the campus are much more helpful than she had found them to be, and age doesn't now seem to be a factor.

And I think it was because I was an older student. They worked different with the younger student, the ones who were just starting out of high school. Both my nieces and my sister are still going to (college). They have gone back to school and they find it completely different. They've gotten a lot of help.

Diaz 3 said the institution was neither helpful nor a problem. He never met a counselor though he tried several times. However, it appeared that he made all of his attempts to meet the counselor as a drop-in student without an appointment. Not surprisingly, the counselor was always busy or not available. The one time Diaz 3 made an appointment he had to call the counselor and cancel it.

No, (I had no problems with administration)...I just went to my classes and that was pretty much it. I got no problems with the administration. I always wanted to talk to a counselor but he was never there. But still it worked out all right...He was sick or whatever. I never tried (to make an appointment) and then, I guess I made one appointment and then I (couldn't) make it.



Diaz 3 also said he did not receive any financial aid, although he likely would have qualified for full aid. However, he did not apply for any, even though he knew student aid existed. He said he didn't think he would get a grant. "No, I (did) not apply for any grants...I know about it but it's like I don't know if they are going to help me out or not. I never applied."

It appears that there may be a connection between counseling and financial aid.

### *Discussion and Interpretation of Institutional Responses*

Lack of counseling for the immigrant may be the difference between staying in college or dropping out. It is through counseling that the students are referred to, and supported in completing paper work for financial aid. Counseling will guide the student to appropriate courses and track the student's progress. The problems identified by Diaz 2W, 3, and 4W might have been addressed if good counseling and guidance had been a part of their initial experiences in college. It was helpful when the immigrant went to the campus and followed the enrollment steps with a friend, as did Diaz 4W. But, initial enrollment support and even preliminary counseling for Diaz 4W did not prevent her from dropping out. Diaz 4W described her frustration with her poor grade and inability to understand what the teacher wanted on the test. Some of this negative result could have been alleviated with follow-up counseling.

California Tomorrow (2002) described findings with which several of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants I interviewed would agree, "Despite their (immigrants) significant presence in the system (community college), immigrant

students' unique needs remain relatively invisible and under-addressed" (p. 12). Some of these "unique" needs were described by Diaz 4W as she tried to understand what the instructor wanted when she wrote in the "blue book." The different methods of instruction and teacher expectations, compared to the immigrants' experiences in their native countries, were confusing. There is often a mistaken belief that schools, teaching, and colleges are universal in their practices. If institutions and teachers in the new country do not recognize that the immigrants come from different educational experiences and expectations, they are unlikely to address the dissimilarity so that the immigrant student can adapt and succeed. Counseling for the immigrants seems critical to their success in postsecondary education.

### *Leaving College Prior to Completion of Program*

The Mexican immigrants' responses to question 7, *Why did you leave college before completion?*, were different than those of the Bangladeshis, who showed family economics as a major factor in leaving college early (see Table 17).

Table 17. Summary of Responses to Question 7: Leaving College Prior to Program Completion

| Question 7: Why did you leave college before completion? |                         |                             |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
|  | Family responsibilities | Lack of finances for living |
| Diaz 1   | yes (father's health)   |                             |
| Diaz 2W  | yes                     | yes                         |
| Diaz 3   |                         | yes                         |
| Diaz 4W  |                         |                             |
| Diaz 5W  |                         | yes                         |

There was no clearly identified theme among the Mexican responses. At the best, it appears that family pressures or responsibilities were factors in three cases.

- *Family responsibilities impacted decision to leave college prior to completion of a program.*

Diaz 1 had to take time off periodically while working on his Associate degree to earn money. He went back to Mexico two years ago to help with the care-taking of his father who was seriously ill. He spent the year before his father died taking him to doctors, buying medicines, and supporting his mother. His siblings all worked and sent money to support his parents at that time. After his father passed away last year, Diaz 1 returned to the US. He said he had about one year left at the state university to get his Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. However, he had not yet been able to return to school. He was looking for a job and hoped to enroll in the university again, but tuition had just been greatly increased.

Diaz 2W said that although she went to community college, and obtained several vocational certificates, she had always wanted to be a doctor. However, when her children were young her mother discouraged her from attending school full-time, or going away to school as she had wanted.

My mother...even though she was not supportive in that sense, because of the cultural thing, (that I should take care of) my kids, she would have been supportive of me had I been a teenager wanting to continue on to college. But a mother has to be a mother, a wife has to be a wife...that's what you chose to do, that's what you're gonna do.

She felt it was too late and planned to simply volunteer in a hospital when she retired.

(I) didn't go any further (past the 24 units required by the county to be

upgraded to the position of human service specialist). And I think that's all I'm going to be able to do. What I think, because I do have this (feeling), when I walk in a clinic or hospital my heart beats fast, it really feels good to be there. I think when I retire from the county I'll just volunteer in a hospital or something. That will give me the pleasure I am looking for I think.

The family necessities of taking care of an ill parent and remaining close to home to raise children deterred college completion for two of the immigrants.

- *Lack of money for living expenses indirectly influenced decision to drop out.*

Each Mexican immigrant had to dropout of postsecondary education for a different reason. If we examine what is behind the reasons given, money appears to be at the top of the list in terms of needs. Diaz 1 had to keep working to attend college. Although he dropped out temporarily to attend to his father, he hadn't re-enrolled because he didn't have money. Diaz 2W said if she had all the money in the world, she would go to medical school, even now. Diaz 3 was very open about his need for money and that was his primary reason for dropping out. Diaz 4W was the only one who did not clearly reference the need for a job or money. However, the class was difficult for her, in part because she was working eight to five and felt the stress of trying to get there on time and balance her life. Diaz 5W was a welfare recipient and therefore, under state law, had limited time in which to find employment. She was focused on the number of units she had accrued and how close she was to getting her Associate degree. Money would have allowed her to get the degree rather than giving it up and working.

Diaz 3 said he could not afford to continue at the community college. He had

no job and needed money. As he said in Question 4,

I was expecting to ...graduate from junior college in something, sure, but I mean it was kind of expensive for me. (I) just drop(ped) out. I got no money to go for it, so I just dropout. Like I told my mom, if I had the money I'd go back but I don't have money.

His answer to Question 6 is applicable here. Although he was aware of financial aid, he did not investigate the feasibility of using it. "No, I (did) not apply for any grants...I know about it but it's like I don't know if they are going to help me out or not. I never applied." He would like to return for a short course and a vocational certificate that would lead to a good paying job if he had the finances.

I (would) just go for a short career. I don't know (in what major), anything they got. I don't know right now what kind of (short-term) classes they got for careers. Something like that (vocational). That's what I like (computers). I mean I can work on any computer. Like right now I can take a 401 and put it back together and see it work. I just learned myself. I haven't looked for computer jobs yet.

He wanted to do something with languages as he found it fairly easy to learn to speak English. "And I like languages too. I (would) like to learn another language, but it's kinda hard. I would like to learn another language, another couple (of languages)." As I pointed out in the discussion of Question 6, more aggressive guidance from the institution was needed by Diaz 2W.

Diaz 4W said she really didn't have an educational goal. She was interested in languages and running her own business. She was looking into getting a real estate license. On one hand, she said she would like to go back and major in languages, but she was concerned about the English and mathematics requirements as she actually

thought she was doing satisfactorily in the one class she took but failed. She was concerned that she would not be able to pass any of those requirements.

I never had a goal like a career in mind. I don't know. My cousin was going so it sounded interesting...(I thought) let me go there...It was fun and I liked it. But then I started going and it's like when you start doing exercise and then you stop and you don't go back unless you have to do it...If I can't commit to something then I just don't do it. So if I'm not going to commit to something I'd rather not do it then start all these things and not finish them. I'd rather just do one thing and then OK. I was going to start enrolling, but when I came from (a vacation in) Mexico it was already...spring, so I came (back)...in February (and) classes were already full. And I now have to go to English and math and I don't like that. Probably I want to take some language classes but they do not have Italian there. I think Italian would be...closer, easier for me since my first language is Spanish. If I go to French they are going to teach me in English and that isn't my first language. I like languages and anything that has to do with social science and all that.

She also found the logistics of working and going to school at the same time challenging, although she did not say this was why she dropped out.

So I started going, but it was kind of difficult because I was working 8 to 5 and then I was going in the afternoons and the parking (at Sac City was difficult). I took one class and then I just did one semester, I didn't do the rest. It was interesting. I liked it, but it was kind of difficult still to go and be at that level with so (many) years without studying without even opening a book. It was just hard to (adjust).

As noted earlier, Diaz 5W was on the CalWORKs welfare program which has a philosophy of work first, and a time limit of financial benefits for only 60 months in a life-time; she was forced to get a job and dropout of school before completing her Associate degree. She received two certificates, but wasn't able to finish her major. It was apparent that she would have liked to get her degree.

(I have) not yet (finished my degree). I couldn't finish because I was in the CalWORKs program but the program wanted (me to) get a job. Then I couldn't go later because I needed to work first. Because CalWORKs needed me to get a job. For that reason I could not finish my program. Probably I have more than 40 units. It was my last (semester) and I couldn't finish. I got two certificates now in child development but I couldn't finish my degree. They start(ed) counting my units, but (because of ) the time (I must spend) on my job I couldn't do it.

### *Discussion and Interpretation of Leaving College Before Completion*

The Mexican immigrants discussed many reasons for leaving college prior to completion. It wasn't just the money for fees or tuition that was the challenge, but money for the family, to be sent home to take care of the parents, to feed the children of the family, and to subsist on while going to school. Interestingly enough, only one of the five participants specifically identified money as the primary reason for dropping out. The other four blamed cultural influences, family needs, state welfare program (CalWORKs) requirements and, a lack of a goal.

### *Other Common Experiences*

It appears that if an immigrant had the goal and determination to attend postsecondary education that they carry this resolve forward to their children. Table 18 shows the common experiences of the Mexican immigrants.

Table 18. Summary of Other Common Experiences

| Other Themes: | College for children | Regret not finishing postsecondary | Still hopes to finish educational goals |
|---------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Diaz 1        |                      |                                    | yes                                     |
| Diaz 2W       | yes                  | yes                                |   |
| Diaz 3        |                      | yes                                | yes                                     |
| Diaz 4W       |                      |                                    | yes                                     |
| Diaz 5W       | yes                  | yes                                | yes                                     |

- *Further education for their children.*

The two participants with children said they were supportive and encouraged their children to go to college and get degrees. This was demonstrated in that the college age (or older) children of these participants are currently in college or have finished their degrees. As Diaz 5W said, "I encourage her (eldest daughter who is currently enrolled at Cosumnes River College) every day to go to school, to finish her school. Sometimes I told my daughter, 'my mother always...encourage(d) us to do something (going to college)...especially my sisters, then they have a career.'"

Diaz 2W was committed to assisting her five children to get through college:

Well, my son's a geography major...he's almost done with school. My daughters have all their community college, they're not finished (with college); they're (still) going. But they're still there. One of them just got an AA, but that's all she wanted. But my other daughter who also has two children, she's still going to school. She...was in the nursing program and changed her mind midway. She wanted to do...medical records and coding, or something like that. She's almost done. One semester, and she'll be done. She had an AA degree already. She's



almost done with her Bachelor's degree. And my oldest, the oldest of my boys, has his own business. He works with computers, web pages. He practices out of Las Vegas, and is doing really good. (He is) still in school, still taking courses. He finished junior college and didn't go straight into a four college because he wasn't sure what he wanted to do...One of the things that I do, which didn't happen for me, I take care of my grandchildren so my daughters can go to school, or my sons. When I am not at work I am babysitting, every weekend and evenings. And I don't care. I will do it as long as I have to so they can go to school.

In these cases, the mothers encouraged and supported their children to attend college.

Among the Mexican immigrants, only one really expressed regret for dropping out. For the most part, they still had hopes for returning and finishing their educational goals, or were resigned to their situation.

- *Regret for not finishing postsecondary education.*

Diaz 2W, 3 and 5W indirectly expressed regret that they had not finished postsecondary education. Diaz 2W was bitter about her lost opportunity to attend Stanford's Physician's Assistant program. She had very much wanted to go on to medical school and claimed that if money were not a factor she would go to medical school even now. Diaz 3 wished he could have stayed in community college and wanted to return to get vocational training. Diaz 5W regretted being forced to dropout of community college. She showed me her transcripts and voiced frustration that she had worked hard for her certificates but had not been able to complete her Associate degree.

Hope, as noted in the discussion on the Bangladeshis' responses, is a strong sentiment within immigrant communities. It may be that to immigrate one must have

hope for a better future.

- *Hope to finish their educational goals, despite a history of dropping out of further education.*

As expressed in the section that discusses dropping out of postsecondary education, each of the immigrants, given the resources, indicated that they would have finished their degrees or educational goals. Four of the Mexican participants hoped to return to school.

Diaz 1 said he hoped to return to California State University, Sacramento in the fall of 2004. Diaz 3 indicated that if he had the finances he would be enrolled in the community college for a vocational program.

Diaz 4W seemed a bit unsure of her goals. On one hand, she indicated that she was intimidated by mathematics and English classes at the community college and therefore might not return. However, at other times in her conversation she voiced an interest in studying languages in the community college. She was sure that she wanted to get her realtor's license, which might or might not lead her back to a college campus.

Diaz 5W, perturbed by the CalWORKs requirement that she sacrifice school for a job, seemed motivated to return to college once the family finances stabilized. Of all the Mexican immigrants interviewed, Diaz 1 and Diaz 5W seemed to be the most committed to completing educational goals. They were both close to completion; Diaz 1 was to be a senior at the four-year state university if he enrolled in the fall of 2004, and Diaz 5W showed she only need one more semester to get her Associate degree.

Table 19 shows the comparison of the themes developed from an analysis of responses to the seven interview questions for the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants. The themes are arranged for the reader for easy comparison. Table 19 segues to Phase two where the sub-research questions examine the similarities and differences of the experiences of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants. It appears that there are almost as many similar experiences as there are different. Each interview question resulted in at least one theme that was alike for both immigrant groups. Institutional support, interview Question 6, was the only question which had no common theme that the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrant participants shared.

Table 19. Themes Identified in Phase One Analysis: Responses to Interview Questions

| Interview Questions        | Bangladeshi Immigrant Themes   | Mexican Immigrant Themes   |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Reasons for Immigration | Economics motivated the Bangladeshis to immigrate to the UK  | Economics motivated the Mexicans to immigrate to the US  |
|                            | Historical connections between Bangladesh and the UK were important factors  |  |
|                            | Arranged marriages to Welsh Bangladeshis encouraged immigration  |  |
| 2. Cultural Identity       | The Bangladeshi immigrants viewed themselves as bi-cultural  | The Mexican immigrants viewed themselves as bi-cultural  |
|                            | Bangladeshi culture, language, and Islamic religious values were important to the immigrants   | Mexican traditions and holidays were important to the Mexican immigrants   |
| 3. College Attendance      | The Bangladeshis attended FE college to improve their job skills through English fluency or job-related credentials and enhance employment opportunities | The Mexican immigrants attended college to improve their job skills through job-related credentials and enhance employment opportunities |
|                            |  | The Mexican immigrants attended community college by choice and aspiration   |
|                            |  | Experienced poor college guidance in California high schools   |
| 4. Family Influence        | Family support influenced the participants' participation in postsecondary education   | Sibling or family support, other than that of parents, seemed important to the immigrants  |
|                            |  | Lack of parental approval for college attendance   |
| 5. College Experience      | College students and faculty were friendly and supportive  | College students and faculty were friendly and supportive  |
|                            | The Bangladeshi immigrants did not experience racism and discrimination in UK educational institutions   | The Mexican immigrants experienced racism and discrimination in California educational institutions                                      |
| 6. Institutional support   | The UK postsecondary education institutions were supportive  | The California postsecondary institutional responses were inconsistent   |
|                            |  | Poor counseling or academic guidance was a hindrance   |
| 7. College Leaving         | Family responsibilities impacted decision to leave college prior to completion of a program  | Family responsibilities impacted decision to leave college prior to completion of a program  |

| Interview Questions      | Bangladeshi Immigrant Themes   | Mexican Immigrant Themes   |
|--------------------------|--|--|
|                          |  | Economic needs of the family superseded the educational goals                                  |
| Other Common Experiences | Further education for their children or younger siblings                                       | Further education for their children   |
|                          | Regret for not finishing postsecondary education   | Regret for not finishing postsecondary education   |
|                          | Hope to finish their educational goals, despite a history of dropping out of further education | Hope to finish their educational goals, despite a history of dropping out of further education |

### Phase Two Findings: Responses to Research Sub-Questions

The research sub-questions, developed in Chapter three, are addressed in phase two of the research findings. The research sub-questions were as follows:

1. How are the experiences of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrant early-leaving students similar or different?
2. How are the postsecondary institutional responses to the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants, as portrayed by the participants, similar or different?
3. What commonalities in the cultures of the Mexican and Bangladeshi immigrants might lead to similar experiences in the postsecondary education systems?
4. What commonalities in the UK and US postsecondary systems might result in similar experiences for the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants?

This section proceeds with a cross-cultural comparison of Bangladeshi

immigrants early-leaving students in Wales and Mexican immigrants early-leaving students in California, examining similarities and differences. The discussion is based on the themes developed in phase one through the analysis of the conversational interviews with the immigrants. Excerpts of quotations, which may have been used in phase one, will be used to illustrate the comparisons. The intention is to refresh the reader's memory and focus the attention on the exact reference to the experience

*Sub-question 1: How are the experiences of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrant early-leaving students similar or different?*

This section will compare the postsecondary education experiences of the Mexican and Bangladeshi immigrants. There were many common experiences encountered by both groups.

### *Similar Experiences*

There were four common themes when the similarity of experiences of the two immigrant groups was compared. As I developed Table 19, the commonalities and differences of both groups was apparent. Referring to research sub-question 1, I searched for the similar common experiences and arrived at the following themes.

- *Economic opportunity motivated both groups to immigrate.*

Bangladesh was on the list of the world's poorest countries, according to the United Nations, 2003 (Pearson Education, 2004). Mexico, though not identified as among the world's poorest countries, is considerably poorer than its border country, the US. It is not a surprise that people from Mexico would want to cross the border to their neighbor where they could find better jobs, increased income, and more

opportunity for education and careers. According to those interviewed in this study, the unemployment and under-employment rate in Mexico is high. However, because Mexico does not pay unemployment benefits to its citizens, the actual unemployment rate of the country is difficult to determine (Licona, 2001, p.1). The following quotes, though noted in the answers to interview Question 1 by both groups, highlight the interest of the immigrants in economic opportunity.

Ali 3, “we’ll earn some money and go back home.”

Like Ali 3, Ali 4’s father was a steel worker in the UK, presumably having immigrated for a better paying job than he could obtain in Bangladesh. “I think he came here for economic reasons.”

Ali 5, “the UK was seen to be the place to make a fortune.”

Diaz 1, “I just wanted to make some money. I was looking for a better future.”

Diaz 2W, “in the United States you can have the education that you want, there’s food for the taking, there’s work, all that you could want.”

Diaz 3, “it’s better opportunity over here than over there.”

Diaz 4W, “the job wasn’t that good for my Dad like it was in Tijuana. So we decided to come over here.”

Diaz 5W, “but our economical situation was really bad in Mexico.”

Although there are different reasons to immigrate, including political dissension, religious persecution, and refugees from war, none of the Bangladeshi or Mexican immigrants identified these rationales as their reason for immigration. Their migrations were irrefutably for economic opportunity. Even the arranged marriages of

the Bangladeshis were linked to economic opportunity sought by the family which already lived in Wales but who brought over approved spouses.

- *Bi-culturalism was the predominant cultural identity of Bangladeshis and the Mexicans.*

Seven of the ten - four Bangladeshis and three Mexicans - viewed themselves as bi-cultural. These seven felt that they belonged equally to both their native country and their new country. All of the participants interviewed were glad to be in their new country, and had no desire to leave it or move back to their native country. The reader may have noted some of the following excerpts in the discussions of interview

Question 2.

Ali 1, "Both cultures."

Ali 2, "my mind is half Bengali. Not (all) British."

Ali 4, "I live in two cultures."

Ali 5, "as British Bangladeshi."

Diaz 1, "I already got (my) citizenship. I did this so I could contribute and participate in political decisions. This is my adopted country."

Diaz 3, "None of them. Just myself and that's it. Nothing like American, or like Mexican."

Diaz 5W, "I share with my family both cultures."

Bi-culturalism is a form of adaptation, where the immigrant retains his roots, traditions, customs and frequently the language from home, at the same time adopting the language and customs of the new country



- *Families supported college attendance of the immigrants.*

Eight of the ten Bangladeshi and Mexican participants were supported or encouraged by family to attend college. The following quotations, seen before in the answers to question 4, focus on the family support to the participant attending college:

Ali 1, “quietly support, not strong support, just quietly.”

Ali 2, “So my wife says, you come (to class), you now (do) hard work, you going to school every day.”

Ali 5, “(his wife) actually wanted him to study more.”

Diaz 1, parents said, “go for it (education), if you want it,” and his siblings, “at least you are doing something we didn’t do.”

Diaz 2W, “if they (siblings) could right now, they would push me to go on to school.”

Diaz 3, “She’s (aunt) the only one who pushing me to go back to school.”

Diaz 4W, “They were OK with it. Unless they see me graduating, they really don’t care unless I finish through with it. They always wanted me to have a career, or to have something for me.”

Diaz 5W, “my mom always told me ‘go and finish your career’ (college preparation for a career).”

The primary family supporters of college attendance were spouses and siblings. Only one immigrant mentioned a parent as encouraging further education. From my point of view, an especially insightful observation about parent support for

postsecondary education came from Diaz 2W. When she was asked for recommendations to be made to postsecondary education institutions she honed in on family support,

I think that family support, more than anything else, that you really need it. The acceptance that higher education, by people who never had any...a family that has never been to school...They (the parents) think fifth grade education is higher education. So, it is very difficult for them to push it to go any higher than high school.

Diaz 2W seemed to feel that if parents have not experienced higher education, they will be satisfied when their children surpass the parental academic achievements.

Ali 3 would agree with Diaz 2W about the importance of family support, "You need a bit of educational background (from the parents)."

- *College students and faculty were friendly and supportive.*

Eight of the ten interviewees also found the experience at college to include friendly students and/or supportive staff.

Ali 1, ESL teacher, "Mary very good; enjoys Mary's class."

Ali 2, "The teachers (are) very good and the staff (is) good. The students (are) very friendly."

Ali 5, "The institution was quite welcoming to foreign students."

Diaz 1, ESL teachers in the community college "are helpful and give you extra time."

Diaz 3, "Yeah, every one was friendly. They was friendly all the times, I got no problems."

Diaz 4W, “The teacher was really nice.”

Diaz 5W, “They were always really nice with me (teachers).”

Aside from a few negative responses from fellow college students (Diaz 5W), and a few non-ESL teachers (Diaz 1), the colleges were perceived as welcoming and sympathetic environments.

### *Different Experiences*

Analyzing the experiences of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants revealed four major differences. Some of these variations were due to cultural distinctions between the Bangladeshis and the Mexicans. Other differentiations in responses to experiences could not be explained without further research.

- *Mexican immigrants had individual aspirations to attend college; Bangladeshi immigrants were compelled to attend college by forces other than themselves, such as job centers, secondary school college-track, or wives.*

All of the Mexicans interviewed had decided on an individual basis to attend college. They generally wanted to attend for educational or career goals. Only one of the five attended for ESL study. The Bangladeshis, on the other hand, did not appear so academically ambitious. One Bangladeshi attended further education because the Career Center told him to go for ESL; and two of the Bangladeshis enrolled in university because the secondary school had prepared them, and subsequently directed them to register in postsecondary education institutions. One of those participants, Ali 4, wasn't sure he had a goal when he enrolled. Only Ali 5 seemed driven by an educational goal.

Diaz 2W, "Then when life got to be a little too difficult and jobs didn't come very easy I went for, tried to go for some training, some college."

Diaz 3 wanted to get a vocational certificate at community college in a short span of time. "I (would) just go (to college) for a short career (training course)."

Diaz 5W, decided to attend college because she had volunteered at her children's school for four years and thought she could get a degree and a paid position in a school. "It is for that reason I decide to get these ECE (Early Childhood Education) classes.

Ali 4 didn't remember making a conscious decision to attend university. "Mainstreamed, after that school, college...part time uni(versity)."

Ali 3 spoke honestly, "I didn't even think about it. I didn't even ask anyone why do I have to go there...it was just a natural thing."

Regardless of the motivation, or lack of thought when they registered in postsecondary education, it did not, by itself, keep the immigrants from leaving early. They all left college prior to obtaining degrees or achieving their educational goals.

- *Some Mexicans experienced racial discrimination; all Bangladeshis experienced racial tolerance.*

The finding of racial discrimination against the Mexican immigrants in the US was touched on in a study by Suzanne Model, "Non-white Origins, Anglo Destinations: Immigrants in the US and Britain" (Loury, Modood, & Teles, 2003, p. 3). Model was researching employer discrimination against minorities in the US and the UK. Model reported that in the US, employers treated minorities "better" and they

have greater advantages than minorities in the UK. She surmised that this may be due to a variety of variables, including the educational and social background of the minority immigrants in the US, but also to the civil rights laws that have been in effect much longer than in the UK, and are more stringent. She also referenced a social survey done in 1997 in four major US cities-Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta, and Philadelphia- in which employers were asked to rank various ethnic backgrounds according to social standing. In this survey “employers who distinguished among backgrounds usually ranked Asians above whites, placed Latinos in the middle and viewed blacks least favorably (Lim, 1999)” (Loury, Modood & Teles, 2003, p. 6).

Racism against Mexicans was also discussed in a qualitative research study by Behnke, Piercy and Diversi (2004) where they found through in-depth interviews of ten families that “racism was a difficult barrier for more than half the youth in the sample” (p. 28).

Apparently, this attitude has extended to the schools, where the Mexicans appear to be ranked lower socially than many other minorities in California. Two of the Mexicans experienced discrimination in college whereas none of the Bangladeshis experienced discrimination.

Diaz 5W, “sometimes I feel a little discrimination from my classmates.”

Diaz 1, “some teachers have no empathy for people learning a language-(the teachers) have some arrogance, discriminating and (are) not fully accepting (of the Mexican student).”

Ali 3, when asked if he had experienced racism, “not at all.”

Ali 2 when asked the same question responded, “no where in Wales.”

This different reaction to immigrants in Wales and California is briefly discussed in the Mexican immigrant section in the Response to Interview Question 5, the college experience. As referenced earlier, several research studies have uncovered erratic discrimination Mexican students may experience in school at any level, primary, secondary, or postsecondary. Why the Bangladeshis do not have the same experiences of discrimination in educational institutions is not clear in the literature. It did seem, from the conversations with the Bangladeshis, that the teachers and principals (in secondary education) took an active role in preventing racist actions by other students.

- *The Bangladeshi immigrants put family needs before individual educational goals; the Mexican immigrants did not sacrifice their educational goals for the same reasons.*

Although both cultures clearly valued family needs over individual goals, it was the Bangladeshis who most often had to act selflessly, giving up postsecondary education for the benefit of the parents and siblings.

Ali 3 reported as the eldest child when his father had heart surgery and could no longer work, “then when it came to me, well I’ve got to go out there and earn some money to support the family.”

Ali 4 had a similar experience as Ali 3, even though he had older brothers to help out, “I sacrificed my further education for the benefit of establishing my family (his parents and siblings).”

Diaz 1 reported similar pressures to take care of his parents (similar to the Bangladeshi experiences), but has managed to return to California with high hopes of finishing his education. “Family is first in my culture.”

On the other hand, Diaz 3, “but I mean it was kind of expensive for me.”

Diaz 5W, “I couldn’t finish because I was in the CalWORKs program but the program wanted (me to) get a job.”

Diaz 4W, “And I now have to go to English and math and I don’t like that.”

The Mexican immigrants interviewed, aside from Diaz 1, did not have to make the choices or sacrifices reported by Ali 3, Ali 4. As noted in Table 17, the Mexican immigrants left college for a variety of reasons.

- *The Mexicans prioritized traditions and holidays and spoke of their love for Mexico; Bangladeshi immigrants focused on language and religion as important cultural aspects to retain.*

It seemed that the Mexicans did not differentiate between their birth country and adopted country as much as the Bangladeshis when it came to cultural values as compared to cultural traditions. The Mexicans, perhaps because Mexico is so close to the US geographically, and the predominant religion, Catholicism, is similar to what they found in the US, focused more on Mexican traditions, and holidays than language and religious practice. For the Mexican participants, traditions included clothing and cultural practices such as the piñatas made by Diaz 3’s aunt, “She wants to make it bigger (her piñata business),” his aunt views herself as Mexican; and the dresses worn by Diaz 5W’s daughters for Cinco de Mayo, “For example when (there is) a chance

(to observe) traditions from Mexico I make my traditions here. For example this Cinco De Mayo my two girls wear Mexican dress in the school.”

To the Bangladeshis, who spoke more of the language and religious priorities, it was important to them to retain the roots of their heritage. The cultural practices of Bangladeshis are often linked to their religion, such as the abstinence of liquor by Ali 4, “My grandfather was a religious person and his advice was don’t have anything to do with alcohol. Don’t sell alcohol,” and taking their children to the mosque for weekly Koran lessons as done by Ali 3, “The one thing I always try to keep going is they (his children) are Muslim. There are some different things (between Bangladesh and Welsh cultures)...I take them to the mosque where they go.” These are practices not typical of their host country, Wales, which is predominantly Christian and where alcohol consumption is socially acceptable. As Ali 4 stated, “Sometimes my own local Welsh friends will go out. I’ll have a glass of orange juice, they’ll have a pint. Oh, why can’t you enjoy your night out or party without a drink? I can.” The Bangladeshis work to retain their heritage.

The Mexicans also expressed their strong love of Mexico. The Bangladeshis, though valuing their roots, were less inclined to speak of their birth country with such passion and referred to infrequent visits.

It was interesting to note that all of the Bangladeshis found language retention to be important. The Mexican immigrants did not seem to have the same connection to their language. Diaz 2W did not pass on her language to her children. She said they could understand it because their grandmother spoke only Spanish, but the children



could not speak it very well, “My mother doesn’t speak English, Spanish only. Yet they (Diaz 2W’s children) don’t know Spanish that well. They understand it real well, but don’t speak it well.” The other four Mexican immigrants were new to the country, less than 10 years in the US, and therefore still learning English. Diaz 5W was the only other Mexican participant who had children. Only one of her children had been born in the US. Her other two children were born in Mexico and spoke Spanish as their first language.

In contrast, the Bangladeshis who had been in Wales and the UK for over 20 years were ardent supporters of their children’s bi-lingualism. Ali 4 was especially eloquent when he described the importance of language and the intrinsic cultural aspects of retaining one’s native language and passing it on to the children, “when you’re home speaking to your elder always speak your own language (Bangladeshi). The main reason is you don’t forget it... don’t forget your roots. Language is very important to communicate with your own people, your own family, or whatever.”

*Sub-Question 2: How are the postsecondary institutional responses to the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants, as portrayed by the participants, similar or different?*

As perceived by the immigrant students, the administrative level the postsecondary institutions in both countries appeared to treat the immigrants much like native students. The perception of the administrative response to immigrants is from the early-leaving students’ points of view as my interviews with the administrators were focused on learning about the postsecondary system in the UK (I was already

familiar with the postsecondary system in the US) and understanding the experiences of the participants. Because of the different needs of immigrants, the standard treatment by the administration was not necessarily viewed by Mexican immigrant early-leaving students as supportive to their particular situations. However, the Bangladeshi immigrants did not report any difficulties with the administrative support of postsecondary institutions. Thus, although the UK and US institutions reportedly were similar in their treatment of the immigrant students, the Mexicans perceived the response as a barrier, whereas the Bangladeshis did not. There are many possible explanations for the different perceptions for apparently similar treatment. The reasons for the difference might include the different programs in which the students were enrolled - the Bangladeshis were in ESL classes and the Mexicans were not; or, the Bangladeshis who enrolled after secondary school in the UK had been on a college track and the Mexicans who had enrolled after secondary school in the US had not been in college tracks; or, two of the Bangladeshis had previously attended postsecondary education in Bangladesh, whereas none of the Mexicans had attended postsecondary education in Mexico. Overall, the Bangladeshis indicated the institutions were supportive and the Mexicans reported varying experiences, which were not supportive.

- *Postsecondary institutional responses in the US and the UK were different according to the Mexican and Bangladeshi immigrants. The institutional response to the Mexican was inconsistent; the institutional response to the Bangladeshis was supportive.*

Two of the Mexican immigrants, Diaz 4W and Diaz 5W, reported support,

with three stating it was a challenge to find the necessary counseling and guidance in their community college, Diaz 2W, 3, and 4W. In the area of administration, registration was easy, especially if one had some help as experienced by Diaz 4W, “I had help because I didn’t go by myself. My cousin went with me,” and Diaz 5W, “very helpful (administration). I got financial aid and child care (through CalWORKs).” On the challenging side, Diaz 2W complained, “Supposedly they (the community college) had a woman’s center. (They were) supposed to give you an orientation as to the ins and outs of getting back to school. They were not very helpful.” Diaz 3 didn’t recognize the lack of counseling support as a problem, but he would have benefited, and maybe stayed in school, if he had been able to get counseling. “I just went to my classes and that was pretty much it. I got no problems with the administration. I always wanted to talk to a counselor but he was never there.”

For the Bangladeshi institutional support may also have been perceived as supportive because two of the Bangladeshis went directly from a UK secondary school into postsecondary education. The route was direct and simple. The Bangladeshis more often reported that the institution was helpful and supportive (all five of the interviewees indicated such support). Both Ali 1 and 2 were taken to the ESOL classes at Coleg Gwent, Newport campus, by their wives. Their wives interviewed the director to be sure their husbands were enrolled in the best ESOL classes. Ali 3 and Ali 4 registered for college along with their classmates. They didn’t recall any difficulties. Because only one Bangladeshi was interviewed who went directly to a Welsh college

from Bangladesh, it was impossible to detect a trend of postsecondary institutional response to the recent Bangladeshi immigrants. Given the mixed responses of the Mexican immigrants who came directly from Mexico to postsecondary education in the US (three of the five), it seems that the level of support differed according to the particular institution in the US or the individual.

*Sub-Question 3: What commonalities in the cultures of the Mexican and Bangladeshi immigrants might lead to similar experiences in the postsecondary education systems?*

There were three themes of commonalities in culture that were thought to lead to similar experiences in postsecondary education for these two groups of immigrants. All of the Bangladeshis interviewed were of the Muslim religion. Four of the Mexicans interviewed were Catholic and one was Buddhist. Although religion was not discussed as a separate topic, clarification between religion (a religious faith) and culture (behavior typical of a group) was requested when the participants described cultural impacts. All of the Bangladeshis interviewed said they were in arranged marriages, which they said was a cultural rather than a religious custom.

- *Family values and influence were important to both the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants.*

Families and the loyalty to the family impacted both immigrant groups as they attended postsecondary education. The influence of family worked both ways, as support or as discouragement. When Diaz 2W found her mother did not support the goal of attending Stanford University, Diaz 2W did not pursue it. "My mother didn't

think it was right that I would leave my kids to do that. Because I would have to go to Stanford and live there for a short while you know... She held me back in a sense because she put a lot of guilt about me and my kids." Sibling and family support were important to the immigrants when they described attending postsecondary education. They attended, in part, at the encouragement of wives (Ali 1, Ali 2, and Ali 5), mothers and aunts (Diaz 3 and Diaz 5W), and siblings (Diaz 1 and Diaz 2W) who valued education. Diaz 3, "Pretty much everything I did I did myself and I did it for my aunt too... She's the only one who pushing me to go back to school." Ali 1 said through the interpreter, "Wife and in-laws support him to go to English." Ali 2 reported, "So my wife says, you (go to school), you now hard work; you going everyday school; so 2-3 years hard work so easy for you (to speak) English."

- *Family needs were put before individual needs by both immigrant groups.*

Both cultures put family needs above individual needs. Ali 4, "In our country, yes we do support, it's very important to support your family." Ali 3 and Ali 4 gave up their postsecondary education so they could financially support their parents. Ali 3, "My dad had a by-pass operation when I was 17 or 18. So he wasn't able to support the family. Then when it came to me, well, I've got to go out there and earn some money to support the family. So this is why my education ended."

Diaz 1 left postsecondary education so he could return to Mexico to care for his ailing father. He indicated his personal experience was an illustration of how the Mexican culture supports families. "Mexicans are family oriented people-they will

sacrifice personal goals for the family.” Diaz 2W did not attend Stanford University so she could stay close to home to care for her five children while she worked and attended the local community college. Ali 4 and Diaz 1 stated explicitly that their cultural values, Bangladeshi and Mexican, were to put family needs before the individual.

- *Immigrants tended to come from large and poor families.*

Like the Bangladeshis, the interviewees tended to come from large families (seven of the ten participants, three Mexican and four Bangladeshis) had four or more siblings. However, most of the Bangladeshi and Mexican adults who were married had only two or three children of their own. Large and poor families result in little money to spend on much other than shelter, food, and clothing. Paying for higher education, rather than working to improve the family’s economic situation, was not a priority. The large families of Ali 3 and Ali 4 meant they needed to drop out of college and earn a living to support their many siblings and parents. Ali 3 said, “And my education, we were 5 children in the family. I’ve got to go out there and earn some money to support the family. So this is why my education ended.” Diaz 1, as the youngest of nine children, “I wanted to study and help my parents. I was torn between my personal goals and my parents. I worked to help my family (he sent money home every month).” Diaz 2W’s large family, her own five children, meant she had to stay close to home to earn a living, rather than leaving the area to attend college.

*Sub-Question 4: What commonalities in the UK and US postsecondary systems might result in similar experiences for the Bangladeshi and*

### *Mexican immigrants?*

With recent changes in the UK postsecondary system, further education colleges and US community colleges offer similar options and experiences in program offerings and opportunities for transfer to four-year postsecondary institutions.

- *Postsecondary institutions offered ESL classes.*

ESL classes are often the first point of contact for an immigrant in a community college or further education college. The US and UK have comprehensive ESL programs that support English language learners to enter at the very beginning levels of ESL and move upward to levels that enable them to participate in college level academic classes which will transfer to a four-year postsecondary institution.

Interviews with both Bangladeshis and Mexicans indicated that the ESL classes are supportive and friendly aspects of postsecondary education (Mexican participant Diaz 1 and Bangladeshi Ali 2) for immigrants. Individualized support and understanding of immigrant issues came from the ESL instructors in California institutions, as reported by participant Diaz 1 of the Mexican participants, “I got positive feedback and encouragement from the ESL teachers.” Diaz 4W, “So I started going to the ESL classes, but I never knew that I’d gone straight to classes I never knew that were available.” Diaz 5W, “I went (to) the Cosumnes River College then I took ESL classes, ECE (Early Childhood Education) classes, child development. (It was a) good (experience). (It was) hard (for me). (With) my (limited) English, finally (I) could finish the classes.” Ali 2, “Mary is a good teacher. (She is) very clear. And

John; I miss John because (of what) John has done for me (taught me at the) community house (where ESOL is taught in the evenings in Newport). John is a good teacher at (the) community house.”

Although none of the Bangladeshi interviewed had started in ESOL in FE college and transferred to an academic program leading to a Baccalaureate degree, it was an option. Ali 2 was hoping to move through ESOL, into academic classes and eventually transfer to a university. Ali 2, “I finish English class at this college then go to another department for anything. I wrote a letter (to) ask (about the) GCSE (university entrance examinations) and go(ing) to university. I hope I go.” Diaz 1, one of the Mexican immigrants in the US followed such a path. He started with ESL in the community college, took transferable academic courses as his English became fluent and transferred to a state university. When I interviewed him he needed only one more year of courses to receive his Baccalaureate degree.

- *Retention was a problem.*

According to an interview with the manager of the retention program at Coleg Glan Hafren, the institution did not record if the dropouts are first- or second-generation immigrants. The UK also does not track retention by ethnicity. An interview with a counselor at a California community college showed a similar concern for Mexican dropouts. Although Mexicans cannot be identified in the tracking data, the larger ethnic category of Hispanic, which included Mexicans, did show that Hispanics dropped out in much higher numbers than whites or Asians.



Diaz 5W points out that her husband was also a drop out, “He tried (to go to school), but because his English is not really good he couldn’t go to school because he was frustrated in the class.”

Diaz 2W believed some of the problem lay in the discouragement from the high school counselors who suggest the Mexican students not pursue college, “they did that with my children, too (counseled them not to attend college) so it’s not just me and it wasn’t just that generation. There is no encouragement at all.” She also described how her own children have had interrupted college experiences, “Well, my son’s a geography major...he’s almost done with school. (He is in his early thirties.) My daughters have all their community college (education), they’re not finished; they’re going. But they’re still there. One of them just got an AA, but that’s all she wanted. The other one is on and off, on and off, her choice.”

Diaz 4W was appalled when she heard her American born cousins were thinking about dropping out of high school.

Diaz 1 spoke of his nephew who was born in the US, “His counselor (in high school) told him an AA would be enough.” Diaz 1 told his nephew to pay no attention to the counselors.

Ali 1 believes many students drop out before completing postsecondary programs, “Some students not finish go to school. Some have better (things) to do then (learn) English. (They) go for a job instead of learning English.”

Ali 3 believes there were more dropouts of his generation and that there will be fewer in the future, “That time (when he was young) many people came (to the UK).

They were 15, 10, 12 whatever, and because they had to support their family those people, like myself, didn't do further education because I thought it was my duty to support my family.”

When I was seeking the participants in Wales and California, I met many second generation Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants. I was told by both groups that they could refer me to many second-generation immigrants who had dropped out of postsecondary education. Retention in postsecondary education appears to be a problem for both groups of immigrants, regardless of whether they are first or second generation.

### *Summary of Sub-Questions Section*

The analyses of the sub-questions are a cross-cultural comparison of the experiences of the Bangladeshi the Mexican immigrant former students in Wales and California. Table 20 shows the comparison of the experiences. There are more similarities than differences in the participants' experiences. The following themes are the similarities in experiences in postsecondary education:

- *Economic opportunity motivated both groups to immigrate.*
- *Bi-culturalism was the predominant cultural identity.*
- *Families supported college attendance of the immigrants.*
- *College students and faculty were friendly and supportive.*
- *Family values and influence were important.*
- *Family needs were put before individual needs.*

- *Immigrants tended to come from large and poor families.*
- *Postsecondary institutions offered ESL classes.*
- *Retention was a problem.*

The following themes are the differences:

- *College enrollment due to individual aspirations versus outside influences.*
- *College experiences of racial discrimination versus racial tolerance.*
- *College leaving due to overall financial need versus family financial need.*
- *Cultural priorities of traditions and holidays versus language and religion.*
- *Postsecondary institutional responses: inconsistent versus supportive.*

### Supplemental Analyses of Indirect Influences on the Experiences of the Immigrants in Postsecondary Education

The supplemental analysis is placed at the end of phase two as it is based on analysis of both the interview questions in phase one and the sub-research questions in phase two. The supplemental analysis discusses cross-cultural topics that surfaced but were indirectly related to postsecondary education. Some of the following analysis includes experiences and insights gleaned from the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants who did not meet my criteria. Generally, these were second-generation immigrants (born in the UK or US) who did not meet my criteria, or the immigrants were still attending postsecondary education. These immigrants were interviewed to add breadth and depth to my understanding of the immigrant experiences. The themes

I identify here were common all the immigrants, whether or not they had been born in the host country.

- *Immigration challenges for the Bangladeshis and Mexicans.*

Immigration for Bangladeshis and Mexicans is difficult. In the 1960's through the 1980's, Bangladeshis were encouraged to immigrate to the UK to meet the need for cheap labor; visas were easy to obtain. The 1990's and 2000's have not shown such labor needs in the UK. The result has been limited visas available to Bangladeshis for immigration (from conversations with the counselor at the International Center, the director of Coleg Gwent's Newport-campus ESOL program, and Dr. Nasfim Haque, my initial contact in Wales who was a research assistant at the University of Wales in Cardiff when I initiated the study).

Currently, the most common way for Bangladeshi immigrants to move to the UK is through arranged marriages. According to several interviews with staff at Career Wales and The Parade, arranged marriages inherently impact the education of the Bangladeshis who migrate to the UK. The new immigrants need to learn English and obtain UK credentials or vocational certificates to work. Likewise, the British Bangladeshis must stop their education to go to Bangladesh at the prime age of 16 to 18 years to meet their future spouse. The young people generally spend about a year in Bangladesh, involved in marriage ceremonies and related traditions before returning to the UK. By which time, the young person's postsecondary education path has been interrupted and may be lost forever. This latter situation was described with frustration

by three of the young British Bangladeshi women whom I interviewed.

In the US, the legal access of the Mexican immigrants remains in upheaval. There is such a limitation by the immigrant quotas on legal immigrants that a Mexican who wishes to immigrate to the US may wait for many years before being granted access. One result is that many of the Mexicans come across the border illegally hoping for amnesty or an avenue to apply for a green card and eventually citizenship. Many of them, like the Bangladeshis, immigrated because they had family in the host country. For the Mexicans, as reported by some of the interviewees, family already in the US may provide another path to legal immigration.

- *Postsecondary educational systems in the UK and the US offer immigrants access to ESL, vocational certificates, and academic degrees, but the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants have few skills when they immigrate.*

Interviews suggested that unlike the US, the UK does not have large numbers of people who return to college as mature students. The British tendency is to go straight through for all of one's education at once; hence, Dr. Nasfim Haque who at 27 had her doctorate. She said this was typical and was quite surprised by my apparent age (my son is only a couple of years younger than Dr. Haque).

According to interviews with administrators at The Parade and Coleg Gwent, the Bangladeshis tended to have the lowest English-speaking skills of all the ESOL students. They seemed also to have the lowest technological skills and literacy in their own language. The comparison of Bangladeshis to other immigrants in the UK, as related to literacy and technological skills may be unfair as the UK has many

Europeans who come over and take ESL. The European students are quite *savoir-faire* about educational institutions, computers, and e-mail. The Bangladeshis usually not only lack the computer experience and skills, but don't know anyone back home with a computer.

Ali 1, as an ESOL student (age 37 years), was the oldest in-school immigrant whom I interviewed. When I asked Ali 3 and Ali 4 if they had considered returning to postsecondary education they appeared startled and confused. They said it wasn't common practice for older adults to attend FE colleges or universities. Yet the FE colleges, like community colleges in the US, offer dozens, if not hundreds, of vocational courses and academics that are transferable to university degrees. Most of the Bangladeshi immigrants were so challenged with the language and financial needs that vocational or academic goals had to be delayed.

The Mexican immigrants in the US encountered many of the same challenges as the Bangladeshi immigrants. Educational experience in their own country was frequently limited if they migrated as adults. Their computer technological skills were equally restricted. The only difference was that it is accepted and common place in the US for adults to attend postsecondary education. The average age of community college students in the US is in the late 20's to early 30's. Some campuses attract even larger numbers of mature students and may have an average age in the early 40's. Although it appears that further education in the UK serve about the same ages of students as the US community colleges, I did not find the overall participation rates of the populations as a whole. Certainly, the Bangladeshis I interviewed expressed

surprise at the thought that they might return to postsecondary education. Four of the nine Mexicans whom I interviewed had attended community college, or were still attending, and they were in their 40's. However, much like the Bangladeshi immigrants, poor language fluency and financial needs of the family usurped vocational and academic goals.

The postsecondary education institutions in the US and the UK are open to all ages and offer ESL and a variety of training and education programs that might be beneficial to the immigrants. However, lack of English fluency and family fiscal stability hinder the immigrants from full participation and profiting.

- *Cultural attitudes hinder the Bangladeshi women.*

The four young Bangladeshi women whom I interviewed, but did not meet my criteria, provided insight into the conflict between traditional Bangladeshi culture and personal goals. All four women were in arranged marriages that they had entered into between the ages of 16 and 18 years of age. One of them had finished college (the equivalent of a community college) and was ready to enter university to study psychology. She was furious when her parents insisted that she stop her studies to be married. No amount of argument with her grandmother (the family marriage broker) could change the situation. Despite Ali's conviction that no Bangladeshi girl would have to marry if she didn't want to, "they know their rights in the UK and can take it to the British consulate," the experiences and stories from the four women proved otherwise.

The three women who were asked about their arranged marriage said they emphatically had not wanted to get married, but that the parents had made the arrangements and would not stop the procedure. The pressure from the family and culture outweighed the individual goals. Two of the four women were determined to continue their university education and achieve career goals. The third one used her husband to relay to her parents the importance of education for the younger sisters. She and her husband were more than willing to pay for any postsecondary education for her younger siblings. She had arranged to pay for law school for her youngest sister when she would have finished high school at age 16. However the parents, against the wishes of all the siblings (and this has now caused quite a rift in the family), pulled her out three months before graduation and had her married. This sister now has a set of twins and a baby and it is unlikely that she will ever go back to finish law school.

Another of the interviewees who was in an arranged marriage by age 16 said she ran away from her husband for three months. She was ostracized by the Bangladeshi community for her insubordination. She returned to him, tutored Bangladeshi women in the ESL program and volunteered in her community to try to make amends. She was about to start back in school so she could eventually attend university.

The experience of educational restrictions on the Bangladeshi women, due to arranged marriages rather than actual denial of education, is not at all like the experience of the Mexican women. Three of the four Mexican women I interviewed



who did not meet my criteria were still in postsecondary education, continuing to work towards transfer to university, or actually already attending a state university. These four women were born in Mexico and had come to the US as young girls or young adults. Two were married and one had children. The married women had the full support of their husbands.

It seems that for Bangladeshi women the most limiting factor in their quest for postsecondary education is the cultural restraints of arranged marriages and immediate babies. It is less easy to identify a primary limiting factor for Mexican women.

- *Parental education levels and the impact on the children.*

Ali 3 thought the educational background of the parents impacted the children. As I quoted him earlier, “A lot of people came to this country (UK) at that time (1960’ and early 1970’s) weren’t educated. It’s as simple as that. You need a bit of educational background (parents).”

The question as to whether the educational level of the parents influenced the immigrants who started in postsecondary education does not hold true for the participants interviewed. None of the five Ali’s came from families with high degrees of education. The fathers of Ali 3 and Ali 4 were steel workers; Ali 1 seemed to come from a farming or rural background and did not mention his parents’ level of education. Ali 2 also came from a rural village. He described how he used to walk three miles to the nearest town to attend high school. Likely, his parents were farmers. Ali 5’s family, when he was a young immigrant to the UK, wanted him to work and

earn money, according to his e-mail to me, rather than gain an education.

However, it is possible that for the second generation the parents' educational attempts are more important, as the pressure on the offspring to earn a living and support the family is less. Therefore, the offspring will have a choice as to what to do with their aspirations, whether to attend postsecondary education or go to work. These decisions may be influenced by the parents in a different way than what the first generation immigrants experienced. As Ali 4 said, "The reason (that the siblings of the immigrants and the children will be more educated than their parents) is they don't have to support the way their elder brothers and fathers did."

- *Older immigrants might be successful in FE or they might be wasting time when they could be earning money for the family.*

Ali 4 posed the questions of whether immigrants who arrive in their new country as adults would be successful in FE or should focus on earning money for the family is not answered by any of the interviews. Immigrant priorities vary according to the family's needs. Ali 5 was able to get in at least one year of FE, until his wife became pregnant with the twins. Then it became important for him to earn money. Yet Ali 1 had a wife and three children and neither he nor his wife worked very much. In fact, he could not get a job right away and had to attend FE to improve his English skills. Ali 2 also immigrated to the UK as an adult. He was able to take time to attend FE as his wife had a good paying job at a bank. There did not seem to be pressure on him to focus more on earning money than on FE.

### *Summary and Discussion*

Table 20 summarizes the previous discussion of phase two, providing a succinct picture for the reader of the cross-cultural comparisons as identified through the research sub-questions. As noted in the summary of phase two, there are more similarities than differences in the experiences of the two immigrant groups. Table 20 separates each research-sub-question and identifies for each, the similar and different themes.

Table 20. Cross Cultural Comparisons of the Experiences of the Bangladeshi and Mexican Immigrants in Postsecondary Education

| Research Sub-questions  | Similar and Different Themes  |
|---|---|
| <p>1. How are the experiences of the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrant early-leaving students similar or different?</p>   | <p><b>Similarities</b></p>  |
|   | <p>Economic opportunity motivated both groups to immigrate.</p>   |
|   | <p>Bi-culturalism was the predominant identity of Bangladeshis and the Mexicans.</p>  |
|   | <p>Families supported college attendance of the immigrants.</p>   |
|   | <p>College students and faculty were friendly and supportive.</p>   |
|   | <p><b>Differences</b></p>   |
|   | <p>Mexican immigrants had aspirations to attend college; Bangladeshis participated due to outside forces</p>  |
|   | <p>Some Mexicans experienced discrimination; all Bangladeshis experienced tolerance.</p>  |
|   | <p>The Mexicans prioritized traditions and holidays and spoke of their love for Mexico; Bangladeshi immigrants focused on language and religion as important cultural aspects to retain.</p>  |
| <p>Mexicans left college for many reasons, including personal financial need to pay for college; Bangladeshis most often left postsecondary education to take care of family financial needs.</p> |   |
| <p>2. How are the postsecondary institutional responses to the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants, as portrayed by the participants, similar or different?</p>                                    | <p><b>Differences</b></p>   |
|   | <p>Postsecondary institutional responses in the US and the UK were different according to the Mexican and Bangladeshi immigrants. The institutional response to the Mexicans was inconsistent; the institutional response to the Bangladeshis was supportive.</p> |

| Research Sub-questions  | Similar and Different Themes   |
|---|--|
| 3. What commonalities in the cultures of the Mexican and Bangladeshi immigrants might lead to similar experiences in the postsecondary education systems? | Family values and influence were important to both the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants.   |
|   | Family needs were put before individual needs by both immigrant groups.  |
|   | Immigrants tended to come from large and poor families.  |
| 4. What commonalities in the UK and US postsecondary systems might result in similar experiences for the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants?              | Postsecondary institutions offered ESL classes.  |
|   | Student retention was a problem.   |
| Supplementary analysis  | Immigration challenges for the Bangladeshis and Mexicans.  |
|   | Postsecondary educational systems in the UK and the US offer immigrants access to ESL, vocational certificates, and academic degrees, but the Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants have few skills to start. |
|   | Cultural attitudes hinder the Bangladeshi women.   |

### ***Phase Three Findings: Responses to the Overall Guiding Research Question***

In this phase, I return to the overall guiding research question, *Why do Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants leave postsecondary education prior to completion?* I examined all of the analyzed themes developed in phase one (responses to each of the interview questions) and phase two themes (focusing on cross-cultural comparisons). The final analysis provides insights and understanding as to why these two immigrant groups leave postsecondary education early.

- *The economic needs of the Bangladeshis and their families, particularly their parents, interrupted their educational experiences and goals.*

The Bangladeshi immigrants perceived their experiences as immigrants, bi-cultural citizens, and as students in a positive light. They appreciated the support of the students and staff and felt included in the postsecondary institutions. They valued education and not only hoped to complete their educational goals despite histories of dropping out, but also hoped their children and younger siblings would attend postsecondary educational institutions.

However, as immigrant families in the 1970's, the financial well-being of the entire family was dependent upon the father. When the fathers, in two cases, became incapacitated, the responsibility of supporting the family fell to the sons. In that decade, before it was acceptable for women to support the family financially, when the couple began to have children, it also fell to the men to take the role of supporting the new family. This was the case with Ali 5 who gave up his second year of college when

his wife became pregnant.

The Bangladeshis were committed to the needs of the family, giving precedence to the family over personal educational goals. Ali 4 stated, "We sacrificed. I sacrificed my further education for the benefit of establishing my family." Ali 3 said, "My dad had a by-pass operation when I was 17 or 18. Then when it came to me, well I've got to go out there and earn some money to support the family. So this is why my education ended."

For the Bangladeshis, the issue wasn't with the expense of attending higher education, but the financial needs of their extended families. They needed to work to pay for housing, food, and general support for their parents and siblings, as well as their own families when they had them. It was of no help to them that in the UK postsecondary education was heavily subsidized by the government.

- *The Bangladeshi immigrants were not committed to educational goals.*

The postsecondary educational goal for the Bangladeshis seemed elusive and distant according to the interviews of the immigrants. Ali 3 tells how he ended up in college, "I was just following them (the other students who went from secondary school to college). It was through the school. I didn't even think about it." Ali 1, through the interpreter, said he went to college, "Because he needed to learn English." He needed enough English for a job. Ali 4 makes it clear that even when he was a teenager, his priority was the family, not his education, "But at the same time my intention was always to look after the family, and at the same time look

after myself (economically).”

- *The Mexican immigrants’ postsecondary education was indirectly interrupted by a lack of finances for living expenses.*

The Mexican immigrants, similar to the Bangladeshis, viewed themselves as settled bi-cultural citizens. They appreciated the opportunity of higher education and enjoyed the friendly students and teachers in the institutions. They also valued education and hoped to finish what educational programs they had started. They, like the Bangladeshis, supported their children in their aspirations for a college education. The Mexicans also had to find employment and give up their postsecondary education goals so they could support their families.

Diaz 2W had a family to support, “I refused to be held back but this time I really couldn’t, five children and having to support them. Even though people said, ‘well you could get cash, you know you could get assistance, you could get welfare.’ That wasn’t for me. It was something I just didn’t feel comfortable doing. If I couldn’t work (while I went to college), I wasn’t going to do it.” Diaz 3 had himself, “I got no money to go for it (college), so I just drop out.” Diaz 5W was forced to drop college and take a job as part of her welfare work plan.

In addition to the living expenses, in the US college is more expensive than in the UK; even the less expensive community colleges have fees that must be paid. There are grants available, but they must be sought out. State universities are even more expensive. Thus, the Mexican immigrants had to work to pay for school as



well as to support their families at the same time.

- *Mexican immigrants' decisions to leave college prior to program completion were influenced by family responsibilities.*

The Mexican immigrants had similar attitudes to families and prioritized family needs much like the Bangladeshi immigrants. Diaz 1 returned to Mexico during his junior year at a state university so he could take care of his sick father. Diaz 5W couldn't attend full time college because of her family responsibilities, "I wanted to move on and do something (go to college). I refused to be held back but this time I really couldn't, five children and having to support them." Diaz 5W had to maintain her standing in the welfare program, CalWORKs so the family would have financial help. "I couldn't finish because I was in the CalWORKs program but the program wanted (me to) get a job. Then I couldn't go (to college) later because I needed to work first." The family needs, whether they were financial or daily care of a parent, impacted the Mexican immigrants postsecondary education paths.

In summary, the question of why immigrants leave college early is answered by the immigrants' experiences. Both groups gave precedence to their families; if their families needed financial or other types of support, the immigrants dropped their postsecondary education to help. Both groups needed money to pay for living expenses, and in the US, to pay for college. The Bangladeshis lacked commitment to their educational goals. The Mexicans seemed to have made a commitment to their educational goals, even if they had to give them up. Diaz 1 was in his third year of studying international business with the intention of becoming a businessman. Diaz

2W wanted to become a doctor, Diaz 3 wanted vocational training for a job, possibly in the computer field, and Diaz 5W wanted her Associate degree in Early Childhood Education.

## CHAPTER 5 – SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter summarizes the analyses of the research findings and interpretations. I then present implications for policy and practice. The study also discusses implications for leadership in the community colleges in the US and in further education colleges in the UK.

The prevailing question, *Why do Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants leave postsecondary education prior to completion?*, was examined through the seven interview questions and four research sub-questions. As this was a phenomenological study, it was the understanding of the immigrant experience and the identification of emerging patterns that were important. The themes of Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrant early-leaving students revealed by this study lead to suggestions for further study of immigrant issues in the UK and the US, and postsecondary institutions in both countries.

### *Summary of Findings*

The responses to the interview questions evolved into themes that answered the research sub-questions. The research sub-questions sought understanding to the reasons these two immigrant groups left postsecondary education prior to completion. The Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants revealed both similar and different experiences in postsecondary education when they were interviewed. Some of their similar experiences were due to both groups being poor immigrants who needed to survive in their new countries. Other similar experiences were based on their

participation in postsecondary education. The Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants both showed a pattern that is not surprising. The majority of them, or their families, immigrated to the new country for economic reasons. There was prospect of a better life with financial opportunity.

The majority of both the Bangladeshis and the Mexicans saw themselves as bi-cultural, with ties to both countries. None of the immigrants in either population planned to return to their native country, except for holidays or to visit relatives.

The Bangladeshis and the Mexicans found the staff and faculty to be supportive of them at college. Overall, they found the experience in higher education to be positive.

### *Differences*

Different experiences of the Bangladeshis and the Mexicans included reasons for college attendance, family responses to college attendance, institutional responses to them as immigrants, and reasons for leaving college prior to completion of education goals.

There were many different reasons for attending college, both within the immigrant groups and between the groups. The Mexicans all showed individual initiative, and none followed a university-bound track from secondary school without forethought, as two of the Bangladeshis did. The Mexicans attended college with careers and vocations uppermost in mind. They also attended college for reasons of ESL and better jobs. The Bangladeshis cited ESL and better jobs as motivators to

attend postsecondary education, but little approaching a career goal.

The Mexican immigrants, although claiming support and encouragement from parents, spouses and siblings, also reported opposition from parents. The Bangladeshis described some support and encouragement from spouses, and more neutral attitudes from parents. For both groups, it would appear that the attitude of parents was less influential than that of spouses and siblings when participants decided to enroll in postsecondary education.

On one hand, both the Mexicans and Bangladeshis generally found students, faculty, and staff to be friendly. On the other hand, only two of the five Mexicans mentioned friendly students, as compared to four of the five Bangladeshis. Additionally, two of the Mexicans felt racial discrimination from either fellow students or teachers, while none of the Bangladeshis reported this experience. The difference between the Mexicans and the Bangladeshis in the area of racial discrimination is perplexing. Both groups of immigrants tend to be darker skinned than the Anglo-European majority of each country. Both groups also tend to be poor, coming from poor countries. The countries seem to have much in common, as do the immigrants. So why is there a difference in racial tolerance towards the immigrants in the host countries? Is it the history of Mexicans, as farm laborers that makes them vulnerable to discrimination? Is it the history and stereotype of illegal border crossing and residency in the US? The UK public has had much the same reaction as that which the US has displayed over the past 20 years towards immigrants: "stories of people coming over to take jobs (away from the natives)" (Ali 5). These are questions that are

not answered in this study.

The postsecondary institutional response is another area that showed differences of experiences between the Bangladeshis and Mexicans. The Mexicans had mixed experiences, reporting both supportive responses and challenging or unsupportive responses from the administration. Whereas, the Bangladeshis overwhelmingly felt supported by the institutions. Except for the difference that none of the Mexicans went to a community college solely for ESL, but two of the Bangladeshis went to FE college just for ESL, there was a variety of experiences of both nationalities. In both groups, at least one immigrant went on to transfer to a four-year university before dropping out. Also, in both groups at least one of the immigrants achieved part of his educational goal, a vocational certificate or degree, though not the full-degree desired. This means there were variations in students' achievements and in the types of postsecondary institutions utilized. Further investigation would have to occur to better understand these differences of experiences between the two immigrant populations.

Leaving college before completion of educational goals is an area with few similar experiences between the two immigrant groups, or even within each immigrant group. Although three of the Bangladeshis left postsecondary education to work full-time and to support their families, of those three, one left to support his wife and new family and the other two left to support their parents. Amongst the Mexican immigrants, there were no two who left postsecondary education for the same reason (see Table 17). One Mexican immigrant left to tend to his father's health, one left

because her mother and culture dictated that she stay near her children, one left because it cost too much without financial aid, one left because she wasn't motivated to persist, and one left because the welfare system forced her to get a job rather than complete her degree.

Of the ten combined interviews, four (three Bangladeshis and one Mexican) said they left postsecondary education early because of family economics; they needed jobs to support the family. Two of the ten were simply not motivated to continue. Two others had to give precedence to their children and marriages (which could be interpreted as economic needs of the family, but indeed one included cultural pressure).

*Key Aspects to the Overall Research Question-Why Did the Immigrants Leave Postsecondary Education Early*

Financial and economic impacts, family responsibilities and cultural priorities sum up the significant reasons that caused both groups of immigrants to leave postsecondary education early. Although superficial rationale was offered by the Mexican immigrants, such as the CalWORKs program that required "work first" over education, and the challenge of working full time while taking a college class, the ultimate reason was a lack of money for the family and general living expenses. In contrast, the lack of financial stability was openly verbalized by the Bangladeshis. For both groups the prioritization of family and cultural pressure to take care of family needs before individual goals were common reasons for leaving college early.

## *Discussion*

The discussion section scans the literature review that preceded my research of the “lived experience” (van Manen, 1990) of the Bangladeshi immigrant early-leaving students in Wales and the Mexican immigrant early-leaving students in California. I refer to the major themes that most precisely reflect the experiences of the immigrants in postsecondary education, including leaving before completion of programs, and I associate those findings to related research described by other authors.

When I conducted the literature review for this study I sought the current data on Bangladeshis in Wales and Mexicans in California, including college attendance, completion of postsecondary education, employment and socioeconomic status. My literature review examined in depth three major areas: the US and the UK as “immigrant magnets;” immigrants in higher education, including access and institutional support; and qualitative research on the experiences of the least successful immigrants in higher education. These three topics of previous research enhanced the development of my interview questions and my research sub-questions. Ultimately, these topics impacted my analysis of the interviews, interpretations of the findings, and my understanding of the implications.

### *Reasons for Immigrating to the UK and the US*

People immigrate for a multitude of reasons. According to the interview responses and the identified theme for both the Bangladeshi and the Mexican participants, economics was the main reason for immigration. Both groups sought



socio-economic betterment and job opportunities in their new countries. However, employment research showed that Bangladeshis suffer some of the highest unemployment in the UK, as do the Mexicans in the US. Both minority groups are economically the least successful in their newly adopted countries (Model, 2005). Model's information would appear to be indirectly supported by the findings of this study, which showed that the Bangladeshi and Mexican participants left college early due to financial needs of the families or themselves.

However, if we look beyond the financial reason for leaving college, the socioeconomic result for the early-leaving students was not economic failure as Model's research might suggest. Interviews revealed that three of the five Bangladeshis, Ali 3, Ali 4 and Ali 5, despite not completing their postsecondary education, were successfully self-employed and living in a middle-class socioeconomic status. Ali 1 seemed the most vulnerable to chronic unemployment, as described by Model. For Ali 2 socioeconomic success was harder to predict, being new to the country, and young. But given his goals, enthusiasm, his wife's career, and economic status, it is likely he will eventually be successful in the area of employment and income. Of the four women participants who did not meet the criteria for study participants, two were employed and lived a middle class to lower middle class lifestyle and a third, though officially unemployed, spent her time managing her husband's businesses and their shared properties. The fourth was young, and our interview did not last long enough to establish her socio-economic status. The indication from the interviews is that the Bangladeshis are economically successful in

Wales, thus not supporting Model's generalized findings that the Bangladeshis have the highest unemployment in the UK.

The five Mexican participants were closer to Model's findings in which the Mexicans suffer from the highest unemployment in the US. Diaz 1 was unemployed, though it was obviously temporary as he had had a long history of work. Diaz 2W had a long work history and was fully employed by the county, living a middle-class life. Diaz 3 was unemployed, but still too young to call it chronic unemployment. Diaz 4W was fully employed in a good position with benefits, and her father had his own successful heating and air conditioning business. He owned the family home in Sacramento and a home in Mexico. They were in a middle class socio-economic bracket. Diaz 5W had been on welfare and may still be. Her husband worked as a custodian and she worked as a day-care provider for the children of the students attending an adult education school. They could be considered examples of the under-employed immigrants (especially since the participant's husband was a licensed and qualified veterinarian). Of the Mexican participants I interviewed, only two of them were unemployed, Diaz 1 and Diaz 3, showing that not all of the participant-reported financial challenges, which led to leaving college early, resulted in unemployment or a low socio-economic status.

### *College Access, Support and Attendance*

The research by Gray et al. (1996) and Ghuman (2002) is supported by the findings of my study. Their studies concluded that support to immigrant students in

higher education in both the US and the UK is unplanned, and generally not considered a necessity. The experience of the immigrants I interviewed showed that though they felt supported by faculty and administration, they did not receive any special treatment, services, or support unless initiated by an ESL teacher. However, administrators at institutions in both countries were aware of the high drop out rates and the retention problems of some immigrant groups, and were seeking ways to understand and address the issues.

As I look back at the research and literature review I did prior to this investigation, where both the UK and US postsecondary administrators and faculty believe English language fluency to be the greatest barrier to success in postsecondary education (Overgaard, 1995; Gray et al., 1996; The European Commission, 2001; Ghuman, 2002), I do not believe that language is the biggest problem to the immigrants. According to the interviews of both the Bangladeshis and the Mexicans, language was a factor, but most of the immigrants appeared to learn English quickly, whether it was in secondary school in the US or the UK, or as an adult. I was surprised at how little the new language impacted the immigrants. They acknowledged that language was a bit of a barrier at first, and was to be expected. However, language did not persist as a barrier. The interviews showed that there is a wide variation in the learning of English and the ease with which language acquisition occurs. Several of the Bangladeshis and the Mexicans indicated with a sense of pride that they had learned English very quickly (six months to a year and they were fluent). One Bangladeshi and one Mexican immigrant still struggled with English.

Financial assistance was also cited in the literature as an important need for immigrant students in the US (Szelenyi & Chang, 2002). Only one of the Mexican immigrants interviewed said this was a problem that precluded him from continuing. However, he admitted that he had not applied for financial aid at his college. Although the others did not explicitly cite costs of education as a problem, they did describe how they had to work while attending college, presumably to pay for college and living expenses. Only one of the immigrants received financial aid to attend college, and he still had to work full time. It seems the financial assistance needs are more than paying college fees and books. Living expenses must be addressed, especially for the mature student who has a family.

Inappropriate, or inadequate preparation, or insufficient support in secondary school appeared to be a concern in both the UK and the US (Office for Standards in Education, 1995; Attinasi, 1996). Yet it was those students who had studied at secondary school in the US and the UK who had the easier time entering and adapting to the postsecondary education system. Two of the five Mexican participants, and two of the five Bangladeshi participants, attended secondary school in their adopted country prior to postsecondary study. Although one of the Mexicans had had a poor experience with counseling in the high school, once she entered the community college she did not have difficulties with the classes. Three of the other students (one Mexican and two Bangladeshis) were put on track for university and took all the appropriate courses. They found the college or university class work to be somewhat challenging, but not too difficult.

Earlier I noted that Doron (1995) looked at three pre-existing models in which: (1) immigrant students and natives were treated the same by faculty, (2) there was special coaching or preparation or other appropriate assistance to immigrant students, and (3) there was a continuum of heightened awareness of cultural differences and the faculty and college administration were given the freedom to act as they saw best to suit the immigrant students' needs and the environment. I said I would consider the impact of faculty attitudes on student success, and seek an understanding from the immigrants I interviewed as to what they perceived to be faculty response to them. I suggested that according to Doron I might find that support from faculty in the acculturation process to be a significant factor in immigrant students' lack of success. To that end I asked the immigrants about their experiences with their teaching faculty.

All of the Bangladeshi participants indicated that the faculty were helpful and friendly. They reported that they were treated just like the other students, in both ESL classes and in college classes. On the other hand, the Mexican participants had more varied experiences with faculty in the community college. The experiences ranged from neutral reactions, to supportive and friendly. In my interviews I heard stories of negative comments by faculty in the classroom about accents, and negative insinuations about the Mexican heritage (as compared to other international students). There were also stories of teachers going out of their way to support the Mexican students and to help them understand the system. These varied responses from faculty seem to indicate that immigrants continue with their education despite negativity from faculty; they do not let it stop them from pursuing their education. The negative

comments or insinuations were not cited in my interviews as the reason for leaving postsecondary education early.

### *Qualitative Research on the Experiences of the Least Successful Immigrants in Higher Education*

This study adds to the current body of qualitative research about the least successful immigrants in higher education. The descriptions of the experiences by the immigrant early-leaving students provides insight and an understanding of the many influences on their decisions to enroll in postsecondary education, the student, faculty and institutional responses to them, and their decisions to leave college prior to educational goal completion. I encountered interest in my study from administrators, faculty, immigrants, and immigrant organizations in both Wales and California.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

This section discusses the implications of the findings of this study. I identify areas of consideration for improving leadership, policy, and educational practices that will support immigrants in postsecondary education and reduce early-leaving prior to completion of educational goals. I highlight insights, questions, and understandings for the reader to contemplate.

### *Family Support Influences Enrollment in Postsecondary Education by Immigrants*

The importance of spousal and sibling support was apparent in both the Bangladeshi and the Mexican interviews. Of the ten interviews, seven (four Mexicans

and three Bangladeshis) said that their spouses or siblings were supportive or encouraging. The parental support for both groups was neutral or opposed (three Mexicans and two Bangladeshis). This latter neutrality or opposition from the parents seemed to have little influence on the immigrants actually starting postsecondary education. The neutrality of the parents, for those Bangladeshis who left to support their parents, likely influenced their decision to continue working and not return to school, especially as neither of these men were married at the time and hence did not have spousal encouragement to do otherwise.

Once a person is past the customary point of moving from high school to postsecondary education, and past the age of parental support and influence, they gather encouragement from sources other than their parents. An additional group for institutions to reach out to, besides parents of teenagers in high school, is that of the spouses and extended family. In families of immigrants, where the family typically includes adult or young adult children, the parents, while important to the unit and usually the culture (as expressed by both the Mexicans and Bangladeshis interviewed), may not be critical to the decisions to obtain or continue in further education.

### *Policy and Practice Considerations*

There are several college awareness programs in California that target parents and children in middle school and high school. However, as evidenced by interviews with the Mexican participants, there is very little information available for the older immigrant who is interested in postsecondary education but who is unfamiliar with the

availability and variety of programs. According to interviews, the process of enrollment, understanding the educational system, and comprehending faculty expectations once in the classroom, can also be daunting. Although these issues were especially identified by the Mexican participants, some of the discomfort of entering college as an immigrant was evident through the Bangladeshi interviews.

Two areas of consideration for policy and practice to address the family influence on immigrants are as follows:

1. *Consider the relationship of the community colleges and further education colleges with the entire families of their immigrant students.*

Orientations to the postsecondary education might include parents, spouses, siblings, and children. These orientations could link families and students to other families and students who either have successfully completed educational goals, or have more than a year of success at the institution. Such peer mentoring, family to family, may help build a small cohort of support.

2. *Consider cohorts or learning communities in educational programs that are popular amongst immigrants who seek employment opportunities and growth.* In a cohort or learning community the same students participate in the same classes together. This offers another form of mentoring and peer support that has been shown to improve retention in postsecondary education (Woodlief, Thomas & Orozco, 2003).



*Postsecondary Institutional Support is Important for Retention of Immigrants*

The immigrants were asked about the institutional response to them as Bangladeshis or as Mexicans. Generally, in both the UK and the US, the discussions went into more detail about registration, access to academic counselors, availability of financial assistance, visibility and access to resources such as ESL classes, tutoring, and even the location of the facility. The UK and the US institutions employ academic counselors, provide ESL and remedial classes, offer tutoring and learning centers, and information about financial assistance. Neither country separates immigrants from any of the other students, either for special support services (except for isolated programs) or tracking of success.

All of the Bangladeshis indicated that the British institutions they attended were supportive. Ali 2 suggested that the satellite campus where he attended ESL classes was inconveniently located. He liked the previous satellite he had been at which was right in the center of the town of Newport. However, that site only offered ESL two evenings a week, not full time in the days. However, the satellite campus where he was attending when I interviewed him was being re-located to the Newport campus; this may alleviate some of the inconvenience. Ali 1 said he had no point of reference, as he had never attended any other postsecondary institutions; therefore, he found the institution supportive. Ali 3 and 4 both felt they were treated as all other British students and that everything was easy. Since their experiences had taken place

a number of years ago (17-20 years) they could not remember the details of that experience. Ali 3 did express regret that he had not had a mentor or somebody counseling him to try to stay in college. But he did not see this as an institutional responsibility. He seemed to be thinking more of an uncle or brother who might have taken that role. Ali 5 said he was treated as all international students were treated and felt it was supportive. He thoroughly enjoyed his student days at the Welsh university.

The Mexican immigrants either had higher expectations of the community college, or their experiences were more recent so they could recall more. Only one of the Mexican participants was 20 years from her postsecondary experiences; the other four had attended postsecondary institutions more recently, in the past five to ten years. This is in contrast to the Bangladeshis interviewed of which only two had attended college within the last five years with the other three 20 years or more away from their experience. Two of the Mexicans felt the institution was supportive and two felt it was challenging. Diaz 3 claimed neutrality. Diaz 3 said he was treated like all of the other students, just as the two Bangladeshis had who, like the Mexican, attended secondary education in the new host country prior to postsecondary. Yet Diaz 3 specifically did not describe the institution as “supportive” whereas the Bangladeshis had indicated institutional support. All three of these participants had an excellent command of the English language, so it doesn't seem as though one can blame language skills for this difference. The two who found the institutional response to be challenging blamed unhelpful academic counselors and some teacher attitudes. Diaz 1, although he obtained financial aid, found the balance of learning English while taking

classes, and trying to support himself financially were difficult.

It is impossible to tell if the difference of the experiences between the Bangladeshis and the Mexicans was due to the difference between the UK and the US institutions; the years of the experiences, 1970's and 1980's versus 1990's and 2000's; the expectations of the immigrant groups; or the actual response of the institution to that particular immigrant group. When the immigrants were asked for recommendations that would improve the conditions for other immigrants they had nothing to offer.

Clearly, both the UK and the US believe that the statistics of poor retention indicate a need to change postsecondary institutional practices. Neither the UK (Shiner & Modood, 2002) nor the US (Carey, 2004) is pleased with the high dropout rates in general and specifically with immigrants. The British and Welsh (Chadha, 1996), like the US and California (California Tomorrow, April 2002), are handling institutional responses and retention rates on several fronts.

### *Policy and Practice Considerations*

Institutional support and response to the students is closely linked to retention (Tracy & Sheldon, 2003). Although the institutions in the US track student participation and retention by broad categories of ethnicity, they do not track the progress of immigrant students. In the UK, postsecondary institutions fairly recently started to track student retention by ethnicity. They, also, do not identify immigrant students. According to interviews with the Mexican immigrant early-leaving students,

one of the greatest frustrations was the lack of guidance and academic counseling. Postsecondary institutions, which understand their immigrant students' needs at the time of registration could better provide appropriate individualized support and counseling.

1. *Increase the immigrants' understanding of the system and faculty expectations with individualized and regular counseling for both the Bangladeshi and the Mexican immigrant students.* Registration is an opportunity to identify immigrant students. Institutional counselors, preferably bilingual in the language of the least successful immigrant students, and trained in the cultures of the many immigrants who attend the particular institution in which they work, might provide a bridge between the immigrant students and the institutions. Immigrant students have specific needs that are different from the native students (Woodlief, Thomas & Orozco, 2003), including learning about the host country's postsecondary system, understanding faculty expectations, accessing financial assistance, and finding campus and community resources that can support them while they are in college, and support their families in the community. Counselors and faculty partnering to understand the various cultures of their diverse students, learning to identify if a student has communication difficulties or is struggling in class, can direct students to appropriate resources, such as tutoring or ESL classes.

2. *Inclusion of immigrant communities in postsecondary institutional plans for institutional planning and multi-cultural professional development may increase immigrant participation in postsecondary education.* Community colleges in the US and further education colleges in the UK primarily enroll students who live in the community. Although the local secondary schools are often important feeders to the colleges, the older immigrants in the communities frequently attend the local college for ESL or job training. Institutional awareness of, and participation in the community offer opportunities for the institution to include immigrants in planning institutional direction and participating in professional development for the counselors and faculty.

### ***Implications for Future Study***

This qualitative research study, as stated previously, describes experiences of immigrants who leave early from postsecondary education. In this section, I suggest areas for further research.

- *The impact of cultural limitations, financial needs, and if sufficient finances would outweigh cultural obligations.* Participants reported cultural obligations to either stay close to home with the children, as happened with Diaz 2W and two of the second-generation Bangladeshi women, or they needed to work to take care of parents and siblings financially, as Ali 3 and

Ali 4 reported and Diaz 1 described. Such a study would clarify for postsecondary institutions, and governments which subsidize students and education, what the financial needs are of immigrant students, and whether money would address the culture of family responsibility and loyalty.

Postsecondary institutional leadership can only attend to the known needs of immigrant students. If we know the financial needs of the students and their families, institutions can seek creative ways to support the immigrants, whether through more flexible scheduling, partnerships with local businesses to provide paid training opportunities, or career counseling for short courses that lead to career ladders.

- *The influence of spousal and sibling support as compared to parental support for attending postsecondary education.* The Bangladeshis were particularly involved in financially and morally supporting younger siblings to attend postsecondary education. The Mexicans received moral and, coincidentally financial, support from spouses. Such a study should examine immigrant students of all ages. My interviews showed that many immigrants attended postsecondary education as mature adults. It is not uncommon for people to immigrate as teenagers, after attending secondary school in their native country. The support of the older immigrant student is different than that of teenagers. The adult immigrant is influenced by siblings and spouses more than by parents. Institutional leadership can provide avenues to solicit

sibling and spousal support. Family days take on a new look when siblings, spouses, and children of the students are involved, rather than the parents of the students.

- *A larger sampling of immigrant students and early-leaving students to better see trends of the experiences in postsecondary education.* A larger study is especially important in the US where the reports by the Mexican immigrants of racism and discrimination were troubling, but not necessarily indicative of anything more than a few bad experiences. Three hundred sixty-three interviews of students conducted by California Tomorrow (California Tomorrow, April 2002) showed about a third experienced some degree of “invalidating” behaviors and attitudes from community college faculty and counselors when interacting with minority students (p. 9). It would be also of benefit to interview participants with more current experiences in the UK, since the problem of dropouts is only recently recorded in current British literature. Postsecondary institutions in the UK and the US can take leadership roles in addressing immigrant retention problems in college if they understand the issues of the immigrants. Larger and frequent studies would keep the institutions informed of upcoming trends and problems that may affect their students and the completion rates of the college.
- *The second generation immigrants, those born to parents who immigrated to the host country, seem to be dropping out in as high numbers as the first*

*generation.* In both populations, the Mexicans and the Bangladeshis, the frequent comment was they all knew many more second generation immigrants who had dropped out than first generation. The impression I had was that most of first generation immigrants who immigrated as adults were too busy learning the language and working to go to postsecondary education, unless perhaps they were already educated and wanted the equivalent credentials in their new country. Studies of the second generation immigrants, starting at the secondary school level where a large number of them leave the education system in both the UK and the US might lead to a better understanding of what support the students need to complete school or continue into postsecondary education. It is important that the leadership examine this trend quickly, before a whole generation of immigrants become marginalized and relegated to the lowest socio-economic status in their host countries.

Additional interviews of both immigrant groups, including those currently participating in postsecondary education and second-generation immigrants who dropped out of postsecondary education, (a seemingly easier group to capture based on the conversations I had in both the UK and the US with members of the Bangladeshi and Mexican groups) would add to the understanding of immigrants experiences in education.

The identified additional studies could provide valuable information to both the US and the UK as the postsecondary institutions attempt to curb the high dropout



rates of the Bangladeshis and Mexicans. As noted previously, such knowledge could prove of value to other countries suffering the same trends. This study was primarily limited by its size. Financial support for a much larger study, such as conducted by California Tomorrow, in Wales and the US might have shown additional themes not identified within the experiences of the ten participants.

### *Closing Thought*

The research for this study focused on the overall guiding question: *Why do Bangladeshi and Mexican immigrants leave postsecondary education early in the Wales and California respectively?* The described experiences of the participants revealed commonalities of the immigrant experiences that have led me to insights and understandings that are already impacting my career. Immigrants are our future citizens who will influence national politics, education and economy. Educating the diverse citizens in all countries is imperative if there are to be effective national and world leaders. The UK and the US postsecondary institutions are considered some of the best in the world, producing large numbers of world-renowned researchers, world leaders, and Nobel Prize winners. Interviews with immigrants showed me some primary causes for their poor completion rates in postsecondary education and early leaving. I hope this study offers some inspiration and insights to make the necessary changes that will support immigrants in postsecondary education.

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