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The premise of this research is that rural immigrants comprise a significant source of untapped human and social capital necessary for community development. However, to capitalize on the growing ethnic diversity in rural America, immigrant newcomers must want to stay in their new rural communities. This investigation was designed to identify factors necessary to enhance rural Latino immigrants' long-term residential stability. Thus, we sought to: (1) identify perceptions of rural residence, with particular attention to employment opportunities and challenges; (2) assess formal support availability and community issues of greatest concern to rural Latinas; and (3) identify strategies for creating bi-cultural communities. To achieve these goals, qualitative and quantitative data were collected from first-generation immigrant Latinas and their second-generation peers residing in five rural Nebraska communities. Recommendations for service and outreach are provided, as are suggestions for continued research and scholarship.

Literature Review

Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in the United States; a large percentage of whom were born in foreign countries (Garcia, 2005). Culturally diverse communities are no longer restricted to border states (e.g., Arizona, California, and Texas) and urban gateway cities. Traditionally homogenous Midwestern states are becoming increasingly ethnically diverse due to an influx of immigrant newcomers. Nebraska is no exception. Between 1990 and 2000, Nebraska's Latino growth rate eclipsed national averages (109 percent vs. 39 percent) (WebArchives, 2000) and had one of the highest Latino growth rates during the 1990's (Marotta & Garcia, 2003). Further, in *rural* areas specifically, Latino populations have doubled from 1.5 to 3.2 million in the last two decades (Kandel & Cromartie, 2004).

Rural development has been a focus of local, state, and national policy for decades, with significant investments in rural capital (Cartwright & Gallagher, 2002). *Human capital* refers to people and their ability to satisfy human needs such as in technical knowledge and leadership skills; *social capital* refers to human networks characterized by customs, laws, and institutions (e.g., family, civic groups, government) (Cartwright & Gallagher, 2002). Human and social capital is critical for successful rural development (Castle, 2002), especially in areas experiencing rapid demographic shifts. Many Midwestern rural communities are facing an alarming out-migration of Caucasian residents and a simultaneous in-migration of immigrant newcomers lured by employment in agribusiness-related industries. Because immigrants maintain the population base, an immigrant influx contributes to the sustainability of rural communities;

however, immigrants' rural residence is not stable (Dalla, Huddleston-Casas, & León, 2008). After a single generation, many Latino immigrants leave rural communities in search of better educational and economic opportunities in urban areas. Residential instability renders the development of human and social capital that could be harnessed for community development difficult to achieve.

Theoretical Approach

Individuals and families immigrate in order to maximize earnings and minimize risk to long-term well-being (Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002; Kandel & Massey, 2002). Push and pull factors are critical in the immigration decision-making process (Massey, 1996). Push factors are those which create risks to well-being (e.g., economic instability, poverty, war or threats to physical safety, oppression) and thus encourage movement. Pull factors are those which attract people to a particular host country (e.g., perceptions of economic or political stability, sound community infrastructure) due to perceptions of enhanced physical and psycho-social well-being. Although developed to illuminate the complexity of *international* movement, this model also aids understanding of immigrants' residential stability within the host country as well. That is, identification of factors which compel immigrants to leave (i.e., push) or remain (i.e., push) in specific rural areas is critical for promoting residential stability within a particular area or community. According to the literature, economic opportunity and community supports (both formal and informal) are especially important "pull" factors.

Economic Opportunities. Internationally, the U.S. is perceived as having many economic opportunities. It is therefore attractive to those from impoverished or economically disadvantaged countries. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), in 2004 more than one in seven U.S. workers were foreign born, with half arriving since 1990 (CBO, 2005). Almost 40% of newly arrived foreign-born workers are from Mexico and Central America (CBO, 2005).

Rural communities are particularly attractive to immigrant populations because of (1) urban labor market saturation; (2) dissatisfaction with urban crime and schools; and (3) new industry growth offering jobs to unskilled laborers (Broadway, 2000). A major pull factor for immigrant Latinos in the rural Midwest is year-round employment in the meat processing industry. Although annual salaries are low (average $22,460) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007), cost of living in rural areas is substantially more affordable than in urban areas—thus balancing the minimal income. And, despite the physically demanding and dangerous conditions associated with packing-plant work, a recent study found that most Midwestern immigrant meat-processing workers felt well-compensated for their labor (Dalla, Ellis, & Cramer, 2005). However, in the same study, immigrant parents indicated wanting *more* for their children—they hoped their children would obtain the education necessary to compete for higher-wage, less physically demanding positions. Such educational advancements (e.g., post-secondary school) with attendant career advancing opportunities are not typically available in rural communities, resulting in immigrant families' relocation to larger cities as their children age.

Community Supports. The role of the community in contributing to well-being and residential stability is well documented (Meyer, 2006; Gahin, Veleva, & Hart, 2003). Churches, clubs, and community groups often provide a sense of belongingness (Magrab, 1999); and formal services from government (e.g., health and human services, police), educational institutions (e.g., cooperative extension, public schools), and charitable organizations (e.g., United Way) (Mannes, Roehlkepartain, & Benson, 2005) provide a sense of security and well-being. However, to maintain their attractiveness, support systems must be available. Because of geographic isolation, economic deprivation, and the lack of a well-defined human infrastructure, rural areas often lack adequate formal supports (Bull & DeCroix Bane, 2001). This is often the case in Nebraska where 90% of its counties are considered Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSAs). Further, even if resources exist, they are often not accessible to Latino immigrants due to cultural and language barriers, and financial cost (Padilla, 1997). Formal supports are notoriously *underutilized* among Latino populations (Parke & Buriel, 1998).

This research was based on the premise that rural immigrant Latinos' assets, skills, knowledge, and social networks could prove significant for maintaining the viability, and continued vitality, of rural communities. Thus, the goal of this investigation was to illuminate factors which contribute to rural Latinos' long-term residential stability. More specifically, we sought to: (1) identify Latinas perceptions of rural residence, with particular attention to employment opportunities and challenges; (2) assess formal support availability and identify community-wide

factors of greatest concern to rural Latinas; and (3) identify strategies for creating bi-cultural communities—those more conducive to an ethnically and culturally diverse resident population.

Methods

Participant Recruitment

Five rural Nebraska communities were targeted for data collection because of substantial increases in their Latino populations over the past decade and high concentrations of Latino residents. Participants were recruited through: 1) Extended educators in the target communities who distributed bi-lingual (Spanish/English) flyers explaining the study; 2) an advertisement in two rural Spanish-language newspapers; and 3) Catholic churches. All recruitment materials contained a brief description of the study and a toll-free number to learn more. Participation required individuals be female, 19 years of age or older, living within one of the target communities (or surrounding areas), first- or second-generation Latino immigrant, and married (or co-habiting with a partner) with at least one biological child in the home.

Procedures

A Colombian, bi-lingual research assistant (RA) monitored the phone line and arranged all data collection. Data were collected using focus-groups and self-report survey indices. All data collection sessions included people of the same nativity who lived in the same community; sessions occurred in schools, extension buildings, conference centers, or churches. A total of 9 focus groups (with six to eight participants in each) were conducted (i.e., six with first-generation immigrant Latinas and three with second-generation Latinas). After obtaining informed

consent, participants completed a series of self-report survey indices (in Spanish or English) and then engaged in a focus group discussion. Discussions occurred in Spanish, were led by the RA, and all were audio tape-recorded. Discussion sessions focused on: perceptions of rural residence, employment, service availability, and community bi-culturalism. Data collection lasted an average of 3.5 hours (range = 2 to 4 hours) and participants were compensated. Focus group data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using MaxQDA, a computer program designed to analyze text-based data. All data were analyzed independently by two RAs and the PI. Bi-weekly meetings allowed for confirmation of results (i.e., identification of themes and sub-themes). When coding discrepancies arose, we examined the original data for clarification.

Instrumentation

Language Preference/Acculturation. The Language Preference Scale (Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980) consists of 12 items measuring preference for Spanish or English using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Spanish Only to 5 = English Only). A score of three or more indicates primary English language usage. This scale provided a proxy for acculturation.

Community Concerns and Support. Participants indicated their level of concern (1 = not concerned to 4 = definitely concerned) over 17 community issues (e.g., alcohol use, unemployment, housing, interethnic conflict, language barriers). Higher scores indicate greater concern. Participants also completed a survey to assess the availability of 17 different community-wide supports (e.g., medical care, job training, youth activities, and financial assistance). Response

choices range from 1 (not difficult to obtain) to 4 (very difficult to obtain), with higher scores indicating greater difficulty in obtaining the service.

Participants

Fifty-one first-generation Latinas (i.e., born in Mexico/Latin America) and fourteen second-generation Latinas (i.e., born in the U.S. with parents born in Mexico/Latin America) participated. Using language use as a proxy for acculturation, the 65 participants were divided into two groups: Spanish-Speaking Latinas and English-Speaking Latinas.

Spanish-Speaking Latinas (SSL) (n = 42) ranged in age from 19 years to 54 years (mean = 33 years). They averaged three children (range = 1 to 7) and most (n = 32) self identified as Mexican/Mexican-American. The number of household members ranged from 3 to 10 (average = 5) and years of formal schooling ranged from 4 to 14 (mean = 9 years). They had lived in their respective communities an average of 7 years.

English-Speaking Latinas (ESL) (n = 23) ranged in age from 19 years to 50 years (mean = 30 years). They averaged 3 children each (range = 1 to 4). Most (n = 21) were married and self-identified as Mexican/Mexican-American (n = 12) or Latina (n = 10). They averaged 12 years of formal schooling (range = 6 to 14 years). Number of household members varied from three to thirteen (mean = 5); they had lived in their respective communities an average of 10 years. (See Table 1 for complete demographic data).

Results

Goal One: Identify Latinas' perceptions of rural residence, with particular attention to employment opportunities and challenges.

Analysis of focus group data revealed many commonalities between the two participant groups. First, in terms of residence in the U.S., and rural America specifically, SSLs particularly enjoyed the conveniences of Americans (e.g., washing machines, hot water), the freedom afforded to women, the availability of food, and the expectation of spousal "togetherness" on outings—which they attributed to the influence of Midwestern family values. They also liked the educational opportunities available to their children and feelings of safety which accompanied rural residence. However, they also mentioned that life was "fast-paced" in the U.S., which created stress. One SSL explained: *"Life here makes me stressed. Life goes by without knowing it, always watching the clock [and then it's] time to leave and later when I get home it is doing laundry, taking a shower and going straight to sleep. The next day is the same. In Mexico that's not the case."* Similarly, ESLs also liked the feelings of safety and tranquility associated with rural residence, and thus, believed rural America provided an ideal setting for raising young children. One said: *"It is very peaceful here. You can walk around at any hour and nothing happens. It's very hard to do the same thing in big cities… someone might attack you or your child or rob you. Here you could leave all of your things outside your house [and still] find all your things exactly where you left them."* Like their SSL counterparts, ESLs also commented on the small schools, believing that students were afforded greater individual attention and more opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. Finally, economics was an important issue of discussion—and a critical aspect of consideration with regard to residential decision-making. Several ESLs noted that work availability was central in their

decision to live in rural Nebraska, yet others explained the lack of jobs was a primary reason behind their impending relocations. The desire to relocate was associated with their children getting older and contemplating entry into the work force. Those planning to relocate felt that too few jobs were available; participants often discussed moving to larger cities in search of better economic opportunities. One ESL nicely summed up the situation: *"Although I like this small town, my husband and I are planning to move to a bigger city. My husband wants to be somewhere where he can progress. He wants to continue studying and so do I. We want to do something that will make us grow to set the example for our daughter…we don't want to be in a place where she can't progress."* Employment opportunities in small communities are limited—particularly for immigrant newcomers lacking English speaking skills and/or formal education. An ESL commented: *"When I came here in the 90's there were a lot of jobs. Now they are talking about closing the Tyson plant. This is a problem. I can find a job anywhere because I'm bilingual. But the Hispanics who don't speak English will be affected the most. My husband will be affected because he won't be able to find another job here since his English isn't perfect."* As suggested in the literature, economic stability was significant in participants' residential decision-making. Thus, discussion often centered on employment opportunities and challenges.

Employment

As evident in Table 1, most participants were employed either full-time (SSLs n = 23 or 55%; ESLs n = 11 or 48%) or part-time (SSLs n = 5 or 12%; ESLs n = 5 or 22%). Thirteen (31%) SSLs and seven

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Data

	SPANISH SPEAKING LATINAS (N=42)	ENGLISH SPEAKING LATINAS (N=23)
	% MEAN (SD)	% MEAN (SD)
AGE (IN YEARS)	33 (7)	30 (7)
NUMBER OF CHILDREN	3 (1)	2 (1)
ETHNICITY		
Central American	7	4
Hispanic/Latina	16	44
Mexican/Mexican American	76	52
MARTIRAL STATUS		
Married	95	91
Cohabiting	5	9
FORMAL EDUCATION*[a]	9 (3)	12 (2)
YEARS IN COMMUNITY**[b]	7 (4)	10 (4)
NUMBER IN HOUSEHOLD	5 (1)	5 (2)
EMPLOYMENT STATUS		
Full-Time	55	48
Part-Time	12	22
Unemployed/Looking	7	13
Unable to Work	24	17
ANNUAL INCOME***[c]		
< $10,000	5	0
$10,000 - $19,999	19	26
$20,000 - $29,999	31	39
$30,000 - $39,999	7	17
$40,000 - $49,999	17	0
$50,000 or more	0	13
Don't Know	19	4

*[a]$F_{(2, 82)} = 28.567$, $p = .000$, post-hoc comparisons: SSLs have significantly less formal education than their ESL peers

**[b]$F_{(2, 80)} = 15.808$, $p = .000$, post-hoc comparisons: ESLs have lived in their respective communities significantly longer than SSLs

***[c]$x^2 = 49.881$, $p = .000$

(30%) ESLs were unemployed. Data analysis revealed three primary employment themes: necessity of dual-wage earner families, and marital and personal impacts from female employment.

Necessity of Dual-Wage Earner Families. Not surprisingly, participants worked because they needed the income. Two pay-checks were necessary to pay bills, to support their families, and to provide nice things for their children. In this regard, SSLs and ESLs were in agreement. Still, despite having two incomes, finances continued to be a concern for most. One SSL explained how she wanted to quit her job, but could not until her husband's salary increased. She then said, *"I've been waiting 13 years and that moment hasn't come yet."*

Although most participants were employed, thirteen SSLs (31%) and seven ESLs (30%) were not. ESLs were more likely to report that they did not need to work, and thus, preferred staying home with their children. Reasons for *unemployment* were more varied among the SSLs. Several chose being home with their children over employment, despite the need for money, because they were uncomfortable leaving their children with strangers. Two SSLs also mentioned that if they worked they would earn a salary comparable to that of their husbands which would create marital difficulties. However, the primary reason for SSL unemployment was illegal immigrant status; this issue was a concern in each of the focus groups involving SSLs. As illegal immigrants, it was nearly impossible to find work. Further, illegal status created problems for those who were employed in that they were unwilling to seek help if problems arose in the workplace (e.g., harassment, abuse).

Marriage & Family Impacts. All participants with wage work agreed that their employment impacted their marriages and families. In terms of benefits, the additional income from both spouses' employment was most significant. However, benefits from work extended beyond monetary compensation. One ESL noted having a better understanding of why her husband was often so tired, which helped her appreciate him more. And another commented that when women work, it helps their husbands to understand them more. Despite these benefits, female employment also incurred challenges. First, the majority of women in both groups believed their employment created distance between themselves and their husbands because of limited time and energy. Increased stress and additional demands from work meant that spouses spent less time together and had less energy for enjoying each other's company. Physical intimacy, in particular, had suffered among many. Further, some spouses worked *opposite shifts* which greatly reduced time they were home together. Beyond these similarities, several differences were also noted. Most notably was that many SSLs believed their employment incurred feelings of insecurity in their husbands. One SSL stated, *"[he was] afraid that I was becoming stronger, really climbing the ladder…afraid that I was moving forward to bigger and better things and that I wouldn't need him."* And another said, *"He [husband] wanted me to be dependent on him financially so I wouldn't leave."* Similarly, another SSL reported that her husband called her *"a chauvinist woman"* for working. One participant nicely summarized the situation faced by many SSLs with the following

comment: *"Husbands feel threatened when their wives don't depend on them. They want us to depend on them 100%."*

Although many SSL felt their husbands were threatened by their employment, the manner in which these women *responded* to husband insecurities differed. Some attempted to appease their partners. To illustrate, one SSL was offered a position with a higher salary than her husband but declined the offer because her husband, *"could not accept that."* Likewise, another *"pulled back at work from responsibilities and coworkers because he [husband] didn't support me."* In contrast, other SSLs refused to yield to their husband's inflexibility. One was particularly adamant in her ability to care for herself and described a recent argument with her spouse: *"I made it clear to him that I knew how to work and that I wasn't the only woman in the world with children and that I could be single. My world was not going to end if he was no longer around or with me. I need him as a companion, as a husband, a lover but not to live my life. I don't need him to support me."*

In addition to limited time with partners, women in both groups described being responsible for the majority of *family labor*—cooking, household chores, childcare; husbands' lack of assistance was creating marital tension. Six SSLs reported that they were responsible for *"everything,"* with one commenting, *"I do the impossible to do everything and not quit working."* This feeling was shared by many ESLs. Comments such as *"He won't pick up much less wash a plate…he expects everything to be done for him,"* *"Whether a woman works or not, they [spouses] expect everything to be ready at the house,"* and *"I'm tired of having to come home and do everything"* were frequently made. Not surprisingly, arguments with spouses

over family labor, and wives' feelings of inequality, often resulted. However, it is important to also point out that some participants, particularly ESLs, reported having husbands who *shared* family labor and household responsibilities. Approximately 20% of ESLs, compared to only 10% of SSLs, noted that their husbands participated in family labor and supported their employment.

Personal Impacts. In addition to impacting their marriages and families, participants also described how employment impacted them personally (i.e., internally). Many participants, particularly those with unsupportive partners, described feeling guilty for working with beliefs that they were "neglecting" their families. A SSL commented: *"Perhaps I'm not sure I'm a good wife… Perhaps I should quit working and completely devote myself to the kids. There's a war going on inside me."* Another was trying to decide whether she should quit her job to *"…be a better wife by taking care of him [husband] and the children."* Another SSL agreed, explaining: *"I feel as though I am neglecting the children because I work."* Women in both participant groups described feeling *"stressed"* from too much to do, and too little time. To compensate, they mentioned doing the following: *"I sleep whenever I can in the morning, so that I am more awake when she [daughter] comes home from school,"* *"I try to be the best mother and wife that I can be,"* and *"I give 100%, 200%."* Not surprisingly, in addition to feeling stressed, many were *"exhausted"* much of the time.

In contrast to challenges, participants also described personal *benefits* of employment. SSLs, in particular, reported that employment not only created stress, but conversely, acted as a "stress reliever" because it afforded them independence,

gave them something to do outside the home, and further, made them feel useful. Comments such as *"I work to get rid of stress, I don't need to work,"* *"I want to have my own wings,"* and *"I don't want to be cooped up in the house all day,"* were all mentioned by SSLs. Several ESLs also described personal benefits from wage work. There was an interesting distinction however, in that personal benefits noted by ESLs centered on feeling good about providing for their families and children, rather than enjoying greater independence, as was so often noted by SSLs.

Goal Two: Assess formal support availability and community-wide factors of greatest concern to rural Latinas.

Community Concerns and Supports: Quantitative Data

Survey results provide a window for understanding participants' feelings about formal community support services in rural Nebraska. In some respects, there was a great deal of similarity between the two groups of women. Issues of *greatest concern* for all participants included: inter-ethnic conflict, language barriers, and alcohol and drug use. However, the two groups differed on issues of *least concern.* ESLs were least concerned about the availability of recreational activities and housing, whereas their SSL peers were least concerned about job availability for adults and spousal abuse. Analysis of service availability revealed additional patterns of similarity and difference. ESLs felt that counseling services and job training for adults were *limited;* SSLs agreed, and also indicated that weekend activities for youth, financial assistance, affordable housing, and after-school care for children were lacking.

Community Concerns and Supports: Qualitative Data

Counseling Services. The availability of mental health services was discussed by women in both groups. Only two of the five target communities offered mental health services in Spanish. Although interpreters were sometimes available to assist mental health professionals, the lack of privacy was a barrier to using professional counseling services. ESLs, more than SSLs, had utilized mental health professionals because they did not need interpreters. Another barrier was the expense; participants were discouraged by the cost of professional counseling, especially when such services were not covered by insurance. Finally, SSLs in particular believed legal status prevented rural Latinas from accessing mental health services. One woman explained, *"There are some people who aren't here legally so at times they are afraid to seek professional help for fear of being reported to the authorities…this fear paralyzes them and stops them from seeking help."* Given barriers to professional mental health assistance, participants often reported obtaining advice from priests, substance abuse counselors, or medical doctors.

Youth Activities. Although both SSLs and ESLs liked the tranquility of their small communities, tranquility sometimes translated into *limited activities for youth.* Two SSL groups discussed at length the lack of places for their children to play, with one commenting: *"I have three children who aren't in school yet. Sometimes we want to take them out because it's boring in the house…There are too few places to go to."* Consequently, they were concerned that their children spent too much time on the telephone and computer. They also described connections between limited

youth activities and substance use. A SSL explained: *"I lived in California for 12 years and the difference was obvious when I got here. We came here because people said that it was a good place to raise kids because it was more peaceful and had fewer drugs and gangs. But it has its good side and its bad side… there's nowhere for them to go to have fun during their school break. There isn't any place where you can go to escape drugs."* This sentiment was confirmed by ESLs, one of whom remarked: *"Children start to drink at a very young age and are sexually active far too early as well. I attribute this situation to the fact that all of the entertainment spots are just too far away. It's easier to entertain yourself by doing these things than going to someplace far away to have some clean fun. Underage drinking is a definite problem here."*

Discrimination. When examining social issues related to immigrants' rural community residence, perceptions of discrimination often emerge (see Dalla et al., 2005). Such was the case in this investigation as well. Not only was inter-ethnic conflict identified as a primary concern in the survey data, nearly all participants had experienced discriminatory actions in the U.S., and in their rural communities specifically. Discrimination, or perceptions of such, was most often felt at schools, workplaces, and community events. One SSL commented *"Sometimes when I go out to the park or a restaurant or whatever I find that we are the only Hispanics there and people look at us strangely. If we speak Spanish they look at us strangely as though we somehow don't fit in, that we don't belong there."* Another agreed, explaining: *"…in this town you can feel the gaze of those people who don't really like you or accept you. They watch*

you whenever you enter anywhere and you're not made to feel truly welcomed." Participants also experienced discrimination in their search for housing. One SSL explained: *"When you have recently arrived here the most difficult thing is that you find that all the doors are closed to you. Although you might go to a boarding house with money in your hand, you will simply be told 'We don't want Hispanics here' or 'I don't want Hispanic people in my place.' Lots of people have faced this."*

Participants believed long-term community residents, especially adults, were most likely to hold prejudices and act in discriminatory ways. Moreover, both groups of women mentioned that discrimination *between* Latinos from different countries was not uncommon. Disagreements and inter-ethnic tension (e.g., jealousy, lack of unity) were discussed by SSLs in multiple focus groups. One SSL explained: *"The people in this area are afraid. They've said that we've come along to take their jobs away from them. I have heard such comments from people who have been here for 9, 10 months who haven't yet learned English. The mentality of this place is so small."* Further, ESLs believed Latinos were discriminated against due to appearance; whereas their SSL peers believed most discrimination resulted from language barriers. One ESL remarked: *"There is discrimination simply for the sake of being Latina. People aren't interested in whether you're a citizen or if you were born here. They simply have to look at you and see your name written down and realize that you're Hispanic to discriminate against you."* It is important to note that, in general, the participants believed that discrimination is present in all countries and further, that U.S. policies intensified fear of outsiders and "illegals." Most also believed that change,

and the development of *acceptance* for "outsiders" was possible. However, in order for change to occur, people had to *want* to change.

Latino Participation in Community Activities. Although not addressed in the survey questionnaire, focus group discussions revealed that ESLs and SSLs desired more community integration; however, perceptions of marginalization prevailed. Community activities, they noted, were frequently organized by and for Americans (i.e., non-Latino immigrants), schools and churches were divided by ethnicity, and further, that the communities were socially "close knit" leading to feelings of exclusion. A SSL remarked: *"In our church there are two groups: the Americans and the Hispanics. If we [Hispanics] want to hold an activity then we run it by the priest first. However, he won't make any decisions unless the Americans are in agreement with our plans."* Another explained: *"This is a very close-knit community. Most people here don't accept you. The main reason why we feel marginalized is precisely because they don't make us feel welcomed."* Some also believed that Latinos were simply not *invited* to participate in community events, even those at the schools. A SSL said, *"There are meetings at the school and you should participate because our kids are there. I think that perhaps these groups haven't taken Latinos into account… I feel as though Latinos aren't considered."* ESLs tended to agree with their SSL peers, noting that community events were either not widely announced or announced in English only thereby excluding non-English speakers. An ESL explained: *"I heard an announcement on the radio but Mexicans don't listen to the radio in English. They also put ads in the paper but many*

Hispanic people don't receive the paper or can't read English… I don't know if it's to prevent Latinos from attending these events or that they just haven't thought to do these things."

Goal Three: Identify strategies for creating bi-cultural rural communities.

The third goal of this investigation was to identify strategies for *promoting* rural bi-culturalism, believing that community integration and acceptance of multi-ethnic populations would exert a "pull" factor for Latinos' long-term residential decision-making. Education, informal social support, and appreciation of diverse cultures emerged as key themes.

Education. Both ESLs and their SSL peers emphasized the significance of *education,* for children as well as adults. First, they noted that in order to achieve bi-culturalism in small multi-ethnic communities, *language barriers* had to be addressed and overcome. In regard to children's education, participants felt the schools were making progress in hiring and retaining bi-lingual educators—thus, they were confident that language barriers would not be a challenge to their children's development. However, learning a new language for *adults* is not easy—particularly in rural areas with limited services. A SSL explained: *"Here, English classes are offered but the group that studies English is very advanced…I went several times and I could see that they expected newcomers to read just as well as everyone else…it's very hard to learn English here."* In addition to learning English, participants also believed the key to community integration rested in cultural education—Latinos had to learn about "American" culture, and Americans needed to be educated about Latino culture. However, the difficulty with learning American culture was again

entwined with language. As explained by the participants, government and politics were conducted in English only, signs and instructions were only written in English, and services and professionals were largely mono-speaking English. Thus, informal sources of support were relied upon in the learning process.

Informal Social Support. Although all participants agreed on the importance of informal support for promoting community integration, the two groups differed in their informal support needs. SSLs described a preference for small groups of trusted friends, believing that close companions provided a vehicle for expanding their social networks. In turn, spending time with small peer networks resulted in: 1.) deeper community and cultural understanding (e.g., norms, American culture) and 2.) a greater sense of community connectedness. Informal support was also beneficial in dispelling myths or inaccurate assumptions about American culture. One SSL explained: *"My husband and I belong to the Bible study group which has allowed us to interact with many people, Hispanics as well as Americans. Through the Bible study group, we've come to realize that not all Americans are racists."* In contrast, ESLs described the need to meet and interact with *many* people, in varied and diverse settings; the bonds created by wide-spread social networking promoted feelings of security, on the one hand, and positive interactions between Latinos and Americans, on the other. It is important to point out that *language* is again an important factor to consider. Because of their bi-lingual skills, the ESLs were positioned to be able to effortlessly socialize with a broad range of ethnically and culturally diverse people; communication skills are critical

in the development of bi-cultural social networks. Beyond expanding social networks, participants also believed that the creation of bi-cultural communities required appreciation for diversity.

Appreciation of Diversity. Despite residual feelings of social marginalization, both groups noticed greater appreciation for Latinos by non-Latino Caucasian community residents; Latinos were likewise developing a greater appreciation for American culture as well. In other words, with the growing presence of Latinos in rural Nebraska, fear of "outsiders" was subsiding somewhat, with subsequent appreciation for individual and cultural differences. Latino businesses were expanding; Mexican restaurants in particular were contributing to a greater appreciation for Latino culture. However, finding an appropriate *balance* between the diverse Latino and American cultural values and belief systems was difficult for many. This was especially true for SSLs who questioned the extent to which they could or should maintain traditional Latino cultural values in comparison to American values. This concern was particularly noteworthy in terms of their children's strong acceptance of American values, dress, behaviors, and lifestyles. Despite the women's acknowledging such was likely a result of peer pressure and their children's need to fit in, generational differences (between Latino immigrant parents and their children) nonetheless created tension and, for some, concern over the *loss* of Latino culture.

Discussion

Latino immigrants comprise an expanding population in the rural Midwest. Still, their residence is often temporary; after a single generation, Latino immigrants

tend to relocate to urban areas seeking better educational and economic opportunities. Latino immigrant populations are critical for the survival of many Midwestern rural communities. Beyond community survival, it is believed that Latino immigrants can contribute to rural community *revitalization*. Untapped skills, knowledge, and competencies can be harnessed to *strengthen* the economic base of rural areas through low-risk economic ventures, entrepreneurialism, and inter-ethnic business partnerships. However,

ment (i.e., higher status positions; post-secondary education) are limited. These limitations were found to be of greatest concern to *English speaking* Latinas as evident in both the focus group discussions and survey data, where ESLs identified "jobs for adults" as a *primary concern.* In contrast, SSLs were not concerned about jobs for adults—as low skilled wage work for non-English speakers is consistently available in rural packing plants. As expected, once immigrants' achieve a plateau in their ability to advance

with recent Latino immigrants to examine the intersection of work and gender. The female participants often worked more hours and earned more money than their male partners, but the consequences did not automatically translate into greater gender equality and sometimes reinforced gender subordination. Menjívar (1999a) writes, these men often respond by diminishing their own responsibilities [in the home and paid work force] thereby creating great burdens, physically and financially, for the women at home (p. 622). Significantly, gender role dissonance in rapidly changing marital and parent-child relationships can amplify and intensify conflicts and lead to family breakdown among immigrant families moving to new socio-cultural contexts (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Menjìvar, 1999a). Continued research on the impacts of gendered power differentials for marital harmony, *and* family economic well-being is necessary. Beyond basic research, a critical need exists for the development of strategies to assist immigrants adjust to dual-wage earner families, with sensitivity to cultural dilemmas posed by such; a gendered analysis and approach is warranted.

> Latino immigrant populations are critical for the survival of many Midwestern rural communities. Beyond community survival, it is believed that Latino immigrants can contribute to rural community revitalization.

for such to occur, Latino immigrants must *want to maintain* residence in rural areas. This investigation was designed to identify factors necessary to enhance rural Latino immigrants' long-term residential stability. In particular, we sought to identify immigrant Latinas' perceptions of: (1) rural residence, with particular focus on employment opportunities and challenges, (2) formal support availability and community-wide concerns, and (3) strategies necessary for creating bi-cultural rural communities.

As noted in other studies of rural Latino immigrants (Dalla, MoulikGupta, Lopez, & Jones, 2006; Gouveia & Stull, 1997; Grey, 1995), economic opportunities (i.e., especially for low-skilled wage labor) and other indicators of family well-being (e.g., physical safety, small schools) attract SSLs to the rural Midwest. However, as hypothesized, opportunities for economic and educational *advance-*

educationally and economically in rural areas—movement to urban geographies is likely to occur.

Additional challenges associated with *female* employment, in particular, are worthy of discussion. First, SSLs in particular, experienced significant marital tension as a result of their husbands' unsupportive attitudes and insecurities about their wives' employment status—fearing their wives' economic independence would weaken their marital commitment. Second, both SSLs and ESLs frequently described *gendered power differentials* in their marriages. That is, despite their wage work, the majority of participants described spouses who contributed little to home management or childcare. The situation left many feeling overworked and exhausted, and had created significant marital tension for some. Similar findings have been documented elsewhere. Menjívar (1999a) conducted interviews

The second and third goals of this investigation focused attention on community-wide issues (i.e., formal service provision) and strategies for creating bi-cultural integration and connectedness. As noted in the literature (Friedman, 2003) and as evident in participants' comments, formal support services are severely limited in rural communities. Both participant groups identified the need for *mental health services.* Mental health practitioners are difficult to access in rural America; Spanish speaking providers are nearly non-existent. Yet, results of this study indicate great need for multi-cultural, bi-lingual

service providers; furthermore, the data suggest that immigrant newcomers *would use* the services of professional mental health providers if services were available and not cost prohibitive. Results of this study further suggest that a *group counseling* approach might be an effective model when working with immigrant newcomers. The focus group methodology used here was commended by participants. Because of their busy schedules, they rarely spent time with peers; the group approach allowed them time to be with others facing similar issues and problems and thus, a sense of camaraderie developed. Thus, a group approach to mental health intervention might be particularly effective and serve an additional need of expanding immigrants' needs for social connectedness. Both participant groups also identified the need for *recreational* activities for children and youth. Although many had *moved* to rural areas to protect their children from negative peer pressure and the influence of drugs and alcohol, limited pro-social organized activities in *rural* areas, they noted, were contributing to youths' substance use. Finally, both ESLs and SSLs discussed the significant role that language barriers played in: (1) limiting economic opportunities; (2) creating feelings of social marginalization; (3) limiting Latinos' active participation in community events; and (4) diminishing opportunities for cultural exploration and education. Addressing language barriers and creating formal supports and informal (i.e., leisure) social outlets are critical for rural residents' short- and long-term well-being. Service providers and community stakeholders can play a critical role in overcoming these rural challenges.

Service Provision. Anguiano and Kawamoto (2003) argue that a new paradigm shift, with an ecological focus, is necessary for addressing the needs of rural immigrants. They describe several recommendations for service providers and community stakeholders aimed at enhancing rural immigrants' optimal well-being. Such recommendations, we believe, would further promote immigrants' rural residential stability. First, Anguiano and Kawamoto (2003) note that outreach efforts much be culturally sensitive and family and community centered. Service providers must be attentive to the unique needs of immigrant families—many of whom may experience significant changes in *familial dynamics and functioning* that could be addressed, or alleviated, through appropriate intervention. Sensitivity to *family level* issues and dynamics is critical; this was particularly noteworthy among the SSLs of this investigation whose husbands, in many instances, viewed female employment as threatening.

Second, community stakeholders must have a vested interest in integrating immigrant newcomers within the community. Community stakeholders and leaders can play a critical role in forging relationships between immigrant families and long-term community residents. Service providers, community leaders, and local and state government agencies are challenged to work together to develop strategically effective means by which *language barriers,* in particular, can be addressed in rural multi-ethnic communities. Adult ESL classes should be offered at varying levels of competency (i.e., from beginner to advanced) and in tandem with employee work schedules (i.e., prior to or directly following industry shifts). Third, faith based centers are

often viewed as sources of information and security by immigrant newcomers (Menjívar, 1999b) and long-term residents alike and therefore, should be utilized as social and family gathering centers—with implications for bi-cultural understanding and integration (Anguiano & Kawamoto, 2003). In addition to service providers and community stakeholders, institutions of higher education and corporate businesses across the nation can play an important role in creating opportunities for educational and occupational advancements in rural areas.

Higher Education. Institutions of higher learning can assist in the revitalization of rural, multi-ethnic communities by helping immigrant newcomers obtain necessary educational credentials and labor-market skills necessary for career developmental and economic advancement. Anguiano and Kawamoto (2003) recommend university participation in the development of innovative approaches in serving rural families through specialists and technology. There is evidence that such partnerships are successful. To illustrate, at the University of Nebraska, teaching and extension faculty teamed up and developed a Career Ladder program. This was a multi-year, on-line delivery system of curricula which allowed student participants to obtain a bachelors degree in elementary education with bilingual certification. The program targeted paraprofessional educators (consisting largely of first generation immigrant Latinas) in five rural communities. At the program's completion, nine participants graduated with teaching endorsements. Likewise, in Los Angeles, another successful Career Ladder program was developed targeting *urban* Latino para-educators (Genzuk & French, 2002). Certainly, these ideas could

be expanded—with on-line education offered in many different areas, including for instance: agri-business management, engineering, and public administration. Through creative thinking and collaborative partnerships, technological advances can be successfully garnered to bridge the physical distance between institutes of higher education and isolated rural residents.

Corporate America. In addition to institutes of higher education, Corporate America can also play a critical role in developing the human capital available in rural areas (Anguiano & Kawamoto, 2003). The University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension (UK-CES) Service has developed a program to assist communities in providing a supportive environment for existing and *potential* entrepreneurs (Scorsone, 2003). Although this program is driven by the University of Kentucky, *corporate businesses* can *partner* with institutes of higher education in joint ventures—including the identification of workforce needs, financial assistance and support, and the development and delivery of training. Research suggests that Latino entrepreneurs are becoming quite successful in some rural areas (Zarrugh, 2007). Technological advances can be used in creative ways to address corporate needs for a diversified workforce (e.g., via home-based labor or the establishment of corporate business ventures in rural areas) and rural residents' needs for employment opportunities and career advancement.

Conclusion

Sustainable economic development endeavors are possible in rural communities, but not without the critical components of human and social capital (Robinson & Meikle-Yaw, 2007; Weinberg, 2000). Latino immigrants represent a vast pool of untapped human and social capital that can be harnessed to revitalize stagnant rural areas. However, unless pull factors outweigh push factors Latinos will continue to re-locate from rural to urban areas in search of better educational and economic opportunities. This research provides valuable information for creating strong incentives for Latino immigrants' rural residential stability. Continued research, especially studies that include Latino males and those targeting rural geographic areas in multiple states, will add valuable information to the literature and knowledge base. ◾

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