

Multinational Communities: understanding the experiences and perceptions of Latinos in Northfield, MN

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Abstract

This study investigated the experiences and perceptions of Latinos in Northfield, MN. Themes of community, identity, and connections to greater Northfield and between the Latino and non-Latino residents were the focus of our research. Why do Latinos come to Northfield? How do Latinos feel they are perceived? What are the greatest barriers to creating connections between Latinos and non-Latinos in Northfield? These and other similar questions framed our conversations with local residents. Our data and analysis was based on focus groups, interviews, and observations that were made possible through our collaboration with a local non-profit organization, Growing Up Healthy Rice County, and Latino community leaders. We have concluded that there is a desire and need for deeper conversation and sharing about Latino immigrant experiences in secure environments, in addition to cross cultural sharing and understanding among Latino and non-Latino residents of Northfield.

Introduction

Romantic conceptions of cultural difference have traditionally relied upon universals, dichotomies, and categorical contrast as place markers to define one-another. A classic example of this is simple—the map, a tool through which we learn to define ourselves from ‘them,’ the others. From an early age, we learn to associate maps—and their concomitant categories of the nation-state—with distinct people and cultures: Mexicans live in Mexico; in France live the French. Yet these tools and conceptualizations rely on a fundamentally problematic assumption: that of the “isomorphism of space, place, and culture” (Gupta 1992: 7). These categories fall short because they fail to represent accurately our complex, multifarious reality. Relying on nation-state boundaries to define one-another, how do we define immigrants, refugees, multinational citizens, and seasonal transitional laborers? Our inclination

to map the globe as a set of culture regions or homelands are bewildered by a dazzling array of postcolonial simulacra, doublings and redoublings, as India and Pakistan apparently reappear in postcolonial simulation in London, prerevolution Tehran rises from the ashes in Los Angeles, and a thousand similar cultural dreams are played out in urban and rural settings all across the globe (Gupta 1992: 10)

Notably, this phenomenon—“the erosion of such supposedly natural connections between peoples and places”—is not restricted to our largest, most multicultural cities; rather, communities large and small can witness the slippage between socio-political categories and our lived experiences (Gupta 1992: 10). Northfield, a farming town-gone-city of 17,000 residents in southern Minnesota, has experienced a rapid influx of Mexican immigrants in the last two decades. Though these communities are less visible from popular destinations in town, including down-town Northfield, Carleton campus, and St. Olaf campus, they play a significant role in Northfield and greater Minnesota—socially, economically, and politically, and are implicated in a larger multinational history.

Historically, Latinos have always occupied the territory now within the United States. Largely ignored until the 1880's when railroads brought European immigrants to the West, Latinos were eventually forced to relocate as the ideology of Manifest Destiny grew to dominate the American consciousness (Suro 1998:36). In 1910 the Mexican Revolution began and Los Angeles began to grow from Mexican immigration. Labor demand following industrialization further encouraged immigration to the region. Specifically during both World Wars, local economies experienced a dearth in available labor force, and, therefore, Mexicans found labor in the United States during this time through programs such as Agricultural Guest Worker Program, which originated in 1943. Though this program ended in 1964, it nevertheless left an open channel for many laborers to travel freely between Mexico and the U.S. Specifically concerned with

restricting immigration from Mexico, the U.S. government passed the Immigration and Control act in 1986. However, because this law permitted those immigrants who were already in the U.S. to remain, it further encouraged immigration as those permitted to remain simply provided accommodation and assistance to other immigrants—often family and friends.

Setting

Northfield itself is implicated in this greater national history. In her article titled “From El Pico to the Canon: The creation of Maltrata-Northfield Transnational Community,” Kristin Wallace explains that labor shortages during World War II drew many Mexican immigrants from the state of Veracruz through a “farm labor” program (2002: 35). The next big influx of Mexican immigrants to Northfield did not arrive until the early 1980s, when a large farm crisis forced many to immigrate to Northfield where they pursued employment with local manufacturers. According to Wallace, there were 23 Mexicans (0.2% of Northfield population) in 1980, while in 2000 there were 767 (4.5% of the population, although this could be underestimated by 25%). Today the Latino population in Northfield is 5.7% according to the 2000 US Census (2000). Wallace also states that the migration influx from Mexico to Northfield has moved towards the southern states of Mexico, including Veracruz where the Maltrata community—a population of about 15,000—is located. Today, Maltrata is the primary source of Mexican immigrants to Northfield: “Communities in the Veracruz state of Mexico, such as Maltrata, are now coming to the states because they have heard of success stories

and/or are personally connected to relatives or other people from Maltrata who live in the states (in Northfield)” (22).

These communities have grown in the last decades. In fact, in Northfield today, there are a number of living areas in town dominated by Latinos. For example, to the north of town is Viking Terrace, a trailer home neighborhood with both Latino and non-Latino residents, and Northfield Estates, an apartment complex also referred to as Dallas. Thirdly, and to the West, is Summerfield Apartments, an additional apartment complex shared by Latino and non-Latino residents.

Because many of these families and households experience low-incomes, they have become involved with Growing Up Healthy (GUH), a non-profit organization based in Rice County that works with low-income communities dominated by families with young children. The organization primarily concerns itself with educating communities about the extent to which affordable and quality housing, access to social services, income, and policy influence the health of citizens. More specifically, the program aims to improve the quality of life of children in targeted communities and to facilitate community leadership. As part of its initiative, GUH met with Latino community members in order to determine what community found lacking in their own neighborhoods. These meetings found that the services in place failed to address and reduce the challenges these communities face. For example, a common sentiment expressed was a lack of connection to the greater communities in which they lived.

Such intra-community connections are not restricted to the Latino communities in town. More specifically, connections between the St. Olaf student population and the greater Northfield community are tenuous at best, and for most students, contiguity

results in no more than a contribution to the economic health of downtown—local bars, coffee shops, and restaurants. In response to this separation, St. Olaf designed a program to facilitate student involvement in the Northfield community through class components called “Academic Civic Engagement”. Ethnographic Research Methods (SOAN 373) this year offered the opportunity to do Academic Civic Engagement through community based research. It is imperative in this type of community collaboration that student research be coordinated and supervised with an organization so that students can truly collaborate with community members as opposed to “studying” a certain group or population.

As sociology/anthropology students interested in the experiences of Latin American (mainly Mexican) immigrants in Northfield, we designed a community based research project (CBR) in conjunction with GUH and Latino community members. Reflecting input from community members, our goal was to begin a process of better understanding where connections exist or lack between Latino community members and the greater Northfield community—and to present possible steps forward for increasing connectivity and erasing false perceptions. In general, we strive to investigate the experiences of Latino community members—unique challenges that may restrict their ability to connect with greater Northfield.

The following pages document our research with these communities. As we analyze the connections and perceptions of the Latino community in Northfield, it is vital to remember our own seclusion on the "Hill" here at St. Olaf — and how this might affect our analysis of solutions. Although each of us has lived in Northfield for three to four years, it was not until this semester that some of us had even heard of the Viking

Terrace community or seen parts of Northfield that represent different levels of socio-economic status. In addition, as students who are not particularly involved with other community activities in Northfield, we can only take our conclusions and recommendations so far without realizing the limitations of our knowledge of both the Latino community and the larger Northfield community.

Problem—a theoretical perspective on existing challenges

Issues of contested identities are well discussed within scholarly literature. One of the theoretical concepts commonly found throughout the literature on immigrants' identity is transmigration. According to Schiller, et. al., transmigrants are those “whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state” (1995: 49). This counteracts the traditional view of immigrants which posits that immigrants leave one society and nation-state to live and try to assimilate in a different society and nation-state. There were many examples in the literature that did not support this traditional view of immigration. Latinos are often tied to two worlds- their country of origin and their life in the U.S. A study from the Pew Kaiser Foundation found that many Latinos have an attachment to their country of origin or their parents' country of origin: “Nearly two-to-one of those who were born outside the U.S. consider their country of origin their homeland rather than the U.S.” (2002: 36). Many Latinos return to their country of origin for visits, are politically involved in and remain citizens of their home country (Pew Kaiser 2002: 36). In addition, there are new waves of immigrants coming to

the U.S. who “refresh” cultural traditions and values of those who have been living in the U.S. for extended periods of time (Suro1998: 71).

Closely related to the concept of transmigration is transnationalism, described as the flow and transfer of goods, money, services people, and information across borders (Wallace 2002: 7). This is linked to the diminished significance of national boundaries (Schiller 1995: 50). Immigrants create new spaces for themselves and “the boundaries of national-state no longer correspond to the social spaces these borderless people inhabit” (Smith 1994: 16). Their space is not dependent upon a specific location or a politically prescribed ethnic space but rather, as Gupta and Ferguson state, “space itself becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization are inscribed (1992: 7).

Transnationalism may also be a way for Latinos and other immigrants to be empowered by holding on to their local identities in different settings. Wallace contends, “It is a way for people to maintain what is important to them while at the same time taking part in globalization” (2002: 9). Latinos may find ways to assert their national and cultural identities to establish themselves within their new localities in the U.S. while still maintaining their international connections to their country of origin. Smith states, “In the effort to 'reterritorialize' after moving, immigrants incorporate selective elements of the past in efforts to establish themselves” (2002: 16). The maintaining of the past and establishment in the present is exemplified in the transnational processes that affect individuals and families on a daily basis “making up the woof of daily activities, concerns, fears and achievement” (Schiller 1995: 51). Transnational processes allow Latinos to live daily in two different worlds. They are able to remember and revisit their

past and are also able to assert that identity within their own transnational communities in the U.S.

One framework for understanding immigrant communities is theorized by Benedict Anderson as imagined communities. Anderson states, “Members of modern nations cannot possibly know all their fellow-members, yet ‘in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...It is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship’ (Chavez 1994: 54). Anderson’s theory states that communities or people are not tied to geographic locations but are imagined based on memories and experiences from homelands and perceptions of immigrant from those within the new physical space immigrants occupy. In regards to imagined communities, Gupta and Ferguson aver:

The irony of these times, however, is that as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient. It is here that it becomes most visible how imagined communities come to be attached to imagined places, as displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, places or communities in a world that seems increasingly to deny such firm territorialized anchors in their actuality (1992: 10).

Living on a different side of a political border does not mean immigrants withdraw from community life, but immigrants also do not obtain instant membership into their new communities. Instead, “immigrants, as newcomers to a community and society, may not readily be imagined to be part of the community by those already living there, nor is shared identity necessarily extended to them” (Chavez 1994: 54).

For many Latino immigrants, the attachment to a country of origin and the feeling of belonging in a new community is greatly affected by documentation status. Chavez

contends that family in country of origin, cultural and physical isolation from society, and immigration status (or others' perceptions of immigration status) prevent(s) people from feeling part of American community. Some Latinos may feel as though they belong to a community in the U.S., but as Chavez notes, "Even if they do imagine themselves to be community members, their full incorporation into the larger society does not depend on their own beliefs or actions: it depends ultimately on the larger society's perception of undocumented immigrants" (1994: 63).

The exclusion of immigrants within U.S. communities is echoed by other literature which discusses insider/outsider mentalities that often lead to alienation of immigrants. In the case of Latino immigrants, Deborah Bushway argues that Latinos are not considered as community members or residents of the town and are not included socially or politically: "In many communities, there is an insider/outsider mentality where non-Latino members consider the Latinos to be 'outsiders.' Thus, Latinos are alienated from the rest of the community, at times even by physical location, and are often not included in the majority of activities or decisions that go on in their town" (2001: 2). Chavez concurs that immigrants, especially undocumented Latino immigrants, are not incorporated into community activities and are seen in the minds of non-Latino residents as "outsiders, strangers, aliens, and even a threat to well-being of the community and larger society" (1994: 56).

Empirical evidence from Minneapolis corroborates these findings. According to HACER (Hispanic advocacy for community empowerment through research) in Dakota County in Minnesota, a primary obstacle encountered by Latinos was discrimination. For example, many Latino individuals mentioned discrimination issues with law

enforcement. One individual from Dakota County reported being stopped by a police officer. He comments: “the police officer stopped me. He said I didn’t have insurance or stickers. Also, he said he stopped me since the car was in an American name and I was a Latino and I had it. But he didn’t know that the company bought the car and it was in the supervisor’s name” (HACER 1999: 37). This example illustrates the extent to which image or appearance influences treatment by authority figures. Yet law enforcement officials themselves recognize alienating the Latino community, and have emphasized the need for “bilingual and bicultural police officers,” for example (Bushway 2001: 25).

Another source of tension with the law concerns driver’s licenses. Although several states (Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, and North Carolina) provide a driver’s license to any resident that passes the driving examination, Minnesota is not one of them. Therefore, the need to drive—whether for work, emergencies, doctor’s visits, or child care—conflicts with the current policy regarding drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants (Bushway 2001: 25). In numerous studies, transportation itself was regarded as a primary issue faced by Latino communities. In Dakota County, lack of cars or other transportation eclipsed community members’ efforts to connect to the larger community and acquire basic social services. Without a car, respondents in the HACER study reported experiencing great restrictions.

This HACER study also emphasizes the degree to which language itself is a significant barrier to Mexican immigrants. It found that “health, social services, economic assistance, and educational agencies were unable to provide essential, basic services because they were seriously ill-equipped to meet the language needs of the Latinos in the county” (HACER 1999: 37). Other respondents connected language problems with the

educational system, asserting that “lack of interpreters and bilingual staff not only enables children to be truant, but can also allow a simple case of truancy to escalate a child into the criminal justice system” (HACER 1999: 37). Without greater language assistance, students and their familiars remain in the dark, unaware of school policies and punishments. Often times schools don’t even contact parents they know speak Spanish; “If there was no way to get through to her, why should we call?” commented one school, referring to notifying a Latino mother of her students attendance issues.

Another frequently explored issue by HACER and other studies concerned the ‘Anglo’ perceptions of Latinos. Many Latinos feel they aren’t recognized and appreciated for the work they do. One social worker comments that many Latinos “say they wish they would be recognized for what they are doing. Because they will take the worst jobs available. They have to fight twice as hard” (HACER 1999: 38). Robert Suro explains similar issues: “Latinos have produced immediate benefits for their families, employers, and consumers but American society has never defined a permanent place for these immigrants” (1998: 4). The lack of place for Latinos and lack of acknowledgment of the historical and present contributions Latinos have made to the U.S. has lead to misconceptions and tensions within communities towards the Latino population.

Still, other challenges Latinos face are driven by larger, more global forces, including international relations and economics between the United States and other Latin American countries. Robert Suro explains that immigrants occupy a precarious position: falls in the U.S. economy or negative events in Latin America result in heightened awareness of immigration. Such events result in not only increased border patrol, but greater efforts to exclude immigrants from welfare programs (1998:22). As

these examples suggest, Latino immigrants to the U.S. often face a diverse range of challenges, some political, others socio-cultural.

Methodology

Our research draws from the already existing body of research, as well as from the particular situation in Northfield. First and foremost, our research grew from an initial meeting with Latino community leaders and a representative from Growing up Healthy. Functioning as a conversational focus group session, this initial encounter served to orient us to the issues, challenges, and sentiments of Latinos in Northfield. As a result, this meeting was especially useful in honing our research questions. We became aware of the issues most pressing to the greater Latino community, and therefore, the issues most appropriate for our research. Through these meetings, we also became acquainted with three primary Latino liaisons through whom we coordinated further interviews with the greater Latino community which formed the basis of our research project.

Interviews with the Latino community varied. Individuals interviewed were both young and old, single and married, some with children, others without. Some had spent few years in the U.S., while others had spent more than a decade. Though we had no pre-existing relations with many of the Latinos we interviewed, some—including St. Olaf custodians and cafeteria workers—we knew beforehand. We interviewed around 20 Latino community members, of which the majority lived in Viking Terrace. The majority of the Latino participants were Mexican, three were El Salvadoran, two were Guatemalan, one Colombian, one Spanish, two of Mexican heritage, and three were of mixed Hispanic nationalities.

Interested in alternative perspectives, we also interviewed non-Latino community members. The non-Latino population interviewed mainly consisted of St. Olaf students with which we were acquainted, three of whom were already involved with the Northfield Latino community through a Latino-youth mentoring program on campus called Reaching our Goals (ROG). Three students we interviewed were Hispanic—some international, some native to the U.S. We also interviewed two Hispanic student teachers who are living and working in Northfield for one year and are taking courses at St. Olaf. Not all of those we interviewed outside the Latino community, however, were students. We also interviewed the priest of St. Dominic's Catholic Church in Northfield, who leads a Spanish mass and is well acquainted with the Latino community. We interviewed the owner of Viking Terrace. Finally, we interviewed the mayor of Northfield to investigate perceptions from a more policy oriented position.

Overall, our interview process benefited greatly from the Latino community liaisons. Our friendship with these individuals as well as the liaison's existing friendships with other Latinos, however, may have influenced the individuals and families that we interviewed. Our sampled population was not a random sample. Though this is not a problem in and of itself, recognizing that the perspectives we heard are not necessarily shared throughout the entire Latino community, nor Northfield in general. It is possible that opinions exist in Viking or Dallas that contrast with those that were presented to us.

Another possible limitation for our research concerns our interview questions themselves (please refer to the Appendix to see our interview questions for Latino community members, non-Latino community members, and students). Some of the questions for Latino community residents have been difficult to answer. These questions

might have been too abstract (for example, what does community mean for you?), or they might have been too complicated (such as what are some assets of the Latino community?) Because of this, we sometimes had to elaborate on the question and at times provide examples, therefore possibly influencing the manner in which respondents answered our questions.

Findings and Analysis

In our interviews with Latino residents of Northfield, common themes arose. These themes included reasons for coming to the United States, preconceptions of the U.S. before arrival, issues of family unity, and challenges encountered while living here, including discrimination, restriction in rights and mobility, the issue of Latino community support, identity struggles, and future aspirations.

The common reason that families and individuals came to live in the United States was to find work. Most expressed notions of coming to live here temporarily, for about one to three years. These families, however, have stayed here for a much longer time than they expected to. The participants also thought that life would be much easier in the states in the sense of raising and educating their children and to being able to make more money. Many of the participants did make more money working than they would have in Mexico. Participants said that they have enough money to support themselves, their families and their family in Mexico. For example, one individual admitted to sending \$350-400 (4,000 pesos) to Mexico, where the average income is about 700 pesos a week. This respondent explained that he sometimes sends Nike shoes to his daughters. In the U.S. Nike shoes can be bought for \$30, and in Mexico they cost about \$100, more

than one week's earnings. Because of sales and abundance of second-hand stores, this individual is able to own 4 or 5 pairs of shoes, a luxury in Mexico.

However, many were surprised by the extra expenses such as payments for rent and utility bills, and feel that their life in the United States is restrained. A few families expressed how tired they are of the daily, stressful routine of continual hard work without having much time, extra expenses or the legal opportunity to do more relaxing activities such as travel. In addition, even though many live in greater comfort, one family has expressed the notion that life here is a "jaula de oro," or a golden cage. There is more comfort living in the United States, but not as much liberty. Omnipresent is a feeling of fear and anxiety, either that immigration officials may barge in anytime, that one might be labeled as a criminal, that one will be criticized because of one's skin color, or one will not be able to freely raise one's children in a manner seen as appropriate.

This last concern ties into a common difference that many participants explained between Americans and Latinos, namely a sense of strong family unity and the honor relationship between parents and children. Families fear that if they are not able to discipline their children in the manner that they think is most appropriate, then the children will begin to lose respect for parents and the family unit will begin to disintegrate. Some families have even expressed desires to move back to Mexico to maintain this cultural value. Even an American wife who married a Mexican immigrant has adopted these strong familiar values, and approved her husband's desires of eventually moving back to Mexico while their daughters are still young.

The family is an important aspect to the Latino community not only because of cultural differences but also because it is a valuable source of support for immigrants.

The majority of the participants who were interviewed lived with other families, who were both related and not related to one another. This source of support has been imperative especially for immigrants who are living without their immediate families in the United States. One participant, who has been living in the U.S. for 10 years without his daughters and wife (who live in Mexico) has lived with other families. He makes an extra payment to the women of the house to make daily for the household. Learning from the struggles of these women, he has also been able to connect better to his daughters in Mexico.

Families also help establish a supportive network for future immigrants. All except for one Latino member interviewed came to the United States having other family members or friends already living here. In addition, the family helped create a sense of stability. When talking about notions of home, participants referred to their families instead of specific location as their greatest sense of home.

Going back to some of our participants' notion that living in the United States is like life in a golden cage, there were a number of restrictions and concerns expressed by the Latino community members. Some families have expressed the notion that life is too freeing in the states. Specific to this belief, one young father told us that "there is a difference between liberty and liberating one self." These families are specifically concerned about their children and drug use. Drugs like cocaine and marijuana are much easier to access in the states than in Mexico. This same young parent was surprised to find out how freely some of his American acquaintances talk about their drug use, while in Mexico those who use or sell drugs are very discrete about it for fear of being caught.

A few families have also felt restricted in living out certain customs, such as their particular ways of celebrating. One parent nostalgically told that in Mexico when there is a fiesta or a party, it is stretched out for a block with trucks blocking the ends of the road. Speakers are placed out, everyone is invited, and everyone dances into the early morning. Another example is that weddings are celebrated for a few days. These families miss the entertainment and ways in which they celebrated occasions. Here in the states, Hispanic immigrants say that American neighbors do not like the noise level or the long extension of their parties, and express their concerns to local police officials.

Another serious concern that the majority of families have experienced living in the states is discrimination. All participants could relate to a time in which Americans have been unpleasant or unwelcoming to them. For example a family discontinued shopping at a local supermarket because of being accused of stealing merchandise. Another family has been irritated when at a laundromat, workers paid more attention to their children's behavior than the American customers' children. Restaurant managers have also explicitly ignored Mexican customers by delaying their services.

Additional examples of discrimination include the areas of language and work. Most families have experience of Americans becoming frustrated with them because they are not able to understand or communicate well with one another. Many participants have expressed discrimination at work in that employers expect them to work harder, give them more work, and pay more attention to their efficiency than they do to their white and black American co-workers. One young father told me that "We are all equal. For me there is no discrimination. It should not matter that we are from different countries." Another participant juxtaposed how he and others had imagined the U.S. to be with the

true treatment of people based upon perceived race and immigration status: “You hear that life in the U.S. is free with a lot of rights, but if you’re Latino it’s different. You live with fear here and you’re not safe here.”

This last statement also reflects the current general attitudes toward Latino immigrants in the United States, which contributes to a feeling of discrimination and insecurity. While many of the people we talked to expressed a feeling of security and being welcome within Northfield itself, some expressed a sense of fear, insecurity, discrimination and frustration that the non-Latino population does not understand the reason Latino immigrants come to the United States. Especially for those immigrants who are not documented, many feel that their reasons for coming to the U.S. and their struggle to gain mobility (in terms of traveling to and from work), to access healthcare and education, and to build lives for themselves here is misunderstood. Given the recent racist legislation in Arizona, which makes it legal for the police to detain anyone whom they suspect is an undocumented immigrant (Archibold: 2010), the prejudiced pronouncements of certain GOP candidates and Tea Party members (Hancock: 2010), and the tabled legislation in the Minnesota House of Representatives which would have made it possible for undocumented immigrants to obtain drivers’ licenses (Collins: 2010), the general climate in the United States is not one that is exactly friendly to Latino immigrants at this time.

Participants in general, however, told us that interactions with non-Latinos vary greatly and depend on the characteristic of the person they are interacting with. Actually, all participants shared some positive experiences with non-Latinos. Interviewees mentioned numerous times that many Americans have shown interest in getting to know

the culture, language and customs of immigrants. For example, some men interviewed who work in the same factory were pleased by the effort that their American co-workers, though few in number, have shown in communicating and interacting with immigrant workers. Another example is one in which a participant recollected warmly when a group of Americans from a local church took the time to hear and sympathize with him about his journey to America. Lastly, a number of participants said that Americans are drawn to certain Mexican traditions and customs, festive celebrations especially.

Many participants have also expressed gratitude for the variety of institutional support available to them in the United States and the contentment they enjoy living in Northfield. Interviewees appreciated that in any type of medical emergency regardless if an immigrant has documentation, assistance will be provided. On the other hand, regular sickness and preventive medicine is hard to access for financial and legal reasons. Therefore, individuals and families resort to their own methods of healing, and one participant in particular has his wife send him medicine from Mexico. In addition to emergency medical care, participants are thankful for the social welfare support that is available for families, women and children. A young mother gave an example of this support as free lunches and school supplies that are provided at school for her children.

In regards to social and welfare assistance, one family expressed unusual sentiments towards the attitudes that many Latino immigrants have. They strongly believe that if an immigrant is living here with an undocumented status, they should not accept any kind of social or financial assistance, especially under illegal names. This family viewed these immigrants as taking advantage of social welfare programs. This family also disagreed with many undocumented immigrants' hopes of staying here

permanently with the help of social welfare programs. The father, who is himself undocumented, said that "When I will return to Mexico I will feel good about myself because I lived here honestly, not cheating the system. I just came here to work and support my family."

Another topic discussed in interviews was the aspirations of participants for their future, and families gave us a variety of answers. A number of families hope to continue to live and work in the United States, as long as the U.S. government will allow them. The majority of the families who have been living in the United States for a while continue to do so for their children. They have expressed that their children have become too Americanized, and they do not want to return back to Mexico, except to visit. These families expressed the desire to eventually move back to Mexico once their children finish high school and are able to support themselves independently in the U.S.

Another family we met continues to live in the states mainly for their children's education. This family is waiting for their children to finish high school and then the whole family will move back to Mexico. Many participants have expressed that there are more affordable and higher quality educational opportunities, as well as better financial support and social services available in the U.S. However, another family disagreed with this statement because school systems in America do not teach children values of honor and respect for one's parents or the value of hard work as much as a typical Mexican family does. "Real education is what parents teach their own children at home, and not necessarily what is being taught at school."

Not all families wish to raise their children in the United States. A few families with young children want to move back to Mexico sooner than later, before their children

become too accustomed to the American culture. One is planning to go back to Mexico in a few months (after living in the states for almost 10 years). The parents, who also have been the few of the Latino community liaisons for this project, wish to move back mainly because they do not want their children to become accustomed to take for granted the things that they own and the relationship that they have with others, especially their family.

In attempting to discover connections and perceptions of the Latino community in Northfield, a major challenge was the phrase “Latino community” itself. Many participants were not sure how to answer the question “When you hear the phrase ‘Latino community’, what does it mean to you?”; when asked where they thought there was a “Latino community” participants gave very few examples, with the predominant answer being “the church”, and communal celebrations such as quinceñeras, baptisms, and first communions. When asked what “community” meant, most answered with general responses saying that community was when people came together in order to reach a goal or to help one another. “Community” was also most often associated with the family. As we compiled the results of our interviews, it became clear that there is a wide range of perceptions about what “community” means and if and where it exists for Latino immigrant residents of Northfield. This being the case, was it fair for us to assume or impose the categories of “community” or “Latino” within our research? Communities are defined by shared experiences, interests, and struggles—and certainly through the course of our interviews, we heard many accounts from interviewees that expressed similar experiences in the U.S. and similar struggles.

In addition, many of the Latino immigrant residents of Northfield come from the same area of Mexico (Maltrata, Vera Cruz); however, some are also from other parts of Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala. As one Salvadoran interviewee said, “Somos Latinos”—but there are differences in culture, food, customs, and ways of relating to each other in community based upon places of origin. “Latino” is perhaps a useful category but it is not all encompassing, nor does its application mean that there is group cohesion or homogeneity. In addition, as within non-Latino populations, simply sharing a language and some cultural values and even living near one another does not guarantee the existence of “community”. Indeed, other factors such as the pressures of work, needing to rest, children, and sustaining a family, prevent the creation of consistent community structures in which many people come together on a regular basis.

These factors were cited by several interviewees, some of whom expressed that there was no such thing as a “Latino community” or that there is a lack of incentive to gather and collaborate. Participants noted that in Viking Terrace people live with their own families in their own houses and are preoccupied with work, resting, and taking care of their families and homes; it is difficult to find places and times for people to gather. “People aren’t available to participate...they think they have more important things to do” one woman said. One father felt that community organizing carried out by the liaisons did not make much sense to him. For example, during a collective home improvement project he thought that it was less time consuming and less expensive to go out and buy home improvement materials by himself than to depend on others. This same participant also values his privacy, which can potentially come in conflict with community organizing. When he was asked about the major concerns facing the Latino

community, he responded by saying that “I don’t know about the problems that exist among others. I don’t want to get involved...this can create gossip.” Other participants noted that they have friends just like everyone else, and just because they happen to live in Viking Terrace does not mean they know everyone.

As was mentioned earlier, Gupta and Ferguson write that space is a grid onto which we unconsciously map “cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization” (1992:7). As we approached the analysis of “community”, we came to realize that we as researchers have been limited by our own preconceptions about the relationship among culture, community, and space. We assumed, for instance, that because there is a significant Latino population in Northfield, that a “Latino community” with shared culture and connections necessarily exists. Indeed “community” is such a buzzword for us as St. Olaf students, that the meaning or existence of “community” is something we assume. While formulating our questions and conducting interviews, then, we did not stop to ask ourselves what the word means and how we were perhaps falsely or uncritically applying it to the people with whom we were working.

This does not mean that there is absolutely no such thing as “the Latino community” in Northfield, as many interviewees did indicate that such a thing exists. Participants did emphasize in a follow up meeting at the conclusion of our research that “community” depends on one’s point of view and that there is indeed community life and support depending on availability. For instance, one Latino community leader emphasized that when new Latinos move into Viking Terrace, neighbors are sure to welcome them and inform them about the rules of the neighborhood and resources available. In addition, Latino immigrants have found and created their own environments

for creating social networks; for instance, one woman in Viking Terrace opens her kitchen each weekend night to sell tacos. People come together regularly for food and conversation. This is an opportunity for community creation that was not necessarily mentioned in our interviews, but is an example of community formation that exists. This being said, entering the project we assumed more cohesion and support than perhaps truly exists based on our *own* categorizations.

Beyond the cohesion of what we have termed “the Latino community” throughout the course of our research are the perceived connections or lack thereof to the wider Northfield community. The theoretical notion of transmigration can form a framework for our examination of the existing connections and barriers to connection of “the Latino community” to greater Northfield. As discussed above, transmigration is when people are rooted in multiple places at once; instead of immigration as a total process in which people lose connections with their places of origin and adopt new cultural traditions, transmigrants in fact hold on to cultural identity and simultaneously build lives in the U.S. while maintaining connections with their country of origin by sending money back to family, building institutions and businesses, and participating in political processes of their countries of origin. Indeed, this was exemplified in our interviews by interviewees indicating frequent communication with family back in their countries of origin and some travel for visits, but who also have connections in the church and are invested in educating their children in Northfield.

In terms of our interviews with Latino Northfield residents, there were both positive and negative responses to the question of connections to the greater Northfield community. Latino participants cited the schools, church reunions, town celebrations as

venues for connection. In addition, participants noted that Northfield was a tranquil, safe place in which to live, and they enjoyed the benefits of living in town and indeed were proud to say that they lived in Northfield. Although most participants said that they did not go downtown regularly for shopping or socializing, participants stated that they would not feel uncomfortable walking downtown, and that in general Northfield has a welcoming atmosphere. Most participants also have very positive experiences with the police in Northfield, who do not hassle them and have even supported them on a number of issues in their neighborhoods. One family expressed on appreciation for the extra police patrolling in Viking Terrace to reduce speeding; however, this family had witnessed and experienced a few unpleasant experiences with the local police officials. In addition, this same family who has lived in Viking Terrace for about a decade suggest that safety in Viking Terrace has remained the same. In general, however, these responses indicate that some participants feel as if they belong in Northfield and feel comfortable living and participating in aspects of town life.

Many participants cited a feeling of disconnection to Northfield. One interviewee noted that a potential reason for the lack of integration into the larger Northfield community is the uncertainty of living in the United States. "Our lives here are a "cuerda floja" or a thin cord, he said. Families will invest less in, say, improving their homes if they continually live in a sense of fear from immigration. Another husband continually expresses to his wife that one day he might not return back home because without legal working or driving documents when and if police officials pull him over, he may be detained.

The most mentioned barrier to Latino-Northfield connection brought up during interviews was the barrier of language. Participants feel intimidated and hesitant to interact with Americans because they do not know English well. In addition, as one interviewee described it, it is not necessary to learn English as a Latino immigrant coming to Northfield. Indeed Spanish is everywhere: in people's homes, at work, and church, at school, on the TV and radio. A few participants stated that it's not that they do not want to communicate with their English speaker co-workers and neighbors in Northfield, but that being surrounded by Spanish at all times does not facilitate learning English. This is also congruent with participant statements about the family as the basis of "community" life—why should people feel compelled to learn English when it's not a necessity and the language of their support system is also Spanish?

Additionally, another barrier to connection of Latinos to the wider Northfield community are issues of identity. For younger interviewees, this issue is more acute. One young man in his twenties who was interviewed talked about his sense of being torn between two worlds. While the interviewee connects to Mexico because it is where he grew up and is the source for his cultural heritage, he also feels as if he belongs in the United States and wants the things life here could offer—education, a job, a family, and economic stability. Another woman in her 20's with children expressed that while she and her husband have been thinking about returning to Mexico, she does not know if Mexico will feel like "home" because she's never raised a family there. At the same time, an older interviewee expressed that he misses Mexico when he's in the U.S. and the U.S. when he's in Mexico and that there are "beautiful things" in both places.

While transmigration means that Latino immigrants in Northfield are building lives, maintaining connections, and negotiating identities both here in Northfield and in their places of origin, the perception of Latinos by the greater Northfield community as “sojourners” rather than “settlers” means that in general, Latinos are seen by the greater Northfield community as transient residents who are only here temporarily (Chavez 1994: 56). The apparent problem of disconnection between Latino Northfield residents and the wider Northfield community, of which this study has begun to explore, is certainly a matter of language—no community truly can be built without venues for communication and coming together. However, the responses from Latino interviewees, which cited experiences of discrimination and restriction of movement, as well as the responses of non-Latino Northfield residents which exemplified some attitudes making Latinos and residents of Viking Terrace the “other” or “outsiders” indicates that perhaps Northfield does not “view the problems of Latinos as problems of the community” (Bushway 2001: i).

As Chavez contends, inclusion of immigrants into a community and the general acceptance of Latinos from the community depends on the community’s overall perception of legal status. As we discovered, students and the general non-Latino population in Northfield perceive a “Latino community” situated outside of St. Olaf and separate from the larger community of Northfield. Viking Terrace was labeled as “little Mexico” by one of the participants and others also suggested many Latinos in Northfield “all know each other because they come from the same place in Mexico.” This idea of Viking Terrace as a separate community from Northfield was also reflected in one

participant's response that Viking Terrace is sort of a "subculture—one which you don't know about unless you live there."

The question of why Latinos come to the U.S. prompted responses that were related to education, employment and a connection to friends or family who are already here. Many Northfield residents assume that residents of Viking Terrace are all Latino and that the community of Viking Terrace is restricted to Latinos—which would explain ideas about a "little Mexico" and a subculture" existing within Viking Terrace. Latinos are also perceived as coming from the same place in Mexico, Maltrata, which we found to be the case with many of our participants. However, the assumption from Northfield residents that a pre-existing community in Mexico was already in place and is just continued within Viking Terrace, is seen in responses from non-Latino residents like "everyone in Viking knows each other."

The idea of an already established Latino community could contribute to Chavez's (1994) and Bushway's (2001) ideas about Latinos being perceived as "others" and "outsiders" if they are not seen as blending into the larger Northfield community. The perception (and sometimes reality) that Latinos are in Northfield for a short period of time augments this view. However, there are several Latinos who are citizens and some who have lived in Northfield for long periods of time who are considered by non-Latinos as part of the Latino community but not the greater Northfield community. The insider/outsider mentality positions Latinos as foreigners and visitors, rather than residents and an integral part of Northfield.

This was seen in examples non-Latino residents gave to explain treatment of Latinos. The manager of Viking Terrace said that comments have been made in regards

to the signs in Viking Terrace not being translated in Spanish. She responded, “If I went to France or some other country, I would have to look at the signs in French, even though I don’t speak French. They wouldn’t change the signs for me.” Also, a community leader made a similar analogy in regards to legal status of immigrants. She stated, “If I went to Sweden and got a job and wasn’t documented, I would face the reality of deportation everyday. That’s the risk you take no matter where you are, if you are in a country undocumented.” The lack of knowledge about the actual living situations of Latinos in Northfield could inhibit others’ capacity to accept them as residents of Northfield, and create barriers that lead to exclusion of Latinos from activities and decisions that happen in Northfield.

In addition, perceptions of fear of Latinos by non-Latinos surfaced in several interviews. The manager of Viking Terrace stated that, in Northfield, there is a general sense of fear towards Viking Terrace and Latinos. When asked why this fear was present she commented that at one time the park had experienced gangs, drugs, shootings and an overall physical dilapidation. She added, “I was even scared to come into the office because of shootings and rumors about Viking Terrace.” She also commented that the fear and negative stigma is still present because many Northfield residents have not driven by or walked into Viking for a long time (or ever) and have not seen how the park’s conditions have been improved. One St. Olaf student said she overheard an adult talking about Viking Terrace: “I wouldn’t go there at night.”

Many respondents said they perceived a general fear and lack of trust from Latinos in Viking Terrace. They commented that this was mostly due to fear of being deported if undocumented. A Latino staff member stated, “Many Mexicans in Northfield

live with fear and unrest due to the possibility of being deported.” Many ROG members emphasized that Latinos, specifically Latino youth, need someone they can talk to and trust. Participants also noted that fear and lack of trust lead to lack of interaction with the greater Northfield community.

The lack of interaction between Latinos and the larger Northfield community was also explained by participants in other ways. One staff member of St. Dominic’s stated that the Latino community “does not have an emphasis on integration or mixing with American culture” and that “Anglos step outside their comfort zone more to approach Latinos.” He added, “Latinos are not going to automatically integrate, and some non-Latinos interpret this as intentional self-isolation.” One non-Latino St. Olaf student stated that there was a lack of integration between St. Olaf students and the Latino community, but that this was a reflection of “a lack of connection between St. Olaf and Northfield in general; connections with the community cannot change unless the community itself initiates it.” Another non-Latino St. Olaf student said that “a possible reason why St. Olaf students do not connect to the outside community is because it might be too much of an investment in emotions for only being at St. Olaf for four years.” Other general responses as to the lack of interaction between St. Olaf students and Latino residents included lack of time on both sides; Latino residents are “working day and night” and students have other activities that tend to occupy their time.

What’s more, language and education were cited as the most present barriers to building connections between Latinos and the wider Northfield community. Respondents said many Latinos lack education and therefore do not have access to certain resources—such as higher paying or higher-skilled jobs—and are at a great disadvantage because of

it. These two barriers also played a role in leadership possibilities for Latinos. A non-Latino St. Olaf student commented, “Latinos have to speak, read and write English proficiently in order to be community leaders in Northfield. And even if they speak English, that doesn’t mean that they have the necessary leadership skills or the desire to be a leader. On the other end, it’s hard for Northfield leaders to be effective with Latino community members if they don’t speak Spanish. Without language, it’s harder to form relationship and harder to hold authority.” One community leader said there is a great want and need for more representation of Latinos on leadership councils, but there is a great frustration with a lack of Latinos who step up. She commented, “We run into the problem of ‘tokenism’—a few Latinos are well-known leaders within the community and everyone goes to them for information and to recruit them to be on boards. These people can’t be the sole representatives for all Latinos in Northfield.” A non-Latino St. Olaf student responded to the question of Latino leadership in Northfield by saying, “There are only a few Latino leaders who are active and have a voice in the community; their voices are overused.”

In addition to thoughts on connections between Latinos and the larger Northfield community, interviews with non-Latinos from Northfield and St. Olaf College and Latino students at St. Olaf who were not residents of Northfield gave insight to perceptions of residents in Northfield and students at St. Olaf College of Latinos and their position in Northfield. Perceptions often followed the lines of general stereotypes, such as Latinos are hard working and have strong family values, but also included negative stereotypes that Latinos are illegal immigrants who are stealing our tax money and causing unrest within the community. We were especially interested in questioning whether Latinos

were considered as part of the larger Northfield community and if issues that affected Latinos were issues that were considered Northfield's issues.

Northfield residents who were interviewed had general ideas about what other Northfield residents thought about Latinos in Northfield. When asked about what they knew about the Latino community, they responded that Latinos valued hard work. They believe many Latinos have working class jobs, often in construction or as laborers in other areas. The recognition by non-Latinos of Latinos as hard-workers is contrary to many Latinos perceptions that their hard work is not recognized. However, this recognition is perhaps only verbal and restricted to private settings. Community members and St. Olaf students see Latinos working as dishwashers, custodians, or laborers or hear stories of Latinos working in meat-packing plants and realize the implications of the work Latinos are doing, also acknowledging, along with Latinos, that these are jobs many Americans, and Northfield residents, choose not to take.

But non-Latinos do not seem to publicly recognize Latinos in conversations, public meetings or other public events. A prominent community leader acknowledged Latino's economic contribution to Northfield but described the jobs that Northfield residents do not want to take as "opportunities for Latinos." Even though the jobs are hard and of conditions less preferable, they are seen by some non-Latinos as at least work Latinos have to support their family. These jobs are also seen as better relative to the opportunities in Mexico. However, the manager of Viking Terrace and a prominent community leader commented that finding jobs has been more difficult due to the current economic conditions.

A Latino student at St. Olaf also agreed that a notion of poverty becomes attached to others' perceptions of Latino identity. When asked why this association occurs she responded, "At St. Olaf most students assume Latinos in Northfield are cafeteria workers or custodial staff probably because that's mostly the picture they see. That is what they're exposed to. They don't have interactions or experiences outside of that." Another student who has had several interactions with Latinos in Northfield through a community organization said many students have these assumptions of Latinos as poor and uneducated before they come to St. Olaf. She stated, "A small percentage of bad things are disproportionately reported in the news and other media sources. Even if students here haven't had personal interactions with Latinos or don't know where or what Viking Terrace is, they still have deeply embedded views about Latinos in Northfield."

Several participants suggested that Latinos have a strong sense of family and greater commitment to family members than Americans. They gave examples of Latinos taking in family members who needed a place to stay and having a lot of people living in the trailers. The manager of Viking Terrace stated that the higher number of people living in the trailers in Viking Terrace bothers some Northfield residents because it's seen as "unclean" or perhaps just abnormal. Overall, the family values of Latinos are seen as a positive aspect and one that some respondents wished to emulate. The manager of Viking Terrace stated that Latino residents "will never let anyone go without food or a place to stay." A prominent community leader said she has learned a few things about Mexican culture from vacationing in Mexico every year and said she has tried to incorporate some of their values into her own life. A non-Latino St. Olaf student commented that certain

cultural values of Latinos in Northfield and abroad have been very enriching for her, acknowledging that “there are a lot of aspects that I admire and want to learn.”

Other perceptions of Latinos include ideas that they are “full of life” and have a greater “joy of life.” Participants overall responded that Latinos enjoyed celebrating with friends and loved ones with loud music and a lot of food. One respondent who is a ROG volunteer stated that Latino culture was like “a constant block party” where everyone is invited. This participant and others stated Latinos were generally louder and that sometimes this got them into trouble with neighbors, law enforcement, or with teachers at school. The manager of Viking Terrace said she had been invited to many parties, specifically *quinceñeras*, a coming of age celebration for 15-year-old girls, and also to weddings and funerals. She stated she went to a funeral which was conducted in Spanish and she and her husband were the only Anglos there. A prominent community leader also stated that Latinos are very celebratory and inviting, as she had been invited to dinners and other social events during her vacations in a small Mexican town.

Many respondents noted religiosity, specifically Catholicism, as a central part of Latino culture and an important part of life for Latinos in Northfield. Several respondents mentioned St. Dominic’s church and its connections to and services for Latinos in Northfield. The church holds a Spanish and bilingual mass, and the respondents who noted this religious aspect stated that they thought most Latinos attended the Spanish mass because that was easier and more comfortable for them. Besides noting that Latinos were mostly Catholic and attended St. Dominic’s Spanish mass, participants did not give further information as to how Latinos worship or what role religion plays in their everyday lives.

The question of why Latinos come to the U.S. prompted responses that were related to education, employment and a connection to friends or family who are already here. Viking Terrace was labeled as “little Mexico” by one of the participants and others also suggested many Latinos in Northfield “all know each other because they come from the same place in Mexico.” This idea of Viking Terrace as a separate community from Northfield was also reflected in one participant’s response that Viking Terrace is sort of a “subculture—one which you don’t know about unless you live there.”

When asked which social spaces Latinos occupy, participants all stated that they do not see Latinos very often in downtown Northfield. One St. Olaf student who is also a member of ROG stated, “Latinos don’t go to places like Blue Mondays;” another member of ROG commented that she never sees Latino youth hanging out downtown, or older Latinos either, as it’s “just not the scene for them.” A staff member from St. Dominic’s contended, “Latinos will go to Cub Foods, Sosa’s grocery (an authentic Mexican grocery store) and sometimes downtown, but rarely; there’s nothing that attracts people there.” The manager of Viking Terrace stated that many Latinos shop at the Wal-Mart in Faribault rather than shopping within Northfield. When asked why Latinos don’t go to local shops, bars or other social spaces, the manager of Viking Terrace said they were simply “uncomfortable” and a Latino St. Olaf student said their choices for finding things within their interests and activities were limited. Some of the participants also added that perhaps some Latinos don’t go to downtown shops or other places because these places are more expensive than some Latinos can afford due to their socioeconomic status.

The manager of Viking Terrace also commented that Northfield Latino residents are often in lower economic positions because they come from poorer communities in

Mexico. She stated that to some Latinos, Viking Terrace is “a palace compared to where they come from” and that some residents are “just glad to have a roof over their head.” A prominent community leader believes Latinos come here because “they believe in a better life.” She commented that economic development is much lower in Mexico and the infrastructure in the U.S. is much improved compared to Mexico. “The U.S. has good education, good health care and overall better infrastructure. For example, here we turn on a tap and have water instantly in generous amounts.” She also commented that economic conditions necessitate many Latinos arrival and remaining in the U.S.: “I’m sure they would all rather be in Mexico with their families, in their home state, if they had jobs and a good standard of living, if they had everything they needed.”

Some St. Olaf students also agreed that Latinos live in Viking Terrace out of economic necessity, noting perceptions of a physical barrier around Viking Terrace because it is low-income housing, rather than because the majority of residents are Latinos. A ROG member stated, “In Viking Terrace, there are also whites who live there, based on class. The reason Viking Terrace is associated with Latinos is because they are more visible.” Another student claimed that the reason social issues are not addressed within Viking Terrace is because Northfield has an “image,” one of upper-class, well-educated students and professionals, and “Northfield doesn’t want issues that are often associated with the lower class such as alcoholism and domestic violence, to be seen or heard.” The invisibility of the lower class “end of town” can be attributed to the lack of acceptance for those who did not fit the “Northfield image,” a fact that further points to the connections between immigrant populations and their socioeconomic positions in the U.S. and in Northfield specifically.

Conclusions

One of the primary goals of Growing Up Healthy in regards to the Northfield Latino community is to build understanding and connection between Latino and non-Latino populations. Much of our research with Latino community members corroborates these goals and desires: while some Latinos do not envision themselves staying in Northfield for extended periods of time, many have nonetheless expressed interests in developing greater relationships with Northfield in general—what includes sharing culture (food, music, celebration) as well as clarifying many of the perceptions of Latinos and their communities.

Refuting the perception of some non-Latino interviewees, that there is insufficient leadership within the Latino population in Northfield, Latino individuals in Northfield have developed future plans, goals, and programs to ameliorate the social distance between communities within Northfield. For example, one Latina in Northfield initiated a “Club de Cocineros,” or a cooking club titled “Club Cuisine” with the help of GUH. The goal of this cooking club is to use food and cooking customs to draw community members together, to share food and customs, and to build relationships. The program has already garnered the attention of WINGS (women in Northfield giving support), a Northfield based women’s group, who recently donated \$1000 to the cause.

In similar cases, the city has attempted to develop and fund its own collaborations with the Latino community, projects and programs that resemble programs already in place within the Latino community. GUH is a good example. According to one prominent community leader, the city has organized events aimed at collaboration and establishing connections with the Latino community, and, by offering stipends for the

time away from work and the travel required, the city attempted make attending the event as easy as possible for all. When Latino attendance to such events has been low, the city assumes there is no interest, concern, or leadership within the Latino community.

Latinos interviewed, have strongly argued otherwise. According to them, the Latino community is already heavily invested in collaborations, projects, and programs such as GUH, which prioritize facilitating community leadership from the Latino community itself. Through such programs, there are already numerous Latino individuals personally invested in community support and leadership. According to them, the city should support programs already in place, and to utilize Latino community leaders already in place.

The responsibility of building community understanding and relationships with the Latino community cannot rest on Latinos themselves. Many Latino interviewees decry the perceptions and assumptions that non-Latinos have made about Latino lifestyle, and their values here and in Mexico. One goal of our research is to inform the non-Latino population of the experiences of Latinos themselves in order to minimize misunderstanding and gross assumptions about Mexican culture. Still, non-Latino community members have a responsibility to respect the Latino community itself, to resist facile judgments of Latino culture and Mexico in general. Interviews with both Latinos and non-Latinos evinced the degree to which many non-Latino community members misunderstand their Latino neighbors, both here in Northfield and to the South in Mexico. The best way to understand each other and build community is through conversation. Establishing an environment in which Latinos and non-Latinos can discuss their experiences together should be a priority.

Literature is another valuable resource for cross-cultural education. During our research, various Latinos expressed the importance of literature and text about Maltrata, Mexico. This seems true for numerous reasons. What literature our libraries contain reflects more than just an arbitrary assemblage of books—much of what we know, appreciate, and respect comes from that with which we are familiar, exposed. Therefore, as the history of Maltrata is (or, for some, should be) extremely relevant to the reality of Northfield today, our libraries should reflect that. From another perspective, maintaining literature about Maltrata is another gesture of respect we can show our fellow community members, especially those from Mexico.

Meeting with GUH and growing up healthy, we learned that non-Latino community members have expressed the desire for Spanish language classes. Drivers for Eco Trans, for example, would like to understand Spanish, so as to connect better with the clients they serve. Common language is the best (if not the only) way to communicate. As Northfield is a multicultural community in which various languages are spoken, a priority should be placed upon teaching Spanish as well—the task of understanding each other should not rest upon Latinos efforts to learn English. Regarding English classes, some Latinos have expressed frustrations in the level of proficiency demanded by classes previously offered. Classes build upon previous knowledge of English; individuals desiring to begin the process of learning the language are in “over their heads.” Therefore, classes in English should prioritize offering a variety of classes—each designed at a different ability level.

Within our research, these themes—cross cultural misunderstanding, community leadership, and the challenges of multiple languages—emerged frequently, and strongly

informed the desires and future goals that Latinos mentioned. As researchers, our primary goal has been to gather information otherwise unavailable—family stories, experiences, challenges, perceptions of community, etc. The reality we have explored is complex, and the views, opinions, and experiences multifarious and at times conflicting. We do not seek to reduce this complex reality to a facile generalization Latino and non-Latino life, us and them. As Gupta et al. remark, “we want to problematize the unity of the ‘us’ and the otherness of the ‘other,’ and question the radical separation between the two that makes the opposition possible in the first place” (1992:14). It is our desire that our results will contribute to work and leadership already in place within GUH, Northfield, and Minnesota that strive to make us more familiar with each other—to reduce generalization and misconceptions of Latinos in Northfield, to enable Latino community leaders, and to facilitate community collaboration with Latinos and non-Latinos alike.

Appendix

Possible Questions for Northfield Latino Participants

Background:

Where are you from? How long have you been living in the US/Norhtfield?

Who do you live with?

Do you speak Spanish?

What kind of work do you do in the states?

What were your reasons for coming to the U.S.?

Tell us how your life is different compared to the lifestyle you had back in your country of origin?

Connections to Mexico:

Do you still have family/relative back at your country of origin? Do you keep in contact with them and how often?

Do you get a chance to go back to your country of origin and how often?

Where do you feel most at home and why?

Perceptions and experiences of life in the states:

How did you view the US, America and the American lifestyle before coming to the US?
How have those views changed?

Overall, do you like it in the state, in Northfield, and why?

What are your longer term dreams or hopes living or working in the United States?

Sense of community/Latino Community:

Is there a Latino community and what does it look like?

Where do you find your greatest sense of community?

What are the assets or strengths of the Latino community about which you would like Northfield to know?/What do you like about the Latino community?

Do you think most people in Northfield have heard of Viking Terrace or have been to Viking Terrace? What are the general perceptions of Viking Terrace?

What are the challenges of the Latino community in connecting with the rest of the Northfield community?

Are Latinos considered residents of Northfield? Are the problems/ issues of the Latinos seen and/or handled as issues of Northfield?

What could be done to create more interactions/connections between Latinos and non-Latinos in Northfield?

What is the non-Latino perspective of the Latino community in Northfield? What kind of things do non-Latinos say about the Latino community?

Possible Questions non-Latino Participants

What kinds of (if any) interactions have you had with Latino community members?/Were there Latino members present in your home community (where you lived before you came to St. Olaf)?

What do you know about Latino culture?/Do you speak Spanish?

What are your perceptions of the Latino community? Of the Latino community in Northfield?

When and where do you see Latinos in Northfield?/How many Latinos do you think are present in the Northfield community?

Have you heard of Viking Terrace? What is your knowledge of Viking Terrace?

From which sources have you gained knowledge of the Latino community (ie, personal interactions, media, etc)

How do you feel about connections (or the lack thereof) between St. Olaf and the Latino community?

What do you think life is like for Latinos before they come to the U.S.? What are some of the differences between life in say, Mexico, and life in the U.S. for Latinos?

Additional Questions for St.Olaf Students:

What role do Latinos play at St. Olaf and the larger Northfield community?

How do you feel about connections (or the lack thereof) between St. Olaf and the Latino community?

What are some of the barriers Latinos in Northfield face? What are the barriers between Latinos and St. Olaf students?

What could be done at St. Olaf to create more interactions/connections between St. Olaf students and Latinos in Northfield?

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