

MIGRANT FARMWORKER STUDENT'S COUNTERSTORIES: CONTRADICTING IMMIGRATION MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES

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Abstract

Many events happened across the United States due to recent immigration reform policies. Different reactions resulted from these policies such as massive immigrant rallies, speeches, and demonstrations. Numerous anti-immigrant and xenophobic stories were also been published through different media outlets. At this same time, the participants in this study, eight Latino migrant farmworker students, were sharing with me several counterstories that were contradicting myths and stereotypes about immigrants. The article will focus on the counterstories that will contradict the myths that immigrants don't want to learn English, that they are taking away jobs from Americans, and that they are getting a free ride in the United States.

Recent focus on immigration reform has been the cause of anti-immigrant sentiment across the United States. Comments such as "Stop the Invasion, Secure our Borders," "Learn English," "Go back to Mexico," and "Millions of Mexican invaders jump the border to steal our jobs, our country, and our lives," are examples of comments and anti-immigrant movements that have been heard and seen in the Internet, the radio, and the media throughout the country. Several reform

bills which have racist overtones have attempted to turn millions of undocumented immigrants into criminals and to make English the official national language (Davis, 2007; Lewis, 2006; Somerman, 2007).

It is these reform acts and the racist and xenophobic comments that they incited that prompted me to write this article. As I was listening to comments such as “those illegals just want a free ride” and “they are taking all our tax money in food stamps and welfare,” I was also listening to the stories told to me by eight Latino farmworker students who were either immigrants themselves or came from immigrant families. The participants in this study told a very different story from what has been recently heard from the mouths of anti-immigrant, xenophobic, and racist proponents of immigration reform acts. The counter-stories that the participants so eloquently shared contradict some of the vicious stereotypes about Latino immigrants. Although the study represents the voices of only eight farmworker students, their stories are important because they serve to illuminate the different ways in which immigrants are creating agency and affirming their own worth in the face of adversity.

ATTEMPTS AT IMMIGRATION REFORM

The United States has long been a nation made up of immigrants. As of 2008, immigrants in the United States comprise 12.5% of the total U.S. population (US Census Bureau, 2010). Increasing numbers of the immigrant population in the United States are linked to debates and concerns about the future of immigration reform. U.S. immigration reform policies have led to different reactions from various sectors. Activists, human rights leaders, religious leaders, and local government officials have participated in massive immigrant rallies, speeches, and demonstrations. This has also catalyzed local and national governments to deliberate anti-immigrant laws and ordinances and to intensify immigrant raids and forced deportations. Intense anti-immigrant sentiment across the nation has manifested through ethnic slurs, violent attacks, and a rise in hate groups across the country. Regardless of this sentiment, immigrants have been able to make impressive gains in a country that is sometimes hostile to them and their contributions.

FARMWORKERS

The National Center for Farmworker Health (2012) estimates that there are over 3 million migrant workers in the United States. Migrant workers can now be found in all parts of the United States, working in many areas, such as dairies, slaughter houses, restaurants, hotels, factories, and in farmwork. The Department of Agriculture classifies farmworkers into two major groups that are classified into three subgroups per major group. The first group is U.S.-born migrant farmworkers. This group has three ethnic subgroups: White non-Hispanic, Hispanic, and other workers born in the United States. The second major group consists of workers born outside of the United States. This group has three national subgroups: workers born in Mexico which make up seventy-five percent of this group, workers born in other Latin American countries at 2%, and workers born in other countries at 1%, including Haiti, the Philippines, Asia, and the Caribbean (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). All of the participants in this study were from Mexico or were of Mexican descent. Therefore, it is important to know this information to understand how the voices of immigrants are found amongst farmworker students.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT) AND LATINO CRITICAL RACE THEORY (LATCRIT)

Many studies have focused on deficit thinking about Latinos or on problems faced by Latinos but have failed to include their own voices. Critical race theory has addressed this by placing the marginalized at the center of analysis and recognizing and addressing the lives of people of color (Fernández, 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Sólorzano, 2009). Critical race theory is defined by Sólorzano and Yosso (2002) as “a framework used to theorize and examine the ways that race and racism impact on the structures, processes, and discourses within a higher educational context” (p. 156). Villenas and Deyhle (1999) argue that CRT “provides a powerful tool to understand how the subordination and marginalization of people of color is created and maintained in the United States” (p. 413). According to Sólorzano (1997), critical race theory attempts to define, analyze, and give examples for the concepts of race, racism, and racist

stereotypes. It also challenges us to find examples within and about communities of color that challenge and transform racial stereotypes such as the voices of the participants in this study.

Sólorzano and Bernal (2001) posit five themes that are the basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy of critical race theory: a) the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination, b) the challenge to dominant ideology, c) the commitment to social justice, d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and e) the interdisciplinary perspective. Latino critical race theory (a branch of the CRT framework) examines the concerns of Latinos and addresses issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality and attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Sólorzano & Bernal, 2001).

MAJORITARIAN STORIES AND COUNTERSTORIES

Majoritarian stories are based on deficit thinking about people of color. They serve to simplify educational inequities, educational failures of students of color, and even to reinforce other majoritarian stories (Sólorzano & Yosso, 2002). Majoritarian stories are created from a legacy of privilege based on race, class, gender, language and other forms of subordination (Sólorzano & Yosso, 2002). These stories are based on assumptions, misconceptions and stereotypes that continue to benefit people in positions of privilege by naming majoritarian stories as the norm. According to Sólorzano and Yosso (2002), a majoritarian story distorts and silences the experiences of people of color by alleging to be neutral, objective, and the standard.

Oppressed groups share counterstories that aim to undermine the majoritarian reality. Richard Delgado (1989) describes these groups as outgroups. The outgroups create their own stories which circulate within the group and become a counter-reality (p. 2442). Delgado views counterstories as “the oldest most primordial meeting ground in human experience” (p. 2438). He states that “oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool for their own survival and liberation” (p. 2436). He explains the importance of counterstories by stating that the telling of counterstories is not an accident.

Yosso (2006) states that counterstories serve at least four functions:

- They can build community among those at the margins of society
- They can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center
- They can nurture community cultural wealth, memory and resistance and
- They can facilitate transformation in education. (p. 15)

Oppressed groups who tell counterstories are groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream and whose voice and perspectives have been suppressed, devalued and abnormalized. These stories, parables, and narratives are used to destroy mindsets, presuppositions, received wisdom, and understandings that make current social arrangements seem fair and natural. Counterstories are used in two ways: as a means of self-preservation and to lessen the group's own subordination. Counterstories attack the dominant complacency and can help overcome the ethnocentrism of the dominant group and the belief that one way of seeing the world is the right way when for so many it is full of misery (Delgado, 1989).

Counterstories are used as a tool to expose, analyze, and challenge the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. They challenge majoritarian stories that omit and distort the voices, histories, and experiences of oppressed people. Counterstories challenge stereotypes and seek to document the persistence of racism in the lives of those who struggle towards equality. They offer critical reflections about the lived realities of oppressed communities.

Critical race theory counterstorytelling is a method of retelling experiences and perspectives of marginalized people (Delgado, 1989; Yosso, 2006). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define a counterstory as "a method of telling stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 32). I will use critical race theory and methodology to retell the counterstories of eight farmworker students.

LOCATION

This study is part of a larger study that took place in the city of La

Cruz. La Cruz is located in the southern part of the United States close to the U.S-Mexico border. It is on the edge of the Chihuahuan desert and along the banks of the Rio Grande. La Cruz has a population of approximately 94,000 of which 29% are White, 55% are Latino, and three percent are Black. The rest of the population is Asian, Native American and other. The median income of La Cruz is \$37,402 with 22% of the people living in poverty.

La Cruz is a fast growing city which has recently seen an influx of new arrivals. Ten percent of the population of La Cruz is foreign born. Of the people living in La Cruz, 40% spoke a language other than English at home, with 92% of these speaking Spanish as the other language (Census Bureau, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

Data used for this article are part of a larger qualitative study which took place in Southwest University (a pseudonym) which is located in the city of La Cruz. I worked with a group of students enrolled in the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) which has been operating at Southwest University for nine years. The program recruits high school students who come from an agricultural background and attend one of the local high schools. The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions held by migrant farmworker students about the influences that enabled them to enroll in college.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS

I took part in various opportunities as a participant observer of a CAMP cohort made up of 18 students for a period of two years. I spent time working with the participants and their families in activities such as Parent Orientation Day, community service activities, and CAMP organization meetings. I also had the opportunity to learn more about these students and to work with them in the University Freshman Orientation course as their instructor. I collected samples of student's work, such as narratives, reflection papers, poetry, journal entries, and other documents that shed light on students' lives. Based on the information gathered during participant observation, I chose eight students to continue working with through interviews and a focus group. It was

during these phases of the study that I collected the counterstories that I will share in this article.

INTERVIEWS

I designed these interviews based on the data gathered during participant observations and from emerging themes. I interviewed each student once for approximately two hours. Interview questions emerged from the situations and themes that arose during the analysis of data from the participant observations such as immigration, barriers they had encountered in high school, and barriers they were now encountering during their first year of college (Heyl, 2001; Patton, 1990; Spradley, 1979). The interviewees also influenced the content of the questions.

Of the eight students interviewed, I selected four students who were born in Mexico and four who were born in the United States. All eight students were farmworkers themselves and were either immigrants themselves or had parents who had immigrated to the United States. For this article, I will focus on the stories that contradict immigration myths and stereotypes. Although not all the participants in the study were immigrants, they all had close family members such as parents or siblings who were.

FOCUS GROUP

The focus group was held during the second year of the study. I used focus groups to verify information the participants had provided and to clarify questions I had from the participant observations and from the interviews. Although all eight participants were invited to participate, only four students could attend the focus group. The focus group lasted a little bit more than two hours. The major topics that were discussed based on the previously rendered data were the influence of family, working in the fields, immigration, and college successes and barriers.

I conducted all interviews in both Spanish and English, and tape recorded, transcribed and translated them. All interviews and the focus group were held in the University Student Center on the campus of Southwest University.

DATA ANALYSIS

The same process of analysis was followed throughout all phases of the study. I wrote field notes on a day-to-day basis (Spradley, 1979). I refer to field notes as a journal of records of what I observed as well as my own reflections, dialogues, scenes, and reactions to these (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I also included my own feelings, perspectives, and personal meanings and significance (Patton, 1990). Notes were reviewed daily and labeled through the use of coding (Charmaz, 2000) according to related issues in order to develop theoretical categories and common threads based on the reviewed literature. I color-coded data into thematic piles based on my continuance of the review of literature coupled with the constant revisiting of all data gathered and coded (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Although several themes emerged from the larger study, this article will focus on the counterstories that emerged from the data.

FINDINGS

During the time frame in which I was analyzing the data, events were happening across the country due to immigration reform policies. There were numerous anti-immigrant articles published in the local newspaper of La Cruz. At this same time, the participants were sharing many counterstories that were contradicting comments about immigration and immigrants. Although I only chose several counterstories, these examples were selected because they most clearly represent how the farmworker student's voices in this study contradict the hegemonic discourse seen through various outlets about immigrants and their families. Although not all participants were immigrants themselves, they all came from immigrant families. These examples are representative of similar counterstories heard throughout the study.

"THEY DON'T WANT TO LEARN ENGLISH"

A widespread belief amongst many Americans is that immigrants and their children are not learning English (Tse, 2001). Ofelia Garcia and Rosario Torres-Guevara (2010) point out that when addressing the education of Latinos in the United States, "much emphasis is placed on two issues that U.S. mainstream discourse perceives as Latino

problems: their English language proficiency, sometimes not considered appropriate; and their use of Spanish, a foreign language, and yet spoken by Latinos in the U.S.” (p. 183). Other scholars, like Garcia (2005) and Rolstad and MacSwan (2010), affirm that this belief of immigrants’ resistance to learning English might be one of the most prevalent beliefs in American education that affects legislation, policies, and public schools and that creates a warped representation of the reality that immigrants experience in this country and of their deep desire to learn English.

In contrast to this belief, Santiago’s counterstory represents a good example of the desire and determination that many immigrants have about learning English. Santiago is a recent immigrant who arrived in the United States during his junior year in high school. He is very proud of himself for being the first one in his family to graduate from high school. He is also the first one to attend college. Santiago is a second language learner and struggled with mathematics and English during his first semester in college. He laughed when he told me that he lived in the math center because he spent so much time there getting help. Santiago started high school in the United States in 12th grade. Realizing that his English was poor, he requested to be sent back to 11th grade:

I then asked the counselor if I could stay another year, “May I stay another year? It will help me grasp the English,” I told him, “and I will practice more.” Thanks to me having stayed one more year, thank God, I am in the CAMP because if I hadn’t stayed another year, I might not be in college. (Interview, February 10, 2006)

Because Santiago was struggling with English he sacrificed moving ahead in grade in order to become proficient in the English language. This choice to be retained demonstrates the desire that Santiago had not only to learn English but to succeed in the United States by continuing his education and enrolling in college.

Santiago continued to struggle in college with the language but was able to find the resources he needed to complete each semester successfully:

College for me [is] a little bit hard because I don't speak English very well, but I will put [as much] effort to finish college and I will graduate. (Autobiography, September 10, 2005)

Although Santiago struggled with his classes during his first year of college, his resourcefulness and motivation allowed him to grasp the English language and find the resources that he needed to finish. Santiago graduated from the university with a bachelor of science in engineering technology.

Supporting Santiago's counterstory, several national studies demonstrate the inaccuracy about immigrants not wanting to learn English. The United States Census reports that of 281 million people aged 5 and over, 20% of the population spoke a language other than English at home. Of this percentage, 55.9% reported speaking English very well, 19.8% well, and 16.3% not well, while only 8.1% reported not speaking English at all (Shin & Kominski, 2007). The Pew Hispanic Center (2010) also reports that immigrant families in the United States are growing more proficient with their new language and losing their first language faster. The center reports that of adult first-generation Latinos, 23% say they can carry on a conversation in English very well, rising to 88% among the second generation and to 94% among the third and higher generations (Hakimzadeh & D'Veira, 2007).

Another important study that demonstrates the desire of immigrants wanting to learn English is in the demand of ESL classes rising every year, becoming the fastest growing area of adult education (Tucker, 2006). The majority of ESL classes have long waiting lists, sometimes up to three years. According to ESL providers (cited in Tucker 2006) "There is no shortage of motivation to learn. Instead the extreme demands for ESL services far exceed the available supply of open classes" (Tucker, 2006, p.10).

"THEY ARE TAKING OUR JOBS"

Another recurring comment about immigrants is that they are taking jobs away from American citizens. Aviva Chomsky (2007) states that some of the most widespread myths about immigration have to do with its effects on the economy (p.1). Immigrants are blamed for a variety of economic troubles such as driving down wages, not paying

taxes, draining public resources, and threatening the economic security of the nation (Brayton, 2008; Camarota & Jensenius, 2009; Chavez, 2008; Chomsky, 2007; Ewing & Johnson, 2007; Hanson, 2007). The belief that immigrants displace citizens from jobs and the perceived negative impact of immigrants in the country is pervasive. Immigrants taking American jobs is one of the most common arguments used to justify the need for a restrictive immigration policy (Chavez, 2008; Chomsky, 2007).

Contrary to the dominant discourse about immigrants taking jobs from Americans, several studies demonstrate that most citizens do not face significant job competition from immigrants. A study done by Rakesh Kochhar (2006) of the Pew Hispanic Research Center examined whether the growth in the foreign-born population has an effect on employment outcomes for the U.S. native-born population. In fact, the study found that rapid increases in the foreign-born population are not associated with negative effects on the employment of U.S. native-born workers. No consistent pattern emerged that suggests a direct relationship between the two (Kochhar, 2006).

Although now immigrants are more likely to work in construction, low-end manufacturing, cleaning services, or food preparation (Hanson 2007), they were once concentrated in agriculture and many are still working in the fields picking crops. Almost 40% of all farmworkers are foreign-born and lack U.S citizenship (Kandel, 2008). Farmworkers make up less than 1% of all U.S. wage and salary workers yet make a major contribution to agriculture. According to the Department of Commerce, agriculture and related industries added \$122.4 billion to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (Ewing and Johnson, 2007). The median wage of farmworkers in nonsupervisory positions was significantly less and amongst one of the lowest wages paid for an unskilled occupation (Kandel, 2008).

Two participants in this study, Eduardo and Jack, shared counterstories that are examples of the grueling work of farmworkers. They illustrate the kinds of jobs that many immigrants are now doing and that many citizens of the United States would probably not be willing to do. Eduardo, whose work in the fields started during the summer when he was in middle school, relates the arduous conditions of his job:

Every day we wake up at 4:00 in the morning to go pick chile. We had to go help our dad make enough money to go pay for the bills and for food. The only thing you can be afraid of while you're working in the fields is getting bit by a snake. We would work from the morning to almost, sometimes till 4:00 in the afternoon. Most of the time I would just go home and take a shower and then just fall asleep, and just wake up the next day and go work again. (Interview, February 14, 2006)

Eduardo started working in the fields when he was 13. He has worked picking *chiles* and onions and in the *asadón*, which is cleaning out the weeds from the fields. Eduardo describes how he and his family had no time to do anything else but sleep and work in order to make a living. Eduardo did not want to do this type of work the rest of his life. He stopped working the fields after his first semester of college and started to work in a fast food restaurant which he considered a "step up." He is now attending the university as a senior majoring in criminal justice.

Jack's story reveals the conditions under which many immigrants are living on daily basis. Jack's family started their life in the United States working in the fields. Jack started working as a very young child in the *chile* and onion fields. He commented that there were no good days in the field. In one instance Jack complained about getting cut with scissors when he was *tapiando cebolla* (trimming onions):

I did not like working that [the onion] because you worked with scissors so you are working with a sharp object. I cut my fingers so many times. The days are pretty harsh and sometimes the field is pretty dusty. There are so many different situations, sometimes it will be dry and hot and sometimes the field would be wet and you'd get all grimy. There are so many different factors that contribute to how bad of a day it is at work. There are no good days, not in the fields, even if the weather was good, sometimes you'd end up cutting yourself or something. Something always happened, something. (Interview, March 2006)

Jack's account supports the research that states that working in the fields is one of the most dangerous and backbreaking jobs in the United States (Mobed, Gold, and Schenker, 1992; Tucker, 2000). After his

harsh experience in the fields, Jack obtained a different job working in a store. He found it boring but said that he did not like to complain because he realized that it could be much worse. Jack recognized that he did not want to relive his experiences in the fields:

That was not the life for me. I saw how hard it was and how difficult it is what you have to go through. I do not want to have to go through that. I mean, I've done that. I probably did one of the hardest things there was to do, which is loading the trucks that take the onions to the onion shed. I did like 12- or 15-hour shifts, (Interview, March 29, 2006)

Jack stated that the memory of working in the onion sheds was so fresh in his mind that it was a constant reminder to do his best in college.

While Eduardo's and Jack's counterstories are different from that of many immigrants who do not have a choice to leave the arduous conditions of their job, they still reveal the rigorous nature of working in such jobs. Both were lucky to have the opportunity to attend college with the help of the CAMP program and to graduate. Many immigrants do not have that privilege and end up in jobs characterized by hard labor, long hours, little pay, no room for advancement—jobs that many United States citizens would not be willing to do.

"THEY JUST WANT A FREE RIDE"

Critics of immigration reform argue that immigrants cost American taxpayers billions of dollars (Chomsky, 2007; Griswold, 2007; Immigration Policy Center (IPC), 2007). Opponents of immigration express the belief that immigrants are in the country getting a free ride, and partaking of the many benefits that "by right" should be only available to U.S. citizens. The myth that immigrants use more in public services than they pay in taxes, that they are "getting a free ride" is widespread in the United States. Immigrants are often blamed for crowded hospitals, schools, roads and prisons and are portrayed as a drain on the economy (Griswold, 2007).

In contrast to these myths, many immigrants are ineligible for many public services or are not quick to use these (Chomsky, 2007; Hanson, 2007; IPC, 2007). The only benefits that cannot be denied to immigrants are public education and emergency medical services.

Besides these benefits, non-citizens are excluded from access to many government entitlement programs such as food stamps.

Legal permanent residents are eligible to receive most public benefits but they must wait five years after receiving their green card before they are eligible to receive most public benefits. They also must pay into the social security system for at least 10 years before they are eligible to receive social security benefits when they retire (Ewing and Johnson, 2007).

Contrary to popular belief, immigrants contribute more to the public sector than what they use (Chomsky, 2007; Hanson, 2007; IPC, 2007). According to Gordon Hanson (2007) of the Council on Foreign Relations, immigration generates extra income for the U.S. economy by increasing the supply of labor and raising productivity of resources that are complementary to labor. Even states with high numbers of immigrants who use roads, schools, and police and fire protection, experience reductions in prices for labor-intensive local services such as fresh produce, housekeeping, gardening, and child care thus helping increase the purchasing power of U.S. households.

All immigrants pay taxes in some form, either as workers, consumers, and/or residents and thus increase state and federal revenues. All immigrants pay sales taxes (buying from stores) and property taxes (rent, etc.) and between one-half and three quarters of undocumented immigrants pay state and federal income taxes (Griswold, 2007). A study by the Texas State Comptroller shows that even states with high numbers of immigrants such as Texas produce revenues from immigrants. The study showed that undocumented immigrants produced \$1.58 billion in state revenues yet only received \$1.16 billion in state services (Strayhorn, 2006). Another study by the Kennan Institute of Private Enterprise (Kasarda and Johnson, 2006) found that the growing population of North Carolina, mostly Latino immigrants, had imposed \$61 million on the state government's net costs but that these same immigrants had increased the state's economy by \$9 billion in taxes as consumers (p. 3).

The two following counterstories told by Marisol and Marina are revealing and depict the strong work ethic and responsibility that many

immigrants possess. They portray determined people in search of a better life, who are just trying to make a living. Their narratives depict the trials and tribulations that both participants and their families were experiencing.

Marisol is one example of how hard immigrant families must work to survive in a new country. Marisol's self-determination and hard work ethic were qualities that she learned at a young age from her mother. Marisol was born in Mexico but immigrated to the United States as a baby. Her mother is from Guatemala and all of her mother's family still lives there. Her father is from Texas. Marisol grew up in the United States and attended school here all her life. In order to make a living, Marisol's mother started a food business selling burritos. Marisol became responsible for helping her mother:

She [mom] would take a cooler with burritos in the car. We would sell them for a dollar. I would help her make them. We would ask for permission to go into the businesses. In the beginning I was embarrassed, but my mom would tell me that stealing is an embarrassment. And this was the work that we were doing. We would make a lot, a hundred [burritos]. And the ones that were left over we would eat. We would eat burritos all week. We would get up very early, at about 4:00 or 5:00. (Interview, February 14, 2006)

Marisol and her family later moved to the northern city, where they then started to sell tamales:

We had bicycles and would go from house to house asking if they wanted tamales. (Interview, February 14, 2006)

Marisol's story is a poignant expression of how hard the family was working in order to make a living. Before going to school every day when many other children are still asleep, Marisol was already working hard. She was not sitting at home waiting for a free ride. The family became self-employed like many immigrants who work in the informal economy but they did not have access to any of the benefits that formal employment provides such as unemployment insurance, workers compensation, health insurance or sick leave or vacation days. Marisol is now in college majoring in bilingual education.

Another counterstory that demonstrates how immigrants contribute to society through their labor is Marina's. Marina is 18 years old and was born in Baja California, Mexico. Marina's family immigrated to the United States when she was 14 years old. She and her family went through many agonizing moments as new immigrants. They did not qualify for any benefits such as housing or food stamps. Due to a lack of money and resources when they first got to the United States, the family had to share a small trailer with another family. In order to survive and afford their own place to live, the family started working in the fields a day after they got to the United States:

We were always in that little room. My mom as soon as we got here, we got here on Friday, and by Saturday there was work in the fields. We went to work in the fields the next day after we arrived here. (Interview, February 10, 2006)

Marina's story dispels the myth that immigrants are "getting a free ride". Marina's family started working in a very strenuous job just hours after their arrival to the new country. This compelling example attests to the fact that many immigrants come here to work hard and make a better life than the one they had in their native country. Marina's family is constantly struggling to improve their situation through hard work and determination. Marina continued to work the fields during her first semester in college in order to help her family. Unfortunately, Marina did not finish her first year of college. Family circumstances set her behind in her classes and she had to drop all of them. Regardless of this unfortunate reality, Marina continues to put much effort into overcoming obstacles and plans to eventually go back to school.

CONCLUSION

While a couple of counterstories will not dispel the many myths about Latino immigrants, these stories represent some of the voices that rarely are heard. The counterstories that the participants in this study shared illuminate the reality that many immigrants in the United States are living. The participants in this study were hard working people who wanted a better life and who were doing all they could to make this a reality including learning English, and working hard. Even

within many constraints these students managed to create agency for themselves and affirm their own worth by enrolling in college.

Anti-immigrant sentiment has grown across the nation fostered in part by the xenophobia expressed through the media. By listening to the participants' counterstories, educators, policymakers, and communities can gain insight to the realities that they experienced and how they responded to them in their quest to start a better life in a new country. Changing the dominant discourses, representations, and negative stereotypes about immigrants might be a good start. The counterstories in this article reveal a more positive perspective about immigrants and have the possibility to help a broader public to recognize the positive and valuable impact that immigrants have on U.S. society.

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