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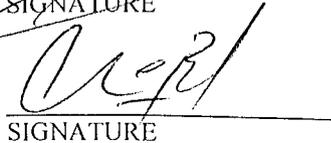
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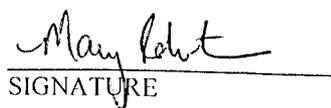
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LOSING CHILDHOOD: LATIN EQUIS CHILDREN IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

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Abstract

Losing Childhood: Latin Equis Children in the Informal Economy, focuses on the stigmatization and normalization of the informal economy of adolescents. I explored how adolescents perceived their quality of life in comparison to their peers and how their income generating strategies meet their family's everyday exigencies. During this economic crisis, many families are experiencing unemployment, and job loss, thus compelling adolescents to supplement their parents' income by selling goods or services to contribute to the family economy. At the core, I found that the youth must compromise their social activities with other youth, and instead prioritize their participation in the informal economy to make-ends-meet, therefore, manufacturing a labor class of adolescents who must take on an adult role within the family.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the age of 6, I been a food street vendor selling cocteles de camarón¹, chicharrones preparados² and at times even pan dulce³. Although I used to be very embarrassed and ashamed for having to scream and knock door by door in apartment complexes in my neighborhood, feeling embarrassed when my friends would see me and try to get discounts, when I would be made fun of at school for being poor, being scared that the cops could arrest us and take us back to Mexico, now I realize that the income generated and our sacrifices aided my family's economic stability and survival. At a young age my parents instilled in me the value of time because when it was time to sell, my weekend would start at 5 am, and if we sold in the weekdays then it would begin at 5 pm. Due to my parents being undocumented, they never found a stable source of income, thus we had to do whatever was necessary to pay bills and buy food. Being a little kid, I hated to sell because that meant that after school I would have to get ready to work, and my weekends I could not be like the rest of kids my age and enjoy watching cartoons (Ricardo age 27. Food Street Vendor).

Ricardo expressed how, since his start in this sector, it has been challenging and emotionally painful for him and his family to survive in this economy. Although the assumption is that the informal economy is predominantly an adult-centric industry, youth also work in this system. From testimonials, like Ricardo's, and my own experiential knowledge, youth participation in

¹ Coctel de camaron: Shrimp cocktail. In a pixie cup the shrimp cocktail is a concoction of shrimp submerged in tomato juice with clam, lemon juice, ketchup, diced onion, diced tomato, diced cucumber, sometimes contains Jalapeño or serrano chile chopped to taste, and salt and pepper to taste for seasoning

² Chicharrones preparados: a flat rectangular pork rind covered in sour cream, diced tomatoes and cabbage, sliced pig rounds and slices of avocado, with Valentina hot sauce to taste for seasoning

³ Pan Dulce: Mexican pastries, sweet bread

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the informal economy is normalized in our culture and under the American lens it is not always accepted. Throughout my upbringing, my parents paved the way for my siblings and I to find our own economic niche through entrepreneurship. For example, while my parents prepared mangos preparados⁴ and elotes preparados⁵, my siblings and I would be knocking door-to-door asking people if they wanted to purchase our products. Overall, my siblings and I contributed to our family's household income, but at the same time, we disliked the fact that money we earned was not spent on us, but rather on bills and food.

In addition to not being entitled to the money, my siblings and I were harassed by other kids, called poor and burros⁶ among other things. We were less fortunate and intermittently threatened with the police being called on us. My siblings and I grew up with this paranoia that law enforcement would eventually arrest us for helping our parents make a decent living. Much like the interviewee quoted above, being scared of our economic situation my siblings and I tried to be invisible while hustling.

As a child it was difficult to comprehend why my siblings and I were expected to contribute to my parents' income, because it was taught at school that it was our parents' job to sustain us. In my case, we had no choice, but to help maximize their economic earning power. Capitalism enslaves people and forces youth to compromise their childhood and generate money like little adults. Nevertheless, I feel like I missed out on my childhood, but at the same time, I became well-educated on how to count and distribute money and be business savvy. One of the utmost significant concepts I perceived through my personal experience in the informal economy

⁴ Mango preparado: mango on a stick, usually cut into a beautiful flower, rub lemon, salt and Tajin fruit chili powder

⁵ Elote preparado: corn on the cob prepared with mayonnaise or butter, grated cheese, tajin chili powder and Valentina hot sauce

⁶ Burros: donkey, but used a lot as an insult

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is that it consists of an enormous web of merchants, businesses, consumers and eventually clients purchasing the product. Even though I managed to make ends meet and become a caregiver for my siblings, several of my friends facing financial issues were not so lucky.

Since they were descendants of undocumented parents, they experienced minimal resources. In order to help out their parents, some of my friends between the ages of twelve and sixteen began to participate in the informal economy as handypersons, food vendors, babysitters and laundry persons. In an article written by Emir Estrada and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2011), the main focus of their study looks at street vending children and teens, and explain both why the youth engage in this work and how they construct narratives of intersectional dignities to counter experiences of shame, stigma, and humiliation with street vending. For example, "While the children and teens actively contribute their labor and earnings to their families, they suffer humiliation and stigma because of the low status, racialization, and illegality of street vending" (p104). While the United States government views the informal economy as deviant, through my narrative and the experience of several of my friends I can demonstrate that the informal economy, is a way to survive. All of my friends' cases revealed that their parent/s, had a forty-plus hour a week job, but their earnings barely allowed them to meet the expectations of paying bills and feed their children. The only way to make ends meet was to involve multiple participants in the informal economy. Even though this is my narrative, the reality is that my story is representative of the larger story told in the research. Thus, my goal in this project is to find out how adolescents in the informal economy perceive their quality of life how committed are they to help their parents make ends meet.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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The World Bank estimates that the informal sector (the informal economy) generates around 40 percent of the Gross National Product (GNP)⁷ of low-income nations and about 17 percent of the GNP of high-income nations. As an example, in some industries, such as retailing and construction, informality can account for as much as 80 percent of employment (Farrell, 2004). It is important to know how people define the economic crisis in this age of globalization. As employment opportunities decrease in the formal sector, the informal sector have risen rapidly in all regions of the world, allowing anyone to participate. The only issue, is that due to it being unregulated work many risks can arise. For example, workers in the informal sector, in most cases, work under the conditions associated with the secondary labor market: low wages, piece-work rates, no fringe benefits, few unions, part-time or split-shifts, unstable employment, limited mobility, and tends to be over represented by immigrants, women, and minority workers (Simcox, 1997). Ultimately, secondary labor markets benefit big corporations and contractors because they can exploit workers, retain high-profit margins, do not have to pay nor give any worker benefits.

This research will focus on the ways insufficient jobs in the formal market, lead to underground employment. For example, the lack of resources (career centers, job fairs, and employment agencies), and invisible barriers (citizenship, language barriers) solidify and further one's participation in the informal economy. I am interested how these limitations also result in collateral consequences. As a direct consequence, as people are expelled from their communities as a result of gentrification, they are forced to move away from available jobs. Unfortunately, success in the formal economy tends to favor whites, men, and those with more formal education and experience, while nonwhites, women, and the less educated are more likely to work in the

⁷ Gross National Product (GNP): total value of goods produced and services provided by a country during one year.

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informal economy (McKeever 1998). To this day, people of color do not have the same resources as the ruling class, thus they are required to work twice as hard in order to participate in this capitalistic system. Economics determine their modes of survival as they are bombarded by bills and debt. When economies are constructed to be opportunistically predisposed, the excluded suffer the consequences that push people of color or their entire families to rely on the informal economy.

The reason why North San Diego County will be the focus of this study is the consistent rise and visibility of informal economy in the region in light of increased gentrification projects. This region offers a window into the social world of the informal economy, a world that has seen limited research. The informal economy sector is being analyzed by scholars that are outsiders to this realm and then discuss their findings through material that analyzes big urban cities like Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Miami, but because San Diego is growing and attracting big business, then there should be a study done on how this attraction is causing low-income earners to struggle to survive in such an increasingly expensive city. In addition, San Diego County is about an hour away from the U.S.-Mexico border so why is it that street vending has not been normalized nor accepted in this region? For example, “an estimated half of all jobs in Mexico City come from the informal economy. Millions of people work on the streets here doing odd jobs, selling and buying anything they can” (Garcia-Navarro 2006). In Mexico street vending is both common and necessary for individuals and families to survive. Thus, because the U.S.-Mexico border is so close, techniques in how to work in the informal economy also come to the United States.

As San Diego County continues to experience mass-gentrification of urban poor communities and urban renewal becomes an eminent threat, more disenfranchised people

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continue to be excluded from the formal labor market. Kim Hoppe, Ezra Susser and Sarah Conover analyzed the informal economy within New York, and one of the key variables aiding to the expansion of the informal economy is gentrification.

Gentrification describes the process whereby rundown, but often occupied, neighborhoods are "reclaimed" for residential use by high-income owners/tenants predominantly white folk. In the process, low-income residents are displaced, land values in the surrounding areas rise, and old staples of neighborhood service give way to those catering to a more affluent clientele (Hopper, Susser & Conover 1985. p194).

Gentrification runs rampant to the point that almost every apartment complex in the neighborhood increases their rents, making it impossible for the original inhabitants to afford and attracting higher-paying residents. According to the San Diego Union-Tribune, from 2004 to 2014, the average rent in San Diego County rose from \$1,242 to \$1,542 per month, and by 2019, the average rent is expected to hit \$1,830 per month (Horn 2014). Once gentrification hit Hidden Shallow Valley, a majority of my friends lost their homes and apartments due to being evicted. The social consequences of this displacement forced them to become homeless or to move into a multi-family home. Nevertheless, friends remained in their homes were the ones that started participating in the underground sector. Comprehending that the informal economy was the only way to make extra money, aided my realization that there is something structurally wrong in society; people are lacking legitimate economic opportunities and resources necessary to survive.

The informal economy is not an ideal choice for its participants, however, it has been reinterpreted into survival strategies for the working class poor. Participating in the informal economy is becoming normalized due to a number of factors set into place. For example, in

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January of 2017, the City of Los Angeles passed an executive order to decriminalize street vending. The trend towards deporting people with criminal records is one reason that Los Angeles has moved to decriminalize street vending. In support of decriminalization, the Los Angeles Times editorial board stated, “Nobody should be deported for simply selling tacos or T-shirts on the sidewalk. Nor should the city criminalize people who are trying to make an honest living, or entrepreneurs trying to develop a business” (The Times Editorial Board, 2016). Individuals should not be punished for trying to make ends meet for either themselves or their families, rather they should be applauded for doing whatever is necessary to survive in this capitalistic economy that is not designed for everyone to thrive.

When a parent is either unemployed or their job is in low demand, they are compelled to find other methods to provide for themselves and ultimately their children. Yet, due to all the limitations and the lack of jobs, children eventually cooperate with their parent/s and also work for their family's economic well-being. By having to assist in providing for the family, children miss out on their childhood because instead of engaging in activities other youth their age participate in, they are obligated to acquiesce on an adult role, put the family first and contribute to the family's well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout this section, I discuss the literature on the informal economy. In the first section, I define the parameters of the informal economy and why it even exists. Second, I examine both the pros and the cons of the informal economy for those who participate in it. Through this section I discuss the reasons why people participate in this realm and to counter it, I will be giving the opposition's perspective of why the informal economy is ruining businesses and hurting U.S. capitalism. Furthermore, for my third section, I will be speaking about the

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racialization of the informal economy. This is important to mention because although anyone can participate in the informal economy, there is racism and a hierarchy in this sector, thus not everyone benefits the same. Following this section, I will be articulating about the participants of the informal economy. I break down this section and discuss marginalized populations that are participants and specifically I look at the Latin Equis⁸ adult and Latin Equis adolescent participation. Next, I will be discussing the hidden silence and potential dangers of the informal economy. Continuing this discussion, I will be analyzing meritocracy and the American Dream because these are two key values that the Latin Equis community are instilled with and try to reach at any cost. Lastly, I will be discussing an executive order that has the aim of decriminalizing street vending. The aim of this literature review is to further inform my readers about the informal economy and to demonstrate to them that the informal economy is an intricate web.

What is the Informal Economy?

The rise of the informal economy has become a controversial phenomenon in the global north, particularly, in the United States of America. The informal economy is also known as the *underground economy*, *shadow economy* or *grey economy*. This economic system is defined as a widespread set of activities, through which people earn money that is not reported to the government and that may entail criminal behavior (Venkatesh. 2006). This type of shadow economy serves as a medium for survival and for making ends meet for people that either cannot find a job in the formal sector, cannot survive economically earning a minimum wage, or simply require extra income. As a result, working in the underground economy becomes an avenue to help participants build on the “human capital.” Learning the language, customs and practices

⁸ Latin Equis: My reason for choosing Latin Equis is due to 1) Latin alone is a term used to group people that have been colonized and 2) by typing Equis rather than X, I am challenging assimilation.

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might help them become gainfully employed or help them start their own businesses.

Unfortunately, for a majority of participants in this realm, they are participating as a means of survival not to become wealthy or advance in the economic hierarchy.

The informal economy is the most common way millions of individuals in the United States engage in this underground sector, thus causing hundreds of billions of dollars in tax revenue to be lost (Feige, 2009. Edelbacher, Kratcoski, Dobovsek, 2016). While the United States government views the informal economy as a deviant wealth generating practice that allows individuals to evade taxes, and become rich by cheating the system, the reality is that a large unknown number of individuals rely on this type of economy to survive. Theoretically, fraud and white collar crime also fall under this category of informal economy, but the actual question is why some behaviors are defined as criminal while others are not. This type of mentality goes hand in hand with Merton's Social Strain Theory, which explains how people in power have created certain values that its constituents must achieve, yet does not provide the necessary resources equally for everyone. Furthermore, the individuals will eventually deviate towards another alternative to fulfill society's expectations. In this instance the path of crime within the informal economy. Although the informal economy is commonly portrayed as a means to generate money for poor, marginalized populations, there is an abundance of intersectionality when considering which demographic groups participate in this sector where the United States Government fails to recognize its role in leaving individuals no other option but take a part in this covert sphere. Rather than admit that the formal employment sector is systemically biased, anything outside the "legal" means of employment is viewed as a criminal (some might see it as a felony but others as a misdemeanor, whereas laws are written that determine that it is one or the other) economic activity. The reason why I am focusing on the

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informal economy among low-income folks and how it is used, is due to how in recent years, the informal economy used by the poor has been criminalized and justified as being crime related.

Yet, white collar crime goes unseen because individuals with power, reputation, high status, or wealth have the means to “justify” their actions.

Through closer observation of the informal economy, researchers find that the majority of its participants come from disenfranchised communities. These are people of color, a majority of which do not lack documents or the credentials to have a “legal” job, but rather due to the bias and racialization of the formal economy’s hiring practices, people of color are not always seen as the right choice for employment. Thus, a majority of people of color who find no income alternative, succumb to the social world of the informal economy. Once within this realm, participants become disenfranchised and fearful of authorities of being caught and criminalized. Participants become bound to an unseen and unwritten set of informal regulatory practices; there are individuals who have an unwritten casual record-keeping systems, lack a fixed place of business, and rely on word of mouth (social networks to spread the word) and other unconventional means of advertising such as the worldwide web. For example, automobile mechanics operating in a home; fruit and vegetable sellers operating from a roadside stand, or crafts persons who operate from a pickup truck (Smith 1987). It is alleged that participants of the informal economy are not qualified to do anything else for a living. Some discourse maintains their perception is due to them being undocumented, but these are fictitious knowledge claims. A majority of participants in the informal economy are skilled, to participate in any job, but because of life or monetary circumstances, are unable to abide by other conventional means to generate income. Overall this leads to people working in the informal economy being

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misunderstood because they are seen as criminals although they are doing legitimate work in order to survive.

Furthermore, people in power and businesses it have stated that through the informal economy, the individuals participating have the opportunity to move up in the socio-economic ladder. This viewpoint has been established by the elite class in society that do not want to risk losing their money, but through Lomnitz's work it can be conceived as a fictitious assumption. Lomnitz finds that the informal participant networking and job tasks are closely linked to jobs in the formal sector. She also adds that the upward mobility in the informal economy can be achieved by its participants, but this takes time and intermittently it does not occur on account of there being a plethora of variables that come into play like, language barriers, citizenship status, covert racism, etc... (Lomnitz, 1978. p133, Snyder, 2003. p286).

Thus negative stereotypes attached to participants of these labor markets are not always factual. Unfortunately what is being portrayed by media, politics, legislation, etc... are headlines like, "the informal sector harbors an active criminal element that must be dealt with" (Johnson, 2013), rather than discussing why people participate in this realm. Rather than acknowledging the reduction in employment, informal economy participants become attacked through labels of criminality and negative stigmatization because their means of survival is "illegal". Although it has been proven and globally researched that "working in the informal economy is often the only available source of livelihood and various informal workers operate in the streets, satisfying the demand for goods and services of an increasingly large population of low and medium-to-low income earners"(Coletto & Bisschop, 2017. P280), laws and media coverages are being designed to specifically target people of color in informal economy.

Pros and Cons for the Informal Economy

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Although individuals with power and privilege argue that this type of economy should not exist, the reality is that this sector is a byproduct of the formal economy. There is high negligence and a lack of benefits for marginalized individuals residing in urban, poverty-stricken cities, which in turn are themselves a byproduct of the formal economy. As a direct result, people resort to whatever means necessary to survive under their given circumstances. The informal economy is a crucial structure to analyze because the intrinsic qualities of informal activity are not different from those of regulated production or exchange. Rather different are the laws and/or regulations imposed by policy makers who seek to control it, and informal workers to avoid such controls (Henry 2015). Furthermore, major laws and policy changes have complicated the situation for workers both to organize and utilize such as labor strikes, bargaining power and pushing demands, thus leading to the loss of wages and benefits (Spade 2015).

Due to law and policy makers applying negative labels such as; criminals, leeches, undocumented, tax evader, etc... the struggling participants of the informal economy are transformed into scapegoats to demonstrate what, in their opinion, is wrong with the United States. By recognizing that the informal economy is not just one mere money-making domain, and that the growth of the informal economy has a correlation with the increase of unemployment (Bates 1996. Khotkina 2007), we are able to gather different variables and likewise stretch a potential interpretation on what the informal economy truly represents. Thus, transforming these negative and criminalized views into a positive mechanism, to alter the connotation, will permit society to understand and empathize towards why marginalized communities are driven to participate in the informal sector. Not all participants in the informal economy are criminals or delinquents as our country wants us to think. Rather, participants of the informal economy have found innovative means to raise income.

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The challenge in trying to reach an omni-relevant definition for demonstrating what the informal economy ideally embodies is infeasible due to the various constructs it can represent, which run from trying to make ends meet, to crime due to the lack of legal rules, state control, bureaucracy or tax regulation (Gudrun 2008). The range of jobs in the informal economy vary from; street vending, mechanics, maids, drug-dealing, prostitution or big scale like the sale of tobacco, pirated movies, etc... Comprehending that there are a plethora of activities, it becomes easier to conceptualize that the informal economy is a byproduct of the formal economy the difference being that the government has no way to monitor, regulate or even tax this sector.

Something that helps explain the growth and expansion of the informal economy is that it is driven by the structure of the world economy (Roberts 2013). Through Snyder's research, the discovery of three factors that contribute towards what attracts individuals to become participants of the informal economy are; constricted opportunities in the formal sector, individual economic motivations, or individual identity motivations (Snyder 2004). Although Snyder argues that these variables lead to an individual being a part of the informal economy, she argues that one of the reasons people leave the formal sector for the informal sector is due to a desire to re-establish themselves in a new realm. She provides a case for New York, where communities are constantly changing and money and jobs became scarce. Along these lines, transforming its negative and criminalized view into a positive mechanism that helps individuals and families, especially of color, generate income for the main purpose of survival and making ends meet would be more accepting and justifiable.

Opposition to the informal economy bases their arguments on crime, which they argue goes hand in hand with the informal economy. For example, countless business individuals believe that the informal economy should be terminated because they are losing revenue;

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informal businesses are increasing and their employees and potential customers are evading taxes (Farrell 2004. Levy 2008). Although there is not much literature on whether or not people participating in the informal economy pay taxes, a myriad of people believe that the informal workers chose to participate in the informal economy for the sole purpose of becoming opulent and cheating the government. Furthermore, people argue that the informal economy should not exist because it is creating a realm of exploitation, tax evasion, and delinquency. Yet the reality is that the informal economy sector is a byproduct of the formal economy. Regardless, these characteristics already occur, informal or otherwise, but covertly. The informal economy has been predominantly depicted as negative while the formal economy has been portrayed as the more positive and acceptable path towards "progress", "advancement" and "modernization"(Williams. 2008, p.297).

Racialization in the Informal Economy

Although the informal economy allows anybody to become a participant, this sector is racialized and classed. While some white people use this sector to either make ends meet or become wealthier, they are not criminalized to the same extent as people of color. For example, when someone goes to a store and is stopped outside by a girl scout selling cookies, how come that is viewed as cute and acceptable? On the other hand, when a youth of color presents a product, why is that considered loitering and solicitation? While the little girl selling cookies is presented as an entrepreneur in society, the youth of color is presented and labeled as a hustler or a nuisance. Even though they are both performing the same activity, because of skin color, the actions end up interpreted differently by both people of power and authority. There is a racial disparity in the informal economy where actions get interpreted differently based on skin color, where an action can be seen as entrepreneurial and acceptable by white people, that same action

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performed by a person of color will be seen as nefarious. While a white person's attempts to get by in corporate America can be seen as innovative, when applied to a person of color, the act is socially twisted and redefined to criminalize and punish for the very same thing that white individuals get praised for. By transforming these negative and criminalizing views to recognize the positive mechanism that helps individuals and families, especially of color, generate income for the main purpose of survival and making ends meet, would permit for the eradication of these linked racial stereotypes.

Participants of the Informal Economy

Participation in the informal economy is not strictly just Latin Equis individuals or immigrants, but rather a mix of people that come from different backgrounds. It is safe to say that the informal economy does not discriminate against any race or gender. Comprehending this, we can also observe that there is a hierarchy in this underground sector. Although the informal economy is not regulated by the government, its participants create the rules so that everyone can ultimately benefit without burning any bridges among competition.

When participating in the informal economy, many participants work in the shadows, meaning that individuals will try to remain invisible in their work due to the fear of police. Furthermore, because they have to work in the shadows, they are voiceless, which implies they in turn do not exist. Through the subaltern standpoint, the subjugated (Go 2016), voiceless individuals, in this case participants of the informal economy, will finally get a voice and express their realities and struggles, because through this approach the informal economy is micro-analyzed through the standpoint of the participants.

Marginalized Population Participation

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While the United States legal system, like the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) views the informal economy as a deviant arena that allows individuals to evade taxes, and become rich by cheating the system, the reality is that an unknown number of individuals rely on the informal economy to survive and make ends meet in our capitalist nation. The reason I say that the amount of participants is unknown, is due to the fact that the majority of these participants do not report taxes, so the numbers gathered are just estimates of how much revenue the United States loses due to unreported taxes. Through closer observation, it can be understood that the majority of its participants come from marginalized and underprivileged communities. These are usually people of color, and “are characterized as individuals who have casual record-keeping systems, lack a fixed place of business, and rely upon word of mouth, and other casual means of advertising. Typical of such vendors are automobile mechanics operating in a home garage, produce sellers operating from a roadside stand, or craftsmen who operate from a pickup truck or in a home workshop” (Smith. 1987. P.83). Participants of the informal economy are individuals who do not lack skills, but rather lack an opportunity in the formal job market. When facing unemployment, many individuals feel useless and often face depression due to their inability to bring any income home. For men, the sentiment of failure expands in their mind because of patriarchal ideology stating that men are the breadwinners, and if they cannot provide income, then there is something wrong with them.

An example of informal labor is domestic labor and how it is portrayed as a task only meant for women because it is in their nature to clean, according to patriarchal ideology (Menon 2012). We are compelled to consider the roles of race and immigrant status in domestic work, because by the employer knowing that their employee is undocumented, they can easily exploit with no repercussions or fear of authority because they automatically know that the employee

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will not go to the authorities due to fear of deportation, and loss of potential and/or current employment (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).

Domestic labor is common amongst women, especially immigrant women, and unfortunately there are no protection laws for them. This type of employment is ultimately demanding, and pays low wages because workers are dispensable. If the domestic laborer were to complain then potential harm could come their way like being arrested, or deported. Some of the abuse that domestic laborers face are the extra duties that they are obligated to put up with and unfortunately have no say in. Furthermore, it is common for domestic labor workers to have their natural rights restricted, like having breaks, have a lunch break, being able to go to the restroom, etc... and not being able to demand anything due to the fear of deportation and having their working career jeopardized.

Another case study of marginalized populations participating in this realm are Trans people. Bianca, a Trans woman had to engage in sex work because she had insufficient funds to purchase her hormones. Even though she tried to obtain a job in the formal sector and apply for welfare because she was homeless and unemployed, when going to a workforce program, she would be harassed and humiliated by staff (Spade 2015). Due to sexuality becoming a commodity, individuals like Bianca who are just trying to work and earn enough money for hormone treatments, are forced to enter the informal economy as prostitutes, because the formal job market does not understand or accept different sexualities outside from the dichotomous male and female. For countless Trans people, if they do not come from a white privileged background, then their transition becomes jeopardized due to jobs not hiring them.

Latin Equis Participation

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A factor that forces Latin Equis individuals to become part of the informal economy is unfair wages and the drive to close the gap between being well off and their present economic situation. Byung-Yeon Kim's article, analyzes the effects of poverty on the informal economy. One of the findings Kim assesses, deals with people in Romania who chose to participate in the informal economy because of the low income earned through formal jobs and the gap between the income desired. Kim's thought-provoking analysis produces that the deep poverty faced by families, becomes a factor that motivates their entry into the informal economy because one job is not enough to make enough money to bring them out of poverty. Through Kim's examination of individuals in Romania, he observes that households' participation in the informal economy is not driven by poverty but by exploiting opportunities, which are more likely to be available for the educated (Kim 2005). Poverty is not the only issue to solely blame, but the lack of opportunities that open up only to educated and privileged people should also be exposed to the public as a contributing factor towards why people participate in the informal economy.

The experiences that have led Latin Equis individuals to participate in the informal economy vary. Looking at this issue through a structural lens, a plethora of variables can be applied, such as: insufficient jobs in the market, lack of resources, invisible barriers that prohibit certain people from being hired, gentrification, exploitation and jobs paying unfair wages. Conjointly, Raijman argues that most self-employment remains marginal (Raijman 2001). This means that a majority of jobs in the informal economy will not lead to a career due to the consequences that come with participating in a "deviant" act. In today's world, there is a correlation between people of color and the lack of resources they are provided versus White people and the resources they obtain, leading to the idea that people of color need to work twice as hard in order to survive the bombardments of bills, debt, etc. Matthew McKeever performed a

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study about reproducing inequality, and found that, “success in both economies tends to favor whites, men, and those with more education and experience, nonwhites, women, and the less educated are more likely to work in the informal economy” (McKeever 1998. p1209). When economies are constructed to favor just one phenotype, others suffer the consequences, which refers back to my research question, what leads Latin Equis individuals to participate in the informal economy.

Due to instability in the world economy, the economic recession that started in December of 2007, cost an innumerable amount of people their jobs. Unemployment escalated, poverty skyrocketed and countless individuals lost their homes (Bivens, Gould, Lawrence & Shierholz). Finding a job that paid a fair wage became problematic because money was scarce and in order to be hired, someone had to be let go or the potential employee would be required to take a wage reduction. Unfortunately, a myriad amount of people of color, agreed to this condition, but it became challenging because they started to live paycheck to paycheck. Furthermore, invisible barriers such as; proof of documentation, or social security number, adopted by the nation, constrained Latin Equis individuals to find an alternative to generate money. For several Latin Equis individuals this meant that the only way to survive was to become a worker either through street vending or taking extra jobs like babysitting, personal care, lawn maintenance, informal retailing, home repair, automobile repair, etc. (McCrohan & Smith, 1986). Becoming a participant in the informal economy was not their ideal choice, however they had no other way to survive in our capitalist nation.

Other authors like Christian Zolniski contribute to the comprehension of the informal economy, by focusing on the multiple forces that drive immigrant individuals to participate in the informal economy. Through his observation in the San Jose area, he witnessed that these

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individuals main argument for participating in the informal economy was to complement their income generated through their work in the formal sector. Immigrants do not originally look to participate in the informal economy, but slowly, they gravitate to this sector because of the lack of money they are earning in their formal jobs (Zlozniski, 2000). Additionally, migrant work centers emerge as a key resource for migrant workers to participate in, but because they accept to work in these informal jobs, they face harsh conditions and fake promises. (Martin, Morales, Theodore, 2007). Furthermore, by the state performing crackdowns on street vendors in order to promote public order, the state controls the rigorous consequences that are legally upheld, and people become silenced for fear of enduring that punishment (Cross, 2000).

Adolescent Participation

The participation of adolescents in the informal economy, is a contentious issue due to the restrictions and laws in place for youth. One of the main dilemmas that arise when children engage in this type of work is that privileged adults usually White, denounce child labor. Due to the participant being young, the adults are viewed as “bad” parents because first they cannot provide for their children, second they are stripping the child from a “normal” childhood, and third, child labor is frowned upon. Furthermore, certain people believe that children should not be working because children do not know the risks and the pressure of working and having so much responsibility, but the reality is that for most families, the children are not being forced to work, rather they choose to help sustain their family’s income. The youth become forced by their circumstances, meaning that because of their conditions, they do not have much of a choice. Youth have the capability to acknowledge their family’s financial limitations and many feel that it is their moral obligation to contribute to the family income. Thus, they end up working without asking for an allowance or wage, because kids recognize that their parents cannot bring home

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enough income alone, thus their contribution is necessary and their involvement becomes instrumental for their family's economic survival. (Estrada & Hondagneu-Sotelo. 2011).

Emir Estrada and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo have gone to predominantly Latin Equis communities of Los Angeles, CA. to observe the daily actions of street vendors. They analyze why adults participate in the informal economy. Although it revolves around a negative stigma of deviance, for a majority of individuals, the informal economy is not an ideal choice but an action necessary for survival. While witnessing the constant struggle of Latin Equis individuals to make ends meet and trying to earn money to put food on the table, they witnessed how the participation of children either benefits the family or even hurt it. Through field notes derived from their participation, Estrada states, “children are not the ‘baggage’ that adult immigrants simply bring along. In the case of street vendors, we see that they are also contributors to family processes” (Estrada 2013. p52). Estrada's findings demonstrate that children are working in order to help contribute to their household income, but most importantly, they play a vital role when it comes to language barriers. The kids are not simply workers, they achieve an understanding of how to manage a business and commerce. Questions that arose for me dealt with children's participation and how they perceived their everyday reality? How do these kids regard their situation and do they feel obligated to help their parents make ends meet?

The stigma a majority of Latin Equis youth receive from society for trying to earn money to help their families make ends meet becomes a point of study for Emir Estrada and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. By assisting in the family's income-earnings, they miss out on their childhood because instead of being able to do the same activities that other youths their age participate in, they are obligated to work. A powerful insight that Estrada and Hondagneu-Sotelo observe, is that “Children who are not privileged by race, class, nation, and gender are simply

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under more pressure to work for money. The Latino street vendor children and teens that we interviewed for this article are not working for an allowance, or for personal spending money, but to ensure family economic well-being and advancement” (Estrada and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2011. p106). When a parent is either unemployed or their job is on low demand, they are compelled to find other methods to provide for themselves but most importantly their children. Yet, due to all the limitations and the lack of jobs, children eventually cooperate with their parent/s and contribute to their family's economic well-being.

Hidden Silence of the Informal Economy

Taking notice of the lack of jobs within the community also helps in explaining why certain areas or neighborhoods have an enormous influx of participants. By cities attracting jobs and more resources, economic stability and even social mobility become a possibility. Furthermore, if cities lose jobs and resources then the community becomes greatly impacted. “The underground economies make it clear that the vulnerability of ghetto communities is a product of the relationship that weaves these areas into the social fabric. Without a change in the kinds of resources... there will never be much in the way of meaningful opportunities for inner-city inhabitants to experience economic stability- let alone upward social mobility” (Venkatesh 2006, p.387). Without jobs in the community, future generations will face the struggle that their parents and/or families endured. Thus, it is critical to have a dialogue and expose this sector because the situation that parents want to avoid for their children will only exacerbate.

Relying on the informal economy, has no guarantee of savings towards an inheritance or of economic stability for their descendants. Residing in cities that have been labeled as “ghettos” or “poor neighborhoods” the demand to attain money and make ends meet compels the individual to generate income in the informal economy. For poor areas or “ghettos”, a rapid

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emergence of drug dealing inhabits the area and plays a role as a method to gain income. The need to provide economic support for one's family as well as achieving status, respect and reputation among one's peers became two core constructs of masculine identity (Whitehead, Peterson & Kaljee, 1994). The informal economy is a money-making industry, but unlike the negative stereotypes, it does not come with luxuries, and the majority of its participants are subjected to demeaning and undignified treatment which goes unrecognized under the larger scope of the negative view of the informal economy.

Taking the issue of exploitation and unfair wages further, Kelly Fernandez the Latin Equis population in the United States, Los Angeles, California and Miami, Florida. Through their observation and analysis, there is a sense that local and federal agencies have contributed to the expansion of the informal economy. Through this ethnographic research, mostly focusing on female immigrants from Mexico and Cuba, working in the industrial sectors like sweatshops and low-paying jobs, it is comprehended that a profuse amount of these types of businesses exploit these women because they are dispensable and most likely undocumented. Consequently, if one of the female employees decides to complain about the working conditions or unfair wages, they are threatened and even attacked.

A multitudinous amount of employees remain silent, because of the harsh consequences that come with being part of the informal economy. Thus, participants in the informal sector go about their business in the shadows, in a manner that most participants in the mainstream economy would consider almost invisible (Thukral 2010) because they lack protection from workers' rights. For a majority of people, participating in the informal economy is something secretive due to the fear of legal consequences. Understandably, these individuals are compelled to keep their jobs secretive, the workers are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and have

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nowhere to voice their injustices: the informal economy has no justice enforcement. In addition, “increased earnings inequality and the associated restructuring of consumption in high-income strata and very low-income strata, are part of the new consumption to compete for the necessary resources in urban contexts where leading sectors have sharply bid up the prices of commercial space, labor, auxiliary services, and other basic business costs” (Sassen 2000. p7).

Indeterminately, there is a correlation between the exploitation in the formal economy and its participants because eventually people would have tolerated enough injustice that their only way to keep earning income is through participation in the informal sector.

Meritocracy and the American Dream

Working-class individuals are bombarded with the idea that through hard work and sacrifice anything is possible, yet for countless participants of the informal economy, their position in the economic hierarchy does not reflect their hard work. Hard work, discipline, and other forms of human capital (Khan 2011) do not guarantee moving up in the economic ladder. Meritocracy is used as a tool of social control, where if people of color do not succeed, they are blamed for their misfortune, and stereotypes on these minority groups are affirmed. For example, if a person of color lives in poverty and cannot survive in our capitalistic nation, meritocracy interprets this simply as that individual not working hard enough, and being fully responsible for their own hardships.

The American dream, is a perception that a profuse amount of marginalized people of color are incessantly fed, but what they are not told is that meritocracy does not reward equally. No matter how strenuously they work, no matter how much they sacrifice, the American dream is an unattainable idea because meritocracy only intends for the privileged to succeed. The American Dream created by our capitalist nation, serves as a goal to become successful and gain

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upward mobility, but if the resources are not available, then not everyone has the capability to reach this desired objective. When thinking about the American Dream, for example, a majority of privileged white people say that in order to prosper and climb higher up the economic hierarchy, then one must sacrifice, work hard and take risks like investing money to become wealthy and truly experience the “American Dream.”

Executive Order to Decriminalize Street Vending

Decriminalizing street vending in Los Angeles, CA. has been a hot topic after the world found out that Donald Trump was victorious in the 2016 presidential election. Fearing what President Trump declared throughout his entire campaign, the biggest fear for countless undocumented individuals living in the United States, is deportation. Los Angeles, CA, is one of the multiple big cities where participation in the informal economy is not covert. One of the biggest arguments created on the defense of street vendors, is that “nobody should be deported for simply selling tacos or T-shirts on the sidewalk. Nor should the city criminalize people who are trying to make an honest living, or entrepreneurs trying to develop a business” (The Times Editorial Board, 2016). Individuals should not be punished for trying to make ends meet for either themselves or their families, rather they should be applauded for doing whatever is necessary to survive in this capitalistic economy that is not designed for everyone to thrive.

What this proposal asks for, is that every stationary vending post must obtain a city permit allowing them to sell their merchandise. Obtaining a permit will be a simpler process; this clause in seeking a permit will not require documentation to be shown, yet at the same time it might not even be worth it for the street vendor. Since most street vending barely makes a profit, with the taxing of their acquired income, there is a high possibility that the vendor will end up running on a negative margin. Another condition expected to take place, is that the operating

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hours will be limited to 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. and only two vendors will be allowed per block as long as the walkway is not obstructed and the stores in that area approve. Additionally, selling in most residential areas will be prohibited (City News Service, 2016).

Although this proposal was passed on March, for many street vendors, residential neighborhoods is where their entire business flourishes, and by this proposal making sales in these areas prosecutable, then what good does it serve the street vendors if it limits them to only sell in walkways. By having to ask the owners of the stores for permission to sell near their business, could be potentially problematic because a majority of store owners will refuse the competition. The protection that this proposal is trying to create, although it does not benefit a myriad of vendors, is just the beginning and will have numerous revisions before the final bill hits the table. In addition, it has to be in consideration that one of the reasons that informal businesses do not apply for a license or city permit is due to the time and money that the process takes, consequently if the individual is trying to find stability and make ends meet, thereupon cannot afford to invest revenue on something that will delay months of potential revenue (Fernandez, Garcia, 1985).

When people do not bother to understand the circumstances of street vendors and their justifications for participating in the informal economy, calling the police to remove them from the streets, creates a negative view in the minds of the participants. Being labeled a criminal and constantly being harassed for not having a city permit to sell their product, forces the street vendors to try and become invisible when they are just trying to make a little bit of money. There has to be an understanding that for many street vendors this was not their ideal choice, rather it was an action taken due to the lack of resources their city provides, low wages, and/or the increased cost of living. Although it is easy to assume that anyone has the ability to get hired in a

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job that pays a livable hourly wage and includes benefits, many individuals do not have this opportunity because they are immigrants. If the chance to get a job is available, then the individual will not hesitate to take the opportunity, but they will never mention the harsh conditions they face, the exploitation and all the fake promises they hear in order to continue working and not complain. Participating in the informal economy is usually the safest alternative compared to their past “formal” jobs. What this proposal for an executive order is trying to achieve is to protect individuals that have been cited with charges for street vending to keep them ineligible for deportation by the city, through amnesty. “The plan, which has been in the works for more than a year, would remove criminal penalties for vending. In addition, the proposal would make it so that vendors seeking a permit would no longer be asked about their immigration or citizenship status” (Carcamo, 2016). By having this policy in play, a myriad of individuals will be able to obtain a city permit to sell, and street vending will be a lesser risk, in the sense that these individuals will not need to hide from authority or be as strictly surveilled.

On the KPCC 89.3 Radio Station many individuals opposing this proposal argued that the “last thing we need is more sketchy street vendors clogging up sidewalks and leaving LA looking like a 3rd-world country. Soon the entire city is going to look like the hellhole that is Alvarado Street in Westlake.” and “this is simply going to allow food-borne illness to flourish. Do the street vendors ever wash their hands? How about taxes and other concerns? This is NOT Tijuana” (Rojas, 2016). These two individuals' opinions are the viewpoints of many and they have a right to be concerned for the future of their towns. For many, they have been able to escape this reality and move somewhere more affluent, and just seeing street vendors on every corner places them back to a reality that they wanted to change. Others just want to see their neighborhood as an affluent community, not where someone suddenly shows up and devalues

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the property. Sadly, our biased economic structure, has a correlation with why individuals deviate to these extremes, but no one is willing to talk about it.

THEORY

The rise of the informal economy can be linked the loss of jobs in the formal sector, lack of resources, the rise in the price of the essentials to live a decent life, gentrification, uncontrollable life circumstances, and so on. Yet, even though there is evidence supporting this claim, participants of the informal economy are blamed for their situation by policy makers and people in power. There are three theorists that explain at the individual level, societal level and global level why the informal economy is rapidly increasing in participants. These theorists are Immanuel Wallerstein, Robert Merton, and Howard Becker. By combining these three theorist and using their analysis to define why the informal economy exists, the conclusion is that although policymakers, politicians, etc... place the whole responsibility on the individual the reality is that the informal economy is used as a means to survive due to the inadequate resources available and covert barriers put in play.

GLOBAL ANALYSIS

Immanuel Wallerstein's research examines both capitalism and globalization and takes it a step further by analyzing how these two factors create the exploitation of cheap labor and raw materials from smaller nations, or better known as the periphery. The periphery is a set of third world nations with an abundance of raw material that strong powerful nations, or the core nations, use to their advantage in order to become wealthier while paying a very minimal wage. Looking at the United States, because corporations move their factories overseas to third world nation-states, the rich elite class benefits while the working class ends up suffering. Now the working class struggles because of the minimal job options available. Knowing and seeing this,

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the elites and owners of businesses, use this to their advantage and are able to pay minimum wage or less, no benefits and demand longer hours because the worker has no say due to being dispensable. Wallerstein puts full blame on our capitalist nation because it is creating an ever-increasing wealth gap which pushes the high elitist class further and further away from the low and middle classes.

Through Wallerstein's analysis of the core and the periphery, it is clear that jobs are being exported to third world nations because of the plethora of workers available and the abundance of resources for the core nations to exploit. Exportation of jobs benefits the business owners because their revenue will only increase while paying less than minimum wages to the workers and they keep reinforcing their dominance over periphery countries. On the other hand, the population that suffers the loss of jobs are marginalized communities and people of color. Due to the lack of employment, employers understand that people are desperate to work, thus they can offer low wages and whoever is willing to take the job will do so, because they have no other alternative.

SOCIETAL ANALYSIS

Furthermore, at the societal level, communities create certain values that its constituents must achieve and abide by, yet the community does not make the necessary resources available to all. Since the resources to meet these values will not be present to all, and for a majority just the bare minimum, through Merton's *Social Strain Theory*, it is said that these individuals will deviate towards a path of crime to fulfill society's expectations. The informal economy is the path which a myriad of people take because of all the benefits that it includes like; making ends meet, survival in this capitalist nation, working in order to attain wealth, or even to cheat the government by evading taxes.

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Merton's theory examines success as an individual achievement and all the materialistic components that society divulges to be necessary to demonstrate success. For example in the United States, in order to demonstrate that an individual has made it and is now successful, they require that individual to show the income that they generate, have purchased a car, show whether they own a home, and must have a wealthy appearance meaning expensive clothing and jewelry, etc. Only by being able to exhibit these elements then one has truly thrived in America's capitalist society. Although Merton's *Social Strain Theory* focuses more on the individual and how they perceive their situation rather than society and its negligence, through this approach people can truly open up and discuss why they feel the way they do and why they feel that these items are necessary to demonstrate that they are well off in life.

The way that Merton's Social Strain Theory applies to the participants of the informal economy is that they are trying to make ends meet and survive in a capitalist nation, but because of the lack of resources available to them, they must achieve their wealth, through street vending. Although street vending is becoming a common method to make money, since individuals do not have access to obtain a city permit or license to sell, this activity has been portrayed as a criminalized act. In an article written by Byung-Yeon Kim, she discusses that poverty is not the only reason why individuals become participants of the informal economy. "Households' participation in the informal economy is not driven by poverty but by exploiting opportunities, which are more likely to be available for the educated and the skilled" (Kim 2005. p164). Although poverty is a factor, the fact that certain jobs are only being obtained by educated, privileged and most likely white people, marginalized people of color have no choice but to seek that same job underground.

INTERACTIONIST LEVEL

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At the interactionist level, Howard Becker created Labeling Theory which in the informal economy is applied by classifying or identifying a participant as a criminal, delinquent, etc. Labeling theory argues that “a majority of persons in supposedly delinquent areas do not become delinquent, on the other hand, persons in “nice neighborhoods”, maybe just as likely to commit infractions, but are less likely to be arrested or officially punished.” (Collins & Makowsky, 2009). For example, on February 21, 2014, the headlines of the Los Angeles Times read, *Girl Scout sells cookies outside pot dispensary: 117 boxes in 2 hours*. The story was about a 13-year-old Girl Scout in San Francisco and her mother making a “business-savvy” decision to sell cookies outside of a medical marijuana dispensary (Harris, 2014 The Los Angeles Times). When this story was published worldwide, the 13-year-old was congratulated for being an entrepreneur, and in the eyes of her community, her strategic “business-savvy” move was brilliant and innovative.

Now moving forward to June 23, 2017, the headlines of the U.S. News World Report stated, *Undercover Police Handcuff Teens Selling Water on National Mall*. This story was about three African-American teenagers being handcuffed and detained by the police for attempting to sell water without a permit in a National Mall (Nelson, 2017, U.S. News World Report). In this case, the three African-American teenagers were immediately arrested because they did not have any sort of permit allowing them to sell water on the premises. The analysis of labeling theory in this example is that although these adolescents were just selling water on a hot day, they were arrested not because of the action itself, but rather because of who they are. Kids of color.

Comparing both the case of the young 13-year-old girl and her mom selling girl scout cookies outside a dispensary without a permit and being viewed as “business-savvy” versus the three African-American teenagers ages 16 and 17 selling water also without a permit and being

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handcuffed and detained, shows that the law benefits some over others. Due to these 3 adolescents being youth of color their innovative technique to make a few dollars ended up having them arrested. On the contrary, the young 13 year old girl and her mother selling cookies to people that had consumed drugs was perfectly fine because they were being innovative businesswomen.

Labeling Theory suggests that “deviance is not a property of behavior; it is an outcome of the interaction between someone who is thought to have violated the rules of the group and others who call him to account for that delinquency” (Erikson 1964. p417). The core idea of Labeling Theory is the social response to deviance and how this designation internally and externally ends up affecting the individual being viewed as deviant. By using Labeling theory to explain social arrangements, it helps explain why white people in the informal economy do what they do and are not perceived as being a delinquent or criminal because they are being “intelligent” in the way they make revenue or ends meet. Yet, the irony is that these kids were just selling water in a safe area surveilled by police but because they did not have a permit then they were being delinquent. Both similar cases, but different outcomes because of race.

By combining Wallerstein, Merton and Becker’s theories, I am able to portray a bigger picture and demonstrate that a majority of participants in the informal economy are not criminals, delinquents, etc... but rather they are being defined as that through the eyes of the white hegemonic elites. Through policies and enforcement, politicians place the sole blame for their situation on the individual but the reality is that the individual did not ask for that life. Rather they are trying to survive with what only options they got. It has to be understood that society does not provide the same resources for everyone, thus incrementing the likelihood that people will seek the informal economy to make ends meet. Unfortunately, through a global

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analysis, it can be proved that resources will keep diminishing because of the mass exploitation of jobs and resources in third-world nations.

METHODOLOGY

Interviewee	Age	Employment
Kevin	21	Fruta Preparada and Raspado Vendor
Maria	21	Lonchera Vendor
Victor	25	Elotes and Mangos Preparados Vendor
Jessica	26	Produce Vendor
Rebecca	20	CD/DVD Vendor
Mimi	21	Handy Person Worker
Xavier	21	Maintenance Worker
Joe	35	Domestic Laborer
Mago	24	Restaurant Worker
Chuy	25	Tamale Vendor
Sally	25	Domestic Laborer
Estrella	28	Ceviche Vendor
Ruby	26	Domestic Labor
Rodrigo	41	Barn Worker
Rey	21	Cobija and Jewelry Vendor

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I started working before I turned 8 years old so that I could at least buy myself shoes and clothes. Since I was the oldest, I felt anger because it was my parents' responsibility to provide for us. And here I was, working and going to school, coming home at 1 or 2 in the morning then waking up at 5 in the morning so I could get ready and walk to school in that morning (Joe age 35 domestic laborer).

Like Joe, many adolescents end up putting their childhood aside in order to support their families' economic well-being. My objective for this study is to provide a detailed portrait of children who participate in the informal economy. This exploratory research seeks to answer how children of the informal economy perceive their everyday reality, and whether they feel obligated to help their parent/s make-ends-meet by contributing to their family's economic stability. In doing so, I hope to expand the ways we think about youth of color and their participation in the informal economy.

Why Qualitative Methods?

This fieldwork investigation will draw upon qualitative research. Numerical data fails to explain how children of the informal economy perceive their everyday reality, and whether they feel obligated to help their parent/s make-ends-meet by contributing to their family's economic survival and potential stability. Furthermore, by using a qualitative approach, I have the capacity to gain an understanding of what motivates individuals to become participants of the informal economy. Lastly, with a qualitative approach, I am able to interview youth that have participated in the informal economy. Although quantitative research is a difficult method to use when it comes to my research because of the invisibility (but not always invisible, often times covert and public) and underground working populations, it would be very difficult for a quantitative

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research to access good information about informal economy. Thus, by using qualitative methods, I was able to reach this hidden population.

Methodology Approach

I conducted my research using a tri-fold qualitative methodology: a) field work research, b) semi-structured face-to-face interviews and c) shadowing the everyday hustle of the participants. Through qualitative methods I explored to achieve an understanding of the reasons and motivations that led individuals to innovate as street-level entrepreneurs. In addition, I used a phenomenology approach to do my research. A phenomenology approach is a method that helps the researcher understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation. I believed that my participants' narratives and data gathered should be told from the participants' standpoint and not solely by the researcher.

Shadow Observations

Shadow observations complimented my interviews and provide a better understanding of the everyday realities and exigencies of participants of the informal economy. Shadow observations are close observations that are typically secret to the rest of the people except the person being shadowed. My reasoning behind doing shadow observations is that not every experience is the same. Through the use of shadow observations I was able to observe my participant in their natural environment, meaning that I was able to accompany my interviewee in their sales. Although I got to observe and analyze an experience I am familiar with, but now with a sociological imagination, I described and viewed the action in many different ways. The Sociological Imagination is a concept created by Sociologist C. Wright Mills, and the power of this concept is that the researcher can get a vivid awareness from the experience and society as a whole. Furthermore, with my observations, I can help readers gain a close familiarity with my

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interviewees and help create a state of empathy. Although this research technique proved to be useful in my research, one of the limitations was that at first my interviewees did not like the idea of being shadowed because of trust. Although they congratulated me for my study and the fact that I am a food street vendor and a Masters student, at the same time they worried about my observations falling into the wrong hands.

Ideal Participants

Latin Equis individuals are my ideal participants because they are members of the informal economy in Hidden Shallow Valley, a town located in North San Diego County, which are key in understanding the Latinization of the informal economy. I juxtaposed my upbringing to help facilitate my analysis of the informal economy since I was a youth practitioner as well. I always normalized Latin Equis street vendors, and because of their epistemic reality and my proximity to this community, I felt that the group's relative experience was more suitable for my study. In addition, the literature on the informal economy was intimately connected to my research participants since my data paralleled with informal economy groups from Los Angeles, CA; I was particularly interested in exploring gendered patterns that revealed how women are more visible than men in the area of food street vending, but lack recognition. One of my reasons for this, is due to the literature on this topic stating that while men work their regulated weekly 40-plus hour job, women usually prepare food the whole day and start selling their product while their husbands drive them around; women usually street vend at apartment complexes or closed streets. Furthermore, the lack of recognition begins due to this type of employment being seen as more suitable to women. For example, in *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) exposes the everyday realities of undocumented female workers in Los Angeles, Through this work, Hondagneu-Sotelo finds that

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employees being hired to clean houses refuse to acknowledge domestic labor as a job because through patriarchal ideology house cleaning is attached to women, thus they view it as a type of hobby (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Furthermore, in the article *Race, Gender, and Immigration in the Informal Economy*, Juhu Thukral (2010) provides a list of jobs where women could be found which includes a wide range, starting from domestic workers who clean houses to the sex worker who tells no one about their true source income (Thukral 2010). For this inquiry I was able to interview an almost equal amount of men and women, seven males and eight females, but the literature and through personal experience, I have usually observed women street vending.

Semi-structured Interviews

The methodological strategy that I used to conduct my interviews was a semi-structured interview strategy. I asked five to ten open-ended questions and a series of follow-up questions as the situation demands, but I did not ask questions in any specific order because the responses may shift the questionnaire order during the interview, but I had a logical order starting with basic questions like, “what is your job in the informal economy?” to a hard question like “what has led you to become a participant in this type of unregulated work?” This question was hard on my participants because they had to reflect on why they started participating in the informal economy rather than having employment in the formal sector. I felt that my research was stronger by using this format because it transformed my research more into a life story.

In my exploratory study of the informal economy, I used a convenience sample to select participants who self-identified themselves as Latina/os which later on turned into a snowball sample because my first participants guided me towards other informal economy participants. I recruited fifteen Latin Equis individuals with an equal amount of women and men, who consented to be interviewed. Furthermore, I focused on individuals who have participated or are

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currently participating in the informal economy, because participants in this underground realm are usually invisible and most of them appeal to their web of social networks; these social networks are centered in their respective community. My goal was to include their stories, empower them to cultivate a voice and to solidify their agency as experts of their own informal economic craft throughout my research.

The Setting

I sought out participants in this study through convenience sampling leading to snowball sampling where I relied on my personal contacts to identify people and then asked these persons if they can recommend other people who might be interested in participating in this study. Also I traveled throughout the reputable part of the community that has a thriving informal economy. For example, I have observed multiple food street vendors selling at grocery chain store parking lots in Hidden Shallow Valley. For this type of setting, I implemented a snowball sampling strategy. I knew people, whom I had pre-existing relationships with, which participated in the informal economy. I used these individuals as references so I could connect with other prospective persons who were willing to share their stories with me. After each interview I conducted, I relied on snowball sampling to obtain further participants willing to share their stories. Thus, by identifying fifteen participants, I asked them if they knew of other street vendors that I could interview. I provided participants with an incentive of ten dollars because they took time away from their business to have me interview them. Furthermore, because my participants do not work traditional hours, my reasoning for ten dollars was due to this compensation being the minimum wage. Ten out of my fifteen interviews lasted for more than 50 minutes while five of them lasted about thirty to forty minutes.

Interview Process

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For the interviews, once I secured my participants, instead of going directly into questions, I allowed them to set pace of the interview. This generated an opportunity for them to create a story. Thus, a semi-structured and open-ended interview approach became a suitable strategy for this sociological inquiry. I suggested that we do our face-to-face interview at a coffee shop, but if they did not feel comfortable in this setting then they choose where we can meet and started the process. Once the interview started, I began the conversation with the question of how did they decide to become a street vendor? Depending on the interviewee response, I had a follow-up question, where I asked them how they earned an income before getting into street vending or if they held another job in the informal economy besides street vending or in the formal sector. I later proceeded to ask, depending on the answer to the previous question, whether or not they were satisfied with their earned wages, and if they had benefits like health insurance. The topics I wanted to ask them about related to the current recession crisis and how it enhanced or hindered their participation in the labor market. As a researcher I was interested in exploring their experiences with invisible barriers such as documentation, social security, gentrification and unfair wages. These topics were common themes found in the literature that unfolded the mechanisms within the informal economy and I explored whether or not some or a majority of these themes were variables that pushed persons to participate in the informal economy. Through my personal experience and knowledge, I was able to expand on this topic to other issues that the literature has not addressed yet. After the interview was over, I offered my participants gift cards as a token of gratitude. I purchased several \$10 gift cards to places like gas stations, fast food, or supermarkets in the area where my participant resided and allowed the participants to select the gift card of their choosing. I offered gift cards to all the participants regardless of the interview duration.

Confidentiality and Privacy

The participants' confidentiality and privacy was my main priority in this study. I made sure to give all participants an option of where they would like to meet and a time they felt most comfortable to participate in this inquiry. I took into account the possibility that information may leave the space of the interview, but I offered them safeguards and precautionary suggestions to ensure complete anonymity. Potential risks included the resurrecting of painful experiences (sadness and/or anger) that my participants may have endured, and taking roughly 45 minutes to an hour or longer on the interview, which they could be working selling their food instead. One of the risks that I considered when seeking out participants was whether they were documented because I did not want them to feel vulnerable at any moment during the process. Also if they felt uncomfortable signing a document then I asked them for an oral consent that way the participant could still be part of my study without feeling obligated to sign anything. Due to this population being vulnerable and running the risk of being deported, I had to make sure they were protected and that no information obtained gets leaked. Another risk that I considered were their emotions and whether it was safe to continue with the interview or not. My last ethical consideration was to incorporate a social justice agenda and accurately represent my interviewees' voices and how they have experienced life in the informal economy.

Data Analysis

Once I obtained my fifteen audio recorded interviews, I transcribed and coded them. The three coding themes that I found most relevant for my research honed in on how adolescents in the informal economy perceived their quality of life in comparison to other youth and how committed they are to help their parent/s make-ends-meet. The coding techniques used for my interviews were Structural Coding, In Vivo Coding, and Emotion Coding.

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The first Coding technique that I found relevant for my research was Structural Coding. Through the use of this coding tool, I was able to pick and choose different segments of the interview and group it together, either because it directly addressed certain questions I asked or it directly answered my research inquiry which was how adolescents in the informal economy perceive their quality of life in comparison to other youth and how committed are they to help their parents make ends meet. The second coding tool I found important for my research was In Vivo Coding. With this type of coding, I was able to code certain terms and phrases that were used by my interviewee. The reason why this type of coding was valuable in trying to maintain the narrative as pure as possible, was because through this tool the participant's voice in the research was maintained. The last coding tool I found valuable for my research was Emotion Coding. This coding technique was necessary for my research because I was able to capture the emotions being recalled, or currently faced by my interviewees.

Safe Guards

The participants' confidentiality and comfortability was a priority in my study. Thus, I allowed the participant to choose a setting where they would like to meet and a time they felt most comfortable. I also took into account the possibility that information may leave the space of the interview, but I offered them safeguards and precautionary suggestions to ensure complete anonymity.

Before I start recording data, I made sure that consent was given in order to record the dialogue. Even though I asked for authorization in the Informed Consent, because I gave them the choice to sign or not I did make sure to get an oral consent in order to continue the process and audio record. Once I obtained the recording of the interviews, I transferred them to my laptop which I secured with a password. Then, once transferred to my secured laptop, I deleted

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the recordings of the digital recorder to ensure the information was not accessible to anyone but me. The recordings remained on my laptop until they were transcribed. Next I transferred the recordings and transcriptions to a USB thumb drive and placed it inside a lockbox in my house. Lastly, I provided pseudonyms (nicknames) for my participants to ensure an added layer of protection for the participant. Once I was done with the data gathered, I completely deleted everything in order to not leave a paper trail.

Reflexivity

Throughout my childhood, I participated in the informal economy. I had to contribute to my family's income, I missed out on my childhood because instead of engaging in activities with my same age peers, I was obligated to work. My parents immigrated from Mexico with minimal formal education. Obtaining employment was very strenuous for them, thus, to survive alongside my family and I sold *fruta preparada*⁹ and *verdura*¹⁰ on the weekdays and on the weekends sold homemade tortillas in order to help my family meet every day economic needs.

At the age of 15, my parents were both hospitalized, my mother experienced a severe case of pneumonia and my father suffered a work-related accident, which meant he was out of work for four months. These misfortunes forced me to find ways to bring income to my household, which at that time consisted of my two sisters, younger brother and I. A major obstacle I faced was that my age restricted me from having a formal job so I had no choice but to work under the table to feed and take care of my siblings. My experience led me to mow lawns, work in construction, gardening, and to work night shifts at a home improvement store as a stock boy. All these employment opportunities came to me from word-of-mouth referrals.

⁹ Fruta preparada: prepared fruit cocktails.

¹⁰ Verdura: vegetables

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Although I currently continue to participate in the informal economy to contribute to my family's household income, I know that my status as a university student gives me an academic privilege and power in comparison to others who participate in the barrio's informal economy. As a documented Chicano, I recognize that my experience in the informal economy differs from other genders, ethnic and undocumented/mixed status groups.

Furthermore, because I am a Chicano, language played a role when it came to both finding participants and interviewing them. Due to my ability to speak fluent Spanish, I was able to approach potential participants without them feeling insecure about my intentions. In like manner, some of my participants felt more at ease conversing with me due to my familiarity with Spanish. Throughout the interviews the majority of my participants spoke in Spanglish rather than struggling in talking in monolingual Spanish.

In addition, my background in the informal economy helped shape the way participants of this realm interacted with me. For example, during the interview process, my participants rather than viewing me as a complete outsider and talking to me as a person that does not know anything about the informal economy felt safe to share their stories with me, because they know I have struggled and have used the informal economy to survive as well.

Although I adequately understand the physical space of Hidden Shallow Valley informal economy, I recognized that people in this social world are not likely to acknowledge me as an everyday practitioner of the informal economy due to my relative privilege, but I will do my best to represent invisible and silenced voices throughout my paper.

Findings

Throughout this section, I will discuss my research findings and provide an analysis of my observations and interviews. I will break down this section and begin by introducing the

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setting, which is the city of Hidden Shallow Valley. Next, I will discuss the barrio-entrepreneurs, who are Latin Equis individuals that enter this sphere and become resident workers who never leave this occupation in order to make-ends-meet. Following this segment, I will discuss how my interviewees experienced their childhood around the informal economy and whether they were forced or freely chose to work collaboratively with their parent/s. Thereafter, I will discuss how the confluence of gender and work impacted the experience of males and females in the informal economy. Afterward, I will articulate the strategies utilized by my participants to not show vulnerability in this setting. Lastly, I will articulate their feelings that emerged during the interviews and the difference in feelings and emotions between male and female Latin Equis folk. The overall purpose of this section is to inform my readers about the themes discussed by my fifteen interviewees and how they may have risked their futures in order to make money for the sole purpose of survival.

The Setting

While walking through the city, around every block there are different cityscapes to observe. For instance, one side of the city can be classified as affluent due to the rich, pristine way that the community appears to exhibit. For example, in this sector every other car is brand new. Houses and parks are conveniently located and surrounded by lush trees, and beautiful green plants that make the air have an annual spring aroma, and the residents are predominantly white. The other side of town can be classified as the “bad” part of the city due to the constant media attention of gang activity and due to the demographics of the residents being low-income people of color.

Walking down the block of the “bad” side of town is tiring and sometimes painful on the feet because the sidewalks are eroded with visible dirt or rocks that interrupt the pedestrians’

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pathway. In addition, the roads are saturated with potholes that seem like craters about to take over the whole lane. Crossing the street, there are two dilapidated convenience stores that sell anything from frozen foods, meats, to clothing. Surrounding these commercial structures are gated and dilapidated apartment complexes. In the same vicinity you will find a public elementary and high school. Adjacent to this learning environment is a plaza with mini stores like fast food chain restaurants, shoe stores, and clothing stores. Parallel to this shopping center are car dealerships with bilingual signs and a sign that reads, “No U.S. license needed (suggesting that this business attracts Spanish-speaking clients).” Walking through this small sector, the smells vary between burnt oil fumes from parked and passerby cars and loud noises from auto shops, to the fragrance of food being cooked. In between this area there is a small neighborhood park where paleteras/os and fruit vendors roam constantly walking through the space pushing their makeshift-carts offering prepared goods to the public. Around the corner of this block, handymen/day laborers stand on the side of the street or in visible corners with anticipation of being picked up for a work opportunity. Taken together, this side of town is the exclusive province of a thriving informal economy

Hidden Shallow Valley is a borderland town in Southern California that is divided into two distinct sections, Old and Hidden Shallow Valley. Old Hidden Shallow Valley was built in 1888 and as the city experienced exponential growth with more inhabitants its boundaries expanded north. Although Old Shallow Valley is known as a city full of rich history, its world-renowned events attract tourism and its natural physical spaces, and outside of its boundaries is a complete different city. Outside of this sphere Hidden Shallow Valley is in a constant campaign to divide and to slowly cleanse itself of low-income communities of color. For example, KPBS through an article stated,

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In 2006 the City Council passed an ordinance that prohibited landlords from renting to undocumented immigrants, but that law was struck down in court... soon after law enforcement followed up with driver's license checkpoints where cars were pulled over to check for valid licenses and small infractions, like broken taillights (Guidi. 2010. KPBS News).

With this selective social control method, and gentrification occurring rapidly the Latin Equis community, Hidden Shadow Valley residents are gradually relocating to neighboring cities or are being forced to move into multi-family homes with friends or relatives. Due to unforeseeable circumstances, individuals and families must find alternate living arrangements and, at the same time, must rely on various income-generation strategies to survive in this city, which lacks affordable housing and rent control.

Hidden Shallow Valley is believed to be the only city in the country to have agreements with ICE and are on standby during sobriety checkpoints (Frey. 2012. The Huffington Post). This partnership solidified law enforcement activities like Operation Joint Effort, first to remove anyone considered a gang member and later on to remove criminal illegal immigrants arose (Gordon. 2010. Sifuentes. 2012. The San Diego Union-Tribune). The current biased and xenophobic city council members advanced a ballot in support of Trump's policies against the protection of undocumented people and it passed with a 4 to 1 vote (Chen, 2018. Fox News). With the support of this draconian measure, Latin Equis informal economy participants have to be more cautious than before due to a majority of them being from the Latin Equis community and might be considered undocumented by law enforcement. Furthermore, with the city's interlocked social control system comprised of the city's police department and ICE, Latin Equis communities are slowly being preemptively targeted and removed from their communities.

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Additionally, ICE's presence in the community is undetected due to ICE officers being covert by dressing in plain clothes and driving unmarked cars (Morrissey. 2018. The San Diego Union-Tribune). The latter strategies aim to arrest anyone that "looks" undocumented by targeting phenotypical dark folk. As a result, Latin Equis communities are facing harassment, hyper-surveillance, fear and alienation. Thus, forcing these vulnerable populations to relocate to avoid detection and harassment.

Old Hidden Shallow Valley

The inhabitants Old Hidden Shallow Valley are members of the predominantly working-class and working-class poor Latin Equis communities. This social space is comprised of dilapidated housing and substandard apartment complexes. From a distance older houses and apartments appear to be in ruins, lawns are dry and unkept, the pavements completely uneven and on the side of houses parked cars with faded paintwork or different shades in some places, that seem for function (to get from point A to point B), trucks full of construction and maintenance tools and the smell of burnt car oil fumes. Further down the road new houses are under construction, and hardly anyone is walking through this neighborhood because of safety concerns, due to "gangs", and the constant surveillance of police.

In the middle of this run-down region there are three renovated Victorian style houses that are set apart from the entire community. These homes have lush green lawns and ADT home security signs right in clear public view, freshly painted fences, and one to two luxurious cars parked near the garages owned by middle-aged looking white people. Furthermore, in this predominantly Latin Equis community, the stores and restaurants do not reflect the needs and tastes of its residents. This gradual gentrification space has promoted the sudden spike in rent pricing (no rent control) for example in this county alone, the average rent has hit a record high

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of \$1,875 last month, continuing more than six years of rising rents (Molnar 2018. The San Diego Union-Tribune) and the Mayor's political agenda has passed or is currently trying to passing measures that benefit the ruling class, which is pushing out a majority of Latin Equis individuals and families from their homes and are having to relocate. Gentrification is forcing the community to become more demographically mixed by attracting affluent white people as the remaining Latin Equis community is forced to seek affordable housing because the rents have skyrocketed.

In addition, throughout this Old Hidden Shallow Valley the police and police officers in unmarked civilian cars (undercover officers) can be seen observing these transformed spaces as they patrol, hyper-surveil, and collaborate in ongoing immigration raids in the neighborhood. In this community, surveillance is two-fold, at the public space and residential space. The neighborhood schools experience police repression, as well, as officers hold a metal detector wand in one hand and with the other he/she handholds a leached police dog to screen students walking into the property. Furthermore blocks away from the school are two police officers in their marked police cars, observing the students leaving campus and the cars that pick them up.

Crossing the street from the school, there is a liquor store and two gas stations where they allow only two student-aged kids at a time and each customer is expected to place their backpacks in cubbies or on the ground near the entrance door to deter thefts. Due to media attention and hyper-surveillance by police of this community, the merchants are empowered to create their own methods of social control. Thus, on account of the police and defacto-agents of law enforcement in the community the everyday behavior and actions of youth are can potentially be considered as criminal behavior (youth control complex¹¹). Dr. Victor Rios

¹¹ Youth Control Complex: concept created by Dr. Victor Rios. This concept is a ubiquitous system of criminalization molded by social control institutions. This complex is the combined effect of institutions, schools,

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created this concept in order to explain how youth are hyper-surveilled and criminalized throughout social terrains like of institutions, schools, families, businesses, residents, media, community centers, and the criminal justice system that collectively punishes, stigmatizes, monitors, and criminalizes youth (Rios 2011).

Additionally, in this sector it is rare to see street vending near schools or apartment complexes due to the constant surveillance of police officers and fear of gangs. Throughout Old Hidden Shallow Valley, there have been fliers posted on walls and given to pedestrians exposing gangs, news outlets stating that gangs are growing in membership, thus shifting from surveillance of community to the surveillance of people of color. The San Diego Union-Tribune stated that “prosecutors are tackling more gang cases out of [Hidden Shallow Valley] than any other North County city” and “Hidden Shallow Valley has roughly 450 documented gang members, most of them belonging to two often-warring gangs. There are also from 800 to 1,000 people considered associates of the gangs” (Figueroa 2017. The San Diego Union-Tribune). Due to the constant anti-gang propaganda, this sector of Hidden Shallow Valley is considered “the bad side” because according to the mass media and various statements from the city’s mayor, gang members are running rampant and creating havoc on the community. As a consequence of this moral panic residents of this social sphere, usually do not walk outside the parameters of their residential communities due to the fear of harassment by law enforcement or to the constant moral panic¹² created by the mayor about gang activity and immigrants. In this case, the

families, businesses, residents, media, community centers, and the criminal justice system that collectively punishes, stigmatizes, monitors, and criminalizes youth (Rios 2011).

¹² Moral Panic¹²: “an extreme social response to the perception that the moral condition of society is deteriorating at a calamitous pace. Most often promoted by mass media reports reinforced by officials such as the state” (Johnson 2000 p201).

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problem is not gangs but the police. On the contrary, New Hidden Shallow Valley is the complete opposite of this sector.

New Hidden Shallow Valley

New Hidden Shallow Valley is comprised of a mixed community of White and Latin Equis low-middle class/high-class families or individuals where the majority are Latin Equis with a 50.9% and Whites are at a 38.9%. Currently New Hidden Shallow Valley is being renovated and expanded by the increased construction of residences in the mountains. Walking through this part of town it is evident that this affluent community consists of new pristine housing with solar panels, high-end luxurious cars and signs of a neighborhood watch being implemented to keep the community safe and secure. They want to project that these are appealing communities that are sanitized from undesirable folk. The apartment complexes in the area are decorated beautifully with an abundance of lush green plants, remote control gates and extra security features that project that these homes are situated in a crime free environment and that law enforcement will be notified if any crimes are committed.

In addition, street vendors are more at ease to sell their street food in this community due to the abundance of parks and apartment complexes. This area of New Hidden Shallow Valley caters to the community's aristocracy through the display of rich elegant wineries, French and Italian restaurants, art galleries, a library and plazas with a plethora of grocery stores. In the parking lots of these commercial places, food street vendors can be observed offering their goods, usually tamales and champurrado¹³ out of the trunk of their cars. In Spanish you can hear a friendly and approachable Latin Equis woman making eye contact that appears to be around 5 feet in height, late 40's, with short curly black hair, wearing a red shirt (usually with clothing

¹³ Champurrado: a warm chocolate-based thick Mexican drink

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layers) with blue jeans “no compran tamales calientitos, champurrado?” (Would you like to buy hot tamales, champurrado?) being offered to passerby individuals walking from the store to their car. In this case, due to language barriers, the vendor only offers their prepared goods to people that they arbitrarily believe are of Latin Equis descent or if they hear them talking in Spanish with people or on the phone. Occasionally white folk approach the vendors and buy their food as well, but the vendor never approaches them due to the fear of being detected or harassed. Furthermore, if the street vendor were to interact with white folk the police may consider them more visible since they might think white people are in danger.

Parking lot structures are a common place where street food vendors sell prepared items. This thriving informal economic activity usually takes place during the weekdays during evening times because the vendor understands that many shoppers usually arrive in this public space after their work schedules, so one of their worries is to have dinner ready for themselves or their family. Furthermore, this is an ideal place because of the countless amounts of individuals that have to go to the store and shop. Most informal entrepreneurs who participated in this inquiry were street food vendors, depending on the store they are selling in front of, usually felt accepted and welcomed by the community. Through the gamut of social interactions the vendors are commonly told by the public that what they are doing is not a crime. They are affirmed that their income generating activities are a decent way to earn a living and that when they see street vendors, they are reminded of the feeling of being at home. In one of my interviews, I asked my participant, Kevin, who is 23 years old and a mango preparado and raspado vendor whether he felt accepted or judged by his neighborhood when people saw him selling and he stated,

My neighborhood, I do not feel like they ever looked down on me or at least I never thought so. But maybe that is because I took great pride into what I did.

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You know I was proving the stereotype [of street food vending] wrong. Like here is this Hispanic family, but look at their kid he is working, you know so I took pride and umm like I said I never felt that we were ever judged (Kevin age 23).

Kevin who is also a soccer aficionado, a 6 foot tall man with short combed over hair and a raspy voice has been working in the informal economy as a food street vendor since the age of 10.

Through his actions, rather than feeling ashamed or believing the stereotype that what he is doing is criminal activity, Kevin takes a great deal of pride because he is surviving with his family. In addition to parking lots, a myriad of food street vendors sell their merchandise in neighboring parks and apartment complexes that are not gated. If you were to walk to a park and sit in a bench to observe the vendor/client dynamics you would find that the use of neutral language to communicate in this sphere is non-verbal, customers usually gaze at the food being sold. For example, during my field observations, I found that when street fruit vendors arrived at the park they first paid particular attention to their families. Here the vendor tries to blend in with the community but also they seek to advertise their goods by using their kids as pawns. I would often see vendors prepare their children a mango before engaging in this public income generation practice. For example, a Latin Equis vendor would open up his ice cooler and search for the most cold and ripe mango out of his assortment, select the item, but a slice of the bottom of the mango in order to insert a stick and start peeling it until he had cut the mango into a beautiful yellow and juicy flower design. Next he would rub the mango with lemon juice and he would sparingly sprinkle salt and Tajin fruit chili powder¹⁴ to make it spicy and appetizing. Lastly he would give it to his son to enjoy the mango around the park. Minutes into my observations, I would find the youngster bite into the mango and find the nectar drip down his mouth area. Once other children

¹⁴ Tajin fruit chili powder: seasoning mix consisting of dried and ground red chilies, sea salt and dehydrated lime juice

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caught view of the boy enjoying the mango they would suddenly crave a mango and gravitate towards the fruit vendor with dollar bills in hand or they would ask their parents to purchase them a prepared mango.

Since this part of town is surrounded by parks, street vendors also use this setting to sell fruta preparada (prepared fruit), usually a cup or bag of sliced cantaloupe, watermelon, cucumber, mango, jicama and topped with chamoy or salt and lemon), raspados (shaved ice with natural fruit juice), chicharrones preparados (a flat 12 inch rectangular pork rind covered in sour cream, diced tomatoes and cabbage, sliced pig rounds and slices of avocado, with Valentina hot sauce), or elotes (corn-on-the-cob prepared with mayonnaise or butter, grated cheese, tajin chili powder and Valentina hot sauce). Since these areas are usually saturated with kids, they have many cravings so the street vendors shout-out-loud what food items they are selling. The curious kids crave this food item that they end up being attracted by what the street vendor has to offer. In these areas, it is common to see vendors with their entire families selling goods because the demand requires multiple persons to meet the public demand. Usually the adult prepares the item while one of the kids handles the money exchange and the other siblings seek to lure potential customers by letting them know what item is being sold. The youth also increase sales by walking around the general vicinity and solicit customers by knocking door to door. These entrepreneurial skills are imperative to meet their family's exigencies within these barrio contexts.

Barrio Entrepreneurs

Many informal economic niches have developed around the participants' economic survival that have been excluded from the formal economy and/or exploited by entrepreneurs taking advantage of their survival needs. The formal economy, is a sector where employment is

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recognized as an income sources on which census are reported and income taxes must be reported and paid. On the contrary, the informal economy is a sphere where “people work beneath the radar, earning a living and providing for themselves and their families... through which people earn money that is not reported to the government” (Venkatesh 2006. p8). Thus workers join the informal labor force voluntarily due to economic desperation (Vogel. 2006). There are multiple reasons of why people participate in the informal economy, but the overarching reason is that without the informal economy they will not survive economically. One of my participants for this study, Maria (age 21. Lonchera vendor) articulated how even though she and her parents have stable jobs the culmination of bills, the parents’ medication needs, their mortgage and unexpected expenses makes the informal economy a safeguard against homelessness. In the interview, she stated,

The side job we have is an entire family job that helps us pay for my parents’ medication and our home or else we could be homeless... since we do not make enough money. And well now since three of us have our licenses, my dad and my mom go in a separate car so they do one side of town and my brother and I do another side of town in order to try and finish with in the day. If we are the ones that have to pick up the product (bread, fruits, vegetables, tortillas), either because my dad had to work or because my mom had to work, then we have to get up around 4:30 am and finish getting ready by 5am so that we can be at the destination of pick up where we restock the lonchera at 6 to 6:15am the latest. And then the rest get up around 7am to get ready and then meet up at the half point mark to take some boxes and start distributing the product. And then for lunch we usually just buy something from the store and eat it in the car because

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we cannot afford to waste time or that means that we might not finish selling that same day, but if we are pretty much halfway to almost done distributing, then that is when we go to a restaurant and eat there something quick and then finishing selling because I do have to go to work at 2pm. The time we finish selling changes every week depending on the time that we receive the trays of bread, boxes of fruit, vegetables and tortillas. Sometimes the tortilla machine breaks down and our order that had to be ready by 7am ends up being ready by 10am and that just made us lose 2 hours. Because I have to work at 2pm my brothers usually end up finishing alone around 6 or 7pm almost at the exact same time as my parents. But if they needed more or clients wanted Sunday orders then they have to go back to the bodega and once again deliver (Maria. age 21).

Maria, long wavy brown/burgundy hair, and medium height roughly between 4 to 5 feet, usually wearing jeans and a flannel shirt, (age 21 Lonchera vender) has been selling out of her family's lonchera truck since the age of 6. Although this is just one point of view, it mirrors the struggles, the sacrifices and the hard work that people in the informal economy perform. Out of the fifteen interviews conducted not all of the participants were food street vendors, although the majority (ten) made their daily hustle from food street vending. Three participants made their living by cleaning houses (one interviewee cleaned homes and was a disk jockey in the weekends), one participant made his or her living selling CD's and DVD's, and the final participant partook in the informal economy by taking care of a ranch and in the weekends doing maintenance work in Hidden Shallow Valley and all over North County.

These individuals have done whatever it takes to make life sustainable. Even though there are risk, ranging from law enforcement intervention (such as detaining or citing) or facing

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deportation due to being undocumented, they cannot allow fear to hinder their economic practices. For example, in one of my interviews, I asked how do you feel about the police when you are trying to make a living and the participant responded,

Yes. This is a big concern for my family every time we step foot out of the house to start working because we have no permit to be selling so it is always a risk.

Especially when it comes to managers in the apartments we sell. Sometimes the managers are mad, frustrated or are not having a good day so they call the cops on us but by the time they show up, we are already gone. When this happens the clients that buy from us let us know that the cops are on the way so that we can leave. So we leave ASAP in order to just avoid another problem (Victor age 25).

Victor (age 25. food street vendor), roughly 6 feet, bald, wears dickies shorts and a dark blue short sleeve shirt, has been selling with his family since the age of 3. Through Victor's interview, it can be seen that he, like many others have no other choice but to work in the shadows of old and new Hidden Shallow Valley, the assessment of risk is always taken, but the necessity to survive overshadows it. From the moment informal economic participants leave their homes and start working, although their focus is on making enough money to acquire stability, pay bills, purchase medication, for example. They constantly ponder about the risks of being detained and arrested. With the example above, the participant has the ability to count on her clientele as a buffer to warn them about law enforcement coming, so that they may leave right away, but other informal economy workers do not have the same social network system. Thus, when a street vendor is seen selling his/her goods and merchandise, day laborers standing on the side of the street waiting for a potential employers, house cleaners travel to their destinations, we have to keep in mind that they might not have any other choice but to work in an unregulated way. It is

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possible that one day they are here in the United States, but the next they could be incarcerated or repatriated to their countries of origin. Thus, when looking at the informal economy and its participants, obligation and choice have to be considered when trying to understand the different perspectives.

Obligation versus Choice

Obligation and choice was a common theme that emerged from my research. My interviewees had a hard time distinguishing whether their participation in the informal economy was an obligation or the making of their own choice. My interviewees stated that they compromised their childhoods to earn an income. They hesitated to complain to their parents because they witnessed the struggle to make-ends-meet. At the same time their emotions were bottled up within themselves and to this day their feelings were suppressed. Their commitment to their family's subsistence needs made them feel obligated to participate in the family informal economy.

Obligation is defined as an act or action to which an individual is morally or legally bound to a duty or commitment. Participants often referred to the concept of obligation to work in the informal economy rather than choice. Jessica (age 26, food street vendor), dark-skinned, roughly around 5 feet, shoulder length wavy blonde hair, very friendly, talkative and approachable, shared how because of her father being unemployed, he forced the entire family to start selling food. Jessica stated,

At that time my dad was not employed and he is a person that cannot sit still. If he were to stay home and try to enjoy the break then he would become anxious and very worried because we would struggle financially. So with the money he had left over he invested it on produce and during the day he would prep everything.

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So once I arrived from school I was obligated to help out because I was the oldest and could take care of myself (Jessica age 26).

Like Jessica, many first-borns in the family have the obligation to assist their parents with making extra income. From the fifteen participants, three first-born females and four first-born males stated that they were obligated to assist their parents financially because they needed the extra set of hands to maximize profits.

One of the common threads amongst the participants that felt obligated to work, was generating clients. By having an extra set of hands, more places like parks and apartment complexes could be covered, thus leading to more income being earned. Furthermore, although the participants articulated that they were obligated to work, the reality is that they knew their family was struggling financially. Thus, even though they were obligated, they still helped without questioning.

In one of the interviews conducted, the participant had no choice or say in whether or not to assist their family in making-ends-meet. In the interview, Rebecca (age 20, CD and DVD Vendor) stated,

I feel that I was obligated to help. Even though they did not have to say much, they did not have to say anything at all you know go help your grandpa out because my grandpa his foot is like hurt you know. So like he cannot get a job and especially because he is undocumented. My grandma all she needed to say was oh we need this money (Rebecca age 20).

Rebecca (age 20 CD and DVD vendor), roughly five feet, fair-skinned, long light brown hair usually in a ponytail, had to find a way to make income forcefully due to all responsibility falling on her shoulders. Unfortunately, due to being undocumented,

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having her only support system facing medical issues and injuries, she was obligated to find different avenues to earn income. Without her economic support, her family would not be able to survive the financial strain, so automatically seeing this, the participant had to work even if she did not want too.

In other scenarios, one of the parents or even both were irresponsible with their income so their firstborn ended up sacrificing their childhood for the sake of their siblings. In one of my interviews, the participant shared that her dad was irresponsible with money and due to the lack of trust between him and his spouse household essentials were always lacking. My participant stated,

Since I was the oldest I had to be another provider for my family. My dad was very irresponsible when it came time to providing economically when it came time to bringing food to the table. Many times, he wouldn't give us money for food or basic necessities for days or even weeks. And if he were to give us money then it would be very little (Mimi age 21, Handy Person).

Mimi a 21 year old, fairly light skin, short curly black hair, roughly 5 feet, was forced to take on the role of a provider due to the lack of responsibility of his father. In this case, Mimi (age 21, handy person) articulated how she had to work cleaning houses, cooking, waitressing, as a stock person, salesperson, anything she could find, in order to feed her family.

Furthermore, choice is a second central theme that emerged from the data. Choice is defined as the right or ability to choose. Under this assemblage, from the fifteen total interviewees, there were five female and three male interviewees that stated to having a choice in determining whether to help out their parents' make-ends-meet or enjoy their childhood. For

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example, in my interview with Xavier, a twenty-one-year-old, around five feet tall, dark brown skin and buzzed haircut, maintenance/gardening worker, he stated,

Since I am the oldest and everyone else was still a minor, it was my responsibility to help out. So I feel like I did have a choice. I really did have a choice because my parents never forced me to seek a job or bring money to the household. Umm if anything it was up to me. I chose to work getting paid under the table, I chose to apply to jobs when I was of age, and I did it for me and for my family (Xavier age 21, Maintenance/Gardner).

Through Xavier's experience, it can be understood that obligation was not really present in his decision to contribute to their household economic needs. Rather than being expected and told by the parents to assist economically, the participant chose to aid their family's income because the financial hardship was vividly present. Through this example, it can be seen that at a young age, informal economy participants develop a sense of economic empathy and understand that without their assistance, their family would struggle even more.

Furthermore, in another interviews conducted, I asked my participant Joe, a thirty-five year old, roughly around five feet tall, with a dark brown skin, and long curly black hair, domestic laborer if the lack of money was visible in his household, and he shared how every Christmas it was noticeable that money was limited. He stated,

When I felt that it was messed up, in the sense that something is not right here, it was usually around Christmas time. During Christmas you know, you are a kid and you check under the tree and there was a few gifts or none at all. So I would ask my mom, hey what is going on? And she would say, es porque no te portaste bien (it is because you did not behave), but umm that is when I knew we were

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struggling. So that is when I told my mom, you know I would be happy with a box of cereal, and I could share with my brothers and sisters. You do not have to waste much (Joe, age 35, Domestic laborer).

Joe due to observing the lack of money, rather than demanding gifts, he would ask for food, that way he could share with the rest of his siblings. Witnessing the amount of work his mother did to bring essential needs to the house, rather than being asked to work and assist, he chose to work and help his mother so that together they could get more jobs and bring more income to the house.

Lastly, other participants stated that they decided to help their parent/s make-ends-meet because they observed their older sibling/s working with them, so they felt that it was up to them to assist in these income-generating activities as well. When interviewing Mago, a twenty-four year old, roughly around five feet tall, fair brown skin, slick back shiny black hair and thick black beard, restaurant worker, he articulated how at a young age, he would observe his siblings going to school and afterwards go to work at a restaurant rather than going out and enjoy the evening. He stated,

I was seven or eight and I would go wash the trays so they could be used again, pelando tomatillos (peeling tomatillos) too and just little things like that. But my brothers would do everything. They would go to school then immediately they would come to the restaurant. Because of them, I chose to also help the family and help my brothers (Mago age 24. Restaurant worker).

For Mago having older siblings working to help out their parents, motivated him to also follow in their footsteps and help contribute. Although he was not told to work and provide for the

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family, because he acknowledged the financial limitations of his family, that was motivation enough to help aid his households' income.

Gendered Differences

Throughout my field notes, a common theme that appeared was the difference in participation between males and females. Although both genders participated equally, in the eyes of the parents and in the eyes of the clientele, only the males received credit and recognition for assisting his parent/s make-ends-meet. Latin Equis women rather than being acknowledged, they were expected to contribute. Also, women represent an invisible demographic group in the informal economy. Throughout this section, I will be discussing the differences when it comes to males and females participating in the informal economy.

Out of the seven Latin Equis males that I interviewed, five participated in the informal economy as food street vendors. Their role was always acknowledged and praised by the parents and sometimes clientele because, in their eyes, the son was sacrificing other moments so that he could assist his parents to make ends meet. For example in one of the interviews conducted, I asked Chuy, a twenty-five-year-old, roughly five feet tall, dark brown skin, slick back brown hair, tamale vendor, if he ever felt judged by the community when he would be seen selling? He stated,

When people that know me or my parents see us selling, they usually interact with us and tell my parents that they are complimented for having raised such a good and responsible son. They are told that not all sons are willing to help their parents so that they should feel lucky (Chuy age 25, Tamale Vendor).

Speaking to Chuy, he shared with me that his sister would never get recognition or even a thank you from their clientele or father because she was expected to help without any questioning or

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hesitation. Thus, Chuy would be praised, seen as a hero by their clientele and asked by his parents if he had time to assist them.

As the interview continued, Chuy shared that when the day was over and it was time to finally head home, his father would ask the mother and daughter for the money earned right away, while Chuy would hand the money in the house. Once the money was counted and the math was done to see how much revenue was gained after taking out the money invested, the mother and daughter were never told about how much income was made. “In my home, it was common for my dad and me to talk about money, but “never in front of the women” like my dad says.”(Chuy age 25, Tamale vendor). Through this small excerpt of Chuy’s interview, male privilege can be observed.

Like Chuy, many of my participants shared similar sentiments in the way they were both praised and asked if they had time to help when it came time to sell. When examining Chuy’s interview, male privilege is visible, through the questioning and gratitude of his parents and clientele for being a responsible son. His sister is selling alongside and she is not acknowledged. This is important to recognize because although my interviewee is doing an “illegal” action due to selling without a permit, he is able to walk anywhere and receive the advantages that males automatically have in a patriarchal society due to male privilege.

The advantages of male privilege in the informal economy are that working in this sphere becomes less dangerous. Unfortunately, males do not tend to worry about being physically or sexually assaulted. Furthermore, males will not have to experience crude remarks from passerby people or even potential customers. For example, during an interview with Sally, a twenty-five year old, roughly six feet tall, light brown skin, long wavy blonde hair, CD and DVD vendor, she stated, “every time I would go sell with my grandma and cousins, going from door to door

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knocking and asking hey do you want to buy movies, do you want to buy CDs? Many times there was a lot of older men trying to hit on me and saying things like “oh such a beautiful young lady” or “if I was your man you would be treated like a queen” (Sally age 25 CD and DVD vendor). Sally shared that every time she knocked on doors or walked down the streets men would always harass her with their inappropriate stares and words. These words were condescending and were pretty much saying how they were feeling threatened by a women being independent and insinuate that she must be taken care of by a man. How men see these occurrences in the street as flattery and not as harassment thus creating an unsafe workspace wherever they go.

Out of the eight Latin Equis women that I interviewed, their participation was different than their male counterpart in the fact that they had to do more work and not get recognized. During an interview with Estrella, a twenty-eight year old, medium brown skin, roughly in between four to five foot tall, curly purple hair, ceviche vendor, stated,

Every time my dad would decide that it was a good day to go sell, he would have me and my mom prepare the stuff at home. While I was at school, my mom would do the shopping, and once I got home we would start preparing the stuff so that once my dad got home we could go sell (Estrella age 28. Ceviche vendor).

Estrella stated that although she and her mother would have everything ready, at the end of the day the father would not acknowledge them when it came time to count how much profit they had made. In the eyes of the father, since his wife was already home the least she could do was go buy the supply and his daughter could help once she arrived from school.

This type of rationality is common amongst females in the informal economy because their participation is viewed as another chore that they have to accomplish (double shift). For

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example during an interview with Ruby, a twenty-six year old, roughly five feet tall, light brown skin, short neck length black hair, house cleaner, shared with me that her family did not view her daily grind as work but rather as a chore due to already knowing how to perform her job duties. During the interview, she stated “ Every time I get home and my parents are there or my siblings and they hear me say that I am tired, then right away they tell me to stop because house cleaning is not a job since I am a woman and I know how to clean” (Ruby age 26, domestic laborer). In Ruby’s case, her family refused to see her job as a job because through patriarchal ideology house cleaning is attached to women. With patriarchal ideology in play, in the Latin Equis culture, house chores are considered a dominant idea traditionally attached to women, a mentality which does not change when coming to the United States.

Internal Emotions of the Participants

The narrative of the informal economy must include how emotionally difficult it is for participants to talk about why they chose this realm to make ends meet. A plethora of emotions arise amongst its participants. Many of the participants had not shared their experience before or explained how painful it was for them not to be able to have a financially stable home. Throughout economic hardships, a sense of economic empathy is felt by the children. Economic empathy is developed by children that witness their parents working in the informal economy. As a result, the adolescents participate and assist their parents because they are keenly aware of their family’s economic disadvantage. Thus, when they shared with me their experience of being an adolescent taking on adult roles, I represented the first person they had confided in about this. For example, during an interview with Rodrigo, (age 41 barn worker), he stated,

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Eramos cinco en total, fuimos a la escuela y luego ayudamos, y mi padre y mi madre se hicieron cargo del rancho. Desde que tenía tres años comencé a ayudar y nunca me quejé porque estaba viendo a todos ayudando a mantener nuestra casa. Cuando tuve la oportunidad de decirle a mis padres que no quería participar, siempre me decían que teníamos que estar agradecidos. Así que nunca dije nada realmente hasta ahora. We were five in all, we went to school and then we helped, and my father and mother took over the ranch. Since I was three years old I started helping and I never complained because I was watching everyone helping to maintain our house. When I had the opportunity to tell my parents that I did not want to participate, they always told me that we had to be grateful. So I never said anything really until now (Rodrigo age 41 Barn worker).

Rodrigo, a forty-one-year-old, standing at roughly five feet tall with a dark brown skin and buzzed brown hair, shared that since the age of three, he was never able to address his feelings towards having to work because his parents would say that he had to be grateful. Out of the fifteen participants in my study, nine of them confided in me that they had never opened up to their parents because they had no other option. Either they assisted and lived a fair life or they did not assist and the economic struggle would become more challenging. During the interview process, both male and female participants showed their emotions differently, whether it was through body language or the physical act of crying. Throughout the following sections, I will explore the common ways emotion was displayed by the interviewees.

When I interviewed Latin Equis males, I noticed they reacted differently to questions I had asked their female counterparts. For example, I asked the participants if they believed their family was economically stable with the use of the informal economy. Before they gave me a

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response, I defined the informal economy as work beneath the radar or under the table, where they can earn a living and provide for themselves and their family (Venkatesh 2006). Many participants would hesitate to answer while others would think for a moment before responding. When I asked Rey, a twenty-one years old, about five feet tall with a light brown, hair slicked back and tied into a ponytail, this question, as he started thinking I noticed that he began to close his hand as though making a fist and then smiled. His voice tone suddenly changed from being calm to sounding deep, agitated and angry while stating, “I do remember some incidents where you know they would argue, like a tradition, you know things we always hear people argue about because there economic situation” (Rey age 21 Cobijas and Jewelry Vendor). He shared how due to the lack of money in his household, the stress would ignite unexpected arguments between his parents.

Furthermore, referring back to my interview with Joe, he shared that his house was always in a state of fear because of his father. Joe stated,

Because my father could not sustain the family, he would be questioned if he was the man of the house by either outside family or friends since my mom was forced to work and in return, he would bring his frustration home (Joe age 35 domestic laborer).

He shared how he would constantly observe his father’s anger making him unapproachable. As a result, he never shared his emotions with his parents; rather he kept bottling them up. Although Joe realizes that it was not his father’s choice to be economically unstable, he could have treated the family better.

In addition, due to machismo being a dominant trait in Latin Equis culture, masculine pride and patriarchal beliefs are dominant. In the Latin Equis culture “male gender role behaviors

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are heavy drinking, toughness, aggressiveness, risk-taking, and virility... as representing a protector, provider, and authority figure” (Saez, Casado & Wade 2009. p.117). If men do not abide by these rules, their manhood is called into question and they are seen as unaccomplished males for not subscribing to gendered legacies. Due to the Latin Equis culture being largely based on a protector-nurturer relationship, machismo transforms into a blindfold where men cannot show any emotion or characteristics that will have their sexuality questioned. Thus, men hesitate to share their feelings because they are taught to be strong, dominant, and a provider.

For example, in my interview with Rey, I asked him if he ever felt fear or anxiety about potentially getting caught selling goods without a permit. At first, he told me how he was bringing attention to himself in school when his friends would yell that he was selling jewelry and that if they could get the “homie discount¹⁵,” but he suddenly paused and looked down at the table. As he tried to continue, his voice started cracking and tears began to well in his eyes. A few seconds later, Julio took a deep breath of air and stated, “Umm, you know obviously it is frowned upon and then my dad he always kept that private and would tell me stuff like, ‘Hey, you do not talk about this like you do not tell what you make, and you do not tell anyone nothing (Rey age 21 cobija and jewelry vendor). Due to the fear of getting caught, and because the entire family was undocumented, Rey’s father added extra pressure on him to remain silent about how they were making extra money. As shown by the male interviewee’s reactions, displays of emotion were halted. They preferred to take time to compose themselves before continuing with the interviews. The women were not so reluctant.

When interviewing female participants, they expressed emotions in multiple forms. For example, during my interview with Rebecca (age 20 house cleaner and disk

¹⁵ Homie Discount: 50% of the original price

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jockey), I asked her if she could tell me about her family's economics and whether her household was stable. Every time she was about to speak, she wound up hesitating, and the more she hesitated, the more she would start fidgeting with her hair. She said,

I have always considered my family not to be a poor family but at the same time a poor family that is able to get by. Umm at one certain point my dad ended up getting into an accident at work, umm where he was not able to do anything because umm one of the tractors ended up falling on his legs. So umm he ended up having to get brackets on his legs, so my mom ended up having to take charge of the household and become the head of the house for almost two years. And that really affected us because you know, my mom was hardly home now. My mom was never home because either she would be cleaning houses throughout the whole day from 8am to 4pm and then literally get home just to change to her uniform to head to her job at a restaurant from 5pm to closing time (Rebecca age 20, Domestic laborer and Disk Jockey).

As the interview progressed, Rebecca began crying and shared with me how her mother was never around when she needed her most. Rebecca stated that she could not be angry at her mother since she worked twice as hard to make sure they never lacked anything. As a provider, she was thanked, but emotionally she was absent. Furthermore, so this is not even about the parents absence but the power of capitalism affecting the institution of the family.

Moreover, in my interview with Mimi (age 21 handy person), I asked in a follow-up question why she did not share her feelings with her family about having to work. She told me, "Because I knew the answer, I knew it was what I had to do. Like, I did not need for them to explain to me how bad it was you know" (Mimi age 21 handy person). As the interview

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progressed, Mimi mentioned that her siblings were fortunate to not have to work and have everything they asked for. As a follow-up question, I asked her how she felt knowing that her sisters did not have to work. She started to giggle awkwardly and fidgeted with her hair as she said, “Honestly I felt like I was a happy child. Despite everything that we went through and faced during my childhood, I observed everything, I remember everything we lived through and I never let it affect me” (Mimi age 21 handy person). Despite her siblings not having to work and being able to enjoy their childhood, Mimi was happy that her siblings did not have to face the economic struggle themselves. Although she had to work in order for her family to make-ends-meet, she saw her struggles as a way to make her into a woman that would not be stopped her from achieving whatever she pursued.

Analysis of Findings

Although both males and females in my study were asked the same questions, emotions were revealed differently. The way these specific examples demonstrated emotions were fairly common for all the interviewees in their respective gender. Throughout the interview process with males, it was common to see closed fists, bodies becoming very stiff, hesitation and voices cracking because in the LatinX culture men are not supposed to show emotions because it relays weakness. In the LatinX culture “male gender role behaviors are heavy drinking, toughness, aggressiveness, risk-taking, and virility... as representing a protector, provider, and authority figure” (Saez, Casado & Wade 2009. p.117). On the other hand, when female participants displayed emotions, they giggled, started fidgeting with their hair and clothing, and cried out of sadness, frustration, and anger.

Looking at both Old and New Hidden Shallow Valley and the agents of social control being applied to these communities, LatinX people are being scapegoated into being viewed as

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criminals. Furthermore with the hateful rhetoric coming from the United States' President like, when Mexico sends its people, they're sending people that have lots of problems and they're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime (Reilly 2016) LatinX communities are being targeted and becoming demonized. For example, in Hidden Shallow Valley due to rent prices skyrocketing and the lack of jobs the LatinX community is slowly getting kicked and in their place affluent people are starting to take over. Thus with constant policing, and financial struggle that families are dealing with, their children end up having to cooperate in order to keep living in North San Diego County.

These non-verbal cues tell us about the structural arrangements of the informal economy. The informal economy is not a realm that my participants necessarily wanted to be a part of. Due to facing economic dilemmas, however, my participants had no other alternative but to work and become contributing agents for the survival of their families.

Although the informal economy is stigmatized by people in power and the formal economy, in Hidden Shallow Valley, adolescents can be observed working in this sphere, thus normalizing it. Throughout the various themes discussed, we can comprehend how adolescents perceive their quality of life and how their income generating strategies meet their family's everyday exigencies. Lastly, through interviews, we get a sense of understanding on how youth must compromise their social activities and instead prioritize their participation in the informal economy to make-ends-meet. Throughout the interviews obtained, it is visible that my participants during their youth expressed empathy for the insecure financial position of their parents. Although there was a split between my participants feeling obligated or had the freedom to choose whether they wanted to help, we can comprehend that because of limited opportunities, my participants themselves became an indispensable contributor to their family's economics.

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Ultimately manufacturing a labor class of adolescents who must take on an adult role in the family.

Conclusion

Although, individuals with power and privilege argue that informal economies are a problem, the reality is that this sector is a byproduct of the formal economy. There is high negligence and a lack of benefits for marginalized individuals residing in urban, poverty-stricken cities, which in turn are themselves a byproduct of the formal economy. As a result, people resort to whatever means necessary to survive under their given circumstances. Transforming its negative and criminalized view into a positive mechanism, could help others to empathize towards why marginalized communities are driven to participate in this informal sector. Not all participants of the informal economy are criminals or delinquents. Rather, participants of the informal economy have found other innovative means to earn money.

The importance of understanding the informal economy and the systemic conditions that create alienation and the loss of childhood are manufactured by capitalist, gentrifiers, and politicians. Furthermore, comprehending the different motives as to how adolescents in the informal economy perceive their quality of life in comparison to other youth and how committed are they to help their parents make ends meet is important because it reflects a common struggle many youth deal with in a day to day basis. Working in the informal economy revolves around a negative stigma of deviance, for a majority of individuals (mostly people of color). Furthermore, the informal economy is not an ideal choice but a necessity for survival. It has been the point that now participating in the informal economy is normalized due to the lack of resources available in low-income and marginalized communities. When a parent is either unemployed or their job is on low demand, they are compelled to find other methods to provide for themselves and most

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importantly, their children. Yet, due to all the limitations and the lack of jobs, children eventually cooperate with their parent/s and also work for their family's economic well-being. As a consequence of having to work, the adolescent misses out on their childhood, due to taking on an adult role. The purpose of my research, is not to make participants of the informal economy visible, but rather to allow the community to learn and empathize these workers. To protect them if they ever need to be protected and ultimately to realize that they are also human beings that because of the lack of employment and covert barriers in play there is a lack of employment available in the formal sector.

Implications

Now that I have completed my research there are things I would like to add to further examine my inquiry. First, I will be going to Arizona State University in the summer to collaborate with one of the leading scholars on Chicano youth in the informal economy, Dr. Emir Estrada. With her guidance and expertise, I will be comparing my work done here in the borderlands region to the borderlands region of Arizona. Second, I would like to interview youth and have them be my sample group. Comprehending what they are thinking in that exact moment I believe will help with my inquiry which is to find out how adolescents in the informal economy perceive their quality of life in comparison to other youth and how committed are they to helping their parents make ends meet. Ultimately I would like to gather my data and create a manuscript and send it to a plethora of journals like Chicana/o Studies, Latina/o Studies, Labor Studies, and contribute to the lack of research on youth participation in the informal economy.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Question 1) Tell me about your family, if you have siblings then what number are you?

- What was/is your role within your familial household?
- Tell me about your family's economics. Was your house-hold economically stable?

Question 2) Tell me about your community/neighborhood. How does it look?

- Is living in your neighborhood expensive?
- What are the demographics of your neighborhood?
- *If food street vendor...* Do you sell in your community?

Question 3) At what age did you start participating in the informal economy?

- Were you the only one in your family participating in this realm or was it an entire family job?
- Do you feel that you had a choice or say in the matter when it came to work?

Question 4) Why did you decide to be a participant in the informal economy?

Question 5) Could you find a job in the formal sector?

- If yes then why are you still an informal economy participant?
- If no, then how come?

Appendix B

Choosing Childhood: Latinx Children in the Informal Economy
Consent to Participate in Research

Invitation to Participate

My name is Felipe Rendon, and I am a Graduate student in the M.A. Sociological Practice at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), I am conducting a study that will explore the everyday reality of participants of the informal economy. This exploratory research seeks to answer how do children of the informal economy perceive their everyday reality, and whether they feel obligated to help their parent/s' make-ends-meet by contributing to their family's economic stability.

The objective of this study is to:

Learn about the everyday reality of participants in the informal economy. Although I will be interviewing adults, the focus is to ask about their childhood since the scant literature on the informal economy of children does not interrogate how their decision to generate an income for the family is due to familial obligation or a free will strategy.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to take part in an interview. During the interview you will be asked questions. Interviews will be scheduled at a time and place you feel comfortable with and convenient to you. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete. I will ask you for permission to audio tape this interview, you may say no without consequence. No names or identifying information will be used in this study, so your identity can be protected. But if you do agree, we can use your first name; this is solely up to you. Once the interview is done, you can ask me any questions.

Risks and Inconveniences

There are small risks to participating in this study. These are:

1. Time: The interviews may take longer time than expected.
2. Sensitive or sad experiences or memories: You may remember experiences (intentional or unintentional) that may bring back memories that are sad or sensitive.
3. Identity of Participant Discovered: Regardless of using a made-up name, some of the information provided for this research can potentially identify you.

Safeguards

- 1) Safeguard for "Time": You will be reminded that you may stop, reschedule, or reconsider doing the interview without any consequence at any time. Also, I will keep track of time while the interview is in progress.
- 2) Safeguards for "Sensitive or Sad Experiences or Memories": You will be reminded that you may stop any discussions at any time. You may also exclude any stories that you address as not necessary for the study. I will provide a Resource Guide will have information for you, where you may access affordable counseling services.
- 3) Safeguards for "Identity of Participant Discovered": I will be recording with an audio recording device, and the recordings will be transferred onto my password-secured laptop. Once transferred, I will delete the recordings from the digital recorder to ensure the information is not accessible to anyone but myself. The recordings will remain on my laptop until they are transcribed. Then I will transfer the recordings and

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transcriptions to a USB thumb drive and give it to my chair Dr. Xuan Santos. Dr. Santos will keep the recordings and transcribed thumb drive in a lockbox inside his office. There will be pseudonyms (nicknames) provided for individuals to ensure an added layer of protection for the participant, and I will include a password-protected file within the USB thumb drive with a reference of the identities' connections to the pseudonyms. Even with access to the recordings and the consent forms it will not be possible to connect the participants with the data obtained. Any documents will be kept secured in Dr. Santos' office (SBSB 4206). Only I (and the professor) will have access to these interviews.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may leave at any time. If the interview takes longer than expected, you may withdraw at any time. There are not consequences if you decide not to participate.

Incentives

I will be offering gift cards as a token of gratitude for the participants allowing me to interview them. I will purchase several \$10 gift cards to places like gas stations, fast food, or supermarkets in the area where my participant resides and allow the participants to select the gift card of their choosing. I will be offering gift cards to all the participants regardless of the interview duration.

Benefits

While there are no direct benefits to you, this study will benefit the community society by giving those who are demonized and criminalized by society a chance to have their stories associated with the informal economy explored. This study will provide a formal way of showing the larger society that my participants are human beings who are just trying to survive in this capitalistic nation.

If you have any questions in regards to the study, you may direct those to me, rendo014@cougars.csusm.edu, or by calling me at (760) 472-8085, or professor/advisor, Dr. Xuan Santos, xsantos@csusm.edu, or at (760) 750-8031. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB at (760) 750-4029. By signing below, you agree to participate in this study:

I agree for the interviews to be audiotaped. (select one)

YES ___ NO ___

Participant's NameDate

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

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Confidential Counselling Resources Guide

Access and Crisis Line 2-1-1 San Diego

- Provides 24-hour, 7-day a week, free confidential crisis intervention
- Free assistance 7 days a week / 24 hours a day at (888) 724-7240 or 'Live Chat' with a counselor at www.optumhealthsandiego.com or www.up2sd.org (Monday–Friday, 4pm-10pm).

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- If you or someone you know is suicidal or in emotional distress, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline exit disclaimer icon. Trained crisis workers are available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Your confidential and toll-free call goes to the nearest crisis center in the Lifeline national network. These centers provide crisis counseling and mental health referrals.
- 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

www.imalive.org

- IMAlive is an online crisis center which is part of the the Hopeline Network, the first online crisis service with 100% of its professionally supervised volunteers trained in crisis intervention. Our goal is to use the Internet to provide crisis intervention to people in crisis online and empower them to take the necessary next steps to address their situation.

www.crisistextline.org

- Crisis Text Line serves anyone, in any type of crisis, providing access to free, 24/7 support and information via the medium people already use and trust: text.
- Text to 741741.
- Your opening message can say anything: The opt-in words you see advertised ("HELLO," "START")

Appendix C

Eligiendo Infancia: Niña/os Latinx de la Economía Informal
Consentimiento de Participación en Investigación

Invitación a participar

Mi nombre es Felipe Rendon, y soy un estudiante de posgrado en la Práctica de Sociología M.A. de la Universidad Estatal de California en San Marcos (CSUSM), estoy llevando a cabo un estudio que explorará la realidad cotidiana de los participantes de la economía informal. Esta investigación exploratoria busca responder cómo los niños de la economía informal perciben su realidad cotidiana, y si se sienten obligados ayudar a sus padres/madres a contribuir a la estabilidad económica de su familia.

El objetivo de este estudio sera:

Aprender sobre la realidad cotidiana de los participantes de la economía informal. Aunque entrevistaré a adultos, el enfoque es preguntar acerca de su infancia ya que la escasa literatura sobre economía informal de niños no cuestiona cómo su decisión de generar un ingreso para la familia se debe a una obligación familiar o una estrategia de libre albedrío.

Descripción de procedimientos

Si acepta participar en el estudio, se le pedirá que participe en una entrevista. Durante la entrevista se le harán preguntas. Las entrevistas tomara lugar en el lugar y tiempo con lo(s) que se le haga mas conveniente, y se sienta cómodo. La entrevista tardará aproximadamente una hora. Le pediré permiso para audio-grabar esta entrevista, y pueden negar el permiso sin consecuencias. No se usarán nombres o información de identificación en este estudio, por lo que su identidad sera protegida. Si está de acuerdo, podemos usar su primer nombre; esto depende exclusivamente de usted. Una vez que termine la entrevista, puede hacer cualquier pregunta.

Riesgos e inconveniencias

Hay pequeños riesgos de participar en este estudio. Estos son:

1. Tiempo: las entrevistas pueden tomar más tiempo de lo esperado.
2. Experiencias o recuerdos emocionales o tristes: puede recordar experiencias (intencionales o no) que pueden traer recuerdos tristes o emocionales.
3. Identidad del participante descubierta: independientemente de usar un nombre inventado, parte de la información proporcionada para esta investigación puede potencialmente identificarlo.

Salvaguardias

1) Protección de "Tiempo": se le recordará que puede detener, reprogramar o reconsiderar la realización de la entrevista, a cualquier momento sin ninguna consecuencia. Haré un seguimiento del tiempo mientras la entrevista está en progreso.

2) Salvaguardas para "Experiencias o recuerdos emocionales o tristes": se le recordará que puede detener cualquier discusión a cualquier momento. También puede excluir cualquier información que usted crea inecesaria para el estudio. Provere una Guía de recursos que tendrá información para usted, donde podrá acceder a servicios de asesoramiento asequibles.

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3) Protecciones para la "Identidad del participante descubierta": grabaré con un dispositivo de grabación de audio y transferiré las grabaciones a mi computadora portátil, con protección de contraseña. Una vez transferido, eliminaré las grabaciones de la grabadora digital para asegurar que la información no sea accesible a nadie más que a mí. Las grabaciones permanecerán en mi computadora portátil hasta que se transcriban. Luego transferiré las grabaciones y transcripciones a una memoria USB y se la daré a la silla de mi comité, el Dr. Xuan Santos. Él guardará las grabaciones y la unidad de disco electrónico transcrita a una caja de seguridad dentro de su oficina. Habrá seudónimos (apodos) para que las personas aseguren una capa adicional de protección para el participante, e incluiré un archivo protegido con contraseña dentro de la memoria USB con una referencia de las conexiones de las identidades a los seudónimos. Incluso con el acceso a las grabaciones y los formularios de consentimiento, no será posible conectar a los participantes con los datos obtenidos. Todos los documentos se guardarán de la oficina del Dr. Santos (SBSB 4206). Solamente yo (y el profesor) tendré(mos) acceso a esta información confidencial.

Participación voluntaria

Su participación es completamente voluntaria, y puede irse en cualquier momento. Si la entrevista toma más tiempo de lo esperado, puede retirarse en cualquier momento. No hay consecuencias si decide no participar.

Incentivos

Ofrecere tarjetas de regalo como muestra de gratitud para los participantes, cuales me permitan entrevistarlos. Compraré varias tarjetas de regalo de \$10 para lugares como gasolineras, comida rápida o supermercados en el área donde reside mi participante. Permitire a los participantes seleccionar la tarjeta de regalo que le guste. Ofrecere tarjetas de regalo a todos los participantes, independientemente de la duración de la entrevista.

Beneficios

Si bien no hay beneficios directos para usted, este estudio beneficiará a la sociedad de la comunidad al dar a aquellos que son demonizados y criminalizados por la sociedad, la oportunidad de explorar sus historias asociadas con la economía informal. Este estudio proporcionará una forma formal de mostrar a la sociedad en general que mis participantes son seres humanos que solo intentan sobrevivir en esta nación capitalista.

Si tiene alguna pregunta con respecto al estudio, me las puede dirigir a: rendo014@cougars.csusm.edu, o llamándome al (760) 472-8085, o al profesor / consejero, Dr. Xuan Santos, xsantos@csusm.edu, o al (760) 750-8031. Las preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante en la investigación deben dirigirse al IRB al (760) 750-4029. Su firma a continuación, indica que acepta participar en este estudio:

Estoy de acuerdo con que las entrevistas sean grabadas: (seleccione uno)

SI NO

NOMBRE DE PARTICIPANTE FECHA

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FIRMA DE PARTICIPANTE

FIRMA DE INVESTIGADOR

Guía de recursos de asesoramiento confidencial

Línea de acceso y crisis 2-1-1 San Diego

- Proporciona intervención de crisis confidencial y gratuita las 24 horas del día, 7 días a la semana
- Asistencia gratuita los 7 días de la semana / 24 horas al día al (888) 724-7240 o 'Chat en vivo' con un consejero en www.optumhealthsandiego.com o www.up2sd.org (lunes a viernes, de 4 pm a 10 pm).

Línea de vida nacional para la prevención del suicidio

- Si usted o alguien que conoce tiene tendencias suicidas o angustia emocional, comuníquese con el icono de descargo de responsabilidad de National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Los trabajadores de crisis capacitados están disponibles para hablar las 24 horas del día, los 7 días de la semana. Su llamada confidencial y gratuita va al centro de crisis más cercano en la red nacional de Lifeline. Estos centros brindan consejería de crisis y referencias de salud mental.
- 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

www.imalive.org

- IMALive es un centro de crisis en línea que es parte de Hopeline Network, el primer servicio de crisis en línea con el 100% de sus voluntarios supervisados profesionalmente capacitados en intervención de crisis. Nuestro objetivo es utilizar Internet para brindar intervención en crisis a personas en crisis en línea y capacitarlos para dar los próximos pasos necesarios para abordar su situación.

www.crisistextline.org

- Crisis Text Line sirve a cualquier persona, en cualquier tipo de crisis, brindando acceso a soporte e información las 24 horas del día, los 7 días de la semana a través de las personas que ya usan y confían: texto.
- Texto a 741741.
- Su mensaje de apertura puede decir cualquier cosa: las palabras de aceptación que ve anunciadas ("HOLA", "INICIAR")