AMARRANOS LAS TRIPAS: FOOD INSECURITY AMONG OLDER MEXICAN ORIGIN ADULTS LIVING IN THE COLONIAS OF SOUTH TEXAS

A Thesis

by

LINDA R. MUÑOZ

Submitted to the Graduate and Professional School of Texas A&M University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Chair of Committee,	Wendy Moore
Committee Members,	Alex McIntosh
	Joseph Sharkey
	Nancy Plankey-Videla
Head of Department,	Steven Garner

May 2022

Major Subject: Sociology

Copyright 2022 Copyright Linda Munoz

ABSTRACT

The voices and experiences of older Mexican-origin adults living in the burgeoning *colonias* along the Texas-Mexico border are missing from the literature. The objective of this qualitative study is to illuminate how older Mexican-origin adults experience food insecurity, explore the geographical barriers they face, and describe how the family is employed as a survival strategy to cope with food insecurity under conditions of material hardship and structural vulnerability. Through data collected in 14 semi-structured Spanish-language focus group interviews with 95 older Mexican-origin adults from four geographic areas along the border. By centering the voices of older adults, this research contributes to our knowledge on culture, aging, health, and poverty in rural areas, and provides valuable information about the experiences of older Mexican-origin adults who live in rural poverty. Their narratives can inform health and nutrition programs, and policies to better serve this vulnerable and growing population.

Keywords: food insecurity, colonias, older Mexican adults, structural inequalities, race, class, space, food inequalities, food access, Texas, the Valley

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this labor of love and sacrifice to all the people who supported and believed in me. First to my daughter Zenaiya who makes me want to be a better person and create a more just world. This is for you *mija*, for a better future and world. To my parents Guadalupe and Tomas Muñoz. M brought me into this world and always encouraged me to follow my dreams. I also want to give a special thanks to Vennie, Lonie, Juanita, and Edna for all the times I was doubting myself or needed to talk about an idea, you were my sound board. I wrote this paper and did it with the love and support of my family. This paper is also for them. Finally, this paper is also dedicated to the beautiful and ingenious Mexican people who are living in the *colonias* of South Texas, because without them sharing their stories and life experiences this paper would not be possible.

CONTRIBUTERS AND FUNDING RESOURCES

Contributors

This work was supported by a thesis committee consisting of faculty chair Professor Moore and members Professor McIntosh and Professor Plankey-Videla of the Department of Sociology and Professor Sharkey from the Department of Health and Nutrition and Science. The data analyzed in the Qualitative Analysis section was provided by Dr. Sharkey. All the work conducted for this thesis was conducted by the student independently.

Funding Resource

Graduate study was supported by a grant from Texas A & M University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT ii

DEDICATION iii

CONTRIBUTERS AND FUNDING RESOURCES iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS v

INTRODUCTION 1

The Importance of Studying Food Insecurity in the Colonias 8

Brief Historical Context 8

LITERATURE REVIEW 14

Food Insecurity and Definition 14

Older Adults and Food Insecurity 15

Sociodemographic 17

Structural Inequality Theory- Race, Class, Space, and Food Access.................................... 19

Colonia Residents & Structural Barriers 24

Strategies, Culture, Material Hardship, Familia 30

The Benefits of Qualitative Research Approach 35

METHODS 37

Data Collection 38

Data Analysis 38

Participant Characteristics 38

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS 39

The Experience of Food Insecurity 40

Survival Strategy-La Familia in Action 60

Barrier- Geographical landscape a Barrier to Accessing Food 66

CONCLUSION 74

REFERENCES 77

AMARRANOS LAS TRIPAS: FOOD INSECURITY AMONG OLDER MEXICAN ORIGIN ADULTS LIVING IN THE COLONIAS OF SOUTH TEXAS

> I [have to] sweat in order to eat! Okay? That's how I buy my food. I was working in the fields. They want to stop me but I don't want to! I want to continue [working] because that is my, my work my life, it has been that [way] since I arrived to the U.S. It's been about two weeks that they've stopped me [from working], they told me, "Don't go to work anymore, start making bread, start making tamales, do something else, don't go to work anymore, don't go [to work] anymore." But still, it's all work for me so that I can buy my food. Always, always for food… the bills. [These words express the experience of Esperanza a sixty-one-year-old woman, mother who has been in the United States for eighteen years working in the fields and living in the county of Hidalgo located in South Texas.]

According to the United States Census Bureau, Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States (2010). "Between 2010 and 2020 the Latino population grew by 23% from 50.5 million (16.3% of the total U.S. population) to 62.1 million (18.7% of the total U.S. population)" (United States Census, 2020). Latinos Account for "slightly more than half (51.1%) of the total U.S. population growth between 2010 and 2020" (United States Census Bureau, 2020). As a diverse population comprised of individuals who come from different cultural backgrounds and geographical locations, contributing their cultural knowledge, labor, traditions, food, music, and language, Latinos play an intricate role in US society. It is predicted that by 2050 the number of Latino seniors will more than double

contributing to the growth and diversity of the elderly population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Persons of Mexican origin comprise the largest subgroup within the Latino population, representing 61% of the total population in 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The United States southwest border region is home to many Latino people who are native born, legally immigrated, or undocumented. The states that makeup the southwest borderlands are Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

The word *colonia* in Spanish means neighborhood and in Mexico it is the official name used to designate community boundaries. In the United States, in English colloquium the word *colonia* has been used as a disparaging term that refers to the improvised communities that have developed along the U.S.-Mexico border (Davis & Holz, 1992; Hannan, 1996;). The state of Texas has the largest number of *colonias* estimated at 2,294 and the greatest amount of people living within these rural, isolated, and ethno-racially segregated communities (Federal Reserve Bank, 2015). The Office of Secretary of the State defines *colonia* as a residential area along the Texas-Mexico border that may lack some of the most basic necessities, such as portable water and sewer systems, electricity, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing (Williams, 2006). *Colonias* "vary by size, density, infrastructure development and quality of housing" (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 2015, p.1). This means that variation can exist within a *colonia* and across *colonias*. This is how on the same dirt road a shack can be built from particle boards and blue tarps for a home, and down the road a well-constructed cinder block house. Most of these *colonias* are located at the southernmost tip of Texas called the Lower Rio Grande Valley, commonly referred to as "The Valley". The Valley is comprised of four counties Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy.

To the people who live in these spaces, *colonia* means neighborhood, community, and home; a place and space where they will make a life**.** Residents living in the *colonias* in The Valley are predominately Mexican Americans, coexisting and creating community with legal and undocumented Mexican immigrants (Davies & Holz, 1992; Hannan, 1996). Many of these residents speak both Spanish and English, and still have ties to Mexico (Saenz & Ballejos, 1993). Despite the investment and infrastructure improvements for some of the *colonias*, poverty remains persistent and concentrated in these communities (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 2015). Historically, The Valley has suffered from persistent high poverty rates (Donelson & Esparza, 2010; Fontenot et al., 2010; Maril, 1989; Slack & Myers, 2012). The American Community Survey 2019 -1 Year Estimates reports that in Hidalgo County 27.3% of the population is living below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau, 2019). *Colonia* residents in The Valley are the poorest in the nation (Arzimendi & Ortiz, 2008). Many older Mexican-origin adults, in particular, experience persistent poverty, and one of the central problems for this population is that they must negotiate persistently high rates of food insecurity.

One key issue corresponding to food security is access to employment. Many residents living in the *colonias* like Esparanza, the respondent quoted at the beginning of this section, find themselves working in the fields locally picking grapefruits, oranges, or onions, or traveling to other states following the seasonal crops to make a living. An alternative to working in the fields for many of the *colonia* residents is day labor work in the construction or manufacturing industry, or service labor, such as sales. Unfortunately, all of these jobs can be characterized as low wage, without job security, without skill development, without medical benefits, or

retirement plans, and this type of work typically does not lead to a better paying jobs or year-round work. Researchers have shown that *colonia* residents in The Valley have historically suffered from high unemployment rates, unskilled dead-end jobs, and low-waged jobs (Bettes & Slottje, 1994; Maril, 1989; Saenz & Ballejos, 1993). This shortage of sustaining employment is even more of a challenge for older adults, who frequently struggle with the physically demanding physical labor of field work, construction, or manufacturing.

Just like Esperanza, many *colonia* residents work their whole adult lives and when the day comes that they are too old or sick to work, and they are unable to find full time work. As a result, in many instances these older individuals are providing food for others, through field work or cooking jobs, while experiencing food insecurity and hunger themselves. Older Mexican-origin individuals experience food insecurity at higher rates than the general population (Minkoff-Zem, 2012; Quandt et al., 2004; U.S. Census: Fact Finder Hidalgo County 2012; Weigel et al., 2007). Mexican-origin people living in the *colonias* are one of the most vulnerable, hard-to reach minority groups living in geographical, social, economic, and political margins of society. This makes this community particularly difficult to study because geographic location and high rates of poverty make them difficult to locate and difficult to convince to take time away from busy lives to fill out surveys or participate in interviews. In addition, criminalization of undocumented immigrants and clandestine policing of immigrant communities make people in these communities particularly reticent to talk with outsiders. As a result, Latinas/os who live in the rural south in extreme poverty are unlikely to be represented in national surveys.

Therefore, Mexican origin people living in the *colonias* are under-represented in national survey data. Consequently, although many *colonia* residents face numerous structural barriers and struggle to meet their basic dietary needs, these people are made largely invisible to Texas state or national policy makers who might provide aid to these communities, as well as to researchers trying to understand the extent of the problem of food insecurity in these communities. Researchers have documented household food insecurity levels in the *colonias* at rates as low as 51% and as high as 78% (Sharkey, Dean & Johnson, 2011; Sharkey et al., 2013). These incredible high numbers suggest that most *colonia* residences are not eating well or at all,- placing them at risk of developing physical and mental health issues, including chronic conditions that will negatively impact their quality of life.

Researchers have also documented that *colonia* residents have limited access to adequate health care facilities, a quality education, labor opportunities, public transportation, grocery stores, healthy food, or simply food (Maril, 1989; Ortiz, Arizmedi, & Cormelius, 2004; Saenz & Ballejos, 1993; Sharkey et al., 2009; Sharkey, Dean, & Johnson, 2011). The wages *colonia* residents earn do not afford them the comforts of a manufactured home, or apartment. Some of them are able to purchase a piece of land where they can build their home with the materials they can afford or find. Unsurprisingly, residents in this area also have a lower health-related quality of life and have “higher rates of obesity and diabetes than other people in Texas or the nation” (Sharkey et al., 2009; UT Health Center San Antonio Report, 2013). The research that has been done on the U.S. borderland *colonias* of Southern Texas provide insight into the deplorable structural conditions experienced by many Mexican-origin communities and the resulting health disparities and food insecurity experienced by members of these communities.

Yet, while some researchers have considered the consequences of poverty and food insecurity for children or adults, few have considered the consequences of the structural deprivations in these communities for the older adult population.

Hidalgo County, in The Valley is reported to have the most *colonias* and the greatest number of people living in its 937 *colonias* (Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, 2019, p. 40). My research focuses on older Mexican-origin adult population, fifty and older, residing in four different area of *colonias* in the County of Hidalgo, Texas. The *colonia* residents of Hidalgo County are a relatively young populace with older adults 65 and over constituting 11.3% of the population (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Although a small percentage of the population, the older population in the *colonias* is particularly vulnerable because they live in a geographical space that has been politically and economically abandoned, making them more prone to the consequences of poor nutritional health and disease (Arizmendi & Ortiz, 2004). Moreover, as the Mexican-origin population grows so will the number of them living over the age of fifty. In the coming decades the United States, Texas, and the *colonias* are going to experience a drastic demographic shift giving increased salience to the issue of understanding food insecurity in this population and the consequences it has on their bodies and quality of life.

This qualitative study examines older Mexican-origin adults, more specifically those fifty and older living in the *colonias* of South Texas. These individuals live in rural, isolated, deprivation and are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and illness, making them an especially important population to understand when analyzing how they make sense of and explain their current situation, the structural constraints they face, and the survival strategies

they employ to cope with food insecurity. The diversity of voices, and experiences of Mexican-origin adults fifty and older living in the *colonias* is understudied. Understanding the experiences of food insecurity among older rural minorities is critical to addressing the health risks and needs of this population. Equally important, the voices of these excluded people can inform health and nutrition programs, as well as policies to better serve this vulnerable and growing population. This research contributes to the literature on older Mexican-origin adults by capturing the unique experiences of a historically excluded people through qualitative focus groups that allow them to talk about their experiences using their own words and their own understanding of the situation. I examine the structural factors that facilitate or constrain food acquisition among older Mexican origin *colonia* residents layering the individual experiences of participants into this structural analysis. This research is informed by three questions, which are:

1. How do older Mexican origin *colonia* residents experience potential and actual food hardship?
2. What are the geographical barriers older Mexican-origin adults faces in accessing food?
3. What survival strategies do they employ as a survival strategy under conditions of material hardship and structural vulnerability?

Through my examination of the lived experiences of Mexican origin adults, ages fifty and older I am also able to explicate how race/ethnicity, class, age, gender, citizenship status, and place and space effect food (in)security. My research also exposes the issues that arise from poor

nutrition among older individuals in the *colonias* and provides much needed data that can help us think about how to intervene in the reproduction of perpetual poverty and food insecurity.

The Importance of Researching Food Insecurity in the Colonias

Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States. This is also a population that is living longer and growing older. To accurately address food insecurity and health disparities within the Latino population we have to examine the experiences and needs within subpopulations of this border population. Understanding how Mexican-origin adults fifty and older living in the *colonias* along the Texas-Mexico border experience food insecurity is vital in addressing public health risks among older people and our society. By capturing the voices of an excluded people this study can inform policymakers, social services, and public health policies, practices, and others interested in reducing food insecurity and hunger. Furthermore, this study also demonstrates the relevance and need for culturally sensitive nutritional and public health practitioners and services, especially because the United States population is only going to get older and diverse.

Brief Historical Context

This research focused on older Mexican-origin adults residing in four different geographic areas of *colonias* in the County of Hidalgo, Texas a region commonly called The Valley. The contemporary conditions of Mexican-origin people living in the *colonias* of The Valley can be better understood through the historical and cultural legacy of this geographical region (Fontenot et al., 2010; Maril, 1989; Saenz & Ballejos, 1993; Slack & Myers, 2012).

In the 1920's The Valley experienced great transitions in the land, labor relations, and the social and economic structure in Texas and the United States. During this time period South

Texas underwent a great transition from cattle ranching and family farming to commercial agriculture (Barrera, 1979; De León, 1993; Maril, 1989; McWilliams, 1990; Montejano, 1987, Saenz & Ballelos, 1993). In Montejano's (1987) historical study of Anglos and Mexican in Texas he documents the economic change that occurred in the 1920's, as well as the new socio-economic order that was brought into existence by the massive arrival of rich white agricultural farmers in the Valley. These white elite agricultural farmers soon owned the majority of the land in the region, while the majority of the Mexicans became landless farm laborers who migrated in the thousands with the different crop harvest seasons (Barrera, 1979; De León, 1993; Maril, 1989; McWilliams, 1990; Montejano, 1987; Saenz & Ballelos, 1993).

Through a combination of legal and unlawful means Mexicans turned over the land to these new elite white agricultural farmers who divided up the land into distinct farm zones (Montejano, 1987; Saenz & Ballejos, 1993). The Winter Garden's area located in south Texas north of Laredo and southwest of San Antonio was identified as a region good for cultivating onions and spinach. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley citrus fruit would be grown due to "rich soil and subtropical climate" (p. 170). In the Gulf Coast plains where the water was insufficient and not suitable for growing fruits or vegetables, cotton was cultivated. As the lands in this region became divided, so did the people.

McWilliams (1990) historical study on the history of Mexicans in Texas provides us with some insight into the importance of the Mexican labor, the wealth made in the agricultural industry, and how whites viewed Mexicans during the 1920's. The south Texas lands were not cultivated naturally, and they needed to be so that fruits of vegetables could grow in the soil. Mexicans transformed the bush land into fertile soil and played a major role in harvesting

crops. McWilliams (1990) cites Hart Stilwell's writings who states, "In the valley today [referring to the 1920's] Mexican laborers- forty thousand of them illegal entrants of "wetbacks'- plant, cultivate, and harvest fruit and vegetable crops worth $100,000,000" (p. 162). White agricultural owners viewed Mexicans as an inferior race, foreign, uneducated, dirty, diseased, and docile, but they also viewed them as suitable to do farm laborer work, and the perfect cheap labor for agriculture (Barrera, 1979; De León, 1993; Maril, 1989; McWilliams, 1990; Monejano, 1987, Saenz & Ballelos, 1993).

De León (1993) quotes Congressman John Nance Garner who was testifying in favor of a more open border between the U.S. and Mexico:

> I believe I am within the bounds of truth when I say that the Mexican man is superior laborer when it comes to grubbing land… And I may add that the prices they charge are much less than the same labor would be from either the negro or the white man and go the same time they do… [and] they produce a third more results from their labor than either the negro or white man would do (p. 67)

Elite white farm owners not only employed U.S. born-Mexican Tejanos to work the land, but they also recruited thousands of Mexicans from across the border to work in their fields. White farm owners viewed Mexicans as a source of cheap exploitable labor, which needed to be controlled by restricting their access to job opportunities and wages, as well as, restricting their literal movement, and the physical places that they could occupy to ensure they could continue to exploit their labor and maintain white superiority. The new racialized and classed socio-economic system that the white elite agricultural farmers setup connected to white supremacy

in society more broadly, and Mexican Americans were relegated a subordinate and exploitable position relative to whites.

One crucial mechanism used to subordinate Mexicans was the racial segregation of whites and Mexicans. Whites enjoyed the privileges of moving freely without fear, manufactured homes, paved streets, electricity, water, plumbing, as well as access to better paying jobs and schools. Mexicans were restricted to specific geographical locations and lived in towns that were characterized by small shanty houses with dirt floors, no windows, no kitchens, no plumbing, they cooked outdoors, had outhouses, dirt roads, and inferior schools (Barrera, 1979; De León, 1993; Maril, 1989; Montejano, 1987).

The segregated "Mexican schools" served as another mechanism to control and exploit the Mexican labor force. No real economical or developmental investments went to the education of Mexican youths. By providing Mexican children with an inferior education, Mexican and Tejano students were kept illiterate and unskilled. "Mexican schools" served the purpose of elite white agricultural owners who wanted to maintain access to a supply of low-wage unskilled farm laborers by keeping Mexicans uneducated. (Maril, 1989; Montejano, 1987).

Due to these deplorable living conditions Mexican towns also suffered from high rates of diphtheria, tuberculosis, as well as a high infant mortality rates, high rates of premature births, pneumonia, and influenza (De León, 1993). By segregating Mexicans into specific geographical areas elite whites were able to better control the resources that Mexican farm laborer communities would receive, as well as controlling their movement through violence.

Montejano (1987) states “Mexicans were primarily a ready supply of laborers and Mexican towns were fundamentally labor camps” (p. 178).

Although many people like to date the *colonias* back to at least the 1950’s, historians and/or sociologists have recovered an important part of Texas history and successfully demonstrated that the *colonias* date back at least to the 1920’s. The “Mexican labor camps” of the 1920’s evolved into the *colonias* of the 1950’s. This means that the *colonias* of South Texas have a varied history with some coming into existence within the last 50 years, while others have been in existence since the early 1900’s (Housing Assistance Council, 2013). The evolution of the *colonias* occurred when land developers responded to the great demand for low-income housing by purchasing valueless agricultural land that lay in floodplains (Arizmendi & Ortiz, 2008; Federal Reserve bank of Dallas, 1995; Hanna, 1996). The useless flood prone land was then divided up into small subplots with little or no infrastructure and sold cheap to working-poor Mexicans. The new landowners were promised that water, electricity, sewage, and other basic services would be provided (Arizmendi & Ortiz, 2008; Davis & Holz, 1992; Hanna, 1996). The unscrupulous land developers never provided these basic services and residents had no other options (Arizmendi & Ortiz, 2008; Davis & Holz, 1992; Hanna, 1996).

While the name of these segregated Mexican communities have changed over time (i.e. Mexican labor camps, *colonias*), the socoeconomic position and living conditions in which many Mexican-origin people have inhabited has not. The Valley still serves as a source of cheap low-wage Mexican labor that elite agriculture and business owners continue to exploit. Many residents still do not earn enough to afford low-income housing with basic services or/and food; Therefore, they buy or rent subplots of land without water or electricity and with their

ingenuity they build a home with the limited resources they have available to them creating a border community and culture.

Today, the *colonias* of South Texas are not getting smaller,- or disappearing; to the contrary, the *colonias* are experiencing a great amount of growth due to the demand for cheap low-wage Mexican labor, lack of affordable housing, population growth, unscrupulous land developers, isolation, extreme poverty, and U.S. international policies, such as the 1996 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Arizmendi & Ortiz, 2008; Davis & Holz, 1992; Hanna, 1996; Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 1995).

Today the Texas *colonias* are unincorporated rural communities that are underdeveloped, but functioning as American towns. In these *colonias* a high concentration of poverty and unemployment exists. Hidalgo County has consistently been among the poorest in Texas (Sharkey, Wesley, & Johnson, 2011). Many Mexican-origin people make their own homes little by little with the help of family or community members. Despite the basic infrastructure upgrades and funding that has gone into the *colonias* major challenges still exist in providing all residents with paved roads, water treatment services, sewage and drainage systems, or garbage collection (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 2015; Texas Secretary of State, 2012). These borderland *colonias* are a testimony to the enduring legacy of racial segregation, disinvestment, and resistance.

Welfare reform changed federal eligibility rules for poor citizens and immigrants, the increased policing of immigrants and Mexican- American communities, suspected immigrants since September 11th, 2000, and increasing anti-immigration sentiment has compounded the destitution in these rural *colonias* (Critelli, 2008; De Genova, 2001; Nam, 2011, p. 8; Nam &

Jung, 2008; Romero, 2008). Researchers have demonstrated that immigrants' access to social services has drastically changed and has become more restrictive. Although this population generates a great deal of profit for the U.S. economy, continues to pay taxes, and adds cultural wealth to the region, they have lesser access to social services, such as food stamps, cash aid, and medical services (Lewonski, 1998; Nam & Jung, 2008; Nam, 2008; Romero, 2008). For example, Nam and Jung (2008) found that welfare eligibility restrictions based on citizenship status negatively impacted the food stamp participation and food security of older immigrant adults. Mexican-origin seniors are even more socially, economically, and politically marginalized then their younger counterparts for the reasons discussed above. Yet, with key exceptions, the experiences of this vulnerable population have not been documented in the literature.

Literature Review and Theory

This section will review literature pertinent to this Master's thesis proposal. I begin by presenting the prevalence of food insecurity in the United States and defining it. I then discuss the literature on food insecurity and the elderly followed by sociodemographic characteristics. Next, I introduce structural inequality theory, and the link between a social hierarchy, geography, and history, which is followed by the structural barriers *colonia* residents face. I then move into survival strategies, culture, family, and material hardship.

Food Insecurity Definition

According to the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) 2020 Economic Research Report, 89.5 percent of U.S. households were defined as food secure throughout the

year and 10.5% (13.8 million households) as food insecure. Low-income households, female single parent households with children, and Black and Latino households were at a higher risk of experiencing food insecurity. In households with older individuals living in the home, 6.9% are food insecure (USDA, 2020). Among older adults living alone, 8.3% are food insecure (USDA, 2020). Disproportionately household food insecurity is influenced by social, economic, and cultural factors, such as race/ethnicity, level of education, household size, income, gender, age, diet, and nutritional behavior (Lee & Frongillo, 2001; Klesges et al., 2001; USDA, 2020)

The USDA defines food insecurity as "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain availability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways" (2021). Food provides human beings with the essential nutrients that the body needs to maintain a healthy and active body and prevent disease. The USDA measures food insecurity with a yearly national food security survey that asks households a series of questions about the "access or lack of access to adequate food" within the last 12 months (USDA, 2021). "The food security status of each household lies somewhere along a continuum extending from high food security to very low food security" (USDA, 2021).

Older Adults and Food Insecurity

As an individual ages, their nutritional needs change becoming more distinct and critical to preventing disease, disabilities, and hospitalization. Older adults are especially vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity for many reasons, such as: fixed income, low income, limited physical mobility or/and disability, social isolation, poor health, and community characteristics (e.g. rural vs. urban, availability of transportation and food stores). Food insecurity in older adults can negatively affect their physical and mental health, their quality of life, the lives of the

people around them, and society at large (Campbell, 1991; Klesges et al., 2001; Lee & Frongillo, 2001;). This is why it is important to understand the nature, extent, and the prevention of food insecurity among older adults.

Food is an essential commodity and an adult's income most likely dictates how much food they can purchase. Older individuals living on a fixed income or low-income may not have the financial resources they need to obtain the adequate amount of food for a healthy and nutritious diet (Klesges et al., 2001). Studies have found that food-insufficiency among older adults results in lower intakes of nutrients, which include magnesium, calcium, vitamins A and B6 (Lee and Frongillo, 2001; Rose & Oliveria, 1997; Sharkey, 2003). Researchers have documented the numerous health consequences that are related to the lack of proper food and nutrients among the elderly. For example, nutritional deficiency is associated with depression, obesity, impaired physical and cognitive functioning, osteoporosis, increased severity of disability and multimorbidity (Ensurd et al., 2000; Kim and Frongillo, 2007; Klesges et al., 2001; Olson, 1999; Sharkey, 2003).

Individuals who are food insecure are at an increased risk of developing malnutrition. Malnutrition has been linked to exacerbating disease, increasing disability, decreasing resistance to infection, and extended hospital stays (Klesges et al., 2001; Torres-Gil, 1996). Other studies have found that older adults who do not take in the proper amount of food and nutrients self- report poorer nutritional, health status, and quality of life **(**Klesges et al., 2001; Lee & Frongrillo, 2001).

Money is not the only concern of older adults. As an individual ages they can develop functional impairments, disabilities, or/and serious or chronic health problems that restricts

their physical movement, making it difficult to conduct their daily activities. Everyday routines such as eating, opening jars of food, cooking, driving, shopping for groceries, or working can become difficult tasks. Often these everyday tasks can no longer be accomplished without assistance. Studies have found that functional impairments are significantly associated with food insecurity among older adults (Klesges et al., 2001; Lee & Frongillo, 2001; Sharkey, 2002). Older adults who need some type of assistance with accessing, obtaining, preparing, and/or consuming healthy food may rely on others for help; therefore, having a strong support system becomes crucial to warding off food insecurity and hunger. Researchers have found that older adults who live alone or do not have a social support system are at a greater risk of experiencing food insecurity and poorer nutritional health (Lee & Frongillo, 2001; Locher et al., 2005;McIntosh, Shifflett, & Picou, 1989).

Sociodemographic

A great wealth of literature on food insecurity has demonstrated that certain sociodemographic groups are at greater risk of experiencing food insecurity. The elderly is one group, and among the elderly population certain groups are at a higher risk of experiencing food insecurity. One study found that elderly individuals who are poor, of minority status, participants in food assistant programs, only a high school graduate, living alone, and socially isolated were more likely to be food insecure (Lee & Frongillo, 2001). Lee & Frongillo (2001) found that food insecurity among the elderly with functional impairments rises when combined with minority status and low income. Additionally, elderly persons of Hispanic descent had the highest prevalence of food insecurity followed by non-Hispanic and Black seniors. Ziliak, Haist, & Gundersen (2008) conducted a national survey study using data from the Current Population

Survey (2001-2005) and found that elderly Latinos were about 20% more likely to be at-risk of hunger compared to whites. These studies highlight the fact that elderly people are all not the same and racial differences among people need to be taken into consideration, because food insecurity is not distributed equally across older adults.

In general, other studies have also confirmed that food insecurity is common among Latino households**.** For example, the USDA 's 2020 Economic Research Report found that 17.2% of Latino households experience food insecurity. They also reported that the prevalence of very low food insecurity was statistically significantly higher than the national average (3.9%) for Latino households (5%), and households located outside of metropolitan areas or rural areas (5%) (USDA, 2020). Researchers have also found that low-income Mexican-American and/or Mexican- origin immigrant households are even at greater risk of experiencing food insecurity (Alaimo, Briefel, Frongillo, & Olson, 1998; Langellier et al., 2012**).** As well, households that primarily speak Spanish are more likely to be food insecure than those who speak English at home, or another language **(**Alaimo, Briefel, Frongillo, & Olson, 1998; Langellier, Chaparro, Sharp, Birnbach, Brown, & Harrison, 2012).

In addition to race, ethnicity, and language being associated with food insecurity, so is immigrant status. Kasper et al., (2000) conducted a cross-sectional survey study among low-income legal immigrants in California, Texas, and Illinois. Latinas/os, Vietnamese, and Cambodians were surveyed for a total of 630 adult respondents. The researchers found that 40% of the households were food insecure without hunger, and 41% were food insecure with hunger. Only 20% of the households were classified as food secure. The households that were most likely to be food insecure had income that was below the poverty line, limited English

speaking skills, and children in the home. In another study Van Hook and Bakistreri (2005) found that U.S. born children of non-citizens experienced higher levels of food insecurity compared to U.S. born children of citizens. Nam and Jung (2008) reported a significant higher rate of food insecurity among older noncitizens than older naturalized citizens.

Migrant and seasonal Latino farmworkers who are often undocumented immigrants are especially vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity. Quandt et al., (2004) conducted a study with a 100 migrant and seasonal farmworker households and found that more than 50% of the households were food insecure, (9.8%) were identified with moderate hunger, and (4.9%) with sever hunger. The researchers also conclude that households without children experience food insecurity at three times the rate of the general population, and for households with children its five times the rate**.** Similarly, Weigel, Armijos, Hall, Ramirez, and Orozco (2007) found high rates of food insecurity among 100 migrant and seasonal farmworkers who were surveyed and interviewed in the Paso del Norte region of far southwestern Texas and southeastern New Mexico. They reported that 82% of the households were food insecure and 42% were experiencing hunger. Additionally, only half of the participants surveyed reported not having regular access to cooking and refrigerated storage facilitates.

In summary the sociodemograhpic studies indicate that race, ethnicity, age, poverty, disability, level of education, children present, limited English speaking skills, citizenship status are all elements that contribute to higher rates of food insecurity and hunger.

Structural Inequality Theory- Race, Class, Space, and Food Access

In addition to examining the relationship between sociodemographic characteristics and food insecurity, it is imperative to account for the structural context in which people exist. The

social structure that an individual lives in impacts their life chances, opportunities, choices, quality of life, health, and food security**.** Borrowing the words of Janet Popendieck, “It is time to find ways to shift the discourse from undernutrition to unfairness, from hunger to inequality” (2012, p. 571). One way to understand social inequalities and food insecurity is through the framework of a structural theory. This type of theoretical lens identifies the social structure of a society as the source of producing and reproducing patterned inequalities.

Every society has a social structural organization of social resources and people are divided into different categories with differential access to these resources. Social categories are vertically arranged creating a top to bottom order. The position a person holds in a stratified social system dictates how much access an individual has to resources, such as income, wealth, social status or prestige, a quality education, higher education, a good paying job, and food (Massey, 2007). The group that occupies the top position in the social hierarchy receives the greatest access to resources and privileges, as well as the highest social esteem and worth. On the other hand, the lowest ranking group are the most disadvantage with the greatest restriction to resources and the lowest social esteem and value. People are assigned to categorical positions based on their race, class, gender, age, and nationality, which interact and intersect with one another shaping the opportunities, privileges, strategies, and barriers experienced by groups (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Collins, 1990). As people are classified into specific categories they are also being identified as “similar” (in-group) or “other” (out-group) drawing social divisions and boundaries (Bonilla- Silva, 1997; Massey, 2007). These social boundaries shape the social relationships between groups, which become patterned social interactions within a society. Researchers have shown how the “othering” process produces and reproduces

“marginalization, disempowerment, and social exclusion” (Grove & Zwi, 2006, p. 1933; Barrera, 1979; Havey & Pickering, 2010; Maril, 1989; Tickamyer & Henderson, 2010).

Typically, the highest-ranking group in the social hierarchy is the one that is categorizing other people, drawing boundaries, and creating a social structure that produces inequalities. Inequalities within a society are generated and reproduced through exploitation and opportunity hoarding (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Massey, 2007). Exploitation occurs when one group takes a resource produced by another group and denies them the benefit of that resource or fair compensation. Opportunity hoarding involves one social group excluding another social group from access to a resource. The stratification process is completed once the superposition group institutionalizes practices and policies of exploitation and exclusion. These systematically patterned practices, policies, and social relationships create and organize the social structure and culture of a society, which affects all aspects of social life (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). The unequal distribution of resources and power in a stratified social system is what creates and perpetuates social inequalities. The greater the distance between the top and bottom group the greater the inequalities are in a society.

In addition to stratification along the socially constructed markers of race, class, and gender, people are also geographically stratified through the systemic process of race and class segregation (Lobao & Saenz, 2002; Massey, 2007). Massey (2007) explains, if the superordinate group can systematically segregate themselves geographically from the “other” subordinate groups they can more effectively control resources, by systematically channeling resources away from the spatial territories that the out-groups occupy and directing resources toward areas that in-groups occupy. The superordinate group becomes more efficient in the

exploitation, exclusion, and subjugation of the subordinate groups, while simultaneously protecting and maintaining their superior position in the social hierarchy. To be clear, segregation is the purposeful investment and disinvestment of communities by the superordinate group that physically and symbolically shape the geographical space a person lives in. Therefore, social boundaries overlay with geographical boundaries, producing spatial inequalities. Snipp (1996) states, that the spatial location of a people is “inextricably linked to their social position in American society” (p. 126).

One does not have to look far to see the uneven development of communities across the United States (Rees, 2019). The purposeful investment and disinvestment of capital and resources in a segregated society includes access to food, for example, whether or not a big grocery store will exist in a community. Just like where a person is going to live is racialized and classed, so is accessing food. For example, “When supermarket access is mapped according to the racial composition of neighborhoods, it shows that predominately Black neighborhoods have less access than their white counterparts” (Rees, 2019, p. 45). Therefore, buying and accessing food is also racialized and classed.

Understanding that a stratified social system is a system of inequalities is powerful, -because you are able to shift from an analysis of the individual social problem to analyze systemic inequalities. Accessing food is not just an individual problem, but a structural issue. This is one reason why I will not be using the word “food desert”; because it does not take into account the role the social structure plays in perpetuating and maintaining food access inequalities. The term “food desert” elicits images of a barren land that exists in a vacuum separate from history, culture, and social structure. Researchers conducting food justice work

have departed from the dominate practice of using the term “food desert” and utilize other terms such as superstore redlining or food apartheid (Reese, 2019).

Examining the history of the Lower Rio Grande Valley from the 1920’s reveals that elite white agricultural business owners exploited Mexican laborers by the thousands. The outcome of this labor exploitation is a racialized socio-economic structure and the creation of the *colonias* a racialized and classed space (Barrera, 1979; Havey & Pickering, 2010; Maril, 1989; Saenz & Ballejos, 1993; Snipp, 1996; Tickamyer & Henderson, 2010). The new racialized and classed economic structure of The Valley was based on the labor market relations between whites and Mexicans, which permeated all other social structures within society and systematically maintained Mexicans in a subordinate position to whites (Barrera, 1979; Maril, 1989; Saenz & Ballejos, 1993). Through the racial segregation of Mexican and white communities, valuable resources were effectively and efficiently channeled into white communities. Racially segregated *colonias* made it easier for elite whites to dominate, oppress, and control what resources or goods Mexicans would have access to, such as sidewalks, roads, and even grocery stores. Food access inequalities are not simple unequal; “they are a by-product of how institutional racism touches every aspect of our life-even where are food resources are located” (Rees, 2019, p. 7).

Studies examining spatial inequalities (i.e. space and place) and in Rural Sociology acknowledge that the unique rural historical legacy of a geographical region and place influences the contemporary inequalities between groups and uneven regional development (Fontenot et al., 2010; Labao & Saenz, 2002; Slack & Myers, 2012; Snipp, 1996). Snipp (1996) explains that the *colonias* of the southwest, Native American reservations, and rural African

American communities are unlike other communities, because they still are contending "with the historical remnants of institutions explicitly created to conquer, oppress, and maintain their subordinate position in society, creating regional pockets of disadvantage" (p. 127). Trickamyer and Henderson (2010) remind us that, "rural poverty is not evenly distributed but is disproportionately found in the regions of subjugation or subordination" (p. 47). The historical legacies of oppression and discrimination in the Valley region help sheds light on the socio-economical and food access inequalities that exist in the *colonias* today, making this region and it's people important to study (Barrera, 1979; Fontenot et. al., 2010; Maril, 1989; Saenz & Ballejos, 1993; Slack & Myers, 2012; Snipp 1996).

Colonia Residents & Structural Barriers

Today, Mexican-origin people residing in the *colonias* of the Lower Rio Grande Valley continue to face numerous structural barriers, which include a lack of economic opportunities and resources, as well as negligent federal and local policies, that make them structurally vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity. One important structural barrier that impacts food security is access to well-paying jobs, which are difficult to obtain in the Valley. Food is a resource that requires money to buy, and a person's income affects their spending power and their ability to acquire adequate and healthy food to feed themselves and their family. For almost eighty years the main source of employment in the Valley was in the agricultural industry harvesting citrus crops. In 1980, an average farm worker earned $1.35 per hour and was forced to perform physically strenuous labor, hunched over the crops picking fruits in the blistering hot Texas sun (Maril, 1989). These meager wages earned were not enough for any human being to pay for their basic necessities, such as housing, utilities, medications,

transportation, or clothing, much less to pay for nutritious food. During the 1980's an economic shift occurred in the Valley, the agricultural industry took third place in the Valley's economy following behind trade and manufacturing (Maril, 1989). Although economic development has occurred in this region, shifting from agriculture to manufacturing, persistent and high poverty, unemployment, and underemployment rates still persist in this region (Federal Reserve Bank, 2015; Fontenot et. al., 2010; Maril, 1989; Saenz & Ballejos, 1993; Slack & Myers, 2011).

Hidalgo County is one of the top ten poorest counties in the nation (Fronczek, 2005). Data from the 2019 American Community Survey 1- Year Estimates provides insight into the poverty levels in Hidalgo. According to the American Community Survey, 21.5% of the adults between the ages 18 and 64 earned an income below the poverty line, while 24.3% of adults 65 and older earned an income below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

Economic development in this area has been undermined by big farmers and business owners who are interested in ensuring large profit margins at the least cost (Fontent et al., 2010). A plethora of low-wage, low-skilled, no benefits, dead-end jobs exist in the Valley. Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants disproportionately fill these positions and are exploited for their labor (Maril, 1989; Saenz & Ballejos, 1993; Slack & Myers, 2011). Maril (1989) argues that The Valley is rich in resources, such as cheap Mexican labor, fruits, vegetables, and manufactured goods, which are all produced in the Valley and then exported out to the rest of country. However, the cheap Mexican laborers who pick and produce these goods do not earn enough money to afford the products they produced, which are sold back to them at a much higher rate.

Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants of the Valley are the working poor who have historically occupied a very low position in the socioeconomic structure, which makes them vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity. The confinement of Mexicans into farm work, domestic, or construction labor represents the economic dimension of oppression (Collins, 2002, p. 6). Economic exclusion impacts the material reality of these people, because it takes money to buy food. Researchers have confirmed that food insecurity is a daily reality for many *colonia* residents (Sharkey, Dean, & Nataly, 2013; Sharkey, Dean, & Johnson, 2011) One study found in a sample of 470 households in Progreso and La Feria that 51% of the households reported that their children experienced hunger almost triple the national average (17.4%) in 2011 (Sharkey, Dean, & Nataly, 2013). If children are going hungry, so are their parents who often sacrifice their own nutrition to provide food to their children (Chavez, Tellen, & Kim, 2007; Kasper, Gutpa, Tran et al., 2000; Quandt, Arcury, Early, Tapia, & Davis, 2004).

Sharkey, Dean & Johnson (2011) confirm women and children living in the *colonias* are experiencing high rates of food insecurity at greater rates than previously reported. Of the 610 households they surveyed 78% reported experiencing some type of food insecurity with 49% of these households experiencing severe levels of food insecurity. In another study Sharkey, Wesley, & Johnson (2011) examined the relationship between nativity and food insecurity among 140 Mexican American women 50 years of age and older living in the *colonias* near the towns of Progreso and La Feria located in the Valley. The researchers found rates of food insecurity higher than the national, regional, and local level, of the 140 older adult women 77.2% experienced food insecurity and almost 68% reporting very severe food insecurity. Additionally, Mexican American women born in Mexico had greater risk of experiencing very

low food security when compared to U.S. born.   They also report that U.S. and foreign-born Mexican Americans had low levels of participation in SNAP benefits. Overall, these studies demonstrate the alarming high rates of food insecurity and inequalities that exists in the rural communities of the *colonias*.

Another structural barrier to securing food is the geographical land scape. In the 1920's Mexicans were concentrated into rural and isolated segregated communities characterized by extreme poverty and limited resources, which eventually gave rise to the *colonias*. The oppressive racialized and classed structure of the *colonia's* was not dismantled, but maintained and reproduced over time. Today, the *colonias* are getting a lot more attention and funding, yet many Mexican residents still live in extreme poverty and their surrounding rural environment still lacks adequate infrastructure and community resources. The *colonias* are a reflection of the ongoing legacy of racial segregation and purposeful disinvestment and neglect in America. The ability for *colonia* residents to access conveniently located grocery stores with healthy affordable foods is crucial to maintaining health individuals, families, and communities. Unfortunately, many people living in the *colonias* cannot walk to a nearby neighborhood supermarket because they do not exist (Sharkey, Horel, Han, and Huber, 2009).   Residents have no choice, but to travel a great distance by car to access the nearest major supermarket (Sharkey, Horel, Han, and Huber, 2009).

Adding to the challenge of accessing the nearest grocery store is the difficulty of transportation. Many *colonia* residents are living in poverty and are unable to find stable work, which makes owning and maintaining a car, and public transportation is very limited or nonexistent in the Valley. This means a great number of people living in the *colonias* do not

have access to a car and cannot just drive to the grocery store whenever they want or need to (Sharkey, Horel, Han, and Huber, 2009). Therefore, accessing a major grocery store where a greater selection of healthy food at an affordable price is a great challenge for many *colonia* residents (Sharkey, Horel, Han, and Huber, 2009). What is available in close proximity to the homes in these neighborhoods are small convenience stores and fast-food restaurants, which typically do not sell a great variety of healthy food or/and charge higher prices for the food they are selling (Sharkey, Horel, Han, and Huber, 2009).

Adding to the structural barriers *colonia* residents face in securing food are federal policies, such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), better known as the welfare reform act. This historical welfare reform act was passed by congress in 1996, and it fundamentally altered federal welfare entitlements. The act canceled the entitlement of poor families and children to cash and food aid and replaced it with temporary assistance that has work requirements, and time limits. It also shifted the responsibility of enacting eligibility rules and distributing welfare benefits from the federal government to state governments and local agencies (Harvey & Pickering, 2010; Harvey, 2011; Shaefer & Ybarra, 2012; Tickamyer & Henderson,2010). This is problematic for residents who are in great need of public assistance and reside in a rural area that has been historically neglected, lacking the capacity and resources to implement welfare to work policies and meet the needs of their community. Researchers have shown that rural minority residents are at even greater disadvantage and have not been served well by the 1996 welfare reform act (Harvey & Pickering, 2010; Harvey, 2011; Tickamyer & Henderson, 2010).

In addition to the 1996 welfare reform act repealing citizens' federal rights to welfare it also changed the eligibility rules for most immigrants. The eligibility rules became more restrictive limiting immigrants' access to most public assistance services and programs in the form of welfare, Medicaid, and food stamps (Borjas, 2001; Critelli, 2008; Nam, 2011). The federal government and some states have made a few exemptions allowing certain immigrants access to welfare benefits, such as minors under the age of 18, adults 65 and older, and disabled individuals (Nam, 2011). Immigrants who arrived after PRWORA must wait five years before they can receive any public assistance benefits and undocumented immigrants only have access to emergency services (Borjas, 2001; Nam, 2011). Therefore, an immigrant's citizenship status, date of entry into the U.S., age, and the state of residence all matter and factor into whither they are eligible to receive welfare benefits (Borjas, 2001; Nam, 2011). Although a few exemptions exist granting eligibility to immigrants welfare reform has severely constrained their access to public assistance from the federal government and placed them at the mercy of the state in which they reside (Hook & Balistreri, 2005; Lewonski, 1998; Nam,2011).

Therefore, citizenship status becomes another structural barrier that impedes the ability of some *colonia* residents to secure food. Researchers have demonstrated that the results of the welfare reform act has been that fewer documented and undocumented immigrants are accessing social service benefits, such as food stamps and medical services. This places immigrants and their families in a more vulnerable position, making them more likely to experience food insecurity and illness at much higher rates than U.S. born residents (Borjas,

2001; Donato, Massey & Wagner, 2006; Gutpa et al., 2000; Van Hook and Balistreri, 2005; Nam, 2008; Kasper; Slack & Myers, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, Nam and Jung (2008) found that immigration status of older individual adults' and the immigration status of the household in which they live is significantly associated with the likelihood of food stamp participation. Their research revealed that when older adult immigrants live in a household where the majority of the individuals are eligible to receive food stamps due to their citizenship status it significantly increases an older immigrant adults' food stamp participation, benefit levels, and reduces their risk of food insecurity. Older immigrant adults living in a house where most of its members are ineligible for food stamps due to citizenship status are therefore at a greater risk of experiencing food insecurity. As a result, an older immigrant adults' citizenship status and household citizenship status can act as an asset or a barrier to food stamp participation and food security.

Strategies, Culture, Material Hardship, Familia

Despite the numerous structural barriers *colonia* residents' face they fight to make a life, giving rise to innovating cultural adaptive strategies that shape their experiences. A distinction needs to be made between coping and adaptive strategies. In this paper "coping strategies" are understood as short-term tools that individual's fallback on to deal with not having food temperately (Davies, 1993). "Adaptive strategies" are understood as long-term or permanent changes to a household's capability of acquiring sufficient food, requiring individuals to form adaptive strategies for these long- term changes (Davies, 1993). Residents of the *colonia* are not dealing with short-term food insecurity. As demonstrated earlier, food insecurity is an unpleasant reality for many *colonia* residents**.** Equally important, these

adaptive strategies are not only long-term, but are also essential to their survival; Therefore, I will refer to them as survival strategies.

The survival strategies that older Mexican-origin adults employ are forms of human agency. People are actors and the social structure that they live in enables and constrains their agency. The stratified social structure forms the capacity and provides the resources necessary for agency (Sewell, 2001). An individual's agency is in part shaped by the categorical position that they hold in the stratified social structure. The unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and power creates different forms and possibilities of agency. This means *colonia* residents are exercising their agency within the confines of the stratified socioeconomic system in which they live. Agency is also particular to a specific space and place. Therefore, agency is spatialized and restrained by structural inequalities. As older Mexican-origin adults exercise their agency within the structural constraints of food inequalities they are also simultaneously employing cultural "strategies of action".

Agency is culturally shaped. Ann Swidler defines culture as a "tool-kit of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems" (1986, p. 273). According to Swidler a "tool-kit" or "strategies of action" is culture, and culture shapes the way an individual chooses to organize themselves into action. Swidler explains another way to think about culture is "in a sense is more like a style or a set of skills and habits than a set of preferences and wants" (p. 275). Therefore, all people are cultural actors and holders of knowledge operating within social structures that confine and/or enable the strategies they employ (Lamont and Thevenot, 2000).

Culture is first learned from the family. A child typically learns from their parent/s how to dress, eat, and speak. Everything a child learns is culture, and in the process of learning culture they are also learning about who they are. As a child grows, they continue to learn about their culture, themselves, and the world they live in from their family, friends, teachers, community members, and greater society. In the process of a child growing and learning a cultural “tool-kit” is being developed, which will continue to be cultivated even into old age. This cultural tool-kit then informs individuals actions and inclinations to act as they make decisions about how to navigate structural inequality.

The *colonias* of south Texas literally exist on the margins of two nations where two different cultures meet, co-exist, clash, and even intertwine. Many Mexican immigrants are often forced to migrate clandestinely bringing with them their life experiences, knowledge, and culture to the *colonias*. As they start a new life in an unfamiliar country, they enter a time period of transition and ambiguity. They are adapting to a new socioeconomic structure, geographical place, culture, language, and surroundings. Just like their life is in transition, so is their culture. Mexican immigrants are actively figuring out what traditional cultural strategies of action will be held, work, need modification, or are ill-suited. A Mexican immigrant may find that some of the cultural strategies that they are accustomed to employing from their native country are no longer sufficient in a new country with a distinctly raced and classed social structure; Thus, requiring the construction of new strategies of action. At a time of change and ambiguity these ingenious cultural actors are trying to make a life, while simultaneously sustaining traditional strategies of action and creating new ones to survive and make a life. Similarly, many Mexican Americans and Mexican-origin immigrants who have lived in the

colonias for generations are also fighting to survive in the face of life changes, such as getting older, not working, or sickness, which demand for the modification and/or development of new cultural strategies of action.

A disproportionate amount of *colonia* residents must fight daily to ensure they have just the minimal essentials for life, such as food, a roof over their head, clothes, and transportation. Mexican-origin people of the *colonias* employ these survival strategies or stratifies of action, under the structural condition of material hardship. Material hardship is a concept used by scholars to capture the full deprivation experienced by households, which cannot be captured by merely looking at income and poverty rates. Material hardship is an alternative measure used to describe households that fall below the poverty line who are unable to meet their basic needs, such as housing, utilities, transportation, medical, clothing, food (Heflin, London, & Scott, 2011).

Heflin, London, and Scott (2011) conducted a four-year qualitative study that examined the survival strategies that 38 low-income mothers employed under conditions of material hardship. These mothers lived in urban areas that had a high concentration of poverty located in Cleveland, Ohio and were eligible to receive welfare benefits. The authors examined five different domains of material hardship: housing, bill paying, food, medical, and clothing hardship. The authors found that one strategy these mother's employed was the use of their personal networks, which consisted of family and friends who provided financial or material assistance occasionally or consistently. Additionally, within each specific domain these mothers are making choices, trade-offs, and simultaneously employing multiple survival strategies that

shift in application for each domain of hardship in the effort to provide for their children under conditions of scare financial resources and limited options.

In another study, researchers interviewed 320 urban low-income Latina mothers in Chicago and found similar survival strategies, as well as reporting some additional ones such as, reducing their nutritional intake by skipping meals or eating less so their children could eat, and viewing their children's school as a resource for feeding their children (Chavez, Telleen, & Kim, 2007). Other studies that have examined food insecurity among rural farmworkers also find similar survival strategies being employed, such as households with children accessing social programs (WIC, SNAP, food banks) and adults not eating to feed their children (Minkoff-Zem, 2012; Quandt, Arcury, Early, Tapia, & Davis , 2004; Sharkey Dean, Nalty, & Xu, 2013).

Studies have demonstrated that people under conditions of material hardship and from different ethnic/racial backgrounds turn to their family, friends, neighbors, church groups, and community members as a survival strategy in securing food (Locher et al., 2004). It is important to note that there are cultural differences in social support and networks along the lines of race/ ethnicity, nationality, gender, and class. Among the Latina/o populations, more specifically Mexicans, *la familia* (family) is a core cultural value and a source of social support (Crist, et al., 2019; Diaz & Bui, 2016; Hancock, 2005). The definition of *la familia* has evolved and continues to change and varies. For the purpose of this paper *la familia* means the strong ties and since of obligation to one another, meaning parents and children are obligated to help one another economically and emotionally (Bassford, 1995). In addition, l*a familia* also includes respect and respecting the dignity of others, such as respecting your elders (Marin & Marin, 1991). *La familia* can include extended family, which can consist of aunties, uncles,

friends, neighbors, and community, - encompassing a wider understanding of connections and relationships (Katiria Perez & Cruess, 2011; Yosso, 2006). My definition of *la familia* challenges cultural deficit theories and recognize culture as an asset and value to people of color because it provides a network of resources Latina/o individuals (Yosso, 2006).

The Benefits of Qualitative Research Approaches

The existing literature makes clear that certain populations are vulnerable to experiencing food access inequalities, that negatively impact individuals'-health status, and quality of life. However, quantitative methods dominate the literature on food insecurity and this bias for quantitative research has resulted in some gaps in the literature. As noted above, national survey studies do not capture the concealed populations that are hard-to- reach (Quandt et al., 2006; Slesinger, 1992). In addition, local survey studies on hard-to-reach populations, while valuable are missing the voice of the participants, and this can rob these studies of the within-community cultural understanding of what it means to be food secure or insecure.

The older Mexican and Mexican American population living in the Valley is marginalized by structural inequalities and are regularly made invisible because they live in some of the most impoverished, historically disinvested rural communities in the country. To produce a nuanced understanding of their experiences with food insecurity, it is essential to center their voices and their cultural understanding (cultural-toll-kits) surrounding food, hunger, and age.

By bringing together the literature on the sociohistorical experience of Mexicans living in the *colonias* of The Valley, food insecurity, older adults, demographic characteristics,

structural inequality, spatial inequality, intersectionality, structural barriers, cultural survival strategies, and focus group interviews this study addresses this shortcoming in the literature. Through the use of qualitative data, place the individual experience and voice at the center of analysis as a source of knowledge, which allows me to examine what structural and individual factors facilitate or constrain food acquisition among Mexican-origin adults who are fifty and older living in the *colonia*s along the Texas-Mexico border (Bernal, 2002). I have attempted to capture the various voices and lived experiences these historically excluded people, as well as and identify the structural barriers and survival strategies that they employ under conditions of material hardship and structural vulnerability, focusing on three sub-questions:

1. How do older Mexican origin *colonia* residents experience potential and actual food hardship?
2. What are the geographical barriers older Mexican-origin adults faces in accessing food?
3. What survival strategies do older Mexican-origin adults employ under conditions of material hardship and structural vulnerability?

This research extends our knowledge on culture, aging, health, and poverty in rural areas, and provides valuable information about the experiences of older Mexican-origin adults who live in rural poverty. In addition, through this study I plan on capturing the humanity and resilience of people in the hopes of intervening in the reproduction of perpetual poverty and food insecurity.

METHODS

Data Collection

In February of 2012, 95 seniors were recruited by *Promotoras de Salud* for 14 semi-structured focus groups discussions in four geographic areas in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. The research team has a long history working in Lower Rio Grande Valley. The four different areas were originally selected by team *promotoras* who identified these *colonias* as areas of great need. The *Promotoras* de Salud are community-based health workers employed by Dr. Sharkey's Program for Research and Outreach-Engagement on Nutrition and Health Disparities at Texas A&M School of Public Health.

Promotoras were trained in recruiting and written consent, as well as training and practice in moderating and observing focus groups. *Promotoras* recruited participants through snowball sampling. Participants had to meet two criteria's, which were they needed to be 50 or older and of Mexican descent. Before each focus group participants were given informed consent forms to participate and be recorded, and a survey to collect data on socioeconomic characteristics, health, and participation in government assistant programs. *Promotoras* assisted participants who needed help with filling out survey, if needed for literacy. Dr. Sharkey developed the first draft of the interview guide, which was then given to team *promotoras* and community partners for input and feedback. The final English survey guide was then translated into Spanish and verified for conceptual and semantic equivalence through active engagement with *promotoras*. The survey was then test piloted before it was given to participants.

For all 14 focus groups there was one moderator and three other *promotoras* as observers. Participants received $20 dollars compensation for their time at the conclusion of

the focus group. The surveys administrated and focus groups were conducted in Spanish. The focus groups were audio-recorded. The Spanish audio-recordings were transcribed and translated from Spanish to English through a 6-stage process for analysis.

Data Analysis

A computer-aided long-table approach was used to code for concepts, categories, and themes. The Spanish audio and transcripts were listened to and read to verify expressions and meaning. The analysis process was not linear, but iterative. I utilized an inductive and deductive technique to allow the frequent patterns, significant categories, and themes inherent in the raw data to emerge. I analyzed each focus group separately and then compared results across each focus group identifying recurring commonalities and differences between focus groups. In the process of analysis, I also consulted with co-investigators on coding, categories, and themes.

Participant Characteristics

The Spanish-language survey was administrated at the focus groups provided characteristics for the 95 participants in the 14 focus group. Of the 95 participations in the study, 73 were female and 22 were male. The mean age was 65 years of age with an overall range from 51-91 years. A total of 17% of the participants reported not having any education, while 68% of the participants reported having six years or less of education which is the equivalent of an elementary school education in the U.S. A total of 8% reported completing eight to eleven years of education, which is equivalent of a middle school or high school education in the U.S. Only 2% reported having higher than a high school education. Most of the participants reported being born in Mexico, with 8 being born in the U.S. Although the average

time spent in the U.S. was 29 years, there were some participants who reported being here for only a couple of years.

The total household composition across the 14 focus groups ranged from 1 to 8, with the mean of 3 people in a household. A little over half the participants are married (53%). Of the 95 participants 63% of them reported that their monthly household income was less than $700. The most common government assistance food program reported being used was food stamps, with 56% of the participants receiving food stamps. About 34% of the participants reported that they received food from some type of food pantry. Only 23% of participants reported receiving food from a Senior Meals program. Over 50% of participants reported experiencing material hardship, indicated by having to choose between buying food or paying their bills. Another 61% reported experiencing difficulties in paying for their medications.

Qualitative Analysis

The content analysis of the qualitative data resulted in the identification of several set themes that illuminate three different aspects of food insecurity (see Table 1). The first set of themes provide insight into the various experiences with food in/security: how food in/security was talked about and described, as well as the historical and cultural context in which food in/security was understood by these older rural Mexican origin women and men. The second theme reflects the local adaptive survival strategy used by these older rural adults to manage food security, which includes preventing food insecurity. The third theme details the physical barriers these participants face in securing food in their geographical landscape. These themes are identified differently from one another to acknowledge the various dimensions of food

insecurity given by the respondents. Although these themes are distinguished from each other the interview segments are often complex and contain more than one theme demonstrating how these themes are highly integrated in the minds of the participants, which illustrates the conceptual framework within which food security is understood in these communities (Quandt, Arcury, McDonald, Bell, and Vitolins, 2001, p. 363).

Table 1

Summary of Themes Related to Food Security (from total sample of 95 participants)

Category	Theme
Nature of Food insecurity/Experience	Always have something to eat Trusting in God "Amarranos las tripas"
Survival Strategy	*Familia* in action
Barrier	Geographical landscape is a barrier

The Experience of Food Insecurity

A range of themes emerged related to the experience of food insecurity, which is reflective of the different degrees of food insecurity that ranged from adjusting food consumption patterns to the most extreme not eating. The most common reoccurring theme I found in the narrative concerning food security I titled, "Always have something to eat." As I analyzed the qualitative data this type of narrative reappeared over and over again throughout the interviews. Women and men across the four different *colonias* used the same or similar wording to describe and affirm that they had food when asked if they had any difficulties in

securing food at home. Even though many of the participants did not believe they had experienced food insecurity within the last year, the narratives they created claiming they always have something to eat made it clear that they had to negotiate competing demands and make compromises regarding resources for food versus other necessities.

> "Either way, to eat, you always have something, we might not have, have what we want, but there's something to eat"

> "If there isn't one thing then it's another"

> "As long as we have something to eat, it's okay, As long as we have something to eat"

> "…We never went to bed hungry even if it were just flour tortillas and beans"

> "Whatever there is. There you go, whatever there is, that is what we are going to eat"

The responses that were elicited from these older Mexican- origin women and men reveal the cultural and historical lens through which they understand their experience with food in/security. Culturally, these respondents are defining what food security is to them; the fact that they are not completely without food lets them construct a narrative that suggests that they do not feel they are food insecure. The responses make clear that respondents did not have easy access to food, or access to different types of food that they may want; clearly food is a resource that has to be negotiated within a struggle of limited resources. These responses illustrate that respondents define food insecurity as having no access to food, whereas, since they have access to food, even if it just "flour tortillas and beans," and they are not defining themselves as food insecure.

In addition to a cultural definition of food insecurity as equated with absence of food, there were clearly historical forces impacting the way these participants think and talk about food security. Many of these older Mexican-origin adults shared childhood memories of living on a ranch or *ejido* and working the land for food in rural Mexico. Many remembered seasonal time periods where there was plenty of food and other times where there was no food. As Lucio shares, "Well sometimes we did lack…. My father… he also had his own farm but it was seasonal, there wasn't …. opportunity for much harvest, right, but uhm, well we were so happy because we lived by ourselves". Like Lucio many of these respondents indicated that they did not always have food readily available to them.

At an early age many participants felt the pains of having an empty stomach- an unwanted sensation that many experienced when they migrated to the United States. The majority of the respondents indicated they were born in Mexico and at some point they migrated to the United States. Mexican immigrants are often forced to migrate and find themselves in the U.S. without money, work, or social networks, and are often afraid to access resources due to their undocumented status. These structural factors make them vulnerable to the experience of hunger (Massey & Riosmena, 2010; Nam, 2011). The childhood and life experiences of the majority of these respondents influenced the way these participants think and talk about food security. Many older Mexican-origin adults feel that having something to eat sets them apart from those who do not have anything at all, they suggest that a meal can be made out of whatever food they have available. This sentiment reveals a resilience and ingenuity in dealing with structural barriers to resources. Accompanying the ingenuity of making a delicious meal out of anything is a sense of gratefulness for having something to eat.

The majority of the participants are thankful for the food they have even if it is not what they wanted to eat, because they know what it is to be hungry, and this makes them hesitate to suggest that they are food insecure. Moreover, many of these respondents reported knowing someone in their community who did not have food to eat so they felt that their situation was better by comparison and thus did not want to define themselves as food insecure. Domingo accurately captures this sentiment of gratefulness when he shares his experience, "No, [well] where, where I used to work I met a lot of people who sometimes wouldn't even take something to eat. They didn't even have anything to eat and they would tell me, "well right now that I get home, we don't have anything to eat" and I've known a lot of people that, well, you say, well we thank God that we have a bit more than other people, who sometimes don't have anything."

Because the majority of the respondents reported not experiencing food insecurity and "always having something to eat," it made me question what are they eating? Tomas succinctly answered this question many others indicated, "it's because if the occasion doesn't call for it, and there's no means to buy meat, you have to eat *sopa,* you have to eat beans, that's the food that the people who are uh … humble and poor … So then [you have to eat] beans, rice, and *sopitas* and that makes you grow, and I think, that that's the best food". This passage is powerful, because Tomas is affirming himself, his community, and Mexican culture, while also recognizing the socioeconomic status and constraints of his community, while illustrating both struggle and resilience through the discussion of food. This respondent describes being able to buy meat when there is enough money and acknowledges the fact that there comes a time when he cannot afford to purchase meat, which is echoed by many of these older Mexican-

origin adults. Despite the economic constraints of poverty participants wanted to convey through their narratives that they retain their dignity and self-respect. Furthermore, the participants create a narrative that demonstrates their resilience showing that they are doing their best with limited financial resources. These narratives illustrate the power of both the structural constraints that limit their access to the necessary resource of food, and the agency of the respondents in the work that they perform and the choices they make to survive in spite of these structural constraints.

As Rosa stated, "thank God, I cook something every day, it's like if I had a banquet every day, like they say, even if it's just beans". This comment, as well as many above reveals that beans are a staple food for many Mexican households. The ritual of putting a pot of beans to cook on the stove is a cultural practice for many that can easily elicit found memories and feelings of comfort. Beans are also inexpensive, filling, a great source of substance and protein, and can be cooked in many ways. Because of their cultural food tradition, affordability, and sustenance respondents like her describe a bowl of beans as a feast and suggest that as long as they can afford beans, they have accomplished food security. Even though many of these women and men are eating something and avoiding the physical pain of hunger they are making compromises on the quality and quantity of their diet. Although these participants describe themselves as being food secure through the qualitative analysis of the focus group interviews I am able to see that different levels of food insecurity exits, findings that would not have been captured in a survey for several reasons.

Through the focus group discussions and the sharing of narratives is where the rich descriptive data reveals the depths of their material deprivation and food insecurity they are experiencing. Therefore, simple asking a question on a paper, like do you have food, misses the cultural understanding, attitudes, and nuances of what it means to these people to have food. Another element to consider is that these older Mexican origin adults may also not know they are food insecure- or more accurately may not know what is meant by the term "food insecure". As well, the variance a household experiences within a month or month to month may not be captured by survey methods.

The second salient theme that is throughout the interviews is their belief in God's power and will over everyday life. One important aspect of everyday life is securing food, and many of these older Mexican-origin adults put their trust in an external higher power for sustenance. Across the four different *colonias* and within every focus group religious sentiment permeated the words of many of the participants, affirming their Mexican culture, spirituality, and age. The infusion of religious sentiment to language and daily endeavors connects to Mexican culture (Treviño, 2006). For example, "Gracias a Dios" (thanks be to God), is a prevalent religious expression of Mexican Catholicism and culture that is a way of life (Treviño, 2006). To be clear, spirituality is a form of knowledge that a people in this community draw on to understand the world they live in, which influences the way individuals experience and cope with life (Medina, 2014); we see this tacitly in the way respondents hesitate to identify themselves as food insecure because they note that they are grateful that they have any food at all. It is demonstrated more explicitly in the narratives of participants below.

Respondents who felt food secure attributed having nourishment to God. “Well, up to know there’s always been enough because thanks to God, He helps us a lot”. This quote captures the belief in an external higher power that is understood to be present in their everyday life and not separated from the daily hustle and bustle of human existence and survival. God’s divine intervention in everyday life is also greatly appreciated, especially when he is assisting in providing the basic necessities, - such as food. This can be empowering as a narrative for individuals struggling to manage with scarce resources, but it can also function to obscure the pain and suffering that result from inequality in a society that has turned a blind eye on the economic suffering of this region of the country.

Older Mexican origin adults who don’t know where their next meal is going to come from are trusting in God to provide an answer to their problem.

> “Sometimes [the check comes out to] two hundred and fifty, sometimes two hundred. Like all this week there wasn’t any work, but only God can provide during times of need”

> “I leave it to God and out of [nowhere] … before you know it, we have food”

Participants who have no money to buy food find themselves in a difficult situation, but they find strength and comfort in an external higher power. The ability to secure food for themselves and/or their family is no longer in their control, but God’s. Their faith in God allows them to cope with the stressful life event of not having anything to eat by giving them the hope that if they weather through hard times eventually God will provide them with what they need.

As demonstrated by the quotes above many of these older Mexican origin adults with food and empty refrigerators are putting their trust in an external higher power. This does not mean that these participants are fatalistic and doing nothing, while they wait for God's divine intervention. In fact, many of these participants are agents of actions who are fighting to survive in a physically and socially isolating structural environment that is hostile. These participants encapsulate the complexities of spirituality and how their faith in a God can be empowering and disempowering. Their trust in God is feeding their spirit so they can withstand another day, and at the same time their faith causes them not to focus on structural inequalities in the community and for them. To be clear, faith is more than just the constrained and unrealistic binary of empowering or disempowering, faith is both; therefore, the interaction and relationship between the two is very complex (Morris**,** 1986; Treviño, 2006).

Historically, Catholicism was used as a tool of oppression by the Spaniards when they conquered Mexico over five hundred years ago. Indigenous people were killed, raped, enslaved, and forced to convert to Catholicism. They were killed for openly worshiping their indigenous Goddesses and Gods or engaging in traditional spiritual practices. The colonization of indigenous people by Spanish conquistadors resulted in the *mestizaje* (mixing) of different races, cultures, and values, which gave birth to a new race of people, culture, religion, and way of life (Treviño, 2006). Through the *mestizaje* of different world views Christianity was transformed and the people of the new world created a unique form of a cultural religious identity called ethno-Catholicism (Treviño, 2006). Therefore, Catholicism in Mexico is very layered with meaning, which requires us to understand how history, politics, geographical

region, culture, beliefs, race, class, and gender intersect to create Mexicans and their faith (Broyles-Gonzalez, 2002).

One-way researchers have characterized religion is one dimensional. Karl Marx does not take into consideration the complexities of religion when he writes that religion "is the opium of the people" (Marx, 1983, p. 115). Marx uses a metaphor to figuratively illustrate how religion is an opioid drug that provides immediate and temporary relief to the painfully reality of their existence. According to Marx, this highly addictive drug provides an escape to the oppressive conditions people are living in by giving them a false consciousness, happiness, and hope. Religion is an addictive pain killer that tricks people into not focusing on the now, but on the afterlife. Meaning, poor people endure their miserable earthly reality, because they are hallucinating about the glorious next life. In the next life, religion promises a life of riches and eternal bliss. Religion teaches people to be complacent by having them submit to unjust inequalities and inhuman suffering. By having the masses focus on the afterlife it diminishes their will and ability to revolt against the ruthless greedy capitalist that oppress them, because all their focused on is getting their next dose of religion. Therefore, Religion is a tool used by the oppressors to keep the oppressed complacent by giving them the illusion of happiness.

Aldon Morris (1986) challenges Marx's argument on the singular dimensionality of religion by arguing that "Opposition is often present in the same cultural materials that promote submission. Rather than running on parallel tracks, cultures of subordination and cultures of opposition travel crisscrossing routes with frequent collisions and cross-fertilization. Thus much of Black religion speaks simultaneously of overthrowing oppression and rewarding

meek souls in the blissful afterlife" (p. 22). On one hand Morris does agree with Marx that religion does create a culture of submissiveness where people are focused on the afterlife. Religion also plays an important role in the decision of people's life on whither they are going to resist or comply. However, Morris departs from Marx by arguing that a culture of submission co-exists with a culture of opposition. Cultures of opposition spring forth out of oppressive social systems; therefore, they coexist and have always existed whither they lead to collective social action is another question.

In the instance of the Civil Rights movement Morris finds that the oppositional culture that pre-existed within in the Black religious communities and church were critical in organizing for collective action and social justice during the late 1950's and early 1960's. The black church is a religious institution that not only attended to the spiritual needs of the black community it also served many of the other needs of its congregation. The black church provided a temporary refuge from the racism, hostility, and violence of White Supremacy in American society. These religious institutions created a safe space where blacks could talk freely about their dreams, aspirations, racism, oppression, and have their lived experience validated. Through the process of being heard and accepted black people were respected, treated as valuable human beings, and became a part of a religious community. Therefore, the church naturally became the space where black people could come together and collectively organize against the oppressive conditions they lived in. According to Morris, "The black church functioned as the institutional center of the modern civil rights movement" (1986, pg. 4). Religion became the vehicle in which an oppressed people could come together, organize, and revolt against white domination.

In another study Roberto Treviño also demonstrates the complexity of religion. Treviño (2006) explores the role of the Catholic church in the Mexican and Mexican American barrio's (neighborhoods) of Houston, Texas. His research focuses on the twenty century and examined the ways that Catholicism played an important role in the shaping of Mexican American history. Treviño does a brilliant job of demonstrating how Ethno-Catholicism oppressed and empowered Mexican and Mexican Americans. The term "Ethno-Catholicism", refers to the Mexican American way of being Catholic.

Challenging the normalcy of deficit thinking, Treviño argues Ethno-Catholicism is a "form of cultural resistance that gave Tejanos self-respect and confidence to cope with material deprivation and social marginality" (2006, p. 24). Mexicans and Mexican Americans were able to define themselves ethnically and create a community through their religion. Their faith reinforced a sense of group identity and belonging and became a collective way of protesting against a dominate culture. At different times in history the church became a safe place where people could organize for social justice and address the material needs of its parishioners.

Simultaneously, as parishioners are experiencing some freedom from white domination they are also being constrained by the patriarchal system of their religion, culture, and society. Meaning, Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans were being socialized into certain roles and knowing their place in the hierarchy of different systems. One example that Treviño provides is the *quincenera*. A *quiencenera* is an elegant and expensive coming of age party for a young girl who has turned fifteen. Typically, the day begins with a church ceremony where she takes communion and gets the priest's blessings. Followed by pictures, and then later in the

evening an extravagant celebration that includes dinner, a toast, music, and dancing. This ceremony celebrates and reinforces Mexican culture, religion, family, and community. Treviño points out this Mexican cultural custom of celebrating the *quinceanera* "also perpetuated the notion of women's inequality and constrained roles in life as primarily mothers and caretakers- the guardians of home and faith. After all, the custom marked a woman's passage into a clearly patriarchal institution, the Catholic Church, which historically tried to inculcate values of women's submissiveness and proscribed role expectations, sacralizing them through the tradition of the quinceanera" (p. 52). Therefore, the *quinceanera* is simultaneously freeing, expressive, celebratory, and constraining to the individual girl and community.

Treviño and Morris demonstrate how religion can be both oppressive and liberating at the same time or at different times. The black community and the Mexicans living in the barrio's of Houston, Texas were both living in abject poverty due to historical systems of inequality that were put into place to restrict their access to social and economic opportunities and resources. Many brown and black people struggled daily to feed themselves and their family. Even though they could not adequately nourish their bodies, they nourished their spirit. The beauty of faith and spirituality is that it does not require money to grow strong and be resilient, just dedication and determination**.** The painful reality of faith and spirituality is it cannot provide actual sustenance to the body, and the body needs food to grow and thrive.

Borrowing the words of Rosa, the third theme is entitled "Amarranos las tripas" [literal translation: tie up our guts which implies to bear with the hunger]. This theme reveals different levels of food insecurity, which consists of participants eating less and in different ways due to

lack of money and resources. A range exists in the reduction of nutritional intake, varying from individuals adjusting their nutritional intake by eating less or less expensive food to the most extreme simple not eating.

Some of the older Mexican origin adults in this research reported receiving disability, social security, or food stamps, which comes only once a month. Typically, at the beginning of the month, food is abundant, but towards the middle or the end of the month there is no additional money coming in and food options become limited. Therefore, these older adults are adjusting their food consumption patterns in a cyclical manner.

> The first week I do buy her everything that she eats. Cookies, yogurt, [things that she likes] one week, and then the second week I'll buy her less [of those items], and then the following week well there's not enough [to buy anymore], [I'll tell her], "wait sweetie," and, but she…we always have food, but [when it comes to] eating just junk food, just junk food, no. But for my daughter [her things come first], her yogurts, her {Gatorade} that she drinks….I buy her what she likes

Itzel strategizes the way she is going to spend her money and organize her meals throughout the month just like many of the other discussants. Every meal and dollar is stretched, so that there will be enough food for the remainder of the month. Many of these older Mexican origin adults are buying what they view as necessary. Itzel feels it is necessary to buy what her daughter likes to eat and drink, even on a limited budget. This may seem irrational to buy a child their favorite foods, sweets, or in this case "Gatorade", but it is not. Itzel's child is central to the life of her household to the point that her child is influencing what to purchase, and even

how Itzel interprets having or not having food (Hamelin, Beaudry, & Habicht, 2002, p. 127). Itzel just like many other parents just want to see their child happy. Besides it is always nice to live a little bit and treat yourself or your love ones to their *antojos* (cravings).

The simple act of eating becomes complicated for these older Mexican-origin adults who do not have enough money or food resources. To budget for the whole month requires a lot of discipline and self-restraint. These older adults must measure their food intake to ensure that they will have food at the end of the month. Itzel like many other discussants have learned to do without the luxuries of meat, cookies, or eating out to ensure they make it to the first of the next month with food.

Another narrative that appeared in the focus groups, came from participants who did not have their legal documents or had only just submitted their legal papers. These Mexican elders were in an even more precarious situation. For example, Emiliano candidly explained the hard position he found himself in, "the obstacle for me is that it's barley been three years that I've fixed [my legal documents]. They'll start giving me benefits in five years and right now I'm the one struggling with all of the resources for the food" [here in Spanish, the participant says "papa" to say food. In Spanish "papa" means "potato" and it's commonly used in Mexican Spanish to refer to "food" in general].

Emiliano and others like him are not experiencing food insecurity in a cyclical manner, but more in an unpredictable and erratic way. This population does not have the security of a monthly check coming in nor are they receiving any government assistance. Further complicating their situation is the lack of regular work. The work they find is irregular and

unpredictable, so they have no income stability and those who cannot find work are left with no recourse, but to go hungry**.** Emiliano and others like him live in a constant state of precariousness because they do not know if they will have work the next day, when their next check will come, or where their next meal will come from. They are literally living day to day.

Another way of coping with not having enough money to buy food is simply not eating so that what food there is can feed the family. This more sever adaptation is frequently gendered. For example, take Maria's words, "My husband laughs [at me], because I tell my kids, "Eat at school as much as you can, so when you already get to the house, you're not hungry anymore" (participant laughing)…… There are times that I won't eat until everyone gets home, …that my husband got home from work, that my kids got back from school".

Maria's narrative is representative of the women who have positioned their children and partners before themselves. Their needs are secondary to the needs of their family. The actions of these women reveal that it is their primary responsibility to take care of their family even if that means that they have to sacrifice themselves. By making the sacrifice of going without food for themselves these mothers are protecting their loves ones from experiencing the gnawing pains of hunger. Historically, women have been assigned the job of caretaker of the family and home. Part of taking care of the family is feeding everyone, which takes a lot of effort and involves planning, acquiring, preparing, cooking, and provisioning the food. As the primary caregivers of everyone in their household they are highly aware of what food is in the refrigerator and cabinets. Multiple times throughout the day these women are deciding what

and how much their family is going to eat. As Maria's words demonstrate, for many women participants this meant feeding everyone else before feeding themselves.

During difficult times women are often the ones who are confronted with making tough decisions about who is going to eat and how much. As demonstrated by the words of Martha, "It's very difficult… "what am I going to [cook]. If I don't have anything?" And having to make something for them because when the kids come from school, they get home hungry, and at the very least you have them some beans, tortillas". Martha and her partner are the sole caretakers of their three grandchildren. They receive a monthly social security check and $16 dollars in food stamps. Her words are representative of the concerns these women have about how they are going to put food in the tummies of their little ones when there is no food in the house. The uncertainty of how a woman is going to feed her family creates a tension between the responsibility of taking care of the family and the lack of money and resources. These families just do not have enough money or resources to feed everyone, so mothers and grandmothers are choosing not to eat and enduring the pain of hunger**.** Through the sacrifice and endurance of these women their little ones are eating. Children are literally and figuratively surviving because of the women in their life.

A vital resource that these primary care takers identified is the free breakfast and lunch programs offered to their children at school. Many women who are taking care of little ones spoke of the importance of their children eating at school. Researchers have documented that food insecurity is associated with developmental and health consequences in boys and girls (Jyoti et al., 2005).

Schools are a safe place where parents are not asked for their social security number, age, or what type of insurance coverage they have to receive food. Mothers in the Penitas *colonia* spoke about receiving food from the school. As Indira shares "Sometimes when I go to the school I bring [home] the food from the school. (crying/sobbing)…Yes, I bring it for her because I get [home] earlier than she does. (crying/sobbing/exhales)…. . If the school did not provide Indira with food to take home, there would be no food at home for her child to eat. Colonia schools play an important role in mitigating hunger amongst the children while bearing witness to the consequences of material deprivation and food inequalities.

A few of the women shared that they are not eating to make sure their adult children and grandchildren are feed and full.

> "Because the kids are first. (Laughs sofetly) If they eat, it's like you have eaten already. It makes you happy to see that they're satisfied., right, well with that you're happy already. It's difficult to have them ask you, "I'm hungry," and ..if you don't have anything …" Barbara

> "Even if I don't get food when they come over. I am happy that all children together. I am really happy they are with me." Eva

> "Well you can endure it [referring to not eating], sweetie, but we can't leave the kids nor the grandkids without food." Zenaida

These mothers demonstrate that even when their children are adults the responsibility of feeding the family does not go away. Even in old age these mothers are sacrificing themselves

for the wellbeing of their family. These older Mexican origin women express a sense of duty, accomplishment, and joy in being able to provide their love ones with the essential nourishment they need.

These mothers are creative and resourceful, because they are making a way out of no way. They are not passive victims paralyzed by multiple interesting forms of oppression. While it is true that they are navigating systems of oppression these women are making choices and taking action. These women are doing everything they can, but they do not have enough money or resources available to them, so they are forced to sacrifice their own health to protect the health of their love ones.

In addition to not eating or eating less so their families could eat, many *colonia* older adults skipped meals or did not eat because there was simply no food. This overarching theme "Amarranos las tripas" [literal translation: tie up our guts which implies bear with the hunger] captures the bravery and honesty of those older adults who shared that they are lacking food and experiencing hunger. As illustrated by the quotes below.

> "Amarranos las tripas" [literal translation: tie up our guts which implies to bear with the hunger] Rosa

> "… you don't make the three meals like you should. You try to make at least one or two…" Cecilia

> "sometimes I just eat one meal…. In the evening, you don't eat dinner" Silvia

"I have [had to cut back on meals], because… I receive few food stamps every month and [I only receive] seventy [dollars] of check per month as well." Denise

Rosa's blunt and forceful words illustrate her unwavering determination to withstand a difficult situation. Her words are illustrative of many other older Mexican origin adults; nothing is going to stop them from doing what they need to do to survive and make a life- not even hunger. Many of these older Mexican origin adults learned at a very young age that giving up is not an option and their only choice is survival. Perseverance is a skill and cultural asset that many of these respondents learned in Mexico or/and from their parents.

Throughout the different focus groups many of the older adults talked about growing up in Mexico. In their childhood narratives there was no mention of getting assistance from the state or federal government, but all of them talked about working at a young age, some as young as five. As Alma shares "…we were nine in my family. My dad abanded all of us right, and just like her {mom} I was raised in a farm and in the city. But when we were small we would go work in the fields, to harvest the corn and all of that….We worked so we could eat, and we were all small." Alma like many in the focus group did not have the privilege of going to school and learning in the classroom. Their classroom was the real world where they learned many valuable lessons, such as perseverance. These older adults were forced to grow up fast, because they had to find a way to take care of themselves and/or family. Working and making sure they feed themselves or/and family are adult responsibilities. Since childhood many of these older adults have been persisting despite all the hardships, poverty, age, or structural barriers. Persistence is a cultural asset that can get you through difficult times, like when there is no food to eat. Although hunger has not stopped these older adults it is slowly killing them,

because their bodies are being denied the essential nutrients they need to stay healthy. Eating one meal a day speaks to the degree and severity of food insecurity and inequalities.

The quotes above also reveal that these older adults are experiencing hunger intermittently. Meaning they are either skipping meals throughout the day or not eating at all the whole day. Their comments reveal that they have worked hard their whole life yet they are still fighting for sustenance and existence. For many who do not have enough money for all their necessities, they must make tough decisions on how they are going to use their limited cash, as demonstrated by Pancha's candid words.

> You see...like how I was telling you, right sometimes the bills some out to be high right, so, …you have to limit yourself MORE on the groceries, right,…in order to pay the bills as well, why? For lack of money. We are now living in a very [Bad] economy, right, very ….for lack of money, right, that well we can't go to the store to buy a lot right because you can't. you can't right…. We would love too, but you can't you know, because…the bills sometimes are high. Well that happens to me you know, it happens to me.

Just like Pancha, many of participants expressed that, they felt compelled, or had no other option, but to pay their rent and electricity first. Their last expense was food, which was bought with whatever money was left over, if there is any money left. As another participant said, "food I can figure out- someone will bring me food—I can't rent or lights."

Many of these older adults seemed unconcerned about not having food or adjusting their nutritional intake, because for many of them their situation seemed temporary and/or

manageable, although they were experiencing high levels of food insecurity. Most of the discussants trust God will intervene and provide.

Survival Strategy

La Familia in Action

The focus group discussions reveal that all these older Mexican origin adults are employing a combination of survival strategies to navigate food inequalities. The survival strategies that emerged from the qualitative data comprised of changing food consumption patterns, portioning food, buying inexpensive food, using coupons, stocking up on consumable food, utilizing public and private assistant programs, such as food stamps, food bank, adult day care, engaging in the informal economy by making food plates, tamales, and collecting cans or metals, and relying on their informal social support network. I will be discussing the last strategy below.

An individual informal social support network includes family, friends, neighbors, church sisters and brothers. I will be focusing on the role of the family. These older adults revealed that they rely heavily on their family members in different ways to ensure that they have something to eat. The quotes below demonstrate the various ways family members are intervening and helping their love ones fight off food insecurity.

> "..My sons also come over every Sunday and each one of them brings me something small, and we'll have breakfast there….I'll have left overs and I'll save it for another day….That's why I like for them to come over.(laughing after saying

this)" MariaRosa

"the youngest one comes and opens the refrigerator and he looks for and finds what we need….We don't suffer because my kids help us " Evelyn

"I don't worry about the bills, right. Because ever since Elvira moved in with me, she pays for the water and electricity" Guadalupe

"yes, they also come and help me. Every time they go grocery shopping they ask me, "Mommy what do you want us to bring from the store, tell us what you want so we can bring it for you" Alejandra

"right now… the cars won't work…and the oldest Alex, sometimes she takes us to do our grocery shopping and all of that." Camelia

The voices of these parents illustrate the strength, agency, cooperation of the family, and the creation of community. For many of the respondents in the focus group the family plays an instrumental role in preventing and/or minimizing food insecurity. The family support ranges from sharing food, providing a ride to the market, buying groceries, to children fully supporting their elders. Despite the lack of access to resources, material deprivation, isolation, and social economic exclusion, these families pull together and combine resources as much as they can to avoid food insecurity.

Equally important, the data also reveals that Mexican families are not homogenous or monolithic; meaning that there is not just one family experience**.** The narratives of these elders capture the different kinds of support they are receiving from their love ones. The help these older Mexican origin adults are getting varies from consistent, occasionally, to no help. The majority of these older adults are receiving assistance from their family in a consistent and reliable manner as expressed by Elsa, "My daughters get to the house, "Here mom, I bought you food." I don't worry about food, sweetie, because thank God we are 7 in the family, all of our daughters give me [food], and I have been widowed 8 years". Elsa has a daughter living with her that assists her by paying the electricity and water bill. Her other daughters help with shopping, food, and even sometimes transportation. Elsa's narrative is representative of many of the discussants that expressed their children help them regularly and prevent them from going hungry or suffering. Elsa also has multiple children helping in different ways.

Others share that they are receiving help from their love ones occasionally**.** As Gabriela states, "well I bring the food…and buy it when I am healthy….but when I can't buy and that I'm really sick my daughter goes". Gabriela is married; they receive a disability check, food stamps, and are accessing the food bank. Just like Gabriela some discussants shared the same narrative of receiving assistance from their children when an unexpected circumstance arises, such as become ill, needing a ride, or being short on money. This means that these parents are not relying on their children on a regular basis, but sporadically and as needed. The help they are receiving from their children is irregular, yet vital at the same time.

Some of the discussants shared that they are not receiving any help from their love ones, because their loved ones are unable to help. Alma captures this sentiment with her narrative, "well they have their responsibilities, their obligations with their family and well… they have to have money for their family, and I can't get mad because they don't support me, but well they also have their obligations, their responsibilities, you can't rely on or think that they have to help you". Alma is representative of the mothers who are highly aware of the constraints of not having enough money to help others. These parents do not want to put their grown children in a compromising position where they must choose between paying for their own family needs or their parents. These older adults value family, even when having a supportive family does not translate into material support. This does not mean that they are not receiving other kinds of aid from their adult children, such as emotional, companionship, physical, or psychological. A very few of these older Mexican origin adults stated that a family disagreement occurred, and their adult children no longer helped them or they did not need their children's assistance.

Family also includes those who live in Mexico. Family bonds do not cease at the border; some of these families transcend manmade national borders by maintaining family ties by sending cash remittances, food, clothing, visiting, and communicating with their love ones in Mexico. As illustrated by Betty, ["We limit ourselves] from a lot of things [to help parents in Mexico]. Well we're limited in almost everything, because even if we wouldn't like to, their need over there is greater than ours and there…and because of their age". Betty feels responsible for taking care of her parents who live in Mexico not only because they are here parents, but also because the conditions in Mexico are worse and their need is greater.

As demonstrated by the quotes above food security is not an individual matter, but a family matter. In a country where individualism is valued and the dominate narrative is the individual working hard to pull themselves up from their bootstraps to make it, these Mexican origin adults are creating an opposing narrative of strength in unity, family, and community. The fight against material deprivation is a communal struggle not an individual one.

There are many reasons why these adult children are helping their parents; one reason is because of economic necessity. Many of these older Mexican origin adults live in poverty and they are utilizing all the resources they have available to them. One of those vital resources is family. As demonstrated by the quotes above the family can help in many different ways regardless if they all live under one roof or reside in different homes. Family members are pulling their resources together and sharing, which is the difference between these older adults having something to eat or not.

In addition to economic necessity, researchers have documented the cultural importance of *la familia* (the family) is to Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans (Marin & Marin, 1995). Adult children who *cumplir* (comply) with their obligations to their parents simultaneously honor their elders and maintain their cultural norms (Crist et al., 2009). Often in Mexican and Mexican American families children are taught to respect their elders and when they become adults it will be their turn and responsibility to take care of their parents. Josephina captures this cultural norm of duty when she shares what happens in her home, "As soon as they come over, the very first thing he says, " Son, we are lacking this," and thanks to God my sons, all of them respond….. I tell him, "don't tell my daughter in-law this or

something," no he says, "We gave them an education, we supported them, and now they have to take responsibility for us". Josephina and her husband receive $120 dollars in food stamps, which "buys them food for the first two week of the month". They are also accessing the food bank, yet they still fall short in meeting all their necessities. Their children step in and help them out with whatever needs they may have, which includes food. Therefore, *la familia* is both a form of social support and an obligation (Smith-Morris et al., 2012). Josephina's words also reveal the possibility of family tensions and the burden of helping your parents or family.

Another reason these adult children are helping their elder parents is because their parents do not receive enough aid, or they do not qualify for private and/or public assistance programs. Many of the older Mexican origin adults who do meet the eligibility requirements are thankful for what they receive, but it is just insufficient. Josephina's experience is illustrative of many of the other participants whose food stamps only last until the middle of the month. While other older adults are disqualified for aid because of their age, type of health insurance, and/or lacking a social security number. Therefore, many older adults are reaching out to the only support they have available to them, their family.

Overall, in this study *la familia* is essential to mitigating food insecurity. *La familia*, is a cultural asset that is moderating the effect of hunger among this older vulnerable population. The reason why *la familia* is stepping in and acting as a buffer to food insecurity is for various reason, such as economic necessity, cultural values, and lack of access or not receiving enough aid to private and public assistance programs**.** The qualitative data also reveals that more daughters are assisting their parents, which is not a surprise since women are often tasked with

the job of taking care of others. Equally important, a good number of sons are caring for the people who raised them. Men are often not thought about as care takers, but the narratives of these elders demonstrate that sons too, take their responsibility of caring for their parents just a seriously as their daughters. The implication of children taking care of or assisting their parents goes further than the family unit. Adult children who are fighting to make it are unfairly given the responsibility of taken care of their mother and/or father, which can easily become a burden and/or stressor for a family that is just making it or struggling to stay afloat.

Barrier

Geographical Landscape A Barrier to Accessing Food

As these older Mexican origin adults shared their experiences with food they identified many barriers, which included illness, injury, age, lack of information, policies, unemployment and underemployment, undocumented status, policing, and the physical environment of the *colonias*. For the purpose of this paper, I will only be focusing on the latter the geographical structure of the *colonias*. To understand the challenges these older Mexican origin adults face in accessing food it is vitally important to look at the geographical space these residents live in.

Researchers have shown that the environment that you live in impacts your health and behaviors. To better understand the geographical landscape of a particular environment the history of a place and space must be acknowledged and not ignored. The geographical constructions of the *colonias* are not natural or accidental. As researchers have demonstrated the *colonias* originated out of the 1920's and they were specially designed to segregate, oppress, and exploit poor working class Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans. The

colonias are historical and contemporary rural racially segregated communities. The *colonias* of southwest Texas are a reflection of the race and class inequalities in the United States (Reese, 2019).

In these places of historical disinvestment and neglect *colonia* residents are making food choices. These older Mexican origin adults are making these choices based on what is locally available to them in their surrounding environment. The existence of food outlets and resources in a particular area is not only dependent on the physical geographical environment, but also on whether the individuals are informed about food resources, if they can access those resources, and how they feel about accessing public or private assistance programs for food. For the purpose of this paper, I am going to focus on the physical structure of the place. Under the theme of the geographical landscape several subthemes were identified: (a) transportation issues; (b) inadequate food outlets, such as a grocery store; (c) higher cost of food; and (d) water.

In each one of the different *colonias* all of the participants agreed that you need a car in order to get to the grocery store, because the local grocery store is just too far away to walk. Tomas explains**,** "I mean, how could you go out? Right? You really can't walk far enough before you get tired…..". It is hard to run a city bus route when there are no paved roads, sidewalks, or street signs. This geographical challenge is even more treacherous for an older adult walking in the heat and carrying bags of groceries home. Consequently, having a car becomes critical to those who live in the *colonia*, because public transportation does not exist in these areas.

Living in a neglected rural isolated area with no personal vehicle or public transportation means that accessing food resources, becomes a much more difficult task. Yolanda pointedly captures this sentiment when she says to another discussant, "Yes you drive. You drive here and there, but for those of us who don't drive, we 're just hoping for someone to drive us around." Yolanda's narrative is representative of those participants who do not have a car and are dependent on others due to the absence of public transportation (Quandt et al., 2001). These older adults do not have the convenience of just driving to the grocery store on their way home to pick up a piece of meat, a box of cereal, or beans. Nor the luxury of having someone readily available whenever they need or want to go the supermarket, food bank, doctors, or pharmacy.

Colonia residents who do not have a personal vehicle have had to be creative and develop survival strategies for accessing food, such as asking someone they know or paying for a ride (Rees, 2019). These older adults are not only concerned about what food they are going to buy and the cost. They have additional transportation factors that they must consider, such as how they are going to get to the grocery store, the store's location, and how much the ride will cost, which may easily translate into added stress (Rees, 2019). Researchers have also found not having easily available and reliable private or public transportation not only restricts a person's access to the grocery store, but other food resources, such as food banks or applying for food stamps (Quandt et al., 2006). As demonstrated by Eufemia's response to the question, if she has access to food banks, "…first of all, I don't have someone…., who can give me transportation, and another thing is that I don't even know [where to go]."

For those who do have a car it is a blessing and a curse. An individual can freely move around and go to the grocery store when they want to without depending on anyone else. The problem some of these residents face is that they do not have enough money to put gas in the car or maintain their vehicle, as demonstrated by the quotes below:

> "Right now we are [waiting for money] to come in to pay the rent, to put gas in the car so we can move about" -Maria

> "It's difficult because sometimes you don't have any [money] not even to pay for medications, right, and at the end of the month you are sometimes already without any [money] to pay for gas and all of that" —Rosa

> "The greatest concern is only when our vehicle stops working, right now we're fearful that it'll stop working. We try not to leave the house so often with the vehicle, so we won't have to [use it]." Pamela

All of these older adults have a car, but because of the cost of maintaining and running a car, all of them sit parked in front of their homes. Rosa highlights the hardship of the end of the month when she does not have the cash for gas or medications, while Maria captures the economic uncertainty of everyday. Pamela speaks to the fragility of food security. Yes, Pamela and her partner have food, but their food security is dependent on their car, which is unreliable. Pamela is just one step away from food insecurity and the threat of their car not working threatens this older couples ability to be food secure. In a rural segregated community

that lacks basic infrastructure and public transportation the threat of not having a working car is a threat to an older adults mobility, independence, food access and security.

Accessing a grocery store is a real geographical problem in the *colonias*, especially for those residents who do not have a local grocery store in their area. Focus group participants were specifically asked, if they have a local grocery store in their area where they can buy food and residents from Alton and San Carlos said yes. In contrast, a great number of residents from Penietas and Progreso said, "All the stores are far away. No stories here", which was typically followed by "We need a big store. An HEB, something like that". *Colonia* residents in Penietas and Progresso do not have access to low-cost nutritious food in their immediate environment. They are forced to drive longer distances to get access to affordable groceries.

Not having access to a local supermarket only further complicates the lives of *colonia* residents. For residents who do not have a car they are not just asking for a ride to the local grocery store, they are asking for a ride into the next *colonia* or town. Margarita captures the drawbacks of food access inequalities when she says, "I'd like for a grocery store to be open here in the community. Because…. sometimes …., you limit yourself with the gas, if you don't have enough gas to go into town, right…to bring food that you need. And there's sometimes that you limit yourself to make *miguitas* [small portion of foods] by itself…". Margarita's narrative illustrates how material deprivation is compounded by the geographical space she lives in, a rural racially segregated community. Rural racially segregated communities are not new they have existed since the founding of this country, nor is the purposeful disinvestment of

community of colors.   This is why I am not using the term food desert; because it does not take into account how the social structure influences where a person lives and their food access.

Margarita navigates these food access inequalities by modifying her food intake. By making smaller meals she can stretch out her food until she has the money for gas and groceries a common practice among many of other colonial residents. The difference is that in areas with no big supermarket they are paying more in gas, time, and energy. Additionally, in these *colonias* it is common that residents have a limited selection and pay higher prices for their groceries (Kaufman, 1998). As illustrated by Sebastian who states, "…. if you go to this little store, with fifty dollars you only get two little bags, that you don't even know in what you spent it on because, because if they charge you for a juice, like over there, in the big stores, it's about one twenty-five ($1.25), here they sell it to you for three fifty ($3.50)". The food choice of these residents is constrained by the physical structure of their community.

Through the focus group interviews participants from Penitas, Progreso, and Alton voiced concerns and frustration about that the cost of groceries rising. Rosalyn accurately captures this sentiment when she says, "Financially well, only that you have to plan more and look at products because every time you go to the store they cost more, the cooking oil, beans cost more and everything else, and I think that everyone is in the same situation trying to find a way to make their paycheck last, right, so we can pay for everything that needs to be paid".   All of these older adults are trying to figure out a way to stretch their dollars, because there is just not enough money. The low-costing staple food items that these older Mexican-origin adults regularly buy are more expensive, while the money they are receiving from work or fixed cash

aid remains the same. These elders were already working with a limited budget for food, and with the prices of groceries going up they may have to adjust what they are consuming. Typically, when people do not have a lot of money to buy groceries, they cut out what is expensive or does not last long, such as meat and fresh fruits and vegetables.

In addition to transportation and food access restraints, *colonia* residents face another unique challenge that is very particular to the space and place that they live. As Gloria explains, "I don't have a vehicle; it's very difficult to go to the store, or go get water". Gloria's voice is speaking for many of the residents who live in the *colonias* who do not have access to clean drinking water. This means that many residents are buying water to drink, clean, and cook their food. Clean water is essential to the human body and is crucial for preparing and cooking healthy food. Gloria is not only worried about getting to the grocery story, but also getting access to clean water. She must have enough money to pay for her ride, gas, and water. For those older adults who are in a similar situation as Gloria accessing clean drinking water becomes a challenge due to the limited transportation options that exist in many of these *colonias*. For those who have a car they must have enough money for gas, because if there is no gas, there is no water (Jespen, 2014, p. 1042).

Despite the investment and expansion of the water structure in the *colonias* of South Texas residents still do not have access to safe drinking water at home (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 2015). Jepson and Brown's (2014) qualitative research study in the *colonias* of Hidalgo captures the water experience of the residents. Jepson and Brown (2014) conducted two group interviews and 38 semi-structured household interviews in 10 different neighborhoods. Many

of the residents said the tap water (*agua de la llave*) smelled of chlorine or sewage, and had a bad taste (p. 1042). The water not only had an unacceptable smell and taste, some residents also stated they "saw dirt, trash, earth worms, trees, and little *diablitos* (little devils) in the tap water" (p. 1042). Overall, the participants in this study believed that the tap water was not safe to drink.

Jepson and Brown's study not only captures the experiences of *colonia* residents they also gives the reader a history lesson on water rights in The Valley. The authors document how in the early 1900's white elite agriculture farmers formed Water Control and Improvement Districts (WCIDs), which worked to ensure that white elite agricultural farmers got water rights and clean water for their crops, while the Mexicans working in the fields and living in nearby *colonias* had no water rights or safe drinking water. The elites who followed reproduced the oppressive power structure endemic in South Texas by reinforcing or repurposing old institutions of inequality (Martin, 1998; Jespen & Brown, 2014). Jepsen and Brown "describe how local elites exercised hegemony control of the law-the most object form state power- to significantly restrict the political space in which *colonia* residents could demand domestic water service" (p. 1038). By changing the state law to exclude *colonias* land from WCIDs (p.1038), local elites were able to legally prohibit *colonia* residents from influencing who gets water, when, and how, which ultimately denied them any water rights.

Today, a century later- Mexican *colonia* residents are still excluded from water governance (Jepson & Brown, 2014). The responsibility of providing safe drinking water has shifted from the state to the individual. Since many *colonia* residents feel that the tap water at

home is not safe to drink they are buying clean drinking water from water vending machines. The act of obtaining safe drinking water is not only costing them monetarily, but also in time and labor. Jepson and Brown (2014) highlight all the labor that goes into the process of getting safe drinking water and some of the challenges *colonia* residents face. One challenge that some of the residents reported having was carrying the water jug after it has been filled (p. 1042). Each water jug "weighs approximately 42 pounds" (p. 1042). A challenge and burden for many older adults that have a chronic illness, physical impairment, or have simple become weaker due to old age.

Food security is more than just money. To fully understand food security or insecurity you have to take into consideration the whole experience, which includes the history and geographical space of a given area. The history of the *colonias* reveals racial residential segregation and the purposeful disinvestment of these communities. The way a community has been segregated and neglected impacts the everyday challenges in the local food system (Rees, 2019, p. 45). The geography of a food landscape includes the time it takes to get to the grocery store, if the streets have sidewalks or paved roads, does public transportation exists, and a person's social network (Rees, 2019). The quotes above clearly illustrate that the geographical landscape of the *colonias* are a barrier to food security and perpetuates food inequalities. These food inequalities did not just spring up one day they have existed, changing, maintained, and perpetuated for hundreds of years. The bigger question is what are we going to do to end food inequalities?

Conclusion

The argument that supermarkets do not exist in certain areas, is because the residents cannot afford the groceries ignores the social structure and history of colonialism, slavery, and racial segregation in America. To understand the present situation in the *colonias* of South Texas you have to know the history of the people and space. People and places do not exist in vacuums separated from history or a social structure. In the United States we live in a white supremacist social structure that has existed since the founding of this country. In America racism permeates every aspect of life, from where a person lives to whether or not a grocery store will exist in a community.

Historians and sociologist have documented the origins of the *colonias* to racially and economically segregated communities known as “Mexican Labor Camps” of the 1920’s. Historically, these communities have been denied resources, such as roads, sidewalks, transportation, clean water, and access to food. The legacy of intentional disinvestment and exclusion are still alive and present today. A lot of literature on food insecurities documents the individual behavior and does not take into consideration the social structure and history of a people and space. I have worked hard to honor the humanity of these older Mexican origin adults who participated in this research and shift the gaze from one that focuses on individual choices, or community, or cultural deficiencies to one that focuses on the social structure, and the race and class inequalities that constrain individuals and communities. Future food inequality research needs to look at what policies and practices perpetuate food insecurity, such as no grocery store existing in an area. Future research can also examine why or why not *colonia* residents are protesting, resisting, and organizing for change.

By centering the voices and experiences of these elders I found that it did not matter if you were born America, had been in America for twenty years, or had just immigrated to the *colonias* of south Texas- they were all struggling to survive. This makes me wonder about their children of the elders we interviewed. Many of these older Mexican origin adults want better and more for their children, who will one day be in the situations they are currently in. In places of extreme poverty, under-served by the state and federal infrastructure, and exploited for hundreds of years, it is so hard to escape and break the cycle of poverty. What about the intergenerational wealth accumulated by Texans during the move to factory farming and manufacturing? Residents in the *colonias* of the Valley have been denied access to that wealth. They have been denied the American dream in spite of the fact that they built the infrastructure that exists and their labor, blood, and sweat feeds many American families. The survival strategies used to survive in spite of food insecurity was different for each person or family, but there were overlapping similarities among the older adults we spoke with, such as finding support in family and community. Yes these older Mexican adults are struggling, but they still persevered and helped one another. Family and community is not a deficit, but an asset. The rich qualitative data that collected for this study provided unique insight into different levels of food insecurity and the strategies used to navigate lack of food or hunger.

References

Alaimo, K., Briefel, R. R., Frongillo Jr, E. A., & Olson, C. M. (1998). Food insufficiency exists in the United States: results from the third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES III). *American journal of public health*, *88*(3), 419-426.

Arcury, T. A., Quandt, S. A., Bell, R. A., McDonald, J., & Vitolins, M. Z. (1998). Barriers to nutritional well-being for rural elders: Community experts' perceptions. *The Gerontologist*, *38*(4), 490-498.

Arizmendi, L. G., & Ortiz, L. (2004). Neighborhood and community organizing in colonias: A case

study in the development and use of promotoras. *Journal of Community Practice*, *12*(1-2), 23-35.

Barrera, M. (1979). Race and Class in the Southwest.

Barton, J., Marquez, R., Perlmeter, E. R., & Sobel-Blum, E. (2015). *Las colonias in the 21st century: Progress along the Texas-Mexico border* (No. 13). Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.

Bassford, T. L. (1995). Health status of Hispanic elders. *Clinics in geriatric medicine*, *11*(1), 25-38.

Bernal, D. D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative inquiry*, *8*(1), 105-126.

Betts, D. C., Slottje, D. J., & Vargas-Garcia, J. (1994). *Crisis on the Rio Grande: Poverty, unemployment, and economic development on the Texas-Mexico border*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (1997). Rethinking racism: Toward a structural interpretation. *American sociological review*, 465-480.

Borjas, G. J. (2001). Welfare reform and immigration. *The new world of welfare*, 369-385.

Campbell, C. C. (1991). Food insecurity: a nutritional outcome or a predictor variable?. *The Journal of nutrition*, *121*(3), 408-415.

CATHOLICISM, I. (2002). YOLANDA BROYLES-GONZÁLEZ. *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*, 117.

Chávez, N., Telleen, S., & Kim, Y. O. R. (2007). Food insufficiency in urban Latino families. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, *9*(3), 197-204.

Cleaveland, C. (2011). 'In this country, you suffer a lot': Undocumented Mexican immigrant experiences. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1473325011409475.

Collins, P. H. (2002). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. routledge.

Coleman-Jensen, A., Rabbitt, M., Gregory, C., & Singh, A. (2021). Household food security in the United States in 2013. *USDA-ERS Economic Research Report*, (298).

Council, H. A. (2013). Housing in the border colonias. *Retrieved from Washington, DC: http://www. ruralhome. org/storage/documents/rpts_pubs/ts10_border_colonias. pdf [Google Scholar]*.

Crist, J. D., McEwen, M. M., Herrera, A. P., Kim, S. S., Pasvogel, A., & Hepworth, J. T. (2009). Caregiving burden, acculturation, familism, and Mexican American elders' use of home care services. *Research and Theory for Nursing Practice*, *23*(3), 165-180.

Critelli, F. M. (2008). The impact of September 11th on immigrants in the United States. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, *6*(2), 141-167.

Davies, S. (1993). Are coping strategies a cop out?. *IDS bulletin*, *24*(4), 60-72.

Davies, C. S., & Holz, R. K. (1992). Settlement evolution of 'colonias' along the US-Mexico border: The case of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. *Habitat International*, *16*(4), 119-142.

De Genova, N. P. (2002). Migrant" illegality" and deportability in everyday life. *Annual review of anthropology*, 419-447.

De León, A. (1993). *Mexican Americans in Texas: A brief history*. Harlan Davidson.

Diaz, T., & Bui, N. H. (2017). Subjective well-being in Mexican and Mexican American women: The role of acculturation, ethnic identity, gender roles, and perceived social support. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *18*(2), 607-624.

Donato, K. M., Massey, D. S., & Wagner, B. (2006, January). The chilling effect: Public service usage by Mexican migrants to the United States. In *Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, Los Angeles (CA)*.

Donelson, A. J., & Esparza, A. X. (Eds.). (2010). *The colonias reader: Economy, housing, and public health in US-Mexico border colonias*. University of Arizona Press.

Ensrud, K. E., Duong, T. U., Cauley, J. A., Heaney, R. P., Wolf, R. L., Harris, E., & Cummings, S. R. (2000). Low fractional calcium absorption increases the risk for hip fracture in women with low calcium intake. *Annals of internal medicine*, *132*(5), 345-353.

Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. (1996). *Texas Colonias: A Thumbnail Sketch of the Conditions, Issues, Challenges and Opportunities.* https://www.dallasfed.org/~/media/documents/cd/pubs/colonias.pdf

Fontenot, K., Singelmann, J., Slack, T., Siordia, C., Poston Jr, D. L., & Saenz, R. (2010). Understanding falling poverty in the poorest places: An examination of the experience of the Texas Borderland and Lower Mississippi Delta, 1990–2000. *Journal of Poverty*, *14*(2), 216-236.

Fronczek, P. (2005, August). *Income, Earnings, and Poverty From the 2004 American Community Survey. US Census Burau*. https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2005/acs/acs-01.pdf

Grove, N. J., & Zwi, A. B. (2006). Our health and theirs: forced migration, othering, and public health. *Social science & medicine*, *62*(8), 1931-1942.

Hamelin, A. M., Beaudry, M., & Habicht, J. P. (2002). Characterization of household food insecurity in Quebec: food and feelings. *Social science & medicine*, *54*(1), 119-132.

Hancock, T. U. (2005). Cultural competence in the assessment of poor Mexican families in the rural southeastern United States. *Child Welfare*, *84*(5), 689.

Hancock, T. U. (2007). Sin Papeles Undocumented Mexicanas in the Rural United States. *Affilia*, *22*(2), 175-184.

Hanna, D. L. (1996). Third World Texas: NAFTA, State Law, and Environmental Problems Facing Texas Colonias. Saint Mary's Law Journal.(Westlaw website).

Harvey, M. H. (2011). Welfare reform and household survival: the interaction of structure and network strength in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. *Journal of Poverty*, *15*(1), 43-64.

Harvey, M. H., & Pickering, K. A. (2010). Color-blind welfare reform or new cultural racism? Evidence from rural Mexican-and Native-American communities. *Research in Rural Sociology and Development*, *15*, 61-79.

Heflin, C., London, A. S., & Scott, E. K. (2011). Mitigating Material Hardship: The Strategies Low-Income Families Employ to Reduce the Consequences of Poverty*. *Sociological inquiry*, *81*(2), 223-246.

Harvey, M., Summers, G. F., Pickering, K., & Richards, P. (2002). The short-term impacts of welfare reform in persistently poor rural areas. *Rural dimensions of welfare reform*, 375-410.

Jepson, W., & Brown, H. L. (2014). 'If no gasoline, no water': privatizing drinking water quality in South Texas colonias. *Environment and Planning A*, *46*(5), 1032-1048.

Jyoti, D. F., Frongillo, E. A., & Jones, S. J. (2005). Food insecurity affects school children's academic performance, weight gain, and social skills. *The Journal of nutrition*, *135*(12), 2831-2839.

Kasper, J., Gupta, S. K., Tran, P., Cook, J. T., & Meyers, A. F. (2000). Hunger in legal immigrants in California, Texas, and Illinois. *American Journal of Public Health*, *90*(10), 1629.

Katiria Perez, G., & Cruess, D. (2014). The impact of familism on physical and mental health among Hispanics in the United States. *Health psychology review*, *8*(1), 95-127.

Kim, K., & Frongillo, E. A. (2007). Participation in food assistance programs modifies the relation

of food insecurity with weight and depression in elders. *The Journal of nutrition*, *137*(4), 1005-1010.

Klesges, L. M., Pahor, M., Shorr, R. I., Wan, J. Y., Williamson, J. D., & Guralnik, J. M. (2001). Financial difficulty in acquiring food among elderly disabled women: results from the Women's Health and Aging Study. *American Journal of Public Health*, *91*(1), 68.

Langellier, B. A., Chaparro, M. P., Sharp, M., Birnbach, K., Brown, E. R., & Harrison, G. G. (2012). Trends and determinants of food insecurity among adults in low-income households in California. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, *7*(4), 401-413.

Lamont, M., & Thévenot, L. (2000). Rethinking comparative cultural sociology. *Repertoires of Evaluation*, *8*.

Lee, J. S., & Frongillo, E. A. (2001). Nutritional and health consequences are associated with food insecurity among US elderly persons. *The Journal of nutrition*, *131*(5), 1503-1509.

Lewonski, S. (1997). Elderly Legal Immigrants and Welfare Reform: An Analysis of the Effects of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. *Kan. JL & Pub. Pol'y*, *7*, 53.

Lobao, L., & Saenz, R. (2002). Spatial Inequality and Diversity as an Emerging Research Area*.

Rural Sociology, *67*(4), 497-511.

Locher, J. L., Ritchie, C. S., Roth, D. L., Baker, P. S., Bodner, E. V., & Allman, R. M. (2005). Social isolation, support, and capital and nutritional risk in an older sample: ethnic and gender differences. *Social science & medicine*, *60*(4), 747-761.

Maril, R. L. (1989). *The Poorest of Americans: The Mexican Americans of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Marin, G., & Marin, B. V. (1991). *Research with Hispanic populations*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Martin, P. (1998). On the frontier of globalization: development and discourse along the Rio Grande. *Geoforum*, *29*(3), 217-236.

Marx, K. (1983). *The portable Karl Marx.* (E. Kamenka, Ed.) Viking Penguin.

Massey, D. S. (2007). *Categorically unequal: The American stratification system*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Massey, D. S., & Riosmena, F. (2010). Undocumented migration from Latin America in an era of rising US enforcement. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *630*(1), 294-321.

McIntosh, W. A., Shifflett, P. A., & Picou, J. S. (1989). Social support, stressful events, strain, dietary intake, and the elderly. *Medical care*, *27*(2), 140-153.

McWilliams, C., Meier, M. S., & García, A. M. (1990). *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*. ABC-CLIO.

Medina, L. (2014). Nepantla spirituality: My path to the source (s) of healing. *Fleshing the spirit: Spirituality and activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous women's lives*, 167-185.

Minkoff-Zern, L. A. (2014). Hunger amidst plenty: farmworker food insecurity and coping strategies in California. *Local Environment*, *19*(2), 204-219.

Montejano, D. (1987). *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*. University of Texas Press.

Morris, A. D. (1986). *The origins of the civil rights movement*. Simon and Schuster.

Nam, Y., & Jung, H. J. (2008). Welfare reform and older immigrants: Food stamp program participation and food insecurity. *The Gerontologist*, *48*(1), 42-50.

Nam, Y. (2011). Welfare reform and immigrants: Noncitizen eligibility restrictions, vulnerable immigrants, and the social service providers. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, *9*(1), 5-19.

Olson, C. M. (1999). Nutrition and health outcomes associated with food insecurity and hunger.

The Journal of Nutrition, *129*(2), 521S-524S.

Ortiz, L., Arizmendi, L., & Cornelius, L. J. (2004). Access to health care among Latinos of Mexican descent in colonias in two Texas counties. *The Journal of Rural Health*, *20*(3), 246-252.

Katiria Perez, G., & Cruess, D. (2014). The impact of familism on physical and mental health among Hispanics in the United States. *Health psychology review*, *8*(1), 95-127.

Kaufman, P. R. (1998). Rural poor have less access to supermarkets, large grocery stores. *Rural America/Rural Development Perspectives*, *13*(2221-2019-2662), 19-26.

Poppendieck, J. (2012). Want amid plenty: From hunger to inequality. In *food and culture* (pp. 563-571).Routledge.

Quandt, S. A., Arcury, T. A., McDonald, J., Bell, R. A., & Vitolins, M. Z. (2001). Meaning and management of food security among rural elders. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, *20*(3), 356-376.

Quandt, S. A., Arcury, T. A., Early, J., Tapia, J., & Davis, J. D. (2004). Household food security among migrant and seasonal Latino farmworkers in North Carolina. *Public Health Reports*, *119*(6), 568-576.

Quandt, S. A., Shoaf, J. I., Tapia, J., Hernández-Pelletier, M., Clark, H. M., & Arcury, T. A. (2006).

Experiences of Latino immigrant families in North Carolina help explain elevated levels of food insecurity and hunger. *The Journal of nutrition*, *136*(10), 2638-2644.

Reese, A. M. (2019). *Black food geographies: Race, self-reliance, and food access in Washington, DC*. UNC Press Books.

Report: Obesity, Diabetes are biggest health threats in South Texas. (2013, August 21). UT Health San Antonio Newsroom. Retrieved March 25, 2019, from https://news.uthscsa.edu/report-obesity-diabetes-are-biggest-health-threats-in-south-texas/

Romero, M. (2008). Crossing the immigration and race border: A critical race theory approach to immigration studies. *Contemporary Justice Review*, *11*(1), 23-37.

Rose, D., & Oliveira, V. (1997). Nutrient intakes of individuals from food-insufficient households in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*, *87*(12), 1956-1961.

Saenz, R., & Ballejos, M. (1993). Industrial development and persistent poverty in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. *Forgotten places: Uneven development in rural America*, 102-124.

Sewell, W. (2001). Space in contentious politics. *Silence and voice in the study of contentious politics*, *78*, 18.

Shaefer, H. L., & Ybarra, M. (2012). The welfare reforms of the 1990s and the stratification of material well-being among low-income households with children. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(9), 1810-1817.

Slack, T., & Myers, C. A. (2012). Understanding the geography of food stamp program participation: Do space and place matter?. *Social science research*, *41*(2), 263-275.

Sharkey, J. R., Dean, W. R., Nalty, C. C., & Xu, J. (2013). Convenience stores are the key food environment influence on nutrients available from household food supplies in Texas Border Colonias. *BMC public health*, *13*(1), 1-8.

Sharkey, J. R., Horel, S., Han, D., & Huber, J. C. (2009). Association between neighborhood need and spatial access to food stores and fast food restaurants in neighborhoods of colonias. *International Journal of Health Geographics*, *8*(1), 9.

Sharkey, J. R. (2002). The interrelationship of nutritional risk factors, indicators of nutritional risk, and severity of disability among home-delivered meal participants. *The Gerontologist*, *42*(3), 373-380.

Sharkey, J. R. (2003). Risk and presence of food insufficiency are associated with low nutrient

intakes and multimorbidity among homebound older women who receive home-delivered meals. *The Journal of nutrition*, *133*(11), 3485-3491.

Sharkey, J. R. (2005). Longitudinal examination of homebound older adults who experience heightened food insufficiency: effect of diabetes status and implications for service provision. *The Gerontologist*, *45*(6), 773-782.

Sharkey, J. R., Dean, W. R., & Johnson, C. M. (2011). Country of birth is associated with very low food security among Mexican American older adults living in Colonias along the south Texas border with Mexico. *Journal of nutrition in gerontology and geriatrics*, *30*(2), 187-200.

Sharkey, J. R., Dean, W. R., & Johnson, C. M. (2011). Association of household and community characteristics with adult and child food insecurity among Mexican-origin households in colonias along the Texas-Mexico border. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, *10*(1), 1-14.

Slack, T., & Myers, C. A. (2012). Understanding the geography of food stamp program participation: Do space and place matter?. *Social science research*, *41*(2), 263-275.

Slesinger, D. P. (1992). Health status and needs of migrant farm workers in the United States: a literature review. *The Journal of rural health: official journal of the American Rural Health Association and the National Rural Health Care Association*, *8*(3), 227-234.

Smith-Morris, C., Morales-Campos, D., Alvarez, E. A. C., & Turner, M. (2013). An anthropology of familismo: On narratives and description of Mexican/immigrants. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *35*(1), 35-60.

Snipp, C. M. (1996). Understanding Race and Ethnicity in Rural America1. *Rural Sociology*, *61*(1), 125-142.

Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American sociological review*, 273-286.

Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs. (2019). *2019 State of Texas Low Income Housing Plan and Annuel Report.* https://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/housing-center/docs/19-SLIHP.pdf

Texas Secretary of the State: Texas Border and Mexican Affairs. 2012. Retrieved Oct. 17, 2013 http://www.sos.state.tx.us/border/colonias/faqs.shtml on October 17

Tickamyer, A., & Henderson, D. (2010). Devolution, social exclusion, and spatial inequality in US welfare provision. *Welfare reform in rural places: Comparative perspectives. Research in rural sociology and development*, *15*, 41-59.

Torres-Gil, F. M. (1996). Malnutrition and hunger in the elderly. *Nutrition reviews*, *54*(1), S7.

Treviño, R. R. (2006). *The church in the barrio: Mexican American ethno-Catholicism in Houston*. Univ of North Carolina Press.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2010. *The Next Four Decades: The Older Population in the United States: 2010 to 2050*. (Report No. P25-1138). Retrieved Oct. 15, 2013 The Next Four Decades: The Older Population in the United States: 2010 to 2050 (census.gov)

U.S. Census Bureau. American Fact Finder Hidalgo County, Texas. 2012. Retrieved Nov. 10, 2013 http://factfinder2.census.gov/legacy/aff_sunset.html?_lang=en

United States Census Bureau. 2019. 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates: Hispanic or Latino Origin By Specific Origin. Retrieved Mar. 8, 2022 https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=hispanic&g=0100000US&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B03001

United States Census Bureau. 2021. *Improved Race and Ethnicity Measures Reveal U.S. Population Is Much More Multiracial*. Retrieved Mar. 3, 2022 https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/improved-race-ethnicity-measures-reveal-united-states-population-much-more-multiracial.html

United States Census bureau. 2019. 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates: Poverty Status in the Last 12 Months. Retrieved Mar. 2, 2022 https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=poverty%20hidalgo%20county%20texas&g=0100000US&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S1701

United States Census Bureau. 2021. Quick Facts Hidaglo County, Texas. Retrieved Mar. 7, 2022 https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/hidalgocountytexas

United States Department of Agriculture. 2021. “Measurement.” Retrieved Feb. 15, 2022 https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/measurement/#:~:text=Food%20insecurity%20is%20measured%20at,food%20intake%20and%20skipped%20meals.

Van Hook, J., & Balistreri, K. S. (2006). Ineligible parents, eligible children: Food stamps receipt, allotments, and food insecurity among children of immigrants. *Social Science Research*, *35*(1), 228-251.

Weigel, M. M., Armijos, R. X., Hall, Y. P., Ramirez, Y., & Orozco, R. (2007). The household food insecurity and health outcomes of US–Mexico border migrant and seasonal farmworkers. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, *9*(3), 157-169.

Williams, R. (2006). Tracking the progress of State-funded projects that benefit colonias. *Final Report in Response to Senate Bill*, *827*.

Yosso, T. J. (2014). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. In *Critical race theory in education* (pp. 181-204). Routledge.

Ziliak, J. P., Haist, M., & Gundersen, C. (2008). *The causes, consequences, and future of senior hunger in America* (pp. 1-88). Alexandria, VA: National Foundation to End Senior Hunger.