

## **Farmworker Narratives/Oral History**

Larch 571

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Archival Research assignment #2

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### **Overview**

The sources I found when searching farmworker narratives and oral history were varied and diverse. The information was interdisciplinary, appearing in forms of books, movies, short stories, plays, artwork, and poetry. In most cases, the information came directly from individual's accounts. Each person seemed to have a different story about his or her experience as a migrant farmworker. A lot of stories included the details of the initial journey into the United States; however, again, each person seemed to have a different experience with his or her journey. Take Everado Llagruno Hernandez in talking about his experience crossing the border:

"When I left my home, I was told that I would have to walk two or three days, but this one time that I crossed (the border) I walked 15 nights. During the day we didn't walk, but still it was very difficult. Various days, we went without water, without food. The balls of my feet were peeling from so much walking. The reality is very sad, but all with the hopes of arriving, of earning something for our families" (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/7024/>).

Tomasa Oruno remembers: "We got stuck in the desert for three days, three days when we only had water (no food),

and one day, almost twenty-four hours in which we had no water" (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/7024/>).

The most important thing that I learned while researching farmworker narratives and oral history is that each individual story is different and unique. While it is important to know that most migrant farmworkers experienced hardship to get to the United States, I feel that it is more important to listen to each person's individual struggles in order to truly understand the person.

### **Issue Analysis**

The number one issue as a whole that emerged as I read the material was the importance of taking each individual's story into account. Because I already talked about this in the overview, I will focus the issue analysis on two other important issues: women's roles in the migrant farmworker culture and the struggles of children in the migrant farmworker culture.

"Of the estimated 2.5 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the U.S. today, more than 1/4 of them are women" (U.S. Dept. of Labor. *Migrant Farmworkers: Pursuing Security in an Unstable Labor Market*, Research Report #5. May 1994). Though women do nearly every kind of farm labor on every kind of farm, they routinely earn less than

men for doing the same work. Often women are further confined by being assigned lower-paying tasks, resulting in incomes which are 2/3 less than those of their male counterparts (The California Commission on the Status of Women: *Campesinas: Women Farmworkers in the California Agricultural Labor Force*, 1978). Women receive less benefits and are more likely to be unemployed. Sexual harassment and discrimination are also reported on the job.

Women migrant farmworkers' home life seems to be problematic as well. Housing is often restricted to single men, and family units are hard to find causing them to live further from their work. While expected to work, most women migrant farmworkers seem to maintain a traditional



role in the home with taking care of the children, cooking, and cleaning. I came across a painting done by a woman migrant farmworker that depicted this 'double face' that women must wear between work and home.

Arte por: Lilitana Martinez  
This artwork was submitted by: Lilitana Martinez

The home seems to also be a dangerous place for women. "In 1995, 1/3 of farmworker women reported that they had experienced domestic violence over the course of the previous year" (Evaluation of the Migrant Clinicians Network, April 1995). Joseph Hovey of the University of Toledo recently did a study on suicide risk among Female Mexican Migrant Farmworkers. While his findings were lengthy, he was able to compile a chart describing the depression-causing issues and the percentage of female migrant farmworker women that experienced the issues:

Language Barriers	47.4%
Unpredictable Work or Housing / Uprooting	45.3%
Being Away from Family or Friends	45.3%
Rigid Work Demands	42.1%
Low Family Socioeconomic Status / Poor Pay /	38.9%
Poor Housing Conditions	34.7%
Hard Physical Labor / Physical Pain Related to	33.7%
Education of Self or Children	28.4%
Lack of Transportation / Unreliable Transportation	26.3%
Discrimination from Society / Exploitation by	24.2%
Lack of Daycare and Supervision of Children	18.9%
Undocumented Status	17.9%
Worries about Socialization of Children	15.8%
Acculturating to New Environment	15.8%
Limited Access to Medical Care / Paperwork for	15.8%
Geographical and Social Isolation	14.7%
Immigration Stressors (during act of immigrating to	12.6%
Loss of Spouse (due to death, abandonment)	6.3%
Domestic Abuse / Poor Spousal Relations	4.2%
Emotional Isolation (diminished capacity to express	4.2%

([http://www.utoledo.edu/psychology/PSIMH\\_MFWSI\\_article.doc](http://www.utoledo.edu/psychology/PSIMH_MFWSI_article.doc))

I included this chart in the analysis because this chart in itself creates awareness to the many issues that women migrant farmworkers face. That fact that being away from family and friends creates one of the highest levels of stress is reflective of the difference between the culture in the United States versus the Mexican culture. After spending over 5 months studying in Mexico, I became aware of the importance of the family and community at large structure of support. Extended family lived together in the same houses and community fiestas occurred on a weekly basis. In the U.S., families tend to live only with immediate family members and community get-togethers typically occur 2-3 times a year. Without the family and community support that these Mexican women are used to, other stresses, such as raising children, seem more overwhelming.

This brings us to the second issue to be examined: the struggles of migrant farmworker children. This issue is closely tied with the first issue, the struggles of women migrant farmworkers. Because migrant farmworker mothers have more stresses and instability, the children seem to receive less guidance and attention from them. The children move in and out of schools without establishing connections with teachers nor other children. Learning

English also can be stressful for children, especially when only Spanish is spoken at home. It's typical for children to go through a period when both English and Spanish merge into one language, making it difficult to communicate at school and at home

(<http://www.mhsgic.org/init/seclang/secondlang.pdf> ).

Another major issue affecting the children is pesticide exposure. When their parents return from working on the fields, pesticides invade the home and create a toxic environment for children. Learning disabilities, asthma, and other illnesses increase with pesticide exposure

(<http://www.soeh.org/files/Sievert,%2058,%20M2.ppt> ).

### **Implication**

As a result of this research, I have learned that when it's time for us to conduct our study on the farmworkers of the Yakima Valley, it will be of prime importance to look at each person as an individual. We'll need to ask them: Where are you from? How did you get here? Why are you here? What is your daily life like?, and What are your future hopes and goals?. I feel like these main questions will give us an idea of where the person is from, where they are

now, and most importantly, what they envision for their future.

I have also learned that despite the migrant farmworker being a male majority field, there are many women working in the field, as well as many children affected by the migrant farmworker lifestyle. It'll be of key importance to interview women and children in our research of farmworkers of Yakima Valley. What struggles do they face on a day-to-day basis? What do they miss most about where they are from? What ideas do they have about improving their living conditions?

When it comes to design implications, it's hard to say what should be done for sure. From my research, I have learned that it's too difficult to make general assumptions about migrant farmworkers, as they are a diverse group of people. We'll need to ask many individuals the questions mentioned above to determine what their specific needs are. I think it'll be important to get people talking about what they miss most about where they are from and then try to incorporate those things into future design strategies.

### **Note on the Method**

Archival research seems to be an essential part of any major interactive research project. Although, at times, it

seems lengthy and tedious, in the long run, it's a necessary piece of the puzzle in understanding a group of people. The time consuming part of obtaining the research seems to be driven by a passion for reaching a successful end result. I recently went through archival research while researching my thesis topic. Because that was a topic that was close to my heart, the archival research seemed less lengthy and tedious. In this case, because I know that I won't be part of the design, it took more energy for me to conduct archival research. I did appreciate doing archival research as a group, as the amount of information is vast and obtained quickly.

## Bibliography

[http://www7.nationalacademies.org/FELLOWSHIPS/2002\\_Poster\\_Abstracts.html](http://www7.nationalacademies.org/FELLOWSHIPS/2002_Poster_Abstracts.html)

### **Suicide Risk Among Female Mexican Migrant Farmworkers**

This website just contains an abstract—I'd love to get my hands on the actual study report.

<http://www.colapublic.org/chavez/bibliography.htm>

Bibliography of books, poetry, plays written about Cesar Chavez and his struggle to organize the farm workers movement.

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/news/articles/1021pimentel21.html>

Ricardo Pimentel's remembrance of farm worker roots. This is a political editorial as it ties in with current issues of the amount of time it takes to become a US citizen.

[http://www.findarticles.com/cf\\_dls/m2278/1\\_28/103996929/pl/article.jhtml](http://www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m2278/1_28/103996929/pl/article.jhtml)

Farmworker women's rights--"Now as farmworker women, we're educating ourselves. We're helping other farmworker women to know their rights. We have conferences where we teach women how to defend themselves, how to get legal assistance, how to sue.... We also have conferences on domestic violence, sexual harassment, pesticides, and AIDS" (Rothenberg 57)

[http://www.panleft.org/wipdescription.php?vid\\_id=13](http://www.panleft.org/wipdescription.php?vid_id=13)  
video on **Immokalee: A Story of Slavery and Freedom**

Brutal exploitation of farmworkers, including slavery and indentured servitude, continues to plague thousands in the fields and groves of south Florida

<http://www.soeh.org/files/Sievert,%2058,%20M2.ppt>  
farmworker exposure to pesticides in Texas

<http://www.mhsqic.org/init/seclang/secondlang.pdf>  
talks about children learning 2 languages—struggles that are encountered

[http://www.earthjustice.org/news/documents/1-04/pesticide\\_farmworkers.pdf](http://www.earthjustice.org/news/documents/1-04/pesticide_farmworkers.pdf)  
protecting migrant farmworkers from pesticides

[http://www.austinchronicle.com/issues/dispatch/2002-03-15/screens\\_roundup17.html](http://www.austinchronicle.com/issues/dispatch/2002-03-15/screens_roundup17.html)

movie review for Escuela—a film about a migrant farmworker's daughter starting high school

<http://www.migrant.net/pdf/app-thorn.pdf>

art scholarships for migrant farmworkers

<http://www.longislandmuseum.org/exhibits/season.asp>

art exhibit on migrant farmworkers

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/7024/>

"The Cycle of Poverty": Mexican-American Migrant Farmworkers Testify before Congress -- Of all the groups living in poverty, the migrant farmworker and his family in general suffer the greatest socioeconomic deprivation

<http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/news/local/6161441.htm?lc>

benefits of chavez 's pension fund system

[http://www.utoledo.edu/psychology/PSIMH\\_MFWSI\\_article.doc](http://www.utoledo.edu/psychology/PSIMH_MFWSI_article.doc)  
a study on-

The Relationship of Migrant Farmwork Stress to Depression and Hopelessness: Preliminary Findings in the Standardization of the Migrant Farmworker Stress Inventory (MFWSI)

<http://www.monh.org/exhibits/farmworkers/content.htm>

national heritage museum's exhibit on migrant farmworkers