



Legality and ways of reconciling health (in)access among Mexican immigrant micro-entrepreneurs in a Southern California swap meet*

Josefina Flores Morales

University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Sociology Dept.

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colorado school of public health



The Swap Meet

Flea markets
Outdoor market
Remate
Pulga
Swap meet (*swami*)



Agenda

1. Present study
Methods | Participants | Site description
2. Past research
3. Preliminary results
Pain | The 'Fíl' Citizenship | Heat | Strengths
4. Discussion
Matrix of Health
5. Implications
6. Conclusion/ Next steps

Present Study

- Weekly visits to field sites
- Ethnographic research
 - Participant observations
 - Informal interviews and conversations
 - Informal interviews with 8 Mexican vendors
 - 5 females, & 3 males | 2 undocumented, 5 documented, & 1 unknown
- Observations over the span of 4 months (and continuing)
 - Building rapport | Relationships | Trust

Past research

- **Ethnic** entrepreneurship (Bishop & Surfield, 2013)
- **Street** vendors (Estrada)
- Flea markets in **urban cities** such as Chicago (Morales, 2009, 2011)
- Health in-access of **undocumented** (Vargas Bustamante 2012)
- **Precarious** work conditions of immigrants (Connell 1993; Mehta et al 2002; Fletcher et al 2006; Garnage 1999)

Now, preliminary thematic results...

Pain

“Doctors cannot cure arthritis.

And, I cant either.

But...I can take away the pain in your body that you get from working in the
‘fil’.”



The 'Fíl'

Customer:

“Do you have these in size 12?,” she asks in Spanish?

Me: “Hmm, let me check.” I shuffle through the pants section.

She continues:

“I am looking for stretchy jeans...I got a C-Section two weeks ago and it was done horizontally. I am looking for jeans to work in since I work in the 'fíl'.”



Citizenship: Out of pocket

One of the clothing store vendors paid 3,000 + dollars for teeth care and knows she needs more care and is saving up for it. But she will not get it done until she has the savings accumulated.

Citizens: take it for granted almost. They seem to be like, yeah, I can access health insurance and life insurance, for example.

“Yeah, I do have health insurance...and life insurance.”

Physical work of market...& the heat

- Summer day sights
 - Children
 - Family
 - Wet towels
 - Portable Air conditioners
 - Lots of bottled water
 - No water fountains & no restrooms

Strengths of workers

- The skill
- The networks
- Clientele relationships
- Autonomy & citizenship

Discussion

Health tied to the market

I argue that the **market shines light** on the salience of work and health from different perspectives and **materializes** the experiences from **both the vendor and customer** perspective **across the immigrant status spectrum.**



Implications: Matrix of health of vendors

	Undocumented	Documented
Not doing financially well	?	Access to low-income health insurances & safety net clinics.
Doing financially well	May be able to afford to pay price of private health care (dental example)	Access to mainstream health insurances.

Next steps

- Autonomy of work
- How legality and citizenship is infused into the business ventures of Mexican migrants.
- Exploring the hierarchy of the market
 - Not all vending spaces are created equal



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Contact:

flores.morales@ucla.edu

Josefina Flores Morales

PhD student in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles



Asking about citizenship

- Indirect ways of asking:
 - Travel outside of the country
 - Access to healthcare
 - Social Security benefits
 - Voting

Gender

- Customers & Vendors
 - Trans customers
 - Females vendors & autonomy (familial role)
 - Female vendors are usually accompanied
 - Male vendors more often alone
- Warnings about sexual harassers in the swap meet