

DISSERTATION

FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN LA
RINCONADA, PERU: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

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AnneLiese M. Busch

School of Education

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Fort Collins, Colorado

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Doctoral Committee:

Advisor: Louise Jennings

Sue Lynham

Linda Kuk

Ernesto Sagas

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ABSTRACT

FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN LA RINCONADA, PERU: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

Studies show that there is a large gap in participation in higher education between Peru's poorest members of society and their wealthier counterparts despite the existence of 51 public universities located across Peru that are free of cost. Quantitative studies addressing this topic rely on a culture of poverty paradigm and have argued that this discrepancy is due to a lack of culture that prioritizes higher education among Peru's poor.

The purpose of this study was to investigate why it is that the poorest segments of the population in Peru overwhelmingly do not pursue higher education despite the existence of tuition-free public universities, to understand the extent to which culture and systemic factors outside their control explain this phenomenon, and to examine how mining families perceive the role of and access to higher education for their children. This study focused on the community of La Rinconada, Peru for three primary reasons: (a) La Rinconada is representative of many illegal mining communities in not just Peru, but Latin America in that it is perceived as a city where low-skilled workers have an opportunity to generate more income working in the mines than by relying on positions that pay minimum wage (now 930 soles per month, which is equivalent to approximately \$284); (b) more than 98% of La Rinconada's population is comprised of individuals belonging to the lowest socioeconomic level of Peruvian society; and (c) the population of La Rinconada has nearly quadrupled within the past decade and continues to grow.

This study employed an ethnographic case study approach including recording and documenting observations of La Rinconada and Juliaca, the two sites in which the interviews were conducted, and conducting interviews with three separate groups of study participants including 14 teachers, 17 parents employed in a mining-related industry and 10 students. Field notes of all observations were kept and recorded as well as all interviews and conversations with the interview participants following their consent. The interviews were transcribed in Spanish and were then translated into English. Codes and patterns for each of the three groups of interview participants (teachers, parents employed in a mining-related industry, and students) were identified and were used to identify the three resulting themes.

The observations I recorded and documented in La Rinconada demonstrate the harsh conditions of day-to-day life for its residents and highlight the extent to which the parents I interviewed are willing to go in order to provide a better life for their children; a life which for most participants included the pursuit of higher education. In the interviews I conducted I identified three themes: acceptance of harsh conditions for more opportunity, importance of higher education and the obstacles to pursuing it and the perceived role of higher education in future success. My findings indicate that for the parents employed in mining-related industries higher education was a priority because of the perceived financial and personal stability it would enable their children to enjoy and the social status and prestige a bachelor's degree would signify for their children because they would now be considered *professional* as opposed to a laborer. In general, for residents of La Rinconada, financial constraints and distance from institutions of higher education were identified as being the biggest obstacles to accessing higher education. My findings show that despite the fact that half of the individuals I interviewed had not pursued higher education themselves, all of the participants stated that they valued higher education and

viewed it as essential to achieving financial and personal stability and they emphasized their desire for their children to pursue higher education.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the people of La Rinconada – you are an inspiration.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

An investment in knowledge always pays
The best interest
Benjamin Franklin

Background

In the quote above, Benjamin Franklin sums up the way higher education has come to be viewed by countries across the globe. And while Franklin may not have intended for the term “investment” to take on the monetary connotation that many read into his statement now, his remark conveys the sense of monetary significance people have come to associate with higher education. The Social Security Administration’s Office of Retirement Policy’s webpage features a prominent link entitled, “Education and Lifelong Earnings”, where one can simply click on the research summary to find out the average discrepancy in lifetime earnings for men and women between a high school graduate and a bachelor degree holder, as well as between a high school graduate and a graduate degree holder (Social Security Administration Office of Retire Policy, 2015). The reports substantiate what the citizens of most countries have come to realize – that the massification of higher education in many countries (both developed and developing) resulted in the creation of a substantial earnings gap between students who do not continue beyond secondary school and those who earn bachelor’s degrees (or equivalent) or higher (Trow, 2005). Higher education is driven less by those with a desire to learn for learning’s sake and more by individuals seeking greater monetary returns for their work (Mettler, 2014).

The emphasis on better salaries and career advancement is reflected in the higher education systems of some developing countries, where students do not *major in academic*

disciplines, but rather study a career (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). In Peru, which is the focus of this study, for example, students select career paths; a student might earn a degree in International Business, Environmental Sustainability in Business, or Hotel Management, rather than in a traditional academic discipline (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). Many newer universities in Peru do not offer classic academic disciplines such as languages, philosophy or humanities-related disciplines, as these do not directly relate to a specific profession (INEI Statistical Study on Higher Education in Peru, 2014). Thus, in Peru, just as in developed countries such as the United States, the association between increased financial returns and higher education has grown increasingly prevalent. For-profit institutions have capitalized on the message of increased earning potential for those with post-secondary degrees by targeting the students' parents, providing them information depicting a direct link between their programs and gainful employment upon graduation (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). In Peru, parents are the primary source of funding for students attending institutions of higher education (INEI Statistical Study on Higher Education in Peru, 2014). A perceived direct link to a job or a career path is therefore an extremely effective marketing tool for many parents who are considering whether to encourage their son or daughter to pursue higher education and potentially provide economic assistance. The study examines perceptions of access and barriers to higher education among a population of students and families that is large in Peru but often overlooked or misrepresented in educational research – those from underground economies such as mining and cocaine production. In particular, I explore the lived experiences of families whose parents work in La Rinconada, a mining community in Peru, to better understand their perceptions of the role of higher education in their lives as well as perceived supports and barriers to access to higher education.

In 2014, the Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática published a lengthy statistical analysis on the profile of students pursuing higher education in Peru. One area of interest is the category pertaining to the manner in which students finance their tuition for higher education. Findings indicate that for 97.1% of respondents, the majority of the economic support came from family (specifically parents) (INEI Statistical Study on Higher Education in Peru, 2014). Apart from allocating support to public universities and institutes, the Peruvian government does not subsidize higher education. Public loans are not made available to students to pay for their education, students must cover these costs themselves (Ongara Estrada, 2001). It is for this reason that the role of family, specifically that of the parents, is essential in determining the likelihood of a student pursuing higher education in Peru (INEI Statistical Study on Higher Education in Peru, 2014).

Numerous studies document the regressive nature of access to higher education in Peru. The 2010 statistical household survey (ENAHO Statistical Study on Households in Peru, 2010) shows that only 37% of high school graduates from the lowest socioeconomic levels (the bottom 20%) enrolled in some form of higher education, while 80% of the wealthiest 20% of the Peruvian population pursued higher education (Castro, Yamada, & Arias, 2011). These statistics mirror the enrollment gap that existed between students of wealthy and poor families among U.S. families in 1987: approximately 74% of wealthy students pursued higher education compared with 37% of students from the lowest 20% of income earners in the United States (NCES Digest of Education Statistics, 2017). However, both rates have increased. In 2017, nearly 65% of students from the lowest 20% of income earners in the United States are participating in some form of higher education, and 83% of students from the highest 20% of income earners pursued some form of higher education (NCES Digest of Education Statistics, 2017). There are many

factors that can account for the sharp increase in access to higher education among the poorest segments of society in the United States, not least of which is the evolution and expansion of the community college system which serves approximately 24% of students whose annual family income falls below \$30,000 (NCES Digest of Education Statistics, 2017). For economically challenged students in Peru however, it is a very different reality.

Castro et al. (2011) hypothesized that apart from the obvious financial barriers rendering access to higher education difficult for the most economically challenged populations, other factors such as family background, academic preparation and family support also impacted access to higher education among the poorest students in Peru. In other words, they asserted that access to higher education in Peru among the poorest students would not be significantly improved by simply making more funding available to these students (Castro et al., 2011). They posit that this is due to a variety of factors including the lack of prioritization of higher education on the part of the parents of students in the lowest socioeconomic levels of the population; higher education is therefore not something that is expected of these students, and not something they are taught to view as necessary (Castro et al., 2011). Similarly, the authors assert that because their parents did not themselves pursue higher education, they are not able to support their children with aspects related to higher education, which in turn makes it less likely that their children will pursue higher education (Castro et al., 2011). Lastly, Castro et al. contend that these students may lack the level of academic preparation necessary to access higher education (each institution has an admission exam, where students who fail to achieve the minimum result are not admitted) and therefore are better off not pursuing it (Castro et al., 2011).

The primary arguments cited by Castro et al. (2011) in support of this conclusion pertain to the percentage of non-poor students enrolled in public institutions, which currently serve

approximately 40% of all students pursuing higher education in Peru. In Peru, the law mandates that students who are admitted to public institutes or universities do not pay tuition (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). As of 2009, 66% of all students enrolled in public institutes are from non-poor families (families that earn more than the bottom 20% of households in Peru), while 80% of students enrolled in Peru's public universities are from non-poor households (Morón, Castro, & Sanborn, 2009). The crux of this argument lies in the fact that there is no tuition associated with attending a public institute or university, and for Castro et al., lack of financial resources cannot by itself account for the lack of participation in higher education by the poorest segments of Peruvian society. This argument does not explore the reasons why students from Peru's poorest 20% of the population do not attend public universities. Additionally, it does not address the issues surrounding primary and secondary public education in Peru and the discrepancy in academic preparation between private and public school.

While there is evidence to suggest that in addition to economic barriers, other factors such as family background, academic capability and the level of education attained by the parents all help to determine a student's likelihood of pursuing higher education, the majority of studies that have analyzed personality characteristics and attributes and how these relate to schooling and labor have primarily focused on the latter, and are predominantly quantitative in nature. Such studies include Claux and La Rosa's (2010) study, which analyzes the personality characteristics and attributes that contribute to employability among individuals residing in urban hubs in Peru. Cueto, Muñoz, and Baertl (2010) examined the way cognitive skills and personality traits impact educational achievement in Peru and rely on a data set created by the World Bank. In a corollary study, Cueto, Saldarriaga, and Muñoz (2011) examined the tolerance

for risk among adolescents in Lima and how this impacts the decision-making processes related to higher education and obtaining and maintaining a job.

Qualitative research on this topic is lacking, specifically that which focuses on the lived experience of poor individuals, the manner in which they view and pursue or do not pursue higher education, and the reasons for this decision. Additionally, most studies (all quantitative), focused on urban hubs throughout Peru – the most densely populated cities. None examined the rural areas of Peru, nor at the gold-mining and cocaine-growing hubs (both legal and illegal) that have predominated many rural regions throughout Peru, where Peru has surpassed Colombia as the largest producer and where cocaine and gold production are at their highest level in three decades (ONDCP, 2018). La Rinconada is an example of one such community – its population has exploded within the past 8 years, going from approximately 20,000 residents in 2009, to at least 75,000 residents in 2016 (ENAHO Statistical Report on Households in Peru, 2016). Not surprisingly, this growth mirrors the jump in the price of gold, which according to according to APMEX, the world's largest online retailer of precious metals, went from an average cost of \$869.75 per ounce in 2008, to a peak of \$1,520 per ounce in 2016 (Gold prices today per ounce & historical gold chart, see <https://www.apmex.com/spotprices/gold-price>).

La Rinconada is a community that embodies the plight of Peru's poorest populations – it is precariously perched on the side of a mountain at an altitude of approximately 18,000 feet, and lacks any semblance of modern infrastructure, including running water, sewage, electrical grid, and trash collection. I spent time in La Rinconada, spoke with the people who live there, and heard their stories. It is important to highlight that of all the people I met in La Rinconada, I have yet to encounter one individual who was happy living there, who was content with the quality of life and the living conditions, and who intended to stay and make their lives in La

Rinconada. When asked about the reason he had decided to move with his family from a small town in the jungle to La Rinconada, one father stated, “well how else would it be possible to provide my children with a shot at higher education?” Surprised that he was already considering higher education for his children (they were 8 and 5 years of age), I asked him why he didn’t just send them to a public university, where he would not have to pay for their studies. He looked at me before responding, carefully considering his words, and then said, “I have a better chance of finding a gold nugget worth \$20,000 tomorrow than my children have of being admitted to a public university.”

It was this conversation that prompted me to begin researching the subject of access to higher education in Peru, and the realities of access for the children of poor families. In their respective studies, Castro et al. (2011) and Cueto et al. (2010) asserted that poor children simply lacked the *academic capabilities* (their phrasing), necessary to be admitted to public universities. Did their parents, who themselves did not attend an institution of higher education, fail to prioritize higher education, or perhaps education in general for their children? Did these children lack the characteristics of perseverance, ambition and a mindset that would enable them to be successful? In other words, could the theory that posited that a direct link between a person’s psychological mindset and their socioeconomic circumstances account for the reasons why so few poor Peruvian students pursued some form of higher education? The theory described in the preceding sentence is of course the “culture of poverty” which was first developed by anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1966) and politicized by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1965), an assistant labor secretary in the Johnson administration.

In his ethnographical study of five poor families in Mexico, Oscar Lewis (1959), first proposed the notion that sustained poverty transcending generations of a particular group of

individuals could be explained in part by a shared culture among these individuals. The culture to which he referred included beliefs, behaviors and attitudes that contributed to the perpetuation of poverty within this group, despite alterations in the structural or societal reasons that initially accounted for the poverty (Small, Harding, & Lamont, 2010). In 1965, Moynihan presented a report that specifically addressed the reasons for the widespread poverty plaguing the African American communities in the United States, and asserted that, “the Black family was caught in a tangle of pathology that resulted from the cumulative effects of slavery and the subsequent structural poverty that characterized the experience of many African Americans” (Small et al., 2010, p. 2).

The theories surrounding the existence of a “culture of poverty” are not without controversy. The earliest scholars on this topic were accused of blaming those in the lowest socioeconomic groups for their poverty, and of insinuating that if these individuals thought differently, comported themselves differently and changed their perspectives (adopted the culture of the wealthy), they would be able to improve their financial situations, and escape poverty (Small et al., 2010). While several scholars, including Lewis (1966), attempted to apply this theory to poor people in developing countries, it was fraught with complications given the vastly different dynamics of the percentage of individuals living in poverty in developing countries, as well as a general lack of public services – the issue seemed to be less based on decision-making, beliefs, behaviors and attitudes, and more on a lack of opportunity.

Based on my interactions with residents of La Rinconada, I sought to understand the extent to which a culture of poverty accounts for the university attendance gap between poor and non-poor students or whether there could be alternative explanations. Through my research, I

endeavored to identify the factors contributing to the limited participation among Peru's poorest members of society in higher education.

The literature suggests several alternative explanations that may explain the gap in college attendance between poor and non-poor families. For example, studies show that those who are compelled to rely on the public education provided by the Peruvian government for primary and secondary education do not receive the academic preparation necessary to compete with their wealthier peers for admission to Peru's ultra-competitive public universities, where in some programs only one in every 400 applicants is admitted (National Survey of University Graduates and Universities, 2017). In the admissions process to public and private universities alike, no consideration of one's financial situation, cultural background or academic preparation preceding higher education is given – all applicants complete an obligatory entrance exam, and those with the highest scores are admitted (National Survey of University Graduates and Universities, 2017). While it could be argued that such a system favors the most academically competent students, this would only hold true if all applicants had received a reasonably equivalent primary and secondary education, which is does not appear to be the case (Rodriguez & Montorro, 2013). Thus, while academic competence is a factor, the quality of the academic preparation received appears to have a far greater impact on a student's likelihood of pursuing higher education than a student's performance in primary and secondary school (Rodriguez & Montorro, 2013). Such data suggests that higher education is a continuation of the stratification of Peruvian society, where those with sufficient resources to pay for a quality primary and secondary education for their children are then admitted to the highest-ranking universities in Peru (public and private).

Statement of the Problem

Studies show that there is a large gap in participation in higher education between Peru's poorest members of society and their wealthier counterparts despite the existence of 51 public universities located across Peru that are free of cost ((National Survey of University Graduates and Universities, 2017). Quantitative studies addressing this topic have argued that this discrepancy is due to a lack of culture that prioritizes higher education among Peru's poor. I believe there are other explanatory factors that have not been identified in current research and that a qualitative approach may yield more data that can more fully explain this complex phenomenon.

The research on access to higher education among Peru's poorest members is entirely quantitative, and has relied on data gathered by international, non-governmental entities collected from urban locations in Peru collected for a variety of unrelated purposes. To my knowledge, no qualitative research on this topic has been conducted, and those most impacted by the regressive nature of access to higher education have not been asked about their experiences related to this topic. Additionally, little research was done in Peruvian cities that depend almost entirely on informal or illegal activities as a source of income, where the national minimum wage has no significance and whose populations come from all over Peru to have the opportunity to increase their earning potential. The city of La Rinconada fits into this category, however it is by no means unique in a country that is rich in natural resources, and where the minimum wage is less than \$300 per month (ENAHU Statistical Report on Households in Peru, 2016; PPK subió el sueldo mínimo a 930 soles antes de renunciar, 2018).

In their research on the qualitative sociology of poverty, Newman and Massengill (2006) defined their objective as highlighting, "the increasing importance of qualitative research embedded in large-scale quantitative studies of poverty" (p. 423). They define poverty not in

terms of welfare dependency, which is how it had been conceived of by Moynihan (1965), and to a lesser extent, Lewis (1966), but as low-wage employment (Newman & Massengill, 2006).

This change in emphasis has had a substantial impact on the manner in which poverty, and a culture associated therewith, has been studied (Newman & Massengill, 2006). For Newman and Massengill, poverty is not so much an outgrowth of the decisions and priorities of the poor, but rather a reflection of the failings of a society in which the skills of some individuals are more highly valued than others, and where the discrepancy in wages is not due to the failings of the poor, but to those of the society in which they live.

As stated above, several quantitative studies in Peru touched upon the topic of access to higher education, however none have evaluated this topic using a paradigm such as that conceived of by Newman and Massengill (2006) and none used a qualitative approach. What is distinctive about Newman and Massengill's paradigm is precisely that it is the result of a qualitative approach to analyzing the state of being poor, the realities for those who are poor, and the limitations and burdens poverty places on them in the political and economic systems governing the countries into which they are born. Because they do not begin with the premise that the poor are responsible for their own poverty, they are able to look beyond the actions of the poor themselves to examine what other societal or systemic factors may be contributing to the persistence of poverty (Newman & Massengill, 2006); for the purposes of this project, I identify how these factors relate to higher education.

Castro et al. (2011) concluded that the primary reasons for the regressive nature of access to higher education among the poorest segments of Peruvian society are the choices and priorities of the poor coupled with their lack of academic aptitude. Had I not traveled to La Rinconada and spoken with individuals such as the father with two young children, I might have

more readily accepted this explanation. Instead, I set out in this study to investigate the role of higher education among the working poor in Peru, specifically, among those living and working in mines of La Rinconada.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study comes from Newman and Massengill's (2006) paradigm on the social and societal impact of poverty (structural poverty), and how this relates to the factors pertaining to access to higher education. The focus is to examine which factors contribute to the higher education gap in Peru and whether these are structural in nature or whether they are related to the shared culture uniting Peru's poorest members of society, as argued by Castro et al. (2011). The systemic factors are those that inhibit or make more difficult access to higher education for Peru's poorest populations due to circumstances outside of their control. Examples include the lack of institutions of higher education (specifically public institutions) within a given region making access for the residents of the community difficult, the lack of adequate primary and secondary schools within a given region making academic preparation difficult, the lack of guidance for students regarding how to access higher education and the lack of financial resources needed to access higher education. Newman and Massengill (2006) posited that systemic factors create the environment necessary for a culture of poverty, such as those defined by Moynihan (1965) and Lewis (1966) to exist.

For the purposes of this study, *culture of poverty* is defined as the manner in which people cope with poverty, and the decision-making processes governing the actions individuals take to either subsist in poverty or to escape it (Small et al., 2010). According to Small et al. (2010), the way to understand how culture impacts the poorest members of a society's population is to analyze why it is that certain individuals born into poverty experience more

professional and by extension, financial success than their peers who may have been born into identical circumstances. They contend that culture might be defined as a “person’s set of strategies of action,” where those who lack a particular strategy will encounter greater difficulty making decisions related to that strategy (Small et al., 2010, p. 10). What is essential to the definition of culture is that it does not refer to a shared set of values or beliefs, but rather the mechanisms a community or group of individuals have developed to cope with the circumstances into which they are born, which in this case can be summarized as “sustained material deprivation” (Small et al., 2010, p. 4).

Small et al.’s (2010) definition of culture of poverty differs from those of Moynihan (1965) and Lewis (1966) in that it does not seek to blame the poor for their poverty, but rather seeks to understand how they exist in the circumstances into which they are born. It should be noted that what this perspective does not address are the reasons for the persistent poverty afflicting certain groups or populations, which is why Newman and Massengill’s (2006) approach is particularly valuable. Additionally, while to my knowledge a comparative analysis focused on the differences between the poverty experienced by individuals in developed countries versus their counterparts in developing countries has not been specifically addressed by researchers, I believe that it is important to acknowledge these differences. Developed countries often provide their citizens with more public resources than do developing countries and thus the way poverty impacts the group or individual is different.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate why it is that the poorest segments of the population in Peru overwhelmingly do not pursue higher education despite the existence of tuition-free public universities, to understand the extent to which culture and systemic factors

outside their control explain this phenomenon, and to examine how mining families perceive the role of and access to higher education for their children. I focused on the community of La Rinconada, Peru for three primary reasons: (a) La Rinconada is representative of many illegal mining communities in not just Peru, but Latin America in that it is perceived as a city where low-skilled workers have an opportunity to generate more income working in the mines than by relying on positions that pay minimum wage (now 930 soles per month, which is equivalent to approximately \$284); (b) more than 98% of La Rinconada's population is comprised of individuals belonging to the lowest socioeconomic level of Peruvian society; and (c) the population of La Rinconada has nearly quadrupled within the past decade and continues to grow (El Comercio, PPK Aumento a S/930 el Sueldo Minimo antes de Renunciar, March 23, 2018; ENAHO Statistical Report on Households in Peru, 2016). The existence of cities like La Rinconada demonstrate the conditions Peru's poorest members are willing to endure in order to have a perceived opportunity of escaping poverty; what merits further examination is what the more than 25,000 children currently residing in La Rinconada (97% of whom were not born in the city and were instead brought by their parents) and their parents perceive as the vehicle to a better future, and the role of higher education in this calculation (ENAHO Statistical Report on Households in Peru, 2017). It should be noted that La Rinconada is a community comprised of *target earners*, individuals who are not seeking permanent relocation and who intend to return to their cities of origin once they have generated the desired amount of revenue (Cohen, 2001; Yang, 2006). Thus, the data collected and findings are situated to this particular community. Nevertheless, findings can be transferrable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to similar communities, and can offer general insights regarding access to higher education among poor families in Peru that can be difficult to derive from broader statistical studies.

A culture of poverty argument, such as the one propagated by Castro et al. (2011), assumes that the poor do not pursue higher education due to a general lack of importance placed on higher education among these individuals. The issue of access addresses the possibility of the existence of an overall lack of opportunity for the poorest members of society to pursue higher education, which could be due to financial obstacles, proximity to an institution of higher education (which might incorporate issues surrounding transportation and lodging), and knowledge of the higher education system in Peru and how to navigate it (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Arkerloff & Kranton, 2000; Bourdieu & Oasseron, 1977; Carter, 2005; Charles, 2008; Cook & Jens, 1998; Small et al., 2010). To fulfill the purpose of the study, I engaged with the residents of La Rinconada in order to better understand how they perceive the role of higher education in their lives, the extent to which they feel it is accessible to them and their families, and the importance they place on it for themselves and their family members.

Research Questions

In this study, the research questions are intended to address two elements: to better understand the underlying factors contributing to families' prioritization of higher education for their children and their perceptions regarding the accessibility of higher education for members of their community. These questions are open-ended because I allowed the information I gleaned from the interview process to guide my research.

RQ1: What role does higher education play for families in la Rinconada?

RQ2: What opportunities and obstacles to higher education (economic, social, cultural, other) are perceived by parents and children from La Rinconada?

RQ3: What futures do the parents envision for their children and do their children envision for themselves?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, culture of poverty as it pertains to decisions regarding higher education is defined as a culture where higher education is not prioritized within the family structures, a culture that encourages children to work and earn money quickly rather than study, and lastly a culture that limits the expectations of children regarding decisions related to higher education, along with other characteristics that do not favor the pursuit of higher education (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Arkerloff & Kranton, 2000; Bourdieu & Oasseron, 1977; Carter, 2005; Charles, 2008; Cook & Jens, 1998). It should be noted that this definition is in keeping with the arguments made by Castro et al.'s (2011) study. One additional component of this definition includes the manner in which people cope with poverty, and the decision-making processes governing the actions individuals engage in to escape poverty (Small et al., 2010). Systemic poverty is defined as the circumstances or conditions created by the economic and political apparatuses within a given country that are outside of the control of the individuals they impact (Newman & Massengill, 2006). Access to higher education is defined in terms of the availability of opportunity to pursue higher education for all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic level, race, ethnicity, gender and physical disabilities (DiMaggio, 1982). Lastly, for the purposes of this study, I define an institution of higher education as one that is legally authorized to provide a program of education beyond secondary education and one that admits students having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate. This definition is based in part on the one set forth by 20 U.S. Code § 1001, but is more general in nature as it applies to international institutions as well (Legal Information Institute Cornell Law School, see <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/1001>).

Methodological Approach

Crotty (1998) defined research methodology as a comprehensive strategy that silhouettes our choice and use of specific methods related to anticipated outcomes. For the purposes of this study, the anticipated outcomes were secondary to my desire as a researcher to allow the study participants to speak for themselves and tell their stories. Anderson (2009) stated that the goal of ethnography is to, “see people’s behavior on their terms, not ours” (Anderson, 2009, pg. 1). Anderson’s perspective is common among today’s marketing industry professionals, who seek to understand how people make purchasing decisions, and how they make use of the goods and services they choose to consume in their lives. Identifying the most popular or best-selling products in a given category can be easily accomplished by analyzing sales data, however, to understand why an individual chooses to buy one brand in lieu of a competing brand requires engaging with the individuals who are making these purchases and asking them about the reasons for their decision. This type of ethnographic interview (Spradley, 1980) can be unstructured, semi or lightly structured in nature, and in some cases can sometimes take the form of a guided conversation, where the researcher defines the topic and facilitates discussion among study participants (Gray, 2009).

I employed an ethnographic approach to collecting data and incorporated a variety of different approaches to observing, engaging with and interviewing study participants. Hammersley (2006) addressed many of the issues surrounding ethnography including the duration of study, the role of interviews as opposed to observation, and the context in which study participants are observed (certain days throughout the week, only in professional or school settings versus social or family settings, etc.). What is clear is that the design of this study was essential to providing an accurate understanding of the views of the community on higher

education. For this reason, it was necessary to engage in dialogue with the study participants – observation alone was not sufficient, as it would not have provided insight into why people either do or do not pursue higher education. Thus, I relied predominantly on semi-structured interviews, and in some cases, open-ended conversations with study participants. This flexibility was necessary in order to account for the varying levels of comfort and openness study participants felt in their interactions with me as the researcher (Gray, 2009).

In my interactions with the residents of La Rinconada, I observed that the men I spoke with tended to be more open to conversations and dialogues with me than their female counterparts, some of whom indicated that they were uneasy or intimidated by my presence. It was therefore useful to approach each individual in a manner that was suited to their preferences and comfort level (Spradley, 1979). In initiating conversations with individuals who were more wary of my presence and objectives, I asked general questions regarding their perception of how other community members are addressing issue pertaining to higher education, and whether they themselves share this perspective. I observed that many of the residents I spoke with felt more comfortable talking about their peers than they did themselves or their families at the start of their conversations with me, and as they grew more at ease, they volunteered more personal information. This is also addressed by Hammersley (2006), who advised that participants who are less comfortable with formal interviews or conversations with a researcher are more likely to provide insight into general behavioral trends in their community, specifically that of their peers (often neighbors or colleagues). These insights are often reflective of the individual's personal beliefs on the topic and can provide a great deal of information not only about the community, but about those individuals who comprise the families and social circles of the interview participant (Hammersley, 2006).

It was important to refrain from making assumptions about an individual's likely perspective on the interview topic. For some, the pursuit of higher education is not viewed as a decision to be made, either because it is assumed that attending an institution of higher education is a given (this may be due to the expectations held by family members and individuals comprising a student's social circles), or because the individual believes that pursuing higher education is either not possible or desirable. Quantitative analyses enable researchers to identify general trends in individual's behavior, but often do not provide insight into the reasons for the behavior. The purpose of using ethnography is to identify the reasons cited by the individuals being studied for why they behave in the manner they do (Hammersley, 2006). This was my goal in this study: to interpret people's behavior through their own understanding of their behavior with attention to the particular cultural context shaping their experiences, knowledge, and self-expression.

Significance of the Study

The Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática (INEI) of Peru publishes reports on annual basis which demonstrate the importance of higher education in Peru – over a lifetime, individuals who earn bachelor's degrees from public universities in Peru earn on average 550% more than their non-degree holding peers (INEI Statistical Report on Higher Education in Peru, 2014). This is a staggering statistic, as it lays bare the impact of higher education in relation to the earning potential of an individual – to find a permanent escape from poverty, higher education plays an essential role. My objective was to identify the reasons for the regressive nature of participation in higher education among Peru's poorest segments of society and the manner in which this impacts pursuit of higher education among Peru's poor. Accurately identifying these factors will make it easier to devise government policies to ameliorate these

obstacles, to make higher education more accessible to these communities and in turn help to facilitate the permanent escape from poverty for at least a portion of these families.

Limitations

The study was limited both in the scope of the study participants, as well as the region. I selected the community of La Rinconada and the surrounding region of Puno, Peru to conduct the study because I believed it to be indicative of other similar communities throughout Peru and other developing countries that are dependent on the excavation of natural resources. Thus, while I expected the resulting conclusions to be informative to similar regions throughout Peru and other developing countries, I explored the realities governing access to higher education among those families residing in or affiliated with La Rinconada, Peru. This investigation, like most ethnographic case studies, can inform the general by investigating the particular.

The study participants were comprised of individuals who have children, and whose children are currently enrolled in either public or private school. The conversations and interviews I engaged in focus on the feelings and experiences of the individuals residing in this community on higher education and may have elicited responses designed to appeal to what the participants felt would be most palatable to me as the researcher. I sought to gain their trust and reassure them that I was not seeking particular responses, I truly wanted to understand their experiences and perspectives. However, no study design could guarantee some level of social desirability was not at work. Additionally, as a White female from the United States, I recognize that my outward appearance and identity could have been a limitation initially, and it was necessary to build trust with the community members I included in the study. For this reason, I was accompanied by a fellow researcher who is a Peruvian male, approximately 10 years my senior – this helped to assuage concerns among community members regarding my objectives

and intentions, as well as speak to the legitimacy of my study. Lastly, as alluded to previously, women in La Rinconada, specifically married women, are less likely to participate in conversations with individuals from outside the community; in order to gain their confidence, it was necessary to employ a unique approach to engaging with them, one that builds trust.

Organization

The study is organized in a standard five-chapter dissertation format, where the first chapter includes the introduction, the second chapter identifies the literature pertaining to the subject, specifically that which has been written on access to higher education both in the United States and Peru, the culture of poverty, and research that has been done on access to higher education in Peru. The third chapter provides a detailed approach to the methodological approach of the study, the fourth chapter summarizes the findings, and the fifth and final chapter addresses the significance of the findings from a policy perspective and provides suggestions as to how the Peruvian government can incorporate the findings into drafting improved policies to facilitate greater access to higher education among the poorest segments of the population.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Access to higher education and the factors that determine who pursues or does not pursue some form of higher education provides insight into the lived experiences of many different populations within a given country. Literature on the access to higher education is readily available and examined in this review. The understanding of the general accessibility of higher education is necessary to then move into a focus on the higher education environment of Peru. The descriptive statistics compiled by the INEI (and the Peruvian Ministry of Education (MINEDU)) are also examined in this study. Lastly, literature on the theory of culture of poverty is reviewed to determine the extent to which these can explain the regressive nature of access to higher education in Peru among the poorest segments of the population.

The Massification of Higher Education in Developed Countries

Researchers analyzed higher education in the United States and identified three forms: (1) elite – designed to shape the mind and character of the ruling class; preparation for elite roles; (2) mass – designed to facilitate the, transmission of skills and preparation for a broader range of technical and economic elite roles; and (3) universal – adaptation of the ‘whole population’ to rapid social and technological change (Brennan, 2004; Trow, 1973; Trow, 2003; Trow, 2005). Trow (2005) asserted the history of higher education in the United States since World War II was largely defined by the emergence of the mass and universal forms of higher education. Prior to this, higher education was perceived as elite and was in existence in the United States prior to independence from Great Britain. Trow (1973) posited that the newer forms of higher education have not supplanted the elite form of higher education, and instead serve as complements to it by fulfilling different objectives and serving distinct populations of individuals. After World War II higher education in the United States was characterized as a substantial broadening of access to

higher education making it possible for more people to pursue some form of higher education (Trow, 2000). The creation and expansion of open access colleges such as community colleges, as they are termed in the United States, are the primary features of Trow's (2000) concept of mass education. These institutions are low-cost and located within the communities they serve contributing to the accessibility of higher education. However, it is important to highlight they are not free to students and they do require that students have access to some form of transportation in order to attend. In Trow's (2005) work, the evolution of technology and its role in higher education provides the differentiating factor between mass and universal higher education and is the hallmark of what constitutes universal higher education. Because students can now access higher education via distance learning or virtual classrooms, it is no longer necessary to commute to a physical classroom to attend class in a shared space with instructors and other students. This opens accessibility to higher education for anyone with access to a computer and the internet. In many cases, accessing the learning materials is free (Trow, 2005). Thus, as Trow points out many of the obstacles to higher education were eliminated within the past 60 years among developed countries such as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. Developing countries however, merit further study.

In his article addressing the relationship between higher education and society, Brennan (2008) incorporated the work of Trow (2000, 2005) characterizing higher education as helping to contribute to a knowledge society - one whereby all members of a society benefit from an educated society as better-educated people tend to contribute more economically advancing society through ideas, job creation and paying more in taxes. Brennan acknowledged the credentials educated individuals receive can be viewed as a private good benefiting the individual rather than a public good in which society as a whole benefits from their credentials.

Another important element in the discussion of access to higher education and its role in society is the extent an earned credential does or does not supersede the importance of the actual education received. Is it the credential itself or the knowledge accumulated throughout the learning process that matters and is the former the private good while the latter is the public good? One factor to consider in addressing this is the rise of universal higher education where an individual accesses learning and course materials without paying a fee, yet payment is required to be allowed to enroll and receive credentials for the completed coursework (Brennan, 2008; Trow, 2000). That the manner in which payment is assessed and collected is determined by whether the student is seeking to earn a credential or a certification of their work sums up the debate regarding higher education as a public or private good (Brennan, 2008).

Both Trow (2000) and Brennan (2004) viewed increased access to higher education and the rise of mass and universal higher education as a positive and inevitable shift among developed countries and document how many developed countries developed laws and policies designed to increase the access of their respective populations to higher education. This trend has not gone unnoticed by the governments in developing countries; however, the manner in which many elected to address this issue has varied widely throughout the past 40 years. Franco-Crespo, Ramos, Herrera, and Chavez (2019) referenced the intentional expansion of access to higher education by governments in Latin America as the *higher education coverage rate*. They asserted that countries such as Argentina, Chile and Uruguay have achieved the *universalization rate* of access to higher education which they define as more than 50% of the population between 18-24 years of age is currently accessing higher education (Franco-Crespo et al., 2019). The authors contended that countries such as Peru, Ecuador, Colombia or Brazil with between 15 and 50% of the 18-24 year old population currently accessing higher education can be considered as

having achieved the *massification phase* of providing access to higher education (Franco-Crespo et al., 2019). They posited that the manner in which each country has achieved an increase in access to higher education is unique to the country and include a mix of government investments along with large investments from private pension funds and private investors (Franco-Crespo et al., 2019). In the case of Peru, the majority of the funds allocated to expanding access to higher education have been private, both in the form of investments by the massive private pension funds as well as private investments on the part of hedge funds and other private equity firms (Franco-Crespo et al., 2019). Peru's growth in the number of private, for-profit, institutions has shaped the manner in which students access higher education and has created a sort of stratification among the students pursuing higher education (Franco-Crespo et al., 2019). The next section examines the manner in which this stratification has impacted higher education in developed countries.

Factors Contributing to Access to Higher Education in Developed Countries

In contrast to Trow's (2000) and Brennan's (2004) view of higher education in developed countries such as the United States, others posit that higher education is not necessarily universal nor accessible. Mettler (2014) asserted that opposite to creating a universal or mass system of higher education, the current state of higher education in the United States has evolved into a sort of caste system. The children of wealthy families attend the higher priced, private, non-profit institutions while the more economically challenged are compelled to pursue their higher education at the underfunded community colleges and for-profit institutions (Mettler, 2014). Rather than fomenting social mobility in the United States, Mettler contended that the current state of higher education is only serving to exacerbate inequality.

In Mettler's (2014) study various factors that she believes contributed to the current state of higher education in the United States were analyzed. The sharp decline in state funding for public institutions, financial aid benefits not predicated on a student's economic situation, lack of support services in the high schools serving the lowest income districts, rankings systems prioritizing standardized test scores as an indicator of the academic capabilities of the institution's student body, and lack of awareness or knowledge of how the system works by the students themselves were analyzed (Mettler, 2014). Mettler concluded that these factors resulted in the creation of a system of higher education reflecting the economic stratification of society, whereby the economically disadvantaged students are routed to specific institutions corresponding to their economic profiles while the wealthier students attend better funded and better regarded institutions to earn their degrees. It can also be perceived that earning degrees from the better institutions will lead to better jobs upon graduation (Mettler, 2014). Mettler found the degree completion rates for disadvantaged students are far lower than those for students attending private, non-profit institutions. Rather than earning higher salaries and advancing in their careers by attending institutions of higher education, disadvantaged students are adding to their debt burden while gaining little in the way of monetary improvement (Mettler, 2014).

Qualitative Research on Higher Education Access in Developed Countries

Qualitative studies focused on access to higher education are far less common than quantitative studies. Critiques of qualitative methods often include producing credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1994) identified four competing paradigms within research, positivism, post positivism, critical theory, and related ideological positions, and define the assumptions of each and the manner in which a qualitative approach should be employed for each based on the implications of these

assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). They commenced by addressing the basic differences between a quantitative and a qualitative approach to research methodology and the belief that historically research has tended towards a quantitative approach resulting in the over quantification of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). For Lincoln and Guba, the key to effective qualitative research is to ensure that the paradigm complements the selected methodology, specifically by respecting the embedded assumptions contained within the paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

In this section, I analyze two qualitative studies focused on access to higher education among high school students in the United States. These studies were selected because they are representative of the qualitative research in this field and are germane to my study. It should be noted that majority of research pertaining to access to higher education in the United States is quantitative and the number of qualitative studies addressing this topic were limited.

Temple's (2009) study is particularly useful for my study because of the ethnographic approach she applied to her research and the manner in which she interacted with her study participants which was similar to my approach to my research. Temple (2009) analyzed the elements factoring into students' decisions as to whether or not to pursue higher education at an urban, predominantly African American high school in New Jersey. She concluded that the most problematic issue for students in accessing higher education was the lack of support, guidance and general knowledge regarding how to apply to college. Other factors included "socioeconomic status, cultural and social capital, family structure and expectations, financial reasons and the general organization of the high school" (Temple, 2009, p. 5). Temple's conclusion suggests that with better college counseling at the high school, more students from the school would pursue higher education.

Temple's (2009) decision to employ an ethnographic approach to this study is aligned with her stated objective to gain a better understanding of the experience of the African American community in a low income, urban setting in accessing higher education. Gobo and Molle (2017) stated ethnography enable a researcher to gain an insight into how a certain community or group of individuals approaches day-to-day life within a given setting, similar to Temple's objective. In this context, relying on questionnaires or surveys as the primary method to obtain information about a specific population or group of people is not sufficient to gather all of the details a researcher can glean through observing the same group or population and making field notes (Gobo & Molle, 2017). The observance of and interaction with a group of individuals within a given setting comprises the essence of what ethnography entails (Gobo & Molle, 2017). Gobo and Molle emphasized that interaction between the researcher and the study participants should not deviate from the quotidian activities of the latter. They acknowledged informal conversations and group interviews among others are acceptable methods of procuring ancillary information not readily accessible through observation of day-to-day activities (Gobo & Molle, 2017).

Richard Ocejo (2013), a sociologist and ethnographer, believed ethnographers seek to analyze how people understand their own life situations, examine connections between their micro-level thoughts and actions and macro-level social structures, and provide generalized explanations for their behavior and for what makes it distinct or similar to other social groups by studying them in their natural settings. It is precisely this element that is missing from the existing research on access to higher education in Peru, the voices of the students, their families, and those most impacted by the process, and it is this aspect of access to higher education in the United States that is examined in Temple's (2009) study of high school students in New Jersey.

Temple found that the most compelling factors either inhibiting or facilitating access to higher education were family members or at least a peer network of individuals seeking to pursue higher education and when this was not present, numerous and highly involved guidance counselors at the high school attended to guide the student through the process and serve as mentors. In the absence of both variables, a student was far less likely to pursue higher education.

Temple's (2009) study focused on the daily lives of students in one urban high school close to New York City. The aspects pertaining to the students' relationship with higher education and the factors influencing the probability of these students pursuing some form of higher education were analyzed (Temple, 2009). In keeping with Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) broad definition of ethnography, Temple did not have a structured method for data collection and instead incorporated a variety of different methods throughout the 2 years of observation. Additionally, Temple did not try to stage or prepare the environments her and her colleagues selected for the study and chose to observe the study participants engaging in their daily routines, which is a common approach in ethnographical studies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In the interviews, she did not identify a list of interview questions for each study participant to answer and allowed the interviewees to determine the course of the interview. She only asked for clarification when she believed it was necessary (Lee, 2000; Temple, 2009). In the 2 years spent observing and interviewing students at the high school, she was able to add to the existing body of research regarding the factors influencing whether or not a high school graduate pursued higher education by determining that in addition to socioeconomic status and family background, the extent to which a high school provided counseling and assistance to students was a contributing factor as to whether or not a student pursued higher education (Temple,

2009). Given the length of time of the study and the number of hours spent both observing and interacting with the study participants Temple utilized an ethnographic approach to her research intending for the results of her study to be generalizable at least as it pertains to other high schools with similar profiles. Generalizability in quantitative analyses can be accomplished in multiple ways, including selecting study participants who share characteristics with multiple populations, devising interview questions and observation methods used in other studies, and ensuring that the location of the study is representative of other populations which might be accounted for in the study (Kirk & Miller, 1986). While Temple focused on a specific community, an urban high school in New Jersey, her results are indicative of a more general problem within U.S. high schools. It is important to note Temple focused on high school students who had not yet attended an institution of higher education, whereas the majority of the quantitative studies in this area focused on students already attending institutions of higher education.

Temple (2009) asserted that when a student's family and peer network do not act as agents in either encouraging or reinforcing a student's likelihood of pursuing higher education the high school they attend must fill this void. Additionally, the issue of lack of parental or peer support network most often correlates to students belonging to the lowest socioeconomic levels of high school students in the United States (Temple, 2009). The methodological approach to reflect these assumptions was to focus on a large, public, urban high school that served the most economically disadvantaged students (Temple, 2009). Additionally, Temple correlated race and access to higher education including statistics from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2007), which indicated that the percentage of African American students attending college immediately following high school graduation was 55.5% compared to 68.5% of their

White counterparts. By incorporating the statistics from NCES into the methodology, it ensured the study participants included a diverse population of students specifically students who identified as African American as well as other minority groups (Temple, 2009). As the objective was to determine the potential causes for the discrepancy in college attendance rates between high and low socioeconomic classes as well as between White and African American students, Temple selected a study participant group that would enable her to explore these factors. The profile of the study participants determined the methodological approach of the study. The decision to do an ethnographic study was based in large part on the profile of the individuals studied and the manner in which she could best extract accurate, useable data with the intent of helping to inform policy decisions in this area (Temple, 2009), which corresponds with my own methodological decisions for investigating access to higher education in Peru.

In their study, Tierney and Colay (2006) profiled the lived experiences of five different high school students and detail their respective journeys from high school to higher education. The stories of the five students are recounted from the perspectives of the students and address the unique circumstances of each student. The students who are profiled in the study are from extremely different ethnic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and what is salient about the study is the manner in which each one navigates within his or her own personal circumstances. It is up to the reader to draw their own conclusions from the five different stories but it is clear that the students with greater economic privilege benefit not only from their family's wealth, but also from the perspectives of their family members, friends and high school administration on higher education. These individuals serve as a kind of support network, encouraging the student to pursue higher education as well as instructing them on how best to access the institutions that are of interest to the student. It was also clear that for the students

who lacked, socio-economic resources, the support network enjoyed by their wealthier peers was also less robust and for two of the students, almost non-existent (Tierney & Colay, 2006).

Both studies focused on the individual stories of the study participants and allow readers to understand the lived realities of those individuals. They included students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, however the majority were from financially challenged backgrounds. The study participants shared with the reader what they believe are the primary challenges to pursuing higher education as well as how and why they identified the institutions they chose to attend if they opted to pursue higher education at all. Temple (2009) found that for the financially challenged students attending the high school in which she conducted her study, peer support networks and numerous and highly-motivated college guidance counselors played an essential role in determining whether a student chose to pursue higher education. Several study participants in Temple's study had friends who attended other, wealthier, high schools and mentioned that at those institutions, students had greater access to guidance counselors – there were more of them. They also mentioned that the guidance counselors at the wealthier high schools were likely to encourage students to pursue vocational training as opposed to academic degrees than were the counselors at their own high school. Tierney and Colay (2006) identified similar factors limiting the pursuit of higher education for the financially challenged students who participated in their study, and additionally, the lack of financial resources was also cited by the study participants as an obstacle to pursuing higher education. Both studies informed the construction of my own study through the methodology as well as the conclusions relating to the realities of secondary schooling and how these contribute to limiting the pursuit of higher education among financially challenged students (Temple, 2009; Tierney & Colay, 2006).

Quantitative Research on Higher Education Access in Developed Countries

The research focused on access to higher education in developed countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom and developing countries such as Peru is primarily quantitative in nature. In the United States, many of the quantitative studies rely on databases that have been collected by entities such as the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which houses the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) that provides data focused on postsecondary education in the United States. The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 was also a source of data for several of the studies I read. The objectives of the researchers who examined access to higher education in the United States, specifically among financially challenged populations, were to gain a global perspective of the factors facilitating or inhibiting access. The post-positivist approach was the most widely used epistemology among the quantitative studies represented in this study. Below I analyze three studies that best represent the quantitative literature addressing access to higher education in the United States.

In their study, Harris and Halpin (2002) devised an instrument that was practical for administering to a large number of students and provides an accurate analysis of the factors related to why students choose to pursue higher education. Harris and Halpin developed the instrument to study the attitudes and experiences of first-year college students enrolled at two southeastern universities in the United States. The study participants were then emailed the survey and were incentivized to complete them with an offer of a reward. The instrument devised by Harris and Halpin (2002) served as the basis for Coy-Ogan's (2009) study who employed a similar approach to recruiting students to participate in the study. By offering a reward for completing the instrument, Coy-Ogan's (2009) study garnered the participation of close to 400 students while Harris and Halpin recruited over 500.

Coy-Ogan (2009) analyzed the salient factors impacting the decision-making process as to whether to pursue higher education and compared first-year, first-generation college students with students from college-educated families. Through Harris and Halpin's (2002) instrument entitled, *The Factors Influencing the Pursuit of Higher Education (FIPHE Questionnaire)*, Coy-Ogan studied 348 first-year college students at a university with a student population comprised of approximately 50% first-generation students. The instrument is a 92-item self-report measure that investigates factors influencing individuals to pursue higher education (Harris & Halpin, 2002). The instrument, predicated on 10 variables, nine of which the authors found a statistically significant effect on the decision-making process for students regarding whether or not to pursue higher education, was originally developed to study the attitudes and experiences of first-year college students enrolled at two southeastern universities (Harris & Halpin., 2002).

The first variable, self-efficacy, defined by Bandura (1996) as one's expectations and beliefs about one's ability to perform specific behaviors, was predictive of behaviors such as academic performance, academic persistence, achievement motivation and the number of career options that a person considers (Bandura, 1996; Brown, Lent, & Larkin, 1989; Harris et al., 2002; Lent, Larkin, & Brown, 1989; Schunk, 1991). The second variable, locus of control, is defined as an individual's perceived sources of control over certain behaviors or events (Chapman & Boersma, 1979; Harris & Halpin, 2002). Individuals who possess a high internal locus of control versus those who view their lives as controlled by external factors are more likely to pursue a college degree (Gadzella, Williamson, & Ginther, 1985; Harris & Halpin, 2002; Mickelson, 1990). Parental influence is the third variable positing that parent involvement, awareness and knowledge leads to better academic performance among students at all educational levels (Epstein, 1992; Harris & Halpin, 2002). College-educated parents have a

particular impact on this area as they are considered to be more aware of the demands of college, and therefore have children who tend to be more successful in pursuing higher education (Harris & Halpin, 2002; Windham, 1996; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). This variable is of particular interest because it does not attribute higher rates of participation in higher education among children of college-educated parents to a greater valuing of higher education by their parents. It also does not deem college education parents as better equipped to guide their children through the process of accessing higher education, it simply states that they are more aware. One can infer that while non-college-educated parents may value higher education and want that for their children, they are not aware of the challenges and complications accompanying this pursuit. Perhaps this is sufficient to deter their children from pursuing higher education.

Family influence is the fourth variable addressing the extent to which the family supports a child in their academic endeavors (Harris & Halpin, 2002; Haveman & Wolfe, 1995; Thompson, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1988). Harris and Halpin (2002) pointed out this can be especially problematic for first-generation students as their families may see value in pursuing higher education and initially encourage their children or siblings to pursue it. Family members can also place additional pressures on first-generation students when academic obligations conflict with time spent with the family (Harris & Halpin, 2002; Terenzini et al., 1994). Peer influence, the fifth variable, illustrates the extent to which friendship networks and peers either work to facilitate or inhibit a student's pursuit of higher education, as well as the institution, and major selected (Harris & Halpin, 2002; Terenzini et al., 1994).

The sixth variable is relative functionalism which measures the manner in which individuals perceive the function or utility of higher education in relation to the pursuit of other, non-academic activities (Harris & Halpin, 2002). They asserted that in certain communities

where other activities such as mining, sports, or potentially illegal activities are commonly engaged in by community members and perceived as providing comparable opportunities to those provided by higher education, it is less likely that an individual will pursue higher education (Harris & Halpin, 2002). The glass ceiling effect is the seventh variable and occurs when a person or group perceives the opportunities for success in a particular job or jobs to be blocked (Harris & Halpin, 2002; Mickelson, 1990). This is particularly salient for minority groups who may feel that due to their race, religion, sexual preference or gender, certain majors or careers traditionally held by the majority populations are inaccessible to them which in turn impacts their desire to pursue higher education (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Harris & Harpin, 2002; Steinburg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

The eighth and ninth variables, teacher-student interactions and general preparation for college respectively are interrelated and indicative of the educational experience enjoyed by the student throughout their primary and secondary schooling (Harris & Harpin, 2002). Students who attended private schools or public schools in wealthy neighborhoods have the advantage as the student/teacher ration tends to be lower along with the ratios for the number of students per guidance counselor (Howe, 1997; Lumsden, 1997; Raffini, 1993). The last variable, financial aid, is of particular interest as the periods of mass and universal higher education described by Trow (2000) and Brennan (2004) were accompanied by decreased state and federal funding for students. Students are compelled to assume a greater portion of the costs associated with higher education in the form of student loans.

Harris and Harpin's (2002) instrument was refined twice prior to achieving the intended results. With alpha coefficients ranging from .66-.89, the results were statistically significant. The most salient aspects in the study were the varimax and oblique rotations to determine which

factors accounted for the greatest total variance. Family support had an eigenvalue of 7.67 and accounted for the greatest variation with 8.43%. Secondary school support, with an eigenvalue of 6.00, accounted for 6.58% of the common variation (Harris & Harpin, 2002). In comparison to the importance placed on financial aid by Trow (2000) and Brennan (2008), it only accounted for 2.63% of the common variance, with an eigenvalue of 2.40 (Harris & Harpin, 2002). This conclusion is also supported in Coy-Ogan's (2009) study using the same instrument which compared first-generation college students with their non-first-generation peers. Family influence and college preparation were the only variables for which there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups of students (Coy-Ogan, 2009). First-year, first-generation college students perceived family influence and preparation for college to be less influential on their pursuit of higher education than students from college-educated families (Coy-Ogan, 2009).

An instrument works best when it is designed by someone who has a deep cultural understanding of the subject group they are seeking to study. In both Harris and Halpin (2002) and Coy-Ogan's (2009) studies, the authors possessed a clear understanding of the culture and backgrounds of their study participants because they resided in the same region and either worked or had an affiliation with the institutions their participants attended.

Language is another important consideration in the design of the instrument – not writing the instrument in the language of the participants, but also incorporating the colloquialisms and idiosyncrasies of the region (Kirk & Miller, 1986). This becomes especially important in places where the intended participants are not accustomed to interacting with individuals outside of their region and are simply not aware of the meaning of phrasing or terminology used outside of their region (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Coy-Ogan (2009) studied a large number of participants who

were first-generation college students, many of whom identified as Hispanic. Utilizing the instrument designed by Harris and Halpin (2002), Coy-Ogan worked to determine whether the results indicated a difference in responses between respondents who spoke a language other than English as their first language and those whose first language was English. If a difference was found it could be due to the manner in which the instrument was worded (Harris & Halpin, 2002; Kirk & Miller, 1986). If the questionnaire were administered to a different population of students from those they included in their study who were predominantly Hispanic or Asian, the factor patterns might vary (Harris & Halpin, 2002).

The approach used by Harris and Halpin (2002) works particularly well when the researcher is interested in targeting study participants at a limited number of institutions. Harris and Halpin focused on two institutions, while Coy-Ogan (2009) focused on only one institution. Implicit in the methodology is the assumption these findings can be reproduced among student populations at other comparable institutions. The researchers do not view the institutions they studied as outliers or exceptions, rather as representative of the student populations of large, public institutions across the United States; therefore, the study is generalizable and transferrable. Generalizability Theory (G) is a statistical theory for evaluating the reliability of behavioral measurements, specifically the manner in which a given study could be replicated in other environments (Brennan, 2001; Cronbach, Gleser, Nanda, & Rajaratnam, 1972; Shavelson & Webb, 2005). This is an important distinction as the specific populations of the institutions themselves are not what the researchers are studying, rather the overall significance of what the results might indicate for the broader population. While Harris and Halpin cautioned the external validity of their instrument might be limited depending on the cultural and lingual backgrounds of the respondents, the intent of the study was to identify general patterns among

the variables impacting student access to higher education in the United States keeping with the principles of Generalizability Theory (G) (Brennan, 2001; Cronbach et al., 1972; Shavelson & Webb, 2005).

Thomas (1998) examined the impact of background, high school preparation, family and peer influence and financial aid on the access for Black and Latino students to higher education. Thomas's study relies on the database compiled by the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988-1994. She used a logistic regression analysis to identify the factors contributing to the discrepancy in access to higher education between Black and Latino students and their White peers. Similar to Mettler's (2014) study, Thomas concluded that the stratification of higher education, which she defines as the venue in which higher education is pursued, proved to have the most direct correlation with race and socio-economic level (SEL) (Thomas, 1998). She concluded that of the students who pursued higher education, Blacks and Latinos were three times more likely to attend community colleges and for-profit institutions than their White peers (Thomas, 1998). Additionally, the Black and Latino population groups were four times more likely to pursue a vocational degree than were their White counterparts (Thomas, 1998).

Thomas's (1998) conclusions are important because they show that among students who pursue higher education there are differentiating factors among students. The institutions where students pursue higher education, the majors they select and the earnings the program graduates can expect are all factors in establishing that even when students pursue higher education, there are factors that can limit the financial success they achieve following the successful completion of a degree (Thomas, 1998). Thomas's study is important because it establishes the differentiation within higher education which is an important part of this study.

The quantitative studies detailed in the preceding paragraphs establish broad-based conclusions that account for the reasons why specific groups of individuals are under-represented in higher education in the United States. They provide readers with an overview of the factors limiting the access to higher education for groups of students, but they do not evaluate the lived experiences of those individuals who appear as data in these studies, nor do they provide the context for these conclusions. In my study, I aimed to incorporate the lived experience of the study participants and to allow them to share their stories.

Access to Higher Education in Peru

The body of literature pertaining to access to higher education and the decisions made by students as to whether to pursue higher education are important to examine within the context of higher education in Peru. The analysis of the literature that follows focuses on the history of the development of higher education in Peru and its current state, as well as on the factors that determine access to higher education in Peru.

Growth of Public and Private Institutions in Peru

In his extensive study documenting the history of higher education legislation in Peru, Ongaro Estrada (2001) described how higher education has evolved in Peru. While it does not fit Trow's (2000) model exactly, it does illustrate that there was a similar trajectory in the attempts made by Peruvian politicians to expand access to higher education to families who had been traditionally been excluded from it (Ongaro Estrada, 2001; Trow, 2000). The way this was executed, however, differs sharply from the way in which this was pursued in countries such as the United States. Rather than increasing the number of state-funded universities, Peru passed laws to facilitate the expansion of private universities (both not-for-profit and for-profit) whose

purpose was to cater to the student populations residing in rural areas outside of the larger cities (Ongaro Estrada, 2001).

During his first term as the president of Peru (July, 1985-July, 1990), President Alain Garcia facilitated the creation of six new universities, only one of which was public (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). Garcia's successor, Alberto Fujimori, oversaw the creation of 21 new institutions of higher education in Peru (15 universities and 6 vocational institutes), all private (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). To put this in perspective, the number of universities in Peru quadrupled from 1962-2000, increasing from 18 to 72, 44 of which are private compared to 28 that are public (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). Fujimori held strong political beliefs regarding public higher education in Peru with the perspective that "some of the most important state universities had converted themselves into nothing more nor less than authentic trenches of terrorism" (Ongaro Estrada, 2001, p. 63). This may help to explain why 15 private universities were created during his tenure while no public institutions were opened, supporting a preference for private institutions. Peru simply lacks the budget to build public universities and institutions, especially given that Article 17 of the Political Constitution of Peru states that students who attend public institutions do not pay a tuition (*Constitucion Politica del Peru*, Article #17).

While the aim of this study is not to examine the political perspectives governing public higher education in Peru but to analyze the expansion of higher education and its accessibility, it is important to provide some insight into how it came to be that Fujimori presided over the greatest growth of private institutions of higher education in the history of Peru and the role of his political views throughout this process (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). Under Fujimori, the concept of universities as businesses not only gained traction, it was prioritized (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). Under previous administrations, the universities were permitted to be private so long as

they did not operate as businesses, instead they invested any profits back into the institution (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). This perspective changed under Fujimori as the only way to incentivize the growth of higher education in Peru, especially in those areas where public funds were simply not available for the purposes of higher education, was to include private enterprise in the process (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). This required officially legalizing for-profit higher education in Peru, a measure accompanied by a great deal of publicity (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013).

Fujimori's disdain for public universities stemmed partially from his own background and the political and social climate in Peru throughout this period (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). Prior to becoming Peru's first president of Japanese ethnicity, Fujimori was a professor at the prestigious Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina, a public university located in Lima that served as one of the few strongholds for political conservatives in an otherwise left-dominated political environment among public universities (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). When Fujimori became president, the political and economic climate in Peru was dominated by a Communist revolutionary movement calling themselves *Sendero Luminoso*, or the Shining Path in English. The group was founded by Abimael Guzman in 1970, who was a professor of philosophy at the San Cristobal de Huamanga National University in Ayacucho. The group relied on violence and intimidation to gain followers across the Peruvian highlands and used the public universities throughout these regions to spread their message (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). In 1990, this group was designated as a terrorist organization by the United States government, the European Union and countries across the globe. They were renowned for their use of violence to achieve their objectives. While the Shining Path controlled large areas of Peru's rural highlands, they were

unable to gain a foothold in Lima, despite successfully perpetrating several mass attacks that resulted in multiple fatalities (Ongaro Estrada, 2001).

Fujimori made the complete destruction of the Shining Path his primary objective, and in 1992 Peruvian authorities captured Guzman in Lima (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). Fujimori's relationship with the Shining Path, and the role public universities played in the dissemination of group's ideology is essential to understanding the reasons why Fujimori was such a big proponent of allowing for the creation of private, for-profit universities. For Fujimori, allowing companies to offer education for profit would accomplish two objectives: a.) provide greater access to higher education in areas where there was none without the need of government investment b.) protect against using universities as vectors for the dissemination of extreme, anti-government ideologies; for-profit institutions are not ideologically-affiliated (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013).

In an assessment of the state of higher education in Peru, Rodriguez and Montoro (2013) analyzed data collected from 1998-2008 to provide some insight into the distribution of applicants and admitted students between public and private universities. In 1998, 75.9% of the total applicant pool applied to a public university. In 2000 this figure was 82%. Then in 2008, this percentage dropped to 61.7% (ANR Peru, 2013; Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). In 2000, approximately 50.1% of all applicants admitted to a university in Peru attended a public university and 59.8% of all enrolled university students were enrolled at a public university. In comparison in 2008, only 30.1% of all admitted students to a university attended a public university. Public university students comprised only 40.1% of all students enrolled at a Peruvian university (ANR Peru, 2013; Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). While the trend in both private and public universities is to admit a higher percentage of applicants than in 2000, in 2008 public

universities only admitted 10 out of every 48 to 63 applicants, compared to private universities which admitted 10 out of every 13 to 15 applicants (ANR Peru, 2013; Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013).

Rodriguez and Montoro (2013) acknowledged that despite the increase in the number of institutions of higher education in Peru, there are not enough to meet the student demand. During the period from 2005 to 2008, between 411,000 and 482,000 students applied to attend a public or private university in Peru (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). Of those, between 144,000 and 216,000 students were admitted for study, less than half of the applicant pool (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). This highlights that while there has been a concerted effort in Peru to make higher education accessible to a greater number of students, it is far from achieving Trow's (2000) definition of universal access. It should also be noted that in addition to private universities, Peru has seen a rapid growth in the number of for-profit vocational institutes. The for-profit vocational institutes offer students the possibility to earn a more technical, applied degree; however, these degrees are not equivalent to a bachelor's degree (Ongaro Estrada, 2001; Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013).

Return on Investment for Higher Education in Peru

In Yamada's (2006) study regarding the return on investment of higher education in Peru, it was found that vocational institutes provided a far lower return on investment than that gained by attending a university, and in some cases generated a net loss. The best option available to students when evaluating higher education based on factors pertaining to return on investment is actually a bachelor's degree earned from a private university, which is surprising given that public universities in Peru do not charge a tuition, while private universities cost on average between \$1,500-\$2,000 per year (Yamada, 2006). In the most recent report on the state

of Peruvian higher education released in 2014 by Peru's National Institute of Statistics (INEI), the biggest difference in salary earned by graduates of private universities versus public universities was in Lima. Graduates of private universities earned 2,670 soles versus the 2,344 soles earned by graduates of public universities in Lima (INEI Statistical Report on Higher Education in Peru, 2014). This contrasts sharply with the situation in the provinces or regions outside of Lima where graduates of public institutions earned on average 1,871 soles as opposed to the 1,836 soles earned by graduates of private universities indicating a parity in the income earned by graduates of both public and private institutions (INEI Statistical Report on Higher Education in Peru, 2014).

The statistics for Lima substantiate Yamada's (2006) conclusions specific for the population of university graduates in the city of Lima. The gap between the return on investment on higher education, specifically earning a university degree, as compared to simply completing a primary or secondary education has increased. In 2014 the return on investment for university degrees was 2.7 times the return on investment of completing a secondary education (Yamada, 2006). This trend is useful for understanding the realities behind the factors associated with students' decision-making processes in determining whether to pursue higher education.

Financial Constraints and Access to Higher Education in Peru

In a study investigating higher education decisions in Peru, Castro et al. (2011) analyzed the extent to which financial constraints, skills and family background factored into a student's decision as to whether or not to pursue higher education in Peru. The article begins with the statement that "access to higher education in Peru is remarkably regressive" (Castro et al., 2011, p. 3). While there is little doubt that this statement is true if one were to compare Peru to developed countries, and even some developing countries, Rodriguez and Montoro (2013) and

Ongaro Estrada (2001) demonstrated that the number of people accessing higher education now in Peru has nearly tripled within the past 40 years. More students are accessing higher education now than at any point throughout the history of Peru and there are more institutions of higher education in Peru now than ever before. However, higher education continues to serve largely the middle and upper social classes. According to the national household survey commissioned by the INEI in Peru conducted in 2010, only 37% of the high school graduates in the lowest 20% of income earning families in Peru enrolled in some form of higher education, compared to nearly 80% of high school graduates in the highest income earning families in Peru (Castro et al., 2011; ENAHO, 2010). This is particularly true of university enrollments as opposed to enrollments in vocational or technical schools or institutes which show an inverse relationship to income-level where those individuals from lower-income families are more likely to enroll in institutes than their wealthier counterparts (Castro et al., 2011; ENAHO, 2010; INEI Statistical Report on Higher Education in Peru, 2014).

Figure 1 shows that the percentage of high school graduates in the bottom three tiers of income earners in Peru, Q1, Q2, and Q3 (0-60% of income earning households) are more likely to attend vocational/technical institutes than universities. The top 40% of income earners in Peru are more likely to attend universities. Approximately 60% of high school graduates in Q1 and Q2 (the lowest 40% of income earners) do not pursue any form of higher education. While high school graduates in Q4 (60-80% of income earners) have more high school graduates attending universities than vocational/technical schools, only 6% more students access some form of higher education than the Q3 group. Interestingly, the Q5 group is only surprising insofar as the percentage of students who attend universities is substantially higher than the previous four groups, with nearly 80 percent of all high school graduates pursuing some form of higher

education. The average for the country indicates that approximately one-third of all high school graduates in Peru attend a university (public or private) and slightly less than two-thirds of all high school graduates pursues some form of higher education.

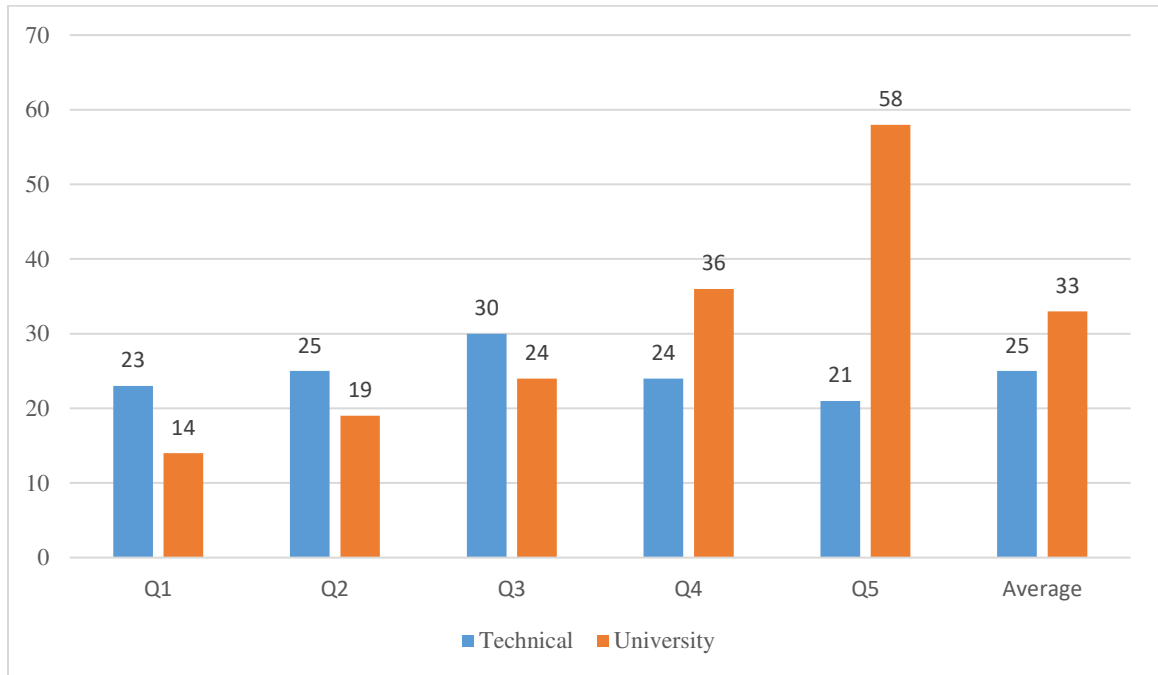


Figure 1. Percentage of 17 to 25 -year-olds with completed secondary education who attended high education in Peru. Source: ENAHO, 2010.

Castro et al. (2011) were principally concerned with identifying the factors contributing to a student's decision as to whether or not to pursue some form of higher education. As opposed to the instrument designed by Harris and Harpin (which was designed for students already attending a higher education institution in the United States), Castro et al. based their analyses on data collected by the World Bank. These data were part of an extensive household survey that included standardized psychology and achievement tests designed to measure both the cognitive skills and the general psychological functioning of the population ages 18 to 50 residing in urban areas of Peru (Castro et al., 2011).

Skill measures through Rasch and z scores were based on cognitive tests of the following: numeracy and problem-solving ability, working memory, verbal fluency and receptive language, self-reported responses to scales of the Big-Five Personality Factors (Goldberg, 1990) and grit or perseverance and the will to strive for long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). The survey also includes a comprehensive questionnaire to assess individual educational histories (pre-school through college/technical education), family background and socio-economic conditions. Socioeconomic conditions are based on data from the following: parental education and occupation, family size and composition, schooling trajectories related to access (e.g., distance) and characteristics of institutions attended, self-reported scholastic aptitudes, parental involvement, self-reported family economic conditions at the time of attendance to basic education, choice of post-secondary career and institution and reasons (Castro et al., 2011).

It is essential to point out that the household data collected by the World Bank study is markedly different in nature than Harris and Harpin's (2002) instrument. The data from the World Bank study are largely based on standardized assessments taken by the study participants and analyzed by the researchers and are not in connection to specific questions surrounding the participant's perspective and experience in contemplating whether or not to pursue higher education. Rather than responding to a survey directly related to higher education designed to measure the impact of family perspective and support, the support provided by the secondary school in encouraging the student to pursue higher education, or the impact of social capital on pursuing higher education, the World Bank study is a collection of unrelated cognitive and psychological tests and assessments the authors used to determine the extent to which the information indicated commonalities among the study participants along with the manner in which these correlated to higher or lower tendency to pursue higher education. This is not to say

that one method (or instrument) is better than the other, but rather to draw the reader's attention to the difference between the two.

It is also useful to highlight that Harris and Harpin's (2002) instrument largely omitted any reference to cognitive ability or academic aptitude, which could have been measured by the student's GPA or performance on a standardized test, in their instrument. Instead, their instrument focused on the student's perception of other factors relating to their decision as to whether or not to pursue higher education (Harris & Harpin, 2002). Adding academic aptitude to the instrument to measure the impact on the decision making process would increase the applicability of the instrument. Additionally, it should be noted the World Bank study does not include information pertaining to the secondary school performance of the study participants, likely because it is very specific to the secondary institution they attended, where a test or assignment in one institution could receive a substantially different mark in another institution.

Castro et al. (2011) undertook their study with the objective of identifying the factors that explain the discrepancy in access to higher education among the socio-economic classes in Peru. They hypothesized that financial constraints could not alone account for the discrepancy, and analyzed the data obtained by the World Bank household survey to determine whether there were statistically significant correlations between pursuing higher education and other factors such as socioeconomic-status, parental background, educational background, cognitive skill and grit (Castro et al., 2011). Prior to this study, both Peruvian and foreign researchers along with Peruvian government officials assumed the primary reason for the gap between higher education participation among the lowest socio-economic classes in Peru and the highest income earners was quite simply a lack of financial resources (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). This assumption was not an unreasonable one, given the dearth of public universities which are the only

institutions of higher education free of cost to students who can pass a highly competitive entrance exam, and the income-gap between the wealthiest and the poorest segments of the population (INEI Study on Higher Education in Peru, 2014). Additionally, the Peruvian government does not provide government-subsidized loans to students seeking to pursue higher education. Only within the past 5 years have banks and other lenders offered financial products designed to enable students to pay for their higher education. The loans are largely characterized by their extraordinarily high interest rates (some as high as 110%) and draconian repayment policies in which a student must begin repayment within 2-3 years of graduation and the borrower begins accumulating interest at the moment of disbursement (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). For students in Peru wishing to pursue higher education, there are limited financial options if they are not admitted into one of the free public universities. Similar to other South American countries, (Jennings & Da Matta, 2009), public high schools in Peru rarely prepare students sufficiently to pass this exam, and therefore those students whose families can afford private K-12 schools tend to be admitted. It is either a parent, family member or benefactor that must cover the monthly tuition of private institutions or the student pays for their own education by working (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013).

One statistic in particular stands out in relation to the correlation between a student's socio-economic level and their likeliness of pursuing higher education that suggests the lack of financial resources is not the only or even the determining factor in whether high school graduates in Peru pursue higher education. Nearly two-thirds of the students enrolled in a public vocational institute and four-fifths of those enrolled in a public university, both free of cost, come from the top 30% of income earning households (Moron et al., 2009). While there are many reasons for this trend such as poor quality of primary and secondary academic preparation

or a general lack of guidance at the institution of secondary education, researchers such as Castro et al. (2011) seize on this statistic to cast doubt on the notion that a lack of financial resources is the only factor at play in determining one's likelihood of pursuing higher education.

It is essential to closely examine Castro et al.'s (2011) study because it is the most extensive study, either quantitative or qualitative, focusing on the manner in which financial resources impact access to higher education in Peru. The purpose of Castro et al.'s study was to determine the extent to which making funds more readily available to high school graduates in the lowest socio-economic classes might help to close the gap in access to higher education. Using a regression analysis beginning with socioeconomic status as a factor in determining pursuit of higher education then progressively controlling for the additional factors, the authors grouped the variables they used in the analysis into five separate covariate groups: socioeconomic status, cognitive skills, non-cognitive skills, parental background and educational background (Castro et al., 2011). In the World Bank survey, respondents were asked to classify their economic status, the background of their parents, their educational background (cognitive skills were measured in a separate exam) and their academic stamina, or grit. The variables comprising the covariate group non-cognitive skills included grit, extraversion, agreeableness or easy going, agreeableness or reliable, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness (Castro et al., 2011). Parental background included father's educational attainment where both secondary and higher education attainment were assigned a 1, mother educational attainment where both secondary and higher education attainment were assigned a 1, importance given by parents to education (high = 1), and importance given by mother to education (high = 1) (Castro et al., 2011). The variables included in the covariate group educational background, included preschool, public school, had to repeat a year or more in school, perception regarding

performance (top = 1), and perception regarding effort (large = 1) (Castro et al., 2011). The last covariate groups, socioeconomic status and cognitive skills did not contain additional variables (Castro et al., 2011).

The results of the analysis indicate that all the covariate groups contained individual variables with statistically significant effects on higher education enrollment (Castro et al., 2011). Within the two skills groups, cognitive and non-cognitive, the aggregate measure of cognitive ability had the most impact with 15 percentage points on university access and 20 percentage points on higher education (vocational institutes and universities) (Castro et al., 2011). Grit was also statistically significant with a considerably smaller impact of 7.5 percentage points on higher education (Castro et al., 2011). The remaining personality traits did not have statistically significant impact. Extraversion and agreeableness (easy going) correlated in a negative fashion in which more self-characterized extraverted and agreeable individuals were less likely to pursue higher education (Castro et al., 2011). The authors noted it was interesting that variables within the parental and educational background groups had a significant contribution even after controlling for skills and that omission of these variables would have led to a biased assessment of the effect of short term monetary constraints; the marginal effect of socioeconomic status declined considerably after their inclusion (Castro et al., 2011).

The parental background related variables indicated a father with some sort of higher education had a statistically significant impact on whether their child pursued some form of higher education. The emphasis the mother placed on education was also a statistically significant influence, especially pertaining to whether a student enrolled at a university versus an institute. The higher the maternal influence on education-related aspects, the more likely it was a student attended a university (Castro et al., 2011). Family income only accounted for half of the

explanation as to the reasons for the gap between poor and non-poor access to higher education in Peru (Castro et al., 2011). As shown in Figure 2, the study’s results indicate the proportion of the access gap between low and medium-high socioeconomic status individuals that can be related to differences in family income is around 35% with an upper-bound close to 55% (Castro et al., 2011). Their conclusion was parental background, educational background, and cognitive skill in addition to socioeconomic status accounted for the full explanation (Castro et al., 2011).

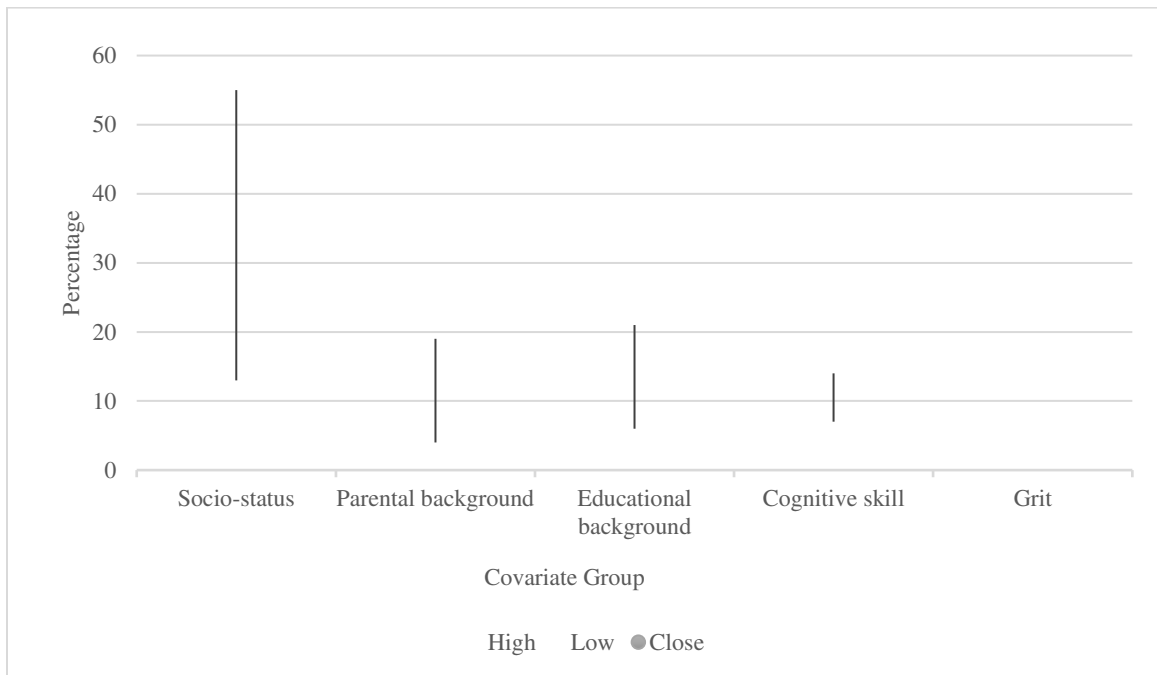


Figure 2. Percentage of college access gap between low and medium-high socioeconomic status individuals closed by each covariate group.

Source: Castro, Yamada & Arias, 2011, Figure 6, p. 24.

In the literature addressing access to higher education among Peruvians, nearly all of the studies were quantitative and based entirely on databases obtained through third party studies (Cueto et al., 2010; Cueto et al. 2011; Cueto et al., 2014). In other words, the researchers did not devise their own instruments and disseminate it to potential participants, and instead relied on the databases furnished by the World Bank and the Peruvian National Institute of Statistics and Information. While these studies are valuable in identifying factors related to access to higher

education in Peru, the databases used in the studies were not specific to the studies diminishing the control had by the researchers in determining how the questions of the participants was posed, how it was measured, as well as who participated in the surveys.

Because the analysis in Castro et al.'s (2011) study was based entirely upon a study done by the World Bank, it is useful to highlight the manner in which this may have impacted the study's conclusions. The World Bank study on which Castro et al.'s research was based was undertaken initially to determine the level of education and cognitive ability among urban populations in Peru as these pertain to existing barriers to the labor market and the mismatch between the employers' needs and employees' skillsets (ENHAB, 2010). The study was intended to serve as a workforce study rather than one related to factors determining whether an individual pursued higher education. While these are clearly useful indicators in determining factors relating to the pursuit of higher education, the study did not target high school-age students, nor did it focus on students already enrolled at institutions (ENHAB, 2010). It should however be noted that one of the authors of this study, Arias, undertook the study on behalf of the World Bank and was therefore very familiar with the manner in which the study was conducted, the nature of the questions, and the profile of the study participants.

Castro et al.'s (2011) reliance on a series of instruments designed by the World Bank may have biased the results of the study. Their conclusions provide readers with some insight into the factors determining access to higher education in Peru; however, there are still a number of aspects not fully explored which could have been misrepresented. This would likely impact on the extent to which the authors' conclusions provide an accurate reflection of the factors related to access to higher education in Peru. This issue is especially germane to the study sponsored by the World Bank, where researchers from outside of the region and country came to assess the

intellectual capabilities, personality characteristics, and family background of study participants through the administration of a series of standardized tests.

Ostensibly, these standardized tests were designed to measure certain aspects of an individual's intellectual capabilities, how they viewed the world and their role in it, the perception of control they felt they had over their own destiny and potential for success, and conversely, whether they felt as though they were subject to the whim of aspects outside of their control. The manner in which many of these exams were worded is specific to those who designed the tests and what they hoped to measure. Many of the test participants had not been exposed to standardized testing prior to participating in the World Bank's study and may not have been familiar with the format and what was being asked of them. Some may have feared the possibility of letting the test administrator down by failing to answer a question in a certain way and may have tried to adapt their answer to their perception of the correct answer or what the test administrator wanted to hear. Additionally, the way a question was phrased or worded and the test participant's level of literacy factored into the results.

From the perspective of the World Bank, such a study makes sense. In this particular instance, the objective of the study was to compare and contrast the results obtained from Peru with those obtained from administering the same standardized tests in other regions and countries in order to generate a more complete perspective regarding the factors determining access to higher education throughout developing countries. Thus, it was necessary to standardize the tests in order to ensure the same tests were administered to all regions and countries participating in the study. While these results provide a picture of Peru relative to the other countries participating in the study, they are not sufficient for providing a detailed analysis of the actual situation in Peru as it was not the intent of the study. For this reason, it is necessary

to reexamine the different regions in Peru using a methodology more applicable to extracting the most accurate information possible.

Castro et al. (2011) incorporated both differential and associational statistical analyses. The first portion of the study analyzed the impact of each one of the aforementioned covariates: socioeconomic status, cognitive skills, non-cognitive skills or grit, parental educational background, and educational background on access to higher education in Peru. The focus was on determining the differences in access between those in lower income, medium income and higher income families, those with greater academic aptitude versus their less gifted counterparts, those with more developed soft skills, those whose parents attended an institution of higher education versus those whose parents did not, and the type of institution attended (private versus public, geographical location, annual tuition, etc.). The question posed by the authors was regarding the difference between the three groups identified in the dependent variable (study participants who did not enroll in post-secondary education, those who enrolled in vocational institutions, and those who enrolled in universities) in socioeconomic status, cognitive skills, non-cognitive skills, parental educational background and educational background. The authors ran a multinomial logistic regression analysis for each of the five individual covariates or vectors, because in this case the dependent variable, post-graduation activity, was nominal with three levels. The outcome variable was the activity pursued by the study participant following graduation from high school, while the five covariates served as predictor variables. The baseline or average selected by the authors was the group that did not enroll in higher education and who were members of the low or medium-low socioeconomic group. Interestingly, cognitive ability appeared to show the largest difference between the three groups, with a 20% difference between those who did not enroll in higher education and those

who at least pursued a technical degree. The cognitive ability variable was determined by performance on national comprehensive academic ability exams. Parental educational background and educational background also depicted discrepancies between the three groups, namely those who decided not to enroll and those who at least attended a vocational institution (Castro et al., 2011).

The multinomial logistic regression analysis was also useful for determining associational relationships between the covariates as to what extent each was able to explain the differences in access to higher education. This type of analysis enables the researcher to control for certain variables while altering the value of others and assessing the manner in which this impacts the dependent variable. The authors posed the question as to how each covariate might close the gap between the observed percentages in access to higher education and 100% access in each of three socioeconomic groups (low, medium, high). Here, the authors defined the baseline as those who are members of the lowest socioeconomic group. The results indicated that socioeconomic status accounted for between 35 % to 55 % of the gap between those who did not enroll in higher education and those who did. The other variables comprised the remaining 45% to 65%. The authors arrived at this conclusion by controlling for the covariates not being tested, while altering the values of the one being tested and measuring the impact on the dependent variable.

Castro et al.'s' (2011) study is important in laying the groundwork for the idea that deficient economic resources is not the only reason that individuals choose not to pursue higher education in Peru as family background and support, social influences, and cognitive abilities also contribute to this decision. These findings could lead to an assumption that those students whose parents have not themselves attended higher education would be less likely to pursue higher education as it would not be prioritized by the parents and therefore may not be prioritized

by the children. This study is lacking the correlation and potentially the triangulation between the socioeconomic variable and the other variables tested. It is probable for example that those individuals in the lowest socioeconomic levels are less likely to have a parent who themselves earned a college degree. The same is true of the educational background variable, where students who lack financial resources are more likely to attend a public institution than their wealthier counterparts who attend private schools (Ongaro Estrada, 2001). The question becomes to what extent the children from the lowest socioeconomic levels are impacted by the lack of financial resources as opposed to their parents' lack of higher education or that they attended a public school in lieu of a private school. From a quantitative perspective, it is difficult to isolate the exact impact that a student's financial resources has on access to higher education given that at least the three variables socioeconomic-status, parental background, and educational background as well as potentially cognitive skill and grit, are all related to socioeconomic status. Castro et al.'s (2011) detailed analysis of these factors make a compelling case for attributing the lack of participation in higher education among underprivileged students to factors outside of the obvious lack of financial resources; however, it is not clear to what extent the factors they identified are in fact related to socioeconomic status.

In the 2014 INEI statistical study on higher education in Peru, Castro, Yamada, and Arias' (2011) conclusions are partially borne out: when asked about the reasons why students selected the university they did, 43.7% reported that the most important factor was the prestige of the university, whereas only 13.4% selected their institution because of cost, and this percentage was true of all ethnic backgrounds who participated in the study (INEI Statistical Study on Higher Education in Peru, 2014). It is also interesting to note that 96.6% of survey participants responded that the primary source of financing for their studies was from family,

while 31.8% financed at least a portion of their studies with their own salary, and only 9.4% claimed to have received a scholarship through their institution or other sources (INEI Statistical Study on Higher Education in Peru, 2014). On average, 84.3% of enrolled students completed their bachelor degree (86.2% of women compared to 81.8% of men, 84.1% of students from private universities and 84.55% of public university students), and of the reasons given by those students who did not complete their degrees, 51.5% responded that it was due to a lack of time, 46.9% planned to return at some point in the future to complete their studies, and only 21.7% cited the high cost of the tuition as the reason for not completing their degrees (INEI statistical study on higher education in Peru, 2014).

In sum, Castro et al. (2011) undertook their study with the objective of demonstrating that financial constraints are not the only reason that underprivileged students cannot access higher education in Peru. They examined other factors such as socioeconomic-status, parental background, educational background, cognitive skill and grit to determine whether these factors have a comparable impact on these students as well. The authors hypothesized that these factors are important and while economic considerations play a role they do not act in isolation. The primary guiding research question posed by the authors was in addition to financial constraints, what other factors contribute to the highly regressive nature of access to higher education in Peru? Their objective was not only to provide additional research on the topic but to also contribute to the body of information informing the government policies designed to address these issues. In their view, simply providing funding would not by itself resolve the issue of limited access to higher education among the poorest segments of the population.

Culture of Poverty and Higher Education

Following is a brief review of research pertaining to the theory on the culture of poverty and its impact on higher education. The theory on culture of poverty was first developed by Oscar Lewis in 1959 and was subsequently taken up in a U.S.-centered political context by Senator, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in 1965. Moynihan's (1965) report focused on impoverished African American communities residing in urban hubs throughout the United States and analyzed the collective culture of these communities in an attempt to identify factors contributing to the generational poverty suffered by these communities. Both Lewis (1966) and Moynihan were heavily criticized for their work and were accused of blaming the poor for their poverty (Small et al., 2010).

In their article addressing the reasons for the strong opposition to the culture of poverty theory, specifically among those who identified as the U.S. political left during this period, Harvey and Reed (1996) postulate that the passionate rejection of this theory by the left was in fact based on a faulty understanding of the underlying tenets of the theory. This opposition was perhaps best embodied by the book written by Charles A. Valentine (1968), who laid out a detailed, point-by-point repudiation of Lewis, characterizing both the man and his work as "patronizing" and "moralizing," which Valentine believed amounted to a virtual assault on poor people that could only be interpreted as a call for eliminating the culture of these individuals, rather than the poverty afflicting them. Valentine maintained that Lewis believed that the people he studied were responsible for their poverty, rather than victims of economic factors outside of their control.

Harvey and Reed (1996) asserted that neither Lewis (1966) nor Moynihan (1965) sought to "blame the poor" for their condition, but rather that their objectives were to investigate the methods adapted by the poor to adapt to the conditions into which they were born and make lives

for themselves despite the bleak conditions they were forced to endure (Harvey & Reed, 1996). Harvey and Reed argue that Lewis in particular was a “man of the left”, who respected and admired the members of the communities he included in his study, and who himself was a Marxist (Harvey & Reed, 1996). In other words, Lewis did not believe the poor came to be so due to their own actions, and like Marx, believed that poverty was the inevitable product of a capitalist society (Harvey & Reed, 1996). Lewis (1955) tried to understand the factors contributing to the persistence of poverty among specific communities, and the manner in which they viewed the world and their place in it. Harvey and Reed characterized Lewis’ approach to research as “ethnographic realism”, a term the authors believe aptly describes his ability to “elicit poignant narratives from his respondents and to sculpt family ethnographies that told us what it meant to live poverty day and day out” (p. 484). In what they characterized as a research climate obsessed with post-positivism, Harvey and Reed maintain that Lewis’ form of ethnography was simply not understood by other researchers and was therefore not well-received (Harvey & Reed, 1996).

Small et al. (2010) discussed the controversial history of the culture of poverty theory, stating, “the heated political environment dissuaded many young scholars from of the time from studying culture in the context of poverty” (p. 2). The authors posited that because contemporary researchers place less emphasis on the distinction between “structural” and “cultural” explanations for poverty and are more critical of the existence of a coherent, measurable uniform group culture, they are able to conceive of the culture of poverty theory in a way that is less rigid than their predecessors (Small et al., 2010). The authors contended that the culture of poverty theory is experiencing a sort of resurgence in the field of cultural studies (Small et al., 2010).

One interesting development in this field is the fact that aspects of this theory are present in several studies related to access and pursuit of higher education; Harris and Halpin (2002) and Castro et al. (2011) are two such examples where this is the case and both have been referenced in this study. Of note is the fact that neither group of authors made a specific reference to the theory in their work. Theories pertaining to culture of poverty and studies focused on access to higher education have remained largely separate, despite the obvious overlap between the two. Viewing access and pursuit of higher education as an extension of a culture of poverty conveys a great deal of information about the student in question, and the extent to which cultural explanations can account for discrepancies in participation in higher education between social economic classes in a given country. Studies analyzing academic success, the manner in which individuals acquire and process information and engage in learning have been studied extensively, but participation in higher education has been largely absent from these studies (Small et al., 2010).

Qualitative Sociology of Poverty and the Informal Labor Market in Peru

In their exploration of the qualitative literature on poverty, Newman and Massengill (2006) highlight the importance of qualitative research as a complement to large quantitative studies on poverty. Their study focused on developed countries in North America and Europe and analyzes four areas within the countries studied including the labor market, welfare reform, class, and neighborhoods (Newman & Massengill, 2006). Much of their work is specific to the profiles of poor communities within the countries they study, but their conclusions are applicable to economically challenged individuals in developing countries as well. In their view, the common culture and sociology born out of material deprivation can provide researchers with an understanding as to how the poor navigate their poverty and this can inform political policies.

However, unlike those who studied the culture of the poor in order to identify reasons the poor remained poor, Newman and Massengill asserted the need to separate the culture within poor communities from the search for an explanation for their poverty. For them, poverty is the result of under-valued labor, which is the manifestation of a faulty economic system (Newman & Massengill, 2006). The existence of poverty is not due to the decisions, priorities or values of the poor themselves, as these develop as a response to the material deprivation brought about by the state of being poor (Newman & Massengill, 2006). It should be noted that for Newman and Massengill, low-wage employment and material deprivation is less salient in countries with greater levels of wealth redistribution such as England, France and Germany where the issue is more one of social exclusion. This is because individuals are guaranteed a reasonable minimum standard of living through assistance programs set up by the government, but despite this assured income, these individuals are less likely to engage with their communities on a political, educational or economic level than their wage-earning peers.

Newman and Massengill (2006) contended that the ethnographers who study the labor market for low-wage earners focus on the manner in which job-seekers identify potential job opportunities and mobilize their networks to obtain employment. Ethnographers who undertook studies in the United States also studied the dynamics of the relationship between native-born communities and immigrant communities, and the way this impacted the labor market (Newman & Massengill, 2006). They found that employers were more inclined to hire immigrants than their native-born counterparts because of the negative perception of the latter group including poor reliability, behavioral issues and a lack of work ethic (Kirschenman & Neckerman 1991; Newman & Massengill 2006; Wilson 1996). It should be noted that the employers' negative

view of native-born workers impacted both native-born African American and Caucasian males and did not appear to be due to racial bias (Waldinger & Lichter, 2003).

What is also of interest is the role of the informal labor market in providing employment for the poorest segments of society. This is of particular importance for a country like Peru, where recent studies indicate that 73% of the workforce is engaged in informal employment, which equates to roughly 12 million people (“Peru tiene 12 millones de personas con empleo informal,” 2018). What constitutes informality in the labor market is difficult to define because while formal contracts may not exist and employees may not be reported to the government to avoid additional tax payments for both the employer and employee, employees can receive health and retirement benefits. Employees that are listed on “planilla” are reported to the government, pay taxes, receive healthcare and retirement benefits and are far more common in medium to large companies. Small companies are less likely to include employees in “planilla” but many offer their employees augmented salaries to enable them to purchase healthcare and determine for themselves as to whether to contribute to their retirement. Thus, for the purposes of this study, informal employees will be defined as those who are not on “planilla” and are not reported to the Peruvian government. They can either be self-employed or employed by another company or individual.

The role of informal employment in the sociology of poverty was touched on by Newman and Massengill (2006) in their discussion on the psychological impact of low-wage employment. Both in developed as well as developing countries, informal employment is the result of a perceived lack of opportunity in the formal labor market (low-paid jobs often have little opportunity for advancement, can have strict oversight of hours worked and duties performed and provide little in the way of employee satisfaction), and informal employment can provide

more flexibility and job satisfaction for the individual (Newman & Massengill, 2006). In Peru, men often seek informal employment in the hope that they can earn more than they could in the formal labor market, while women seek informal employment for reasons of greater flexibility and time to spend with their children (ENAHO Statistical Study on Households in Peru, 2016). Cities like La Rinconada offer only informal employment opportunities and are the fastest-growing regions in Peru (ENAHO Statistical Study on Households in Peru, 2016).

Summation

The literature indicates that in Peru, like the United States and other developed countries, the trend is towards the massification of higher education without the universalization as defined by Trow (2005). The result is an increased number of institutions of higher education of both universities and vocational institutes in Peru. The studies related to access to higher education in the United States, specifically why students chose to pursue higher education, indicate that factors such as family background, the extent of guidance regarding higher education in the student's high school, and social networks, have a statistically significant impact on predicting whether a student will pursue some form of higher education. What is surprising however, is that these mirror many of the factors determining whether Peruvian students pursue higher education. While the costs of higher education in Peru have a larger impact on a student's likelihood of pursuing higher education than is true of students in the United States, the remaining factors are surprisingly similar.

Most of the research addressing access to higher education in Peru are quantitative in nature (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). While this is useful in providing an overall picture of the current situation, it does not examine the lived realities for those students whose families are part of the lower socioeconomic classes in Peru. From this perspective, it is useful to analyze regions

such as Puno, Peru, where the population is increasing primarily due to the illegal mining and contraband industries providing individuals with greater economic resources than their counterparts in other regions (INEI Statistical Study on Higher Education in Peru, 2014). The rapid acquisition of financial resources for many of the families who elected to relocate to these regions in search of greater economic opportunities has in turn drawn an ever-increasing number of new families to the region, all of whom are hoping to encounter the same opportunities.

If higher education is a tool that facilitates long-term escape from poverty, why do greater numbers of individuals from the lowest socio-economic classes not pursue it? Is the culture of these individuals responsible for this decision, or is a systemic lack of access to higher education that renders any form of post-secondary study inaccessible for society's poorest individuals to blame for the disparity? The Puno region is an ideal environment to shed some light on this question, and to investigate the factors impacting access to higher education. The Puno region is unique in that despite the expansive range of financial resources among the inhabitants (some are quite wealthy while new-arrivals tend to be extremely poor), its inhabitants share a similar cultural background, and perhaps most importantly, a background that for the vast majority of parents is devoid of any higher educational experience (INEI Statistical Study on Higher Education in Peru, 2014). The 2017 admission statistics for the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano – Puno, a public university serving the residents of the region, provide an indication as to the number of students interested in pursuing higher education. Of the 9,134 students who sat for the entrance exam, which is the only criteria used to establish which students are admitted, only 696 students were admitted (Universidad Nacional del Altiplano de Puno, 2017).

There is a story to be told regarding access to higher education in Peru. As a researcher, my job is to tell it.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Prior to my first visit to La Rinconada, I had the opportunity to speak with several of its residents by phone, as well as three individuals (two Peruvian reporters and one Peruvian/American reporter) who had visited the town on prior occasions about what to expect. The city they described to me was one of unimaginably harsh conditions, lawlessness (due to a lack of police presence), a strong sense of resignation among the city's residents, and an overarching obsession with the one and only reason for the town's existence, the perpetual search for gold. "No one is really from La Rinconada, it is no one's hometown", one of the Peruvian reporters explained to me. "Those who are there are the people who are seeking a better life for their families, and who are willing to endure the harshest of conditions to have a shot at wealth". I spent some time reflecting on how life could be in a city whose residents felt no ties, no bonds and took no ownership of it. The words of one resident I spoke with during our conversation prior to my initial visit to La Rinconada provided the most accurate description of the city – "Imagine a place where there is no joy, there is no beauty, where the only purpose unifying the people is to rape the earth and take what is hers because it is profitable. A city where no one expects to stay, and where no one cares about the long-term future of the city because they don't expect to be there to see it. That my friend, is La Rinconada."

I get out of the car, almost in disbelief. I have finally arrived at La Rinconada, Peru, a city that is the stuff of legend. It is perhaps best known as the highest city on earth and has taken its turn atop Tim Cester's *BuzzFeed* article entitled "Bleakest Places On Earth" (Chester, T. 2013). The air is cold and musty – the sweet smell of rot and decay waft up at me the moment I opened the car door. The source of the smell became clear when I stepped out and found myself standing on a mound of garbage – there was garbage

everywhere. All I could think is that there is no place like this on earth, and nothing could prepare someone for life in La Rinconada. The locals I speak with tell me that anywhere between 10 and 20 million US dollars of gold is extracted from La Rinconada's mines on a daily basis, but looking around, one would never know the vast riches flowing through the city. I pick my way through the piles of trash and make my way towards public school IEP 72147, where I have a meeting scheduled with the school's headmaster, Freddie. Little did I know that through Freddie, I would come to discover a largely unknown world, one in which the residents of La Rinconada view higher education as an integral step in the struggle to succeed in creating a better future for themselves and their families. (June 30, 2016)

The above passage is an excerpt from my ethnographic field notes and highlights the contradiction in the image presented by the harsh reality of life in La Rinconada, and the desire of the parents I spoke with to accrue enough money to afford a pathway to higher education for their children. This dissertation investigates the manner in which the families residing in the community of La Rinconada view higher education and focuses specifically on the lived experience of the students and parents in this community as they determine whether or not to pursue higher education and the reasons behind the decision that is reached.

Framework of Study

This study employs a social constructivist framework and incorporates aspects of both the personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), and Berger and Lukman's (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality*, which emphasizes the shared meaning communities of individuals develop among themselves and their societies. Although I did not employ grounded theory as a research design, I am in accord with Charmaz's (2003) description of how modern grounded

constructivist theory differs from original grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in that it is not “objectivist” and “recognizes that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 273). Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that the role of the researcher should be to transmit an objective reality of the data being gathered. Dawson and Prus (1995) and Charmaz (2003) maintained that a researcher cannot avoid being influenced by their own biases as well as their “disciplinary emphases” and “perceptual proclivities” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 259). A constructivist approach allows for a researcher to identify and select a targeted pool of study participants which Patton (1969) referred to as *purposeful sampling*. Patton asserts that “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

The constructivist paradigm fits into the interpretivist philosophy, in that it is primarily concerned with the study of the manner in which humans make meaning of their environments and surroundings and the lived experiences of study participants (Williamson, 2006). Constructivism therefore focuses primarily on the manner in which people build their societies and how they identify within these societies (Williamson, 2006). In a constructivist framework, selecting a sample frame for ethnographic studies does not involve random sampling for research participants. This methodology is not concerned with statistical representation; instead groups or individuals are targeted "who represent the important characteristics that researchers consider of interest to the study" and therefore it is considered that there is no need to sample multiple cases that will not contribute anything meaningful (Williamson, 2006).

In this study I employed ethnographic case study methods to gather, analyze and interpret data. I draw on interviews, ethnographic observations and supplementary textual data. These methods provide scholars with a vehicle for exploring the world and making meaning of what they observe within the context and limitations of their own experiences (Hammersley, 2006) and within their cultural context. Ethnographic research as a mechanism for collecting data is not new to our time and place. Western epistemology – the foundation of contemporary social sciences – is derived from ancient Greco-Roman traditions of rhetoric and hermeneutics, legitimate methods of inquiry that allowed early philosophers to investigate the world around them (Spencer, 2006).

This chapter details the foundations of ethnographic research. I address the postmodern critique to the early structuralist perspective of ethnography. Subsequently, I explore the ethnographic research in sociology and access to higher education that is relevant to my own project. Finally, I explain the research protocol of my study.

Ethnographic Observations and Interviews

In this project I integrate in-depth interviews with ethnographic observations. Both are methods for gathering qualitative data that are particularly well-suited for exploring a social phenomenon in great detail and depth (Briggs, 1986; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; O'Reilly, 2005; Spradley & McCurdy, 1988). One objective of ethnography is to provide readers with what Geertz (1973) termed a *thick description* of the setting and circumstances that are observed by the researcher. Another is to aim to provide both an emic, or insider's view as well as an etic, or outsider's view to cultural knowledge and meaning making (Spradley, 1980). Ethnography, as defined by Hammersley (2006), is a term that refers to, "a form of social and educational research that emphasizes the importance of studying *at first hand* what people do and say in

particular contexts” (p. 4). When speaking about the data collected as part of ethnographic study, Geertz (1973) stated that:

This fact - what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to - is obscured because most of what we need to comprehend a particular event, ritual, custom, idea or whatever is insinuated as background information before the thing itself is directly examined. (p. 9)

For the purposes of this study, Geertz’s (1973) quote is of particular significance in that the accuracy regarding the representation of La Rinconada and its citizens is heavily dependent on the inclusion of *background information* in order to provide context for the larger assertions that are presented. Hammersley (2006) pointed out that in ethnography, there exists a “tension between what we might call participant and analytic perspectives” (p. 4). Hammersley also stated:

As ethnographers, we typically insist on the importance of coming to understand the perspectives of the people being studied if we are to explain, or even describe accurately, the activities they engage in and the course of action they adopt. (p. 4)

He concluded by stating:

At the same time, there is usually an equal emphasis on developing an *analytic* understanding of perspectives, activities and actions, one that is likely to be different from, perhaps even in conflict with, how the people themselves see the world. (p. 4)

The *participant observation* to which Hammersley is referring is generally defined as the process through which a researcher engages with and develops a relationship with human study participants in their natural surroundings in the pursuit of scientific understandings of that group’s unique cultural and social context (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). In the context of my

research, the natural setting includes both the specific facilities of the public, primary school in La Rinconada, but also the city as a whole as well as its mines, given the importance of the role played by both the physical and aesthetic realities that accompany life in La Rinconada. The observations also include the city of Juliaca, the site of the interviews I conducted with the university students. One cannot understand the residents of La Rinconada or Juliaca without first understanding the conditions in which they live. It is the industry of illegal gold mining around which La Rinconada was built that dictates all aspects of life in this community, from the reason people come, to the reason they stay, as well as how they are able to afford to pay for pursuits such as higher education for their children. Mining encompasses all aspects of life in La Rinconada. While Juliaca has industries outside of mining, it is heavily dependent on the mining industries that surround it and most of its residents are linked in some way with mining and La Rinconada because of the numerous miners who work in La Rinconada and have families in Juliaca.

In my study, much of the “thick description” described by Geertz (1973) is predicated on my observation of daily life in La Rinconada, and the harsh conditions the community members are subjected to. I had the opportunity to explore the city to see and experience how people live. I hiked up to the mines that dot the steep, rocky outcroppings above the city, and observed and documented the activities taking place in and around them. My two visits to the mines of La Rinconada were essential in that the mines are what attract people to La Rinconada; they are at the core of all aspects of daily life for its inhabitants. Each visit was for a period of approximately 24 hours and included an overnight stay. Below I describe methods of observational data collection.

Due to the harsh conditions and absence of any presence of law enforcement, long-term research in La Rinconada is impossible, and for this reason, I rely on the interviews I conducted during two separate visits to La Rinconada with the teachers and the parents employed in mining-related industries to provide me with perspective both on their lived experience in La Rinconada and their experiences related to higher education. I conducted one interview in the city of Juliaca which coincided with my second visit to La Rinconada.

Addressing the Colonizing Foundations of Ethnography

The first ethnographers of the modern world emerged during colonial times (Spencer, 2008). Explorers sent by their governments and priests and missionaries who came to spread their religion arrived in the Americas and would frequently document their experiences, encounters with native cultures, and descriptions of the new environments in which they found themselves in diaries or journals (Spencer, 2008). These early ethnographers were tasked with providing members of their communities with a description of the societies and individuals they encountered on their excursions, and to be able to do this effectively, they needed to document these encounters in as detailed a manner as possible. Boas (1911), Sapir (1924), and Kroeber (1925) all studied Native American communities and compared the cultures and practices of the communities they observed with that of the well-educated East Coast culture of the United States, and Western European cultures they originated from. While their research does not constitute the ethnography practiced by modern day, trained academics, it does provide a basis for understanding how outsiders to a community, in this case White Europeans, conceived of and documented their initial interactions with communities of individuals that were very different from what they were accustomed to, which effectively gave rise to the concept of “other,” or “strangers,, as touched on by Bauman (1998), Derrida (1996), and Jenkins (1997). The objective

of their research was to provide their readers with a picture of cultural and religious traditions of the communities they studied, and to emphasize the differences between these cultures and their own (Spencer, 2008).

Early ethnographers often romanticized the appearances and cultural practices of those they studied in order to make them appear more exotic, and thus more interesting to their readers (Guillon, 2016). As a methodology for research, ethnography was often employed by researchers in the fields of anthropology and sociology, where they would spend long periods of time living with, interacting with, and observing the members of the communities they studied (Guillon, 2016). It is important to note that many of the early ethnographic studies were conducted during the height of Colonialism, where the interactions between the researchers and the individuals they studied were heavily impacted by the power dynamics of the time (Spencer, 2008). This power inequity rendered interactions between the researcher and study participants difficult and did not allow for casual observation or conversation to take place. Loomba (1998) argued that the colonial experience reshaped the way in which the world was structured by bringing to life the anonymous individuals who comprised what Europeans considered to be Other, or simply put, non-Europeans. Europeans came to view themselves in terms of their race, religion and cultural traditions, and those who did not share Western attributes could easily be dismissed as Other and less-than. “The definition of civilization and barbarism rests on the production of an irreconcilable difference between ‘Black’ and ‘White’, self and other” (Loomba, 1998, p. 57). Given my identity and positionality as a White middle-class European American engaging in research in impoverished communities in Latin America, it was essential that I critically reflect on my research design and my role in this research through a postmodern lens.

Postmodern Critique

While colonialism helped to create the concept of Other, postcolonial studies have deconstructed the binary of self and other by disrupting the principles of colonial logic (Rao, 2002). Colonial structure ensured that colonizers, despite creating the construct of Other, could never assume the role of Other within the existing power dynamic – their inherent privilege and status as compared to that of the colonized rendered role reversal impossible. “The colonizer is never an Other, especially not to the colonized. The colonizer asserts an identity in confrontation with the colonized; the colonized can never attain an identity in this asymmetrical power relationship” (Savigliano, 1995, p. 166). This should not inhibit study of cultures outside of our own, but it reinforces the need to educate ourselves about the historical, cultural and political implications of past events and how these shape the research methods we employ. Asad (1986) considers researchers who take the etic or outsider approach to be cultural translators and emphasizes that good translations should be as unbiased as possible, however Asad acknowledged that there is a bias in all forms of qualitative research that should be accounted for and addressed by the researcher.

The concepts of self and reflexivity and the roles these play in the data collection and research process are essential to understanding how to design studies that are best-suited to the community being studied and the identity of the researcher, and the manner in which these intersect. Foucault (1972) referenced *masked knowledges* when addressing how identity and culture influence an individual’s perspective on the world, and Gramsci (1971) addressed how dominant norms can make it difficult for an individual to see beyond the cultural norms and values that shape their daily lives. Within the context of Postmodern perspectives on ethnography, Margery Wolf (1992) reexamined her research, specifically her field notes dating

from her research in Taiwan. Wolf responded to external criticism, in addition to subjecting her work to self-criticism and reflection, and while she concludes that the representations of those she studied were as fair and accurate as she was capable of producing, she acknowledged the impact that her identity and cultural background could have had on the manner in which she described the community and individuals who participated in her study.

Hammersley (2006) addressed the temporal shift that has occurred in modern ethnography, in that researchers tend to spend less time with the communities they are studying than did their ethnographic predecessors. Fieldwork can range anywhere from several days to months, as opposed to years (Hammersley, 2006). He cautioned that it is incumbent upon each researcher to ensure that the context in which a particular observation is taking place factor into any conclusions reached by the researcher (Hammersley, 2006). This can include the venue in which the observation is taking place (in a school setting, in a church, etc.), a specific time or period in which the observation is taking place (days of the week, times of day) and other factors that may render any generalizability to providing a holistic view of life in the community difficult (Hammersley, 2006).

For the reasons noted in a previous paragraph, my visits to La Rinconada were short in duration, and for this reason, I rely on a large number of interviews with local residents regarding their experience and that of their children with higher education. The Head Master of the public school in La Rinconada agreed to facilitate contact with the local community through Skype, FaceTime, and other video calling services, especially for school events or celebrations. Thus, in keeping with Hammersley's (2006) recommendations, I focused on acquiring data that are not specific to a venue, day or time, but that is holistic in nature. This ensured that the conclusions reached in my research were predicated on data that was not incomplete or lacking in context.

Ethnographies of Higher Education in Developing Countries

Ethnographies in the field of higher education research are common, however those pertaining specifically to access and or pursuit of higher education among different communities are not as common. It is especially difficult to find ethnographies that address access to higher education in developing countries, particularly communities that due to their location are not considered urban. The literature addressing access to higher education in developing countries tends to be quantitative in nature. Such research tends to overlook individual voices and experiences, particularly those of people who are marginalized or disenfranchised. I sought to understand and study the lived experiences of residents in La Rinconada in order to shed more light on their access to higher education and what supports and stands in the way of that access. I also recognized the need to be cognizant of my identity and positionality as a White European American woman from the United States and the influence that my subjectivity and positionality had on all aspects of this research study.

As a White, female researcher conducting research in an entirely non-White, predominantly male-dominated environment, it was essential to account for the dichotomy in identities between myself as the researcher and the study participants. Lecompte (2002) addressed how ethnography can be conducted in this type of environment and asserts that the concepts upon which traditional ethnography has been based (culture, site, language), no longer exist in the way they once did. Thus, while traditional ethnographers were often accused of cultural colonialism, the way we define many of the aspects that once dominated ethnography has evolved, and this has positive implications for ethnography as a methodology (Lecompte, 2002). I am married to a Peruvian man, and lived and worked in Lima, Peru for 6 years. I have two children who have both Peruvian and American citizenship. I am fluent in Spanish. I

worked for a Peruvian university throughout the time I resided in Lima and had a great deal of contact with students from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, throughout my time in Peru I was very dedicated to animal rescue and I undertook a number of spay, neuter and vaccination campaigns in some of Lima's poorest districts. The vast majority of my fellow *animalistas* are from these areas, and despite the fact that I have been back in the United States for 4 years, we remain friends to this day. These aspects are an integral part of my identity, and far from being an *outsider* to Peru, I consider the country my second home. Thus, while in physical appearance I am indeed *White*, my family is Peruvian, and it is a country I have come to know well.

In these respects, I am different than many non-indigenous researchers in that apart from my whiteness, I have lived in Peru, know the country well, my husband and kids are Peruvian, as are of course my in-laws. I am an *outsider* only in appearance. People's perception of me changes immediately when we begin to speak because apart from speaking Spanish fluently, I am able to relate with them on soccer (I follow Peru of course, know the players), on politics, and many other things that break down barriers immediately. I always begin by telling people that for me, Peru is my second home.

Here are a few pictures from some of my campaigns in Carabayllo.



Figure 3. Carabayllo, Lima, Peru.

Figure 4. A stray dog forages for food in Carabayllo, Lima, Peru.

La Rinoconada, while nearly devoid of individuals from the United States (White or other), can be described as a melting pot comprised of individuals from all over Peru and Bolivia. In La Rinconada, culture is defined by the environment and the job – such an identity is not unique to miners in La Rinconada, it is an identity assumed by individuals who work in the mining industry throughout Peru. To be a miner is a culture unto itself and as is the case in many towns and cities across Peru whose primary industry is mining, the mines impact every aspect of city life. I know the mining industry in Peru as well as those who work in it from my experience working in aspects related to the link between higher education and educating students for the mining profession and the companies, governmental and environmental organizations dedicated to Peru's mining industry. I introduced the School of Mining from the Colorado School of Mines to many of these organizations as well as institutions of higher education in Peru and have maintained many contacts in this industry both among the miners themselves as well as among the instructors in higher education. Ethnic and racial identity has less significance in La Riconada than it might in more homogenous cultural settings (Lecompte, 2002).

While my identity informed my research and perspective on the study, I made sure to include the perspectives of people from very different cultural and ethnic backgrounds than myself. To this end, I incorporated the feedback of five Peruvians of varying socioeconomic levels, three men and two women, in the formulation and wording of the interview questions. Their input was essential in allowing me to understand how the wording of specific questions could be interpreted by the study participants. Additionally, I conducted each interview together with two Peruvian, male, university researchers in order to ensure that my interaction with study participants and understanding of participant responses was interpreted through a diverse lens,

and most importantly, by individuals whose perspectives more closely resembled those of the participants.

Data

For this study, I carefully and systematically examined the themes and topics that emerged from observations and interviews through the paradigms of culture of poverty to assess the extent to which the resulting conclusions are in keeping with the expected outcomes as dictated by each paradigm. Additionally, in conducting the interviews, I worked with my fellow researchers to identify the culturally rich points (Geertz, 1973). I used these to account for the potential inequalities between speakers, as defined by Blommaert (2005), to better understand and translate inequalities such as those that may have stemmed from my identity as a White woman from the United States.

Setting and Participants

Setting

There are two settings in which the interviews and observations were conducted. The first is La Rinconada, a city located in the San Antonio de Putina Province of the Puno region of Peru. It has a population of roughly 76,000 people (ENAH0, 2016), but it should be noted that it is difficult to establish how many people currently reside in La Rinconada due to the rapid population growth and the informal nature of the housing structures most of which are built from corrugated metal.

Below are two maps depicting the locations of La Rinconada and Juliaca where the interviews will be conducted. Figure 5 shows the distance between Cusco and Juliaca, La Rinconada is shown in the middle right of the map. Figure 6 has a red locator indicating the location of La Rinconada.

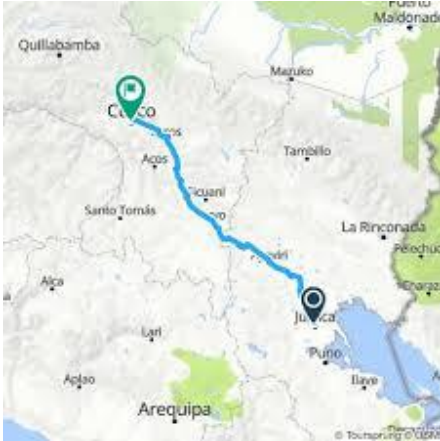


Figure 5. Map obtained from *bikemap.com*.



Figure 6. Map obtained from *michellekaeser.com*.

Corrugated metal is the cheapest and most readily available building material in and around the city. The electricity in La Rinconada powers the lighting for the city as well as the machinery required for mining. The establishments I visited in La Rinconada did not have heat. There is no underground sewer system in the city; waste flows through an open channel that runs through the center of the city and empties into a small lake located below the city. The largest elementary school in the city has approximately 623 enrolled students and served as the venue in which I conducted my interviews. The school is constructed in the same way all public elementary schools in Peru are built – from cinder blocks and in one-story, block buildings surrounding a courtyard. I visited four classrooms in June of 2016, and all had the necessary supplies one might expect to see in an elementary school including desks, chairs, books, chalk boards. I also visited the headmaster’s office, which contained a desk with a computer and shelves full of books and reports published by Peru’s Ministry of Education. The headmaster mentioned that the school’s toilets were the only ones in the city that drained directly into the aforementioned open channel and were the only functioning toilets. I had the opportunity to use them and was unable to as raw sewage was overflowing from the toilets in the girls’ bathroom. I

do not know whether this was also the case in the boys' bathroom. La Rinconada's primary economic activity is illegal gold mining.

The second location in which I conducted interviews is the city of Juliaca. The purpose of including Juliaca in the study was to conduct interviews with the children of parents who work in La Rinconada's mines but who no longer reside in La Rinconada. Miners who can afford to send their wives and children to Juliaca to enjoy a better quality of life and access to better schools and public services. Additionally, Juliaca is the closest city to La Rinconada that has universities. It is the capital of the San Roman Province located in the Puno region of Peru and is a three hour drive from La Rinconada. Juliaca is a bustling, industrial city and has the closest airport to Lake Titicaca. Tourists seeking access to the world's highest lake pass through Juliaca on their way to the better-known city of Puno. It is estimated that an average of 1.5 billion dollars of illicit goods including gold, cocaine, clothing, cigarettes, stolen cars and gasoline passes across Peru's borders on an annual basis and that Juliaca is at the center of the illegal good trade (ENAH0, 2016). These same estimates presume that at least 60% of Juliaca's population of 276,110 residents earns at least a portion of their monthly household income from the smuggling of illicit goods (ENAH0, 2016).

Participants

I identified three groups of study participants for this study. The criteria used for selecting study participants was that they be teachers in the public elementary school located in La Rinconada, parents of one or more children attending public school in La Rinconada and either personally employed or married to someone employed in a mining-related industry, or university students at least 18 years of age in the city of Juliaca with a parent or close family member employed in La Rinconada. It should be noted that I attempted to eliminate any

identifying information of the study participants and have altered some personal details in order to ensure their privacy.

The first group was comprised of 14 teachers working at the largest public, primary school in La Rinconada, nine men and five women. Of these, all the men and three of the women had at least one school-aged child, and several had children already enrolled in university. All these individuals came to La Rinconada for work and all were from a city or town located in the province of Puno.

The second population of interview participants were the parents of children attending a public school in La Rinconada who were either themselves employed or were married to someone employed in a mining-related industry. They numbered 17 in total. Thirteen were men and four were women and all but one woman were employed in a mining-related industry. The women who are married to men who occupy the lowest socioeconomic levels reside with their families in La Rinconada and are likely to be recent arrivals from other towns in Peru and Bolivia. Most of these women work as *Pallaqueras*, a sector comprised of only women, whose sole occupation is to search among the rubble extracted from the mines for flakes of gold missed by the miners. Those married to more wealthy miners (typically those who have acquired valuable skills as miners and have accumulated a sufficient level of seniority to oversee crews of new arrivals to the mines) will have likely relocated with their children to Juliaca, where access to better schools as well as an easier life is accessible. Their husbands may come to visit their families one day per week as the mines in La Rinconada operate 24 hours per day, 7 days per week and one day per week of *decanso* or rest is permitted. Table 1 depicts the details of the interview participants in La Rinconada.

Table 1

Gender and Profession of Teachers and Parents Employed in Mining

	Teachers	Miners	Shop Owner
Men	9	13	0
Women	5	3	1

Of the four women in this group, three were married and one was single, all had at least one child. Three of the women worked both in the mines as well as industries related to the mines (selling goods such as food and water to the miners). One of the women, the oldest of the group, did not work in the mines and operated her store out of a small booth located close to the mines out of which she sold beverages, paper goods and arts and crafts.

The men in this group all worked in La Rinconada’s mines and occupied various levels of the mining hierarchy. The wealthiest among them earned between \$1,500-\$3,000 per month while the poorest among them earned between \$160-\$300 per month. This disparity can be accounted for by the amount of time they had been in La Rinconada and the skill level they possessed in mining. Eleven of the men were married, two were not married but all had children.

The final group of study participants is the students themselves. I interviewed university students between the ages of 18 and 20 years of age. The group was comprised of 10 students. I conducted the interviews in both a group and an individual setting. It should be noted that all the students I included in this study attended high school in Juliaca as the opportunity for high school in La Rinconada, while technically available, is almost entirely devoid of students because students who enroll in high school do so with the intention of pursuing higher education, and those who do not intend to pursue higher education who grow up in the city of La Rinconada do not enroll in high school. This does not skew the study because I accounted for the students

who do not enroll in high schools in Juliaca by speaking with their parents in La Rinconada.

Table 2 depicts the details of the study participants in Juliaca.

Table 2

Gender and University of Students Interviewed

	Male	Female
Universidad Nacional de Juliaca	1	4
Universidad Andina Nestor Cáceres Velásquez	3	2

Data Collection

For this study, I employed two forms of data collection: observations that draw on ethnographic methods such as the *rich description* described by Geertz (1973), and focus group and individual interviews with a selected group of study participants.

Observation

My observations focused on the cities of La Rinconada, Peru and Juliaca, Peru. I collected observational data from both locations on multiple occasions. My first trip to Juliaca in the Puno region of Peru took place from March 09 thru March 12 of 2016. My second trip which included La Rinconada and Juliaca took place from June 29 thru July 02 of 2016. I returned to La Rinconada and Juliaca to finalize my observations and conduct interviews the first week of November of 2019. CSU's IRB granted approval to use the observations, group conversations, and interviews from my three trips to La Rinconada and Juliaca in this study.

I recorded my observations both through extensive field notes and pictures. I verbally recorded my field notes using a voice recorder application on my phone and relied on hand-written notes. The phone application allowed me to record my impressions in the moment. I took time at the close of each day to listen to and review them, and to jot down written

summaries of my recordings, adding in details I might have missed. I also used this time to expound upon my field notes and added in more detailed interpretations; I also noted issues or questions I needed to follow-up with (Hammersley, 2006; Spradley, 1980). My observations focused extensively on the physical aspects of these environments, the natural environment, the structures, the sounds, the smells. These elements are essential to conveying the realities of daily life for residents. In La Rinconada, I have verbal and written observations of the approach to the city, the city and physical structures, the weather conditions, and the activities I viewed people engaged in (Spradley, 1980). This includes the activity of mining. I had the opportunity to hike up to several mines to observe the activities of the miners and how mining is transacted as a business in La Rinconada. I also had the opportunity to observe the activities during lunchtime in the main square of La Rinconada.

I documented these observations with both my verbal impressions, as well as pictures. I did not take pictures of individuals as this was not necessary to convey the realities of daily life in La Rinconada and as a means to protect their identities. Additionally, I had the opportunity to visit the largest elementary school in La Rinconada, which was also the venue of several group discussions and individual interviews. I arranged with the school's headmaster ahead to visit several classrooms and observe the classes, as well as the extracurricular activities which took place in the school's courtyard. I did not photograph any students, and simply documented the physical structure of the school including the classrooms and the courtyard. The headmaster asked to have a photograph taken with me and my colleague; I asked his permission to use it in my research and he provided his consent.

The objective of my observations in La Rinconada was to get a feel for the city, the daily activities of its residents, and the realities of life they face. Juliaca served a different purpose in

that the interviews with the students were the primary focus of the time I spent there. My observations describe the basic infrastructure of the city and the industries most of its residents are employed in. I documented my observations through the use of a voice recorder application on my phone and did not take identifying pictures of individuals as this was not the purpose of my study.

Interviews

Table 3 depicts the interview process.

Table 3

Interview Process

Interviews	Total Number of Interviews	June, 2016 Visit to La Rinconada	Number of Interviews Collected Fall 2019
Teachers	15	1 group interview	14 individual
Parents in Mining-Related Employment	18	1 group interview	17 individual
Students	10	0	10 individual

The interviews were conducted primarily in the public primary school located in the heart of La Rinconada, as well as one university in Juliaca, Peru, a city approximately three hours driving from La Rinconada. Additionally, I continued to communicate with multiple study participants through WhatsApp, FaceTime and other modalities, although these communications are not part of the data set included in my analyses for this study. I further describe the various settings as they relate to my findings in Chapter 4.

Each of the 41 individual interviews lasted between 4 and 20 minutes, each group interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. I was the primary interviewed and followed a standard script of questions, described below, and used these as a foundation for each interview while also allowing the interview to develop organically and expand to other topics. In the case

that there were misunderstandings or confusion, my male colleagues helped to identify and clarify the source of the confusion. I recorded each interview and asked each participant to provide both written and verbal consent prior to initiating the interview. With IRB approval, I asked for verbal rather than written consent (captured on the audio recording) because not all the participants were literate and I wanted to ensure that they understood what they were consenting to.

I conducted the interviews in Spanish. The translations of the interviews are my own. The interview scripts are provided here. I posed the questions listed below to the teachers and parents and directed questions 13-20 to the 10 students I interviewed. The interview scripts required the participants to provide demographic information as well to answer questions relating to the importance of higher education and the obstacles to accessing it. As mentioned previously each interview was organic and evolved in the manner best suited to the study participant. The scripts were used as prompts and guidelines for the structure of the interviews to ensure the interaction adequately addressed the research questions in this study.

Interview Script

Demographic Information

1. Name
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Place of Origin
5. Occupation
6. Cultural background (Quechua, Aymara, other)
7. Highest degree earned

8. Perspective on importance of higher education
9. Perspective on access to higher education
10. Personal desire to pursue higher education
11. Desire to pursue or for children to pursue higher education

Questions

12. Describe your reason for being in La Rinconada.
13. What do you hope to accomplish from your time in La Rinconada?
14. What do you envision for yourself/family for the future?
15. In your view, how important is higher education to obtaining a high-paying job?
16. What role does higher education play in your household?
17. Do you feel that higher education is affordable for you and your family? If not, what would make it more so?
18. What are the primary obstacles to pursuing higher education?
19. Would you pursue higher education if the obstacles were eliminated?
20. Would your children pursue higher education if the obstacles were eliminated?
21. How would you define success?
22. How important is higher education to achieving success?

Preguntas

Información Demográfica

1. Nombre
2. Edad
3. Sexo
4. Lugar de Nacimiento
5. Ocupación

6. Trasfondo cultural/etnicidad (Quechua, Aymara, otra)
7. Nivel de educación (inicial, secundaria, superior, postgrado)
8. Perspectiva respecto a la importancia de la educación superior/universitaria
9. Perspectiva respecto al acceso que tiene a la educación superior/universitaria
10. Deseo propio de lograr un título universitario
11. Deseo para sus hijos/descendientes de lograr un título universitario

Preguntas

12. ¿Porque razón está usted en La Rinconada?
13. ¿Qué expectativas y metas se ha propuesto respecto a su estancia en La Rinconada
14. ¿Qué visión tiene usted para si mismo y su familia respecto al futuro?
15. ¿Considera que un grado universitario es necesario para lograr un trabajo con mejores condiciones salariales?
16. ¿Qué rol tiene la educación superior/universitaria en su hogar?
17. ¿Le es asequible económicamente la educación superior/universitaria?
18. ¿Cuáles son los principales obstáculos que impiden que usted pueda seguir una educación superior/universitaria?
19. ¿Si los obstáculos fuesen eliminados, seguiría usted una educación superior/universitaria?
20. ¿Si los obstáculos fuesen eliminados, sus hijos/descendientes seguirían una educación superior/universitaria
21. ¿Cómo definiría éxito?
22. ¿Qué tan importante es una educación superior/universitaria para lograr su éxito?

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) asserted that data analysis is the most laborious but crucial element of qualitative research. The researcher is left to their own devices to interpret the data

relating to the intersectionalities of the setting, the study participants and the topic of study and draw conclusions (Merriam, 2009). Patton (2001) stated:

Description is the foundation upon which qualitative research is built . . . Here you become the storyteller, inviting the reader to see through your eyes what you have seen. Start by presenting a straightforward description of the setting and events. No footnotes, no intrusive analysis – just the facts, carefully presented and interestingly related at an appropriate level of detail. (p. 96)

Creswell suggested that data can be divided into the following five steps: (a) data management, (b) coding and identification of recurring themes, (c) description, (d) interpretation, and (e) representation. For Creswell (2007), raw data are the input and a final narrative or conclusion is the output. In order to ensure that the narrative or conclusion accurately represents the themes raised in the input, a researcher must code or categorize the data (Merriam, 2009). Coding is the process of identifying relevant phenomena, collecting samples of these phenomena and analyzing them for commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures (Merriam, 2009). Codes are then categorized in accordance with their order of importance, typically as they relate to the focus of the study (Merriam, 2009). These comprise the subsequent *themes*.

Braun and Clark (2006) suggested that thematic analysis has been poorly branded, but nonetheless, is widely used. There is some discussion as to whether thematic analysis is a method unto itself, or rather a process that can be used to assist a researcher in their analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Holloway & Todres, 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). For the purposes of this study, thematic analysis was employed as a process as opposed to a standalone methodology. Braun and Clark (2006) and King (2004) asserted that it is a useful way to analyze the responses of research participants by focusing on the similarities and differences in responses of each

individual or group. Nowell et al. (2017) identified the following six phases in thematic analysis: (a) familiarizing yourself with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. For the purposes of this study, parts of this process were incorporated in the analysis of the data.

For my study, I identified the codes and patterns for each of the three groups of interview participants (teachers, parents employed in a mining-related industry, and students) to determine whether any themes could be identified. This process can be completed with the aid of computer programs such as NVivo and others; however for the purposes of my study, I coded my data manually. Because the interviews were conducted in Spanish, I felt more comfortable coding the data manually. I then employed a thematic narrative to present the data and relate the themes back to the research questions identified in Chapter 1.

Coding the Interviews

Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2007) discussed the importance of first coding the data obtained from the interviews prior to identifying the themes. As Merriam (2009) outlined, the objective is to ensure that the categories (codes) are manageable in number but are exhaustive and accurately represent the data. These categories enabled the researcher to derive the themes from the data. I apply this approach here. My approach to coding is reflective of the constructivist framework I employed for this study in that it is inductive rather than deductive (Merriam, 2009). The codes I identified come from the data I collected – I did not identify codes or categories prior to collecting the data. I relied on both the transcripts of the interviews and my notes throughout the interview process to identify both the codes and themes.

In the coding process, I grouped the teachers and parents employed in mining-related industries together and the students separately because the interview protocols differed. I

identified the codes by analyzing the interviews to determine common categories that were touched upon frequently in the interviews by the participants. I searched for recurring words and phrases and tracked these as I read the transcripts of each interview. The interviews I conducted with all three groups of participants were very structured in nature, not by design, but because the participants did not volunteer information outside of the questions that were posed. It is this structure that informed the way I identified the codes. Table 4 illustrates the codes for the teachers and the parents of the students.

Table 4

Interview Codes for Teachers and Parents Employed in Mining

Codes					
Reasons for being in La Rinconada	Climate	Access to Higher Education	Role of Higher Education Personally and in Household	Definition of Success	Plans for Future

Table 5 depicts the codes for the students.

Table 5

Interview Codes for the Students

Codes		
Access to Higher Education	Role of Parents in Pursuing Higher Education	Plans for Future

Two of the three codes identified for the student study participants are also identified as codes for the parents employed in mining and the teachers. Because the students either had never or no longer resided in La Rinconada, the harshness of the climate was not addressed in my interviews with them. Additionally, they did not speak to the manner in which they defined success and instead discussed what they hoped to accomplish in the future.

I used the above-referenced codes as the basis for identifying the overarching themes of the data obtained through the interviews. I returned to the transcriptions of the interviews to further refine the themes to ensure that they accurately reflected the content of the interviews and used these to revise the codes. The resulting themes are as follows: Theme One is the acceptance of harsh conditions for more opportunity, Theme Two is the importance of higher education and obstacles to pursuing it, and Theme Three is the perceived role of higher education in future success.

Qualitative research does not have as its primary objective the pursuit of one objective truth or reality because these are relative and vary in accordance with the perspective of the individual. To establish internal validity and credibility of qualitative studies, triangulation is an important tool (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), there are four types of triangulation: (a) multiple methods, (b) multiple data sources, (c) multiple investigators, and (d) multiple theories. This study relies on multiple methods of data collection and on multiple sources of data. In addition to observations and interviews, I include supplemental data including photographs of the setting (La Rinconada) and statistical reports related to higher education produced by Peru's National Institute for Statistics and Information.

Credibility and Dependability

Guba (1981) identified four elements of trustworthiness for all academic studies:

- i. Establishing confidence in the authenticity of the findings*
- ii. Establishing the applicability of the findings*
- iii. Establishing the consistency of the findings*
- iv. Establishing the neutrality of the researcher*

Wallendorf and Belk (1989) raised one additional concern regarding the integrity of the researcher in accurately conveying the responses of the study participants. The accurate representation of the study participant's view of reality is a fundamental aim of qualitative, ethnographic research. Credibility is defined as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research finding and is determined by the instrument of data collection, which for qualitative studies, is the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002; Macnee & McCabe, 2008). The more reliable the instrument of data collection, the more credible the study. One of the strategies employed by ethnographers to ensure the credibility of a study is to interview a sufficient number of study participants. Morse (1994) recommended that ethnographers conduct a minimum of 30 interviews. I interviewed 41 individuals from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds for my study. As mentioned previously, data analysis is influenced by the biases of the researcher, however this bias can be mitigated by increasing the number of study participants, which is how I approached my study (Creswell, 2007).

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry can be corroborated by other researchers (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). In other words, ensuring that the interpretations and conclusions drawn by the researcher are derived from the data. To achieve confirmability, the researcher must ensure the quality of the application of methods employed to execute the study (Creswell, 2007). This pertains to the interview protocol, the manner in which questions are phrased, the rapport between the researcher and the participant, the level of anxiety or fear felt by the participant and the extent to which the participant feels compelled to answer in a certain manner in order to please the researcher. I addressed these concerns in the section entitled *race, research and ethnography*, and am confident that the interviews I conducted were

structured to mitigate any unintended bias or skewing of the results and that my interpretations and conclusions were based on the data collected.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings can be applied to other, similar circumstances – the interpretative equivalent of generalizability (Bitsch, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Tobin & Begley, 2004). What is unique about my study is that despite the fact that the study participants all currently reside in La Rinconada or Juliaca, they represent nearly all regions of Peru as well as some in Bolivia. I am confident that my findings could be applied to communities where illegal activities are the primary source of revenue generation (examples include the Vraem Valley in Peru which is the largest producer of cocaine as well as other illegal gold mining towns throughout the Peruvian rain forest).

Dependability refers to the extent to which the study can be replicated and produce similar results over time (Bitsch, 2005; Creswell, 2007). In other words, if a different researcher returned to the same location several years later and employed the same methodology to study the same topic would they draw the same conclusions? As a researcher, I have no reason to doubt that this would be the case, however, as situations and circumstances are constantly evolving, it is difficult to ascertain how this might impact the results if there were to be another similar study in La Rinconada in the future.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this study is the methodology. The studies that have focused on access to higher education among Peru's poorest individuals have been quantitative. A qualitative study provides a different perspective on this issue and allows the reader to hear from those who are most impacted by the limited access to higher education in Peru. Another strength of this study is the internal transferability and dependability of the study. In setting up the

interview protocol and analyzing the data that I protected both the reliability and validity of this study. Additionally, the perspectives and viewpoints shared with me by the study participants have been conveyed as accurately as possible. The presence of my Peruvian, male colleagues was particularly useful in that I was able to consult with them when I had questions regarding the interpretation of a participant's statement. Lastly, because of the diverse population of La Rinconada, this study included individuals from all over Peru as well as several regions in Bolivia, which was another strength of this study.

One limitation of the study pertains to the discomfort several of the female participants I interviewed appeared to feel. Some were uncomfortable speaking in front of their husbands because they did not want to convey any feeling of dissatisfaction or unhappiness. I mitigated this issue by speaking with those who were willing to participate without the presence of their husbands, which allowed them to volunteer more information.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In my introduction, I identified the following three research questions:

RQ1: What role does higher education play for families in la Rinconada?

RQ2: What opportunities and obstacles to higher education (economic, social, cultural, other) are perceived by parents and children from La Rinconada?

RQ3: What futures do the parents envision for their children and do their children envision for themselves?

In this chapter I share the findings from the analysis of data I collected from two separate site visits to Juliaca and La Rinconada (the first in July of 2016 and the second in November of 2019). Over the course of both periods, I conducted two group interviews and 45 individual interviews. I also documented my observations regarding the character of each location, specifically the infrastructure and climate in order to answer these questions. I start by providing a sense of the physical surroundings and daily life in La Rinconada followed by a brief description of the interview participants. I conclude by analyzing the content of individual interviews regarding participants' perceptions of higher education with respect to the three research questions listed above.

It is important to mention that all the conversations with the interview participants conducted in La Rinconada and Juliaca, both in individual and group settings, were recorded after receiving the consent of all of the individuals present in the interviews. They were provided with both a written and verbal consent form describing the purpose of my research, my identity as a doctoral student at Colorado State University, the manner in which I intended to use the research, and how the information they shared with me would be protected. For this reason, I do not use the real names of the individuals whose comments I include in this study.

Additionally, the identifying characteristics such as age, job, number of children and marital status will not be exact, in order to safeguard confidentiality. These conversations were transcribed by me and then translated from Spanish to English. The only existing copy of this transcript and the English translation are in my possession in a password protected file.

La Rinconada, Physical Description of City, Infrastructure and Daily Life



Figure 7. Refuse from La Rinconada along the roadside.

During my first visit to La Rinconada in July of 2016, I traveled with a Peruvian academic administrator and professor who was a colleague of mine throughout part of the time I spent living and working in Peru. He and I were employed by the same university for close to 2 years. He helped me to establish contacts in both Juliaca and La Rinconada and helped to set up our initial visit to the latter as well as my follow-up visit in November of 2019. On the first trip, we had the opportunity to speak with a group of 32 parents – 20 fathers and 12 mothers – as part of a group interview. Most of the mothers in the group were married to one of the 20 men present

at the interview. In order to get a sense of daily life in La Rinconada, I asked them how they would describe life in La Rinconada. “La Rinconada isn’t for everyone, that’s for sure”, remarked Francisco, a miner and father of two young daughters. “Yeah, the cold can feel overwhelming at times, it’s impossible to get warm and my wife and children complain,” echoed Ignacio, a recent transplant from Iquitos and father of two young children, a son and a daughter. “I am from the jungle,” Ignacio explained, “there it is always warm so it is very difficult to get accustomed to this cold, humid, mountain climate.” The headmaster invited both the men and women who were present to participate in the initial group interview I conducted at the school. I obtained verbal, informed consent from each participant prior to starting the interview. Many of the women in the group looked down, glancing up at me nervously. Those whose husbands were in the room stood behind their husbands to ensure that all questions were directed to their husbands. Manuel was one of the oldest men in the room and is a teacher at the elementary school and works in the mines on the weekends. He is from Puno, a city located on the shore of Lake Titicaca, approximately four hours driving from La Rinconada. He explained to me that he has been in La Rinconada for the past decade, and initially came to work as a teacher. His wife and three children all live in Juliaca, and two of his children are attending the Universidad Andina Néstor Cáceres, a private, for-profit university in Juliaca. “I remember how I felt when I first moved here (La Rinconada),” he chuckled, “I thought I wouldn’t last through the first semester. And at that time there was only a quarter of the people who are here now, so it was pretty isolated. Now you can hop on a bus almost anytime you want and be down in Juliaca in less than three hours,” he exclaimed. “These people will get used to life here,” he assured me, “with the money to be made from these mines, people can get used to anything.”



Figure 8. Housing in La Rinconada.

The city of La Rinconada is, at its core, a city dedicated to the industry of gold mining. The state has almost no presence in La Rinconada apart from two elementary schools, one high school and one medical post (ENAH0, 2018). The mines and associated business located in La Rinconada do not pay taxes and are designated “informal,” a term that serves as a euphemism for illegal, meaning not authorized by the government or subjected to government oversight (Castro & Yamada, 2010). In the most recent census, the Peruvian government estimated La Rinconada’s current population to be approximately 75,000 inhabitants (ENAH0, 2018). The population in 2009 was estimated to be approximately 25,000 inhabitants (ENAH0, 2010). The rapid growth of La Rinconada is evident in the structural composition of the housing. The standard material used to construct housing in La Rinconada is corrugated metal as evidenced in the adjacent picture. Multiple interview participants apprised me that houses like the two-room house with a porch pictured in Figure 8 are extremely expensive, comparable in value to well-located one-bedroom apartment in Lima (\$100,000). They told me that most recent arrivals to

La Rinconada could not afford to purchase a house, and instead rented rooms from landlords operating in the city's burgeoning real estate industry.



Figure 9. Housing for recent arrivals.

The real estate pricing in La Rinconada is governed by proximity to the center of town and the elementary schools. The wealthiest residents live closest to the town center, while those with fewer resources live further up the side of the mountain, closer to the mines, as depicted in Figure 9. The houses are typically one-room and made from corrugated metal. The residents I spoke with informed me that no residential structures in La Rinconada are heated. The city's average temperature is 34.2° F, which makes for an extremely cold environment to live in without a source of heating (ENAHQ, 2018). The constant, bone-chilling cold was the primary complaint among the residents I spoke with. I asked them whether they relied on burning wood or coal to provide heat in their houses, and they told me that the corrugated metal housing made the burning of any material impossible because the fire would overheat the metal, scalding

anyone who came into contact with it. Additionally, most houses did not have a mechanism for allowing the smoke emitted by the fire to escape.



Figure 10. Open sewer system

I asked the residents I spoke with about access to electricity in La Rinconada and they informed me that electricity was only used to operate the mines and public buildings, including



Figure 11. Open sewer proximity to dining area.

the schools. The mines operate 24 hours per day seven days per week. This of course means that heating, lighting, and other electrically powered appliances are not widely available in La Rinconada. The residents mentioned that some people successfully tapped into the electrical grid that powered the mines, without the permission of the owners of the mines, but that this was the exception rather than the rule. Those who live higher up on the sides of the mountain closer to the mines have no access to electricity in any form.

I asked the residents about the sewage system in La Rinconada and they informed me that it was an open ditch system for those houses that were located close enough to the city center to be connected. Most of the houses located on the outskirts of La Rinconada are not connected to the open-ditch sewer system and rely on pits or holes in the ground to dispose of waste. The open-ditch system is routed through the center of the city, often streaming through some of the city's main streets close to the primary shopping and dining activities. This is pictured in Figure 10 and Figure 11, which features a picture of the bricked-in area of the ditch that runs by the central, outdoor dining area of the city.

Given the harsh climate and difficult living conditions of La Rinconada, it is useful to consider the factors that drive families and individuals to relocate there, oftentimes with young children. Why is it that people are drawn to the perceived opportunities La Rinconada offers, despite the arduous living and working conditions? My research provides insights into the reasons for this phenomenon, and how La Rinconada's unique opportunities for income generation correlate with access to higher education.

Description of Elementary School I.E.P. 72147, La Rinconada

During both visits to La Rinconada, I met with parents, teachers and school administrators at the largest elementary school in the city, I.E.P. 72147. When I first visited

in July of 2016, I met with the head of the school, and as he was giving me a tour of the facilities he told me, “at this institution, we do our best to prepare students for the eventuality of not only continuing on to secondary school, but for the possibility that they will continue on to study at a university or an institute.” Noting my surprise at the mention of higher education he said:

You are not the only person to be surprised that higher education is a common objective for many parents here in La Rinconada, but what people don’t realize is that there is money here, real money. People work in the mines so that they can afford nice things for their families, and education is considered extremely important.

The head of school gave me and my Peruvian colleague a quick tour of the elementary school. It was typical of many public schools that had been constructed in the era of Fujimori’s presidency (July 28, 1990 – November 22, 2000) with a simple two-story concrete structure in the shape of a rectangle with a courtyard in the middle for sporting activities and school activities. Figure 12 represents the structure.



Figure 12. Elementary School I.E.P. 72147.

During the tour, I asked to use the restroom. The head of the school indicated the location of the girls' restroom and explained to me that the school's restrooms were the only restrooms in La Rinconada with an underground septic system. As previously mentioned, the rest of the city has open sewers.

The school's septic tank was not in working order during both of my visits, which made the conditions very difficult for the students, but such conditions are not unique in the city. The school did not have any form of heating, and the children sat in the classroom with coats,



Figure 13. Classroom.

sweaters and boots. Figure 13 depicts a typical classroom at the school which is equipped with wooden desks and chairs. Several classrooms contained older-model computers as well as a drop-down screen with which the teacher could project images from the computer.

I did not find the school or classrooms to be lacking in any way as compared to other classrooms in public primary schools I have visited throughout Peru, apart from the lack of heating. Because it is a public building, the school does have electricity available to operate the lights, computers and projectors; the internet, however, is sporadic at best.

During our tour of the school and initial meeting with the head of the school, he mentioned that the school was over-enrolled, and because of this, it was necessary to restructure the class schedule to accommodate the additional students. He stated that all children attend classes for only a half-day session as opposed to the full-day session that is more typical of public elementary schools in Peru. I asked him whether he felt like the decreased hours in school

had a negative impact on the students' opportunity to learn. He responded with a shrug and said, "what does it matter, we do the best we can with the resources we are allowed." I posed this question to the teachers I spoke with in both our first and second focus groups (June of 2016 and November of 2019 respectively). For the most part, their reaction mirrored that of the head of school in that they did not feel as though it was worth the effort of analyzing the potential negative impact of the decreased hours in school given their inability to change the students' reality. One teacher who had been employed at the school for over a decade stated that he felt that the most negative consequence of the decrease in educational hours at the school was the impact it had on the parents' ability to work. "Obviously the fathers aren't taking their kids with them to work in the mines," he said. "But for the mothers, it's very difficult for them to work and manage their children at the same time, not many jobs allow for them to do that."

Daily Life in La Rinconada

In La Rinconada, the mines are the only constant, they operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As one father who is also a miner put it, "of course the mines operate at night, what difference does it make whether it's light or dark outside when you spend all of your time working in a hole without light?" All aspects of life in La Rinconada revolve around mining. I had an opportunity to sit and speak with the director of the elementary school on both visits and he provided me with a great deal of insight into the daily life of the residents of La Rinconada with children at his school. Below is an excerpt from our conversation:

Director of the School: There are lots of young, single men who come up here to work, or men whose families live somewhere else, like Juliaca. The mine juntas try to be accommodating to fathers with wives and children in La Rinconada by offering them daytime hours so that they can be with their families at night. It isn't safe after dark,

people start drinking, fights break out and there is lots of violence. No one wants to leave their wife and children alone.

AnneLiese: So the single men typically work at night?

Director of the School: Yes, but there are a lot more single men than there are job labor opportunities at night so the men who aren't able to get nighttime work in a mine go to the bars.

AnneLiese: Do the parents of children at your school generally work during the day in the mines?

Director of the School: Yes, until they earn enough money to be able to afford to move their families down to Juliaca.

AnneLiese: What percentage would you say are able to do that and how long does it usually take?

Director of the School: For some it can happen within the first year, if they are lucky and find something valuable on the day they are allowed to work for themselves. For others it can take years.

AnneLiese: Do people ever leave to go back to where they came from even if they don't find success in La Rinconada?

Director of the School: Almost never. They exhaust the resources they have to get here, so they come with nothing. Even if they want to leave they have to stay because they can't afford to leave.

AnneLiese: Do most of the parents of the families with children at your school stay married? Or does the economic stress and the stress of having left their hometowns impact them?

Director of the School: No one divorces, they need each other to succeed here, it is very difficult to make things work as a single parent. There are single parents, but not due to divorce. Typically it's because one of the parents died in an accident in the mine or a health issue.

AnneLiese: So the children go to school for a half day, who takes care of them throughout the rest of the day while their parents are working?

Director of the School: For most recently arrived families, both parents work, in which case the mom takes her children with her to work either in the morning or the afternoon. If a family has more than one child in the school, we try to make sure they have the same schedule to make it easier for their parents. The older children often take care of the younger ones when their parents are working in the mines.

AnneLiese: Where do residents of La Rinconada purchase food items and clean water? Are there grocery stores here in town?

Director of the School: Trucks arrive up here every day with food supplies and bottled water. It's very expensive compared to the prices down below, but we don't really have a choice.

AnneLiese: What in your opinion is the most difficult aspect of life here?

Director of the School: The never-ending cold. You can never get warm. The cold seeps into your bones and doesn't let go. I have never felt anything but cold up here. I don't stop feeling cold until I am at least halfway to Juliaca. And for the kids? The cold and lack of nutritious food is the biggest problem. The food we can buy up here is all prepackaged because it is easier to transport and doesn't spoil, but the long-term effect of

consuming that especially for the younger children is that their bodies lack iron, vitamin c, those types of things, so the vast majority of kids are anemic.

The living and working conditions in La Rinconada are some of the most inhospitable anywhere on earth. The people who come to live in La Rinconada do so because from their perspective, they have more opportunities to generate income than they do in their cities of origin. The purpose of this section was to provide readers with a basic understanding of the realities of life in La Rinconada; this is essential to grasping why it is that the number of people relocating to La Rinconada every year is in fact an unexpected phenomenon. One would not expect that a city with conditions similar to those in La Rinconada would attract the number of people it does, which is precisely what makes this city and its allure so intriguing. In my interviews people emphasized over and over how difficult the conditions were in La Rinconada, but each time it was mentioned it was almost always followed by a reference to the financial opportunities available to its residents. The harsh conditions combined with the prospect of wealth are what stood out to me as I learned more about the city and its inhabitants. I assumed that the harsh conditions and isolation of La Rinconada would, in accordance with the second research question, serve as obstacles to accessing higher education for the residents. I examine this question in greater detail when I describe findings from the interviews. I did find that access to education and higher education was made possible by mothers and children living in Juliaca while their husbands worked during the week in La Rinconada. I describe Juliaca briefly next.

Juliaca, Physical Description and Primary Industries



Figure 14. Train station.

Throughout my time both living and working in Peru I have spent a total of several weeks in Juliaca. Juliaca is a city located approximately three hours drive from La Rinconada in the Puno region of Peru. In the most recent census, Juliaca recorded a population of 276,110 people (ENAH0, 2017). Unlike its neighboring city, Puno (located on the shores of Lake Titicaca), Juliaca is a very industrial city. It is informally referred to as the “windy city” and is gritty and dusty and generally not frequented by tourists, despite the fact that it is home to the closest airport to Lake Titicaca. It is also wealthy compared to other urban hubs in the region, and it is the largest center of commerce in the region of Puno (ENAH0, 2017). What is interesting about Juliaca are the statistics that are not tracked and published, those that relate to the industries that form the backbone of the city’s economy. Juliaca is known (informally) as the epicenter of black-market smuggling (everything from electronics to alcohol as well as gold obtained through informal and illegal mining). These products flow through Juliaca from Bolivia and are distributed to the rest of Peru as well as other countries in South America. This information is not documented in any report or analysis, it is based on the conversations I have had with residents of Juliaca and people in the Peruvian government who are familiar with the industries that comprise Juliaca’s economy.



Figure 15. Standard housing in Juliaca.

Although Juliaca is not known as a visually pleasing city, it is recognized for having the most expensive and longest wedding celebrations (typically three days) and the highest per person spending on vehicles anywhere in Peru (ENAH0, 2017). There is wealth in Juliaca, despite the outward appearance of the city and poor state of the infrastructure. The vast majority of its families are working class in that they do not work as professionals such as medicine, law or accounting, and most operate small businesses or are employed in the agricultural and mining industries (INEI, 2018). These jobs are more lucrative in Juliaca than are many professional jobs (ENAH0, 2017). Most residents identify as Quechuan or Aymaran and speak either Quechua or Aymara as their first language and Spanish as their second (INEI, 2018).

Juliaca has four universities -- three private for-profit and one public university -- and two institutes, both private for-profit. The estimated total number of students attending one of these institutions is roughly 48,600 -- over 17% of Juliaca's population (ENAH0, 2017). This rate compares to less than 6% of Lima's total population of 9.32 million people pursuing higher education (INEI, 2018). I selected the Universidad Andina Juliaca Nestor Cáceres Velásquez because with 30, 651 students, it is the largest university in the Puno region -- it is also a private, for-profit institution. I selected the Universidad Nacional de Juliaca because it is the only public university in Juliaca; it has 1,630 students. The enrollment numbers for these institutions show that far more students attend private, for-profit institutions as opposed to their public

counterparts, despite the fact that the latter have a far lower cost point. This point was addressed by several teachers and parents in their interviews and will be discussed in detail in the upcoming section.

Interview Participants in La Rinconada

During my second trip to La Rinconada in November of 2019, I had the opportunity to conduct individual interviews with a total of 31 people. Table 6 depicts the number of men and women and their professions. Apart from the 14 teachers I interviewed, all of the remaining 17 individuals I interviewed had at least one child enrolled at the elementary school I.E.P. 72147.

Table 6

Gender and Profession of Teachers and Parents Employed in Mining

	Teachers	Parents/Miners	Parents/Stay at Home
Men	9	13	0
Women	5	3	1

The Teachers

The 14 teachers I spoke with were direct, forthcoming, and well-spoken. Of these, four of the men and one of the women held master’s degrees in a field relating to education, all had been earned at a private, for-profit university located outside of Lima. Two had earned their degrees at the largest for-profit university in Juliaca, Universidad Andina Nestor Cáceres Velásquez. All 14 of the teachers had been assigned to La Rinconada by the Peruvian Ministry of Education and therefore did not come of their own volition. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Peruvian Ministry of Education assigns public school teachers and administrators to a location where they required to stay until their request for a relocation is approved (Benavides, 2004). The length of time an individual must stay in a given location prior to be granted a relocation depends on the

individual's seniority, academic specialty and the needs of other schools (Benavides, 2004). Additionally, in conversations I had with several of the teachers, they intimated that the teachers and administrators who forged close relationships with administrators in the Ministry of Education were treated differently than those who had no close relationship with individuals affiliated with the Ministry of Education. Some stated that in their mind, payment was required in order to secure transfers from less-desirable locations to those that were more desirable.

Teachers and school administrators are unique among La Rinconada's residents in that they are all college-educated and generally do not work in the mines. Peru's Ministry of Education requires all primary and secondary school teachers to have earned at least a Baccalaureate degree in education or the subject they are teaching (Rodriguez & Montoro, 2013). The vast majority of Peru's public school teachers come from families that are among the bottom 40% of income earners in Peru (ENAH0, 2017). This statistic most likely contributes to the fact that approximately 83% of public school teachers earn their Baccalaureate degree at one of Peru's private, for-profit universities as opposed to a public university (ENAH0, 2017). Only one of the teachers augmented his teacher's salary by working in the mines on the weekend. Of the 14, he was the most familiar with life in La Rinconada and appeared to be the most integrated into the society there. His wife and grown children lived in Juliaca where he owns several houses because of the additional salary his work in the mines on the weekend provides.

The remaining eight men I interviewed who are employed as teachers at I.E.P. 72147 all have children and their wives and children all reside in Juliaca where they attend private primary or secondary schools and universities. They explained to me that while they would not consider themselves well-paid for their jobs, their salaries afforded them the possibility of sparing their families the self-described "harsh life" of La Rinconada. They explained that every Friday

evening they take a bus from La Rinconada to Juliaca in order to spend the weekends with their families and would often return to La Rinconada late on Sunday night in order to begin the work week. Their perspectives on higher education and life in La Rinconada are particularly insightful because they not only have children of their own but are also in a position to be able to observe the behavior of the parents with children at the elementary school.

The five women I interviewed who are teachers at I.E.P. 72147 have lived in La Rinconada for less than 5 years. Two are single and under the age of 30 and three are married and in their early thirties. All five reiterated their plans to leave La Rinconada as soon as possible on multiple occasions. They found the city inhospitable, harsh and extremely difficult to live in; this was especially emphasized by the two single women. Like their male colleagues, the two single women both said they traveled to Juliaca every weekend in order to spend as little time as possible in La Rinconada. One of the women who was married mentioned that her husband was employed in La Rinconada and for that reason, the whole family resided in La Rinconada. Of particular interest were their observations of the families of their students and their perceptions of how the families view higher education. It is in this context that I will be incorporating the information gleaned from the interviews I conducted with two single women. The married woman was able to provide great insight into family life in La Rinconada and her perspective on the future for her children and the role of higher education.

Parents Employed in Mining

During my second trip to La Rinconada in November 2019, I interviewed 17 miners, 13 men and four women. They ranged in age from 28 to 51 with the women tending to be younger than their male counterparts. I attributed this to the fact that because most families arrived in La Rinconada with very few resources, women were often compelled to work in the mines

alongside their husbands in order to generate enough money to afford rent and food. As the women got older, their husbands were often promoted to higher paying jobs within the mines where they could earn a percentage of the monthly earnings from the mine and could afford to allow the mothers of their children to relocate from La Rinconada and care for the children on a full-time basis.

Of the men, nine were married and had wives and children residing with them in La Rinconada. The other four all had wives and children in Juliaca – they tended to be older and had been in La Rinconada longer than their counterparts. Of the four women, two were married, one was single and one a widow, all had at least one child studying at the public primary school in La Rinconada, and three worked in the mines.

Interview Participants in Juliaca

Students

I interviewed 10 students in Juliaca. Nine of the 10 students I interviewed identified as either Quechua or Aymara, and of the 10, none had parents who had themselves pursued any form of higher education. I interviewed five students from the Universidad Andina Nestor Cáceres Velásquez located in Juliaca, Peru and five students from the Universidad Nacional de Juliaca. As mentioned previously, the Universidad Andina Nestor Cáceres Velásquez is a large, private, for-profit university and the Universidad Nacional de Juliaca is a small, public university. Table 7 represents the gender breakdown of the 10 students I interviewed at both universities.

Table 7

Gender and University of Students Interviewed

	Male	Female

Universidad Nacional de Juliaca	1	4
Universidad Andina Nestor Cáceres Velásquez	3	2

All the students had family members working in the informal mining industries around Juliaca and were familiar with the living and working conditions of the informal mining towns. Apart from one of the male students, the female students appeared more at ease and comfortable sharing their experiences in the interviews than their male counterparts. They volunteered more detailed information on their decision-making process in pursuing higher education than their male counterparts and were more likely to speak about their family members. In general, however, the interviews I conducted with the students were shorter in duration than those I conducted with the teachers and miners in La Rinconada.

Thematic Analysis of the Interviews

As detailed in Chapter 3, in the coding process, I grouped the teachers and parents employed in mining together and the students separately because the interview protocols differed. I identified the codes by analyzing the interviews to determine common categories that were touched upon frequently in the interviews by the participants. I constructed six categories for the parents employed in mining and teachers: reasons for being in La Rinconada, Climate, Access to Higher Education, Definition of Success, and Plans for the Future. For the students, I constructed three main categories: Access to Higher Education, Role of the Parents, and Plans for the Future. I then returned to the data to complete a focused coding that elaborated each of these categories in their respective data sets.

One of the final steps of analysis was to review the categories and data to conceptualize themes. Figures 16, 17 and 18 depict the themes that I constructed from the coding process:

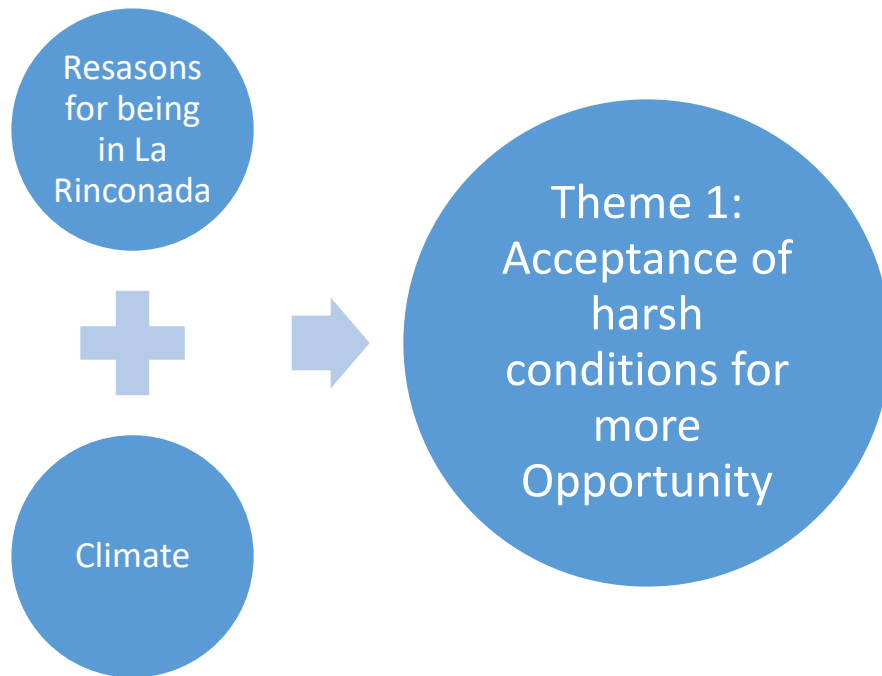


Figure 16. Theme One

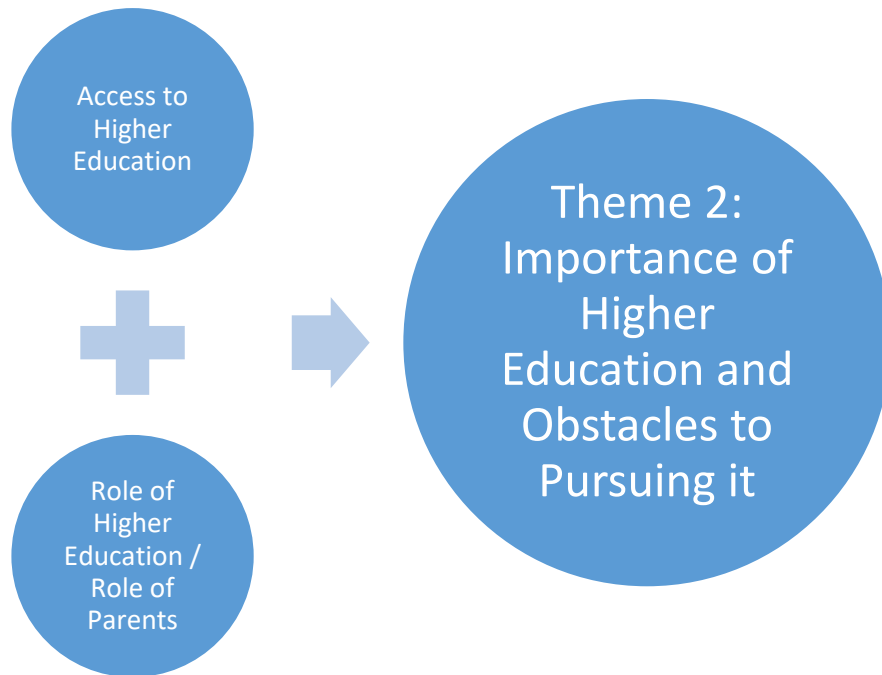


Figure 17. Theme Two

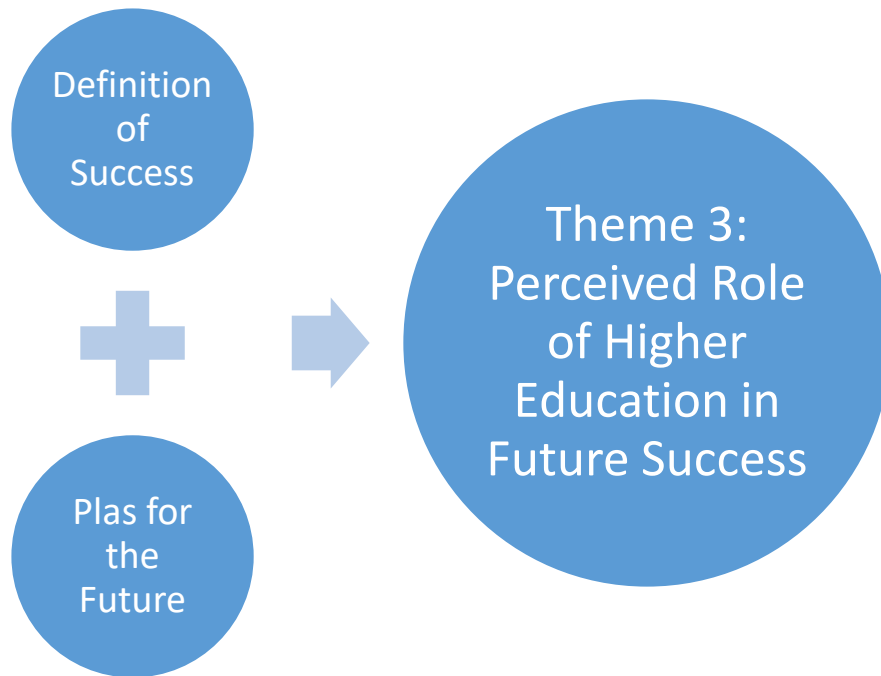


Figure 18. Theme Three

Theme One: Acceptance of Harsh Conditions for more Opportunity

The first of the three themes identified *acceptance of harsh conditions for more opportunity*, was highlighted by every teacher and miner I interviewed. This theme was less prevalent among the students, although they did make reference to lack of job opportunities and choice. The following excerpts of the interviews best reflect participants’ feelings on what brought them to La Rinconada and their perceptions of life in the city.

Enduring a harsh and cold climate. For this section, I focus specifically on the responses of the interview participants I believe sum up people’s general perspectives on the realities of daily life in La Rinconada. I did not include a question specifically addressing the interview participants’ perspectives on La Rinconada’s climate because I felt that if it were a factor they deemed to be important they would incorporate a reference to the climate in their responses to other questions. All the excerpts I include below were gathered through

conversations with interview participants, although I did speak with many residents of La Rinconada regarding their impressions of La Rinconada's climate. I only include the precise transcript of what was relayed to me for the study participants due to a lack of a written and verbal consent for non-study participants.

I decided not to group the responses in accordance with the occupations of the study participants and I include responses from both parents employed in mining and teachers. What is striking in the responses of those I interviewed is that people come to La Rinconada despite the harsh climate and lack of basic infrastructure such as running water, electricity and a functioning sewer system. When asked if there was one word they would use to describe La Rinconada, the word most frequently selected by the participants was *duro*, meaning hard/harsh in English. Many cited the exact elevation of the city, 5,380 meters, when describing life in La Rinconada. Both women and men, parents employed in mining, teachers, shop owners and others, were poetic in the manner in which they described the impact of the constant cold. They would describe how the cold could affect the body, the mind and the spirit. They described how the cold impacted the children. Yucretia, a 47-year-old teacher who has lived in La Rinconada for 10 years, described it as:

You wake up feeling cold, you spend your day shivering, you return to your bed in search of an escape from the ever-present cold. The children come to school with permanent runny noses, they spend their days draped with sweaters and coats, expending energy trying to get warm, energy they don't have because the food here isn't very nutritious.

Andres, a 45-year-old miner who is in his first year in La Rinconada, said, "When I came to La Rinconada, I left behind the happiness and warmth that surrounded me in my home city Lampa.

I haven't felt warm since I left." Jaime, a 35-year-old teacher in his first year in La Rinconada described the cold in La Rinconada in the following way:

The only escape for people from the cold is sleep, alcohol and death. The children at our school can sleep, but they wake up to the cold that is there to greet them. It accompanies them through their day, says good night to them and promises them to be there in the morning when they wake up.

Jaime's description sticks with me. Having been to La Rinconada twice in two very different times of the year (June and November), I wore layers of the warmest clothing I own on both occasions. I did not shed clothing while indoors as the temperature was equivalent to the outdoor temperature. There is truly no way to get warm. The cold is a damp, bone-searing cold. It wears you down, it fatigues you before you even start your day. There is no escape. The children are perennially flushed, their cheeks a bright red. As for me I am relieved when I return to the vehicle that will take me back to Juliaca. I know I will find heat and comfort there. The residents of La Rinconada do not have this escape. It is cold, 24 hours per day, seven days per week, 365 days per year.

The climate and the lack of infrastructure is undoubtedly the biggest factor impacting life in La Rinconada. Interestingly, it was only mentioned as a factor by three of the teachers I interviewed and two of the miners. This may have been because the other interview participants felt as though the climate and lack of basic infrastructure are such obvious factors impacting daily life in La Rinconada that it was not useful to reference them. It cannot be overstated however that life in La Rinconada is exceptionally harsh and difficult – the bone-chilling year round cold and the altitude combined with the lack of infrastructure make it an extremely

inhospitable place to live which makes its booming population a phenomenon worth investigating.

Given the harshness of the environment, it was essential to hear from the interview participants the reasons why they had come to La Rinconada. These follow in the next section.

Perspectives of the parents employed in mining – reasons for coming to La Rinconada. The following excerpts from the interviews I conducted with the 16 participating parents employed in mining are representative of what I heard echoed by the vast majority of the individuals I spoke with. I selected the statements made by these individuals because they were clear and summarized much of what I was told.

Angelica is a 51-year-old miner from Puno and has spent 20 years living and working in La Rinconada. She is also a mother of two sons, both of whom are now grown. One of her sons currently resides in Juliaca and the other is an attorney in Lima. Both pursued higher education. When asked about the reasons she came to La Rinconada and what she hoped to accomplish while there Angelica stated:

I came to La Rinconada 20 years ago because there were no opportunities for me in my hometown of Puno. I had to leave university in my seventh semester of study because I got pregnant. There were no jobs for me in my hometown. I came here because this was the only place that offered opportunities for someone like me. All they ask you to do is work, they don't require that you submit anything, that you demonstrate any skill or invest any money. They just want you to work. I can do that!

Freddy, a 43-year-old miner also from Puno who has spent 12 years living and working in La Rinconada, touched on an issue highlighted by all 16 of the miners who were interviewed when he discussed the reality of raising a family on a salary based on minimum wage:

No one can live off of a salary of minimum wage with two children. I didn't have studies, diplomas or certificates to show people, I had my hands and my desire to work. Here, people value that. I earn more here if I really work hard than many of my siblings who live in Arequipa, Puno and Lima. You see it for yourself, life here is harsh. But at least I can earn enough here to support and educate my family.

I asked him whether his family lived with him in La Rinconada:

No. They lived here when we first came to La Rinconada but I sent them to live in Juliaca 2 years after I arrived here. This is not a good, a safe place for children. There is a lot of crime, people drink a lot, they go to the bars where there are girls, it's not a good place for kids.

Life in La Rinconada is so harsh that many families, like that of Freddy, live hours away in Juliaca. Families are willing to live apart so that the husband can work in the mines, as there is little opportunity for unskilled labor elsewhere in Peru.

The parents employed in mining all talked about the importance of being able to make a living and provide for their families. Rolando, a 37-year-old miner from Huancané who has been in La Rinconada for 2 years:

I have two children under the age of 12, I tried to launch a business in Puno and couldn't make it work. I had a transportation business, a *mototaxi*; I tried to make it work, I worked day and night taking people from their hotels to the Lake but I barely made enough to cover what I owed on the vehicle. I had no choice, there aren't a lot of good job opportunities for someone like me, someone who doesn't have a degree, someone who didn't even finish high school. But in La Rinconada, people accept you as you are,

if you're willing to work hard you get rewarded. Is this a nice city to live in? No, definitely not, but at least here they let me make money.

Both Freddy and Rolando demonstrate the decision-making process addressed in *theme one*, where those seeking employment in mining who come to La Rinconada determine that the opportunity to earn more money outweighs the inhospitable living and working conditions they are compelled to endure. The inhospitable conditions are likely why most interview participants stated that they intended to leave La Rinconada after making sufficient money to start anew in a more livable city. The promise of leaving La Rinconada after having earned a predetermined amount of money makes the decision to live in La Rinconada easier to accept – the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. Teofila is a 43-year-old miner from Juaja and is married with two children – a son and a daughter. She has been in La Rinconada for a little over 13 years and works the mines along with her husband, Jorge. I asked her if she remembered what reasons brought her to La Rinconada and how she would describe her life in the city. Teofila was shy and soft-spoken but seemed to enjoy telling me about her life:

My husband and I came to La Rinconada when I was 30 with our two children. Juaja, where I am from, has a climate that can be cold in the winter, there are mountains, but it is nothing like the climate here in La Rinconada. We came here because we had family members who had come here and found gold almost immediately after they arrived. They returned to Juaja and started their own business, it was exactly what we wanted to do. So that's really why we came here, to earn some money quickly to invest in a business we could start back in Juaja. Of course we didn't have the same luck as they did. We have been very lucky some months, but usually the money we earn in those months helps us to off-set other months when we don't earn very well. We have never earned

enough to be able to leave and go and start a business. I don't regret being here though. We earn more than we could have earned living in Jauja. The other option would have been Lima. I am sure I would be working as a maid maybe like my sister. I definitely earn more than she does and I don't have to live in someone else's house 6 days a week. When we first came to La Rinconada, it was very difficult to adjust so I spent the first months we lived in La Rinconada staying indoors as much as possible. It so cold here, and there really is no escape. I guess you just adapt. I don't really notice it now the way I did when we first came here. But I can definitely see the reaction of the people who are new to La Rinconada. The cold is the most difficult part of life here.

The personal stories shared by the interview participants suggest that people came to La Rinconada because of the earning potential it offered. It offered those without academic credentials the potential to earn far more than they could have in most other jobs open to people with similar backgrounds and credentials. The teachers I spoke with who reside in La Rinconada do have academic credentials so their reasons for coming differs from those cited by the miners. I explore these reasons in the following section as well as their impressions of the climate and day-to-day life in La Rinconada.

Perspectives of the teachers – reasons for coming to La Rinconada. During my interviews, I asked the teachers what their reasons were for coming to La Rinconada. All 14 teachers told me in a very succinct manner that they had come to La Rinconada because they had been assigned to the location by the Ministry of Education, not out of choice. I asked a question pertaining to what their goals and expectations were for their time in the city. This question allowed them to go into greater detail regarding their feelings on living in La Rinconada, and several addressed their plans for the future and whether they wanted to stay in this location.

Additionally, 7 of the 14 teachers emphasized their commitment to doing their job to the best of their ability because they believed that the students and their parents needed them to do so.

Alejandro, a 37-year-old teacher and father from Huancané who had been in La Rinconada for 5 years, told me:

I am here for work, I teach in the school here. La Rinconada is a tough place to be but more people keep coming, so you need to ask yourself why that is? Why do they keep coming? Because as ugly as it is here, as cold as it is, a cold that never lets you get warm, people come because they have better opportunities to earn more here than anywhere else. They don't need experience, they don't need to meet prerequisites, they can just work. Look, not everyone is lucky, some families leave here with nothing, but most don't. Most earn more here than they would in the towns they are from.

Alejandro did not elaborate on his reasons for being in La Rinconada apart from the fact that he came for work. He did not discuss whether he planned to stay in La Rinconada or go into detail regarding the difficulty of life there. Of the nine male teachers I spoke with, all addressed the question as to why they were in La Rinconada in a similar manner. They all responded that they had come to La Rinconada for work. The reason for the reluctance of the male teachers to provide greater detail as to their reasons for coming to La Rinconada or to address their perspectives on life there is likely due to the cultural expectation that men be stoic and refrain from expressing unhappiness or dissatisfaction with physical or emotional stress or discomfort. They are expected to assume the role of the grounding force in the family structure. I observed similar behavior on several occasions, including dealing with unexpected deaths or tragedies in the family, where the men in the family do not show emotion in the same manner as their female counterparts.

More than the men, the women teachers I interviewed described a desire and hope to leave La Rinconada. Beatriz, a 28-year-old, single, teacher from Ayaviri who has been in La Rinconada less than 6 months stated that:

I am here for work, of course I am here for work. When I initially arrived here, I thought it was pretty, I mean not La Rinconada, but the surrounding area. But now that I have been here six months, the only thing I want to do is to get out, to find somewhere else where I can teach. The families who come here, they are here because they have no other choice, no other option. They have to be here, otherwise they would be destined for eternal poverty. This is their only chance for escape.

For a teacher's request to be relocated to be approved by Peru's Ministry of Education, there must be an open, equivalent, position available in another location and priority is always given to those who have seniority. Celia, a 29-year-old from Huancane, also a primary school teacher who did not share how long she had been in La Rinconada, shared similar sentiment to that of Beatriz. When asked what her expectations and goals were for her time in La Rinconada she responded, "To see first. The climate is horrible for me. That's what struck me first. My goal is to leave here and to go somewhere else to work. That is my goal. Just that." Carmen, a married 30-year-old with children from Puno phrased her objectives for leaving La Rinconada in a more delicate manner:

Insofar as I have been here, I have been here 2 years now, the objective is to push myself professionally, and to maybe not be in the same situation where we are here, because as you have seen this is a place where we lack quite a few necessities, so one seeks to overcome and to not be here forever.

Men and women assigned to La Rinconada to serve as teachers seemed to largely accept their assignments. They had work as teachers. While some seemed resigned to their teaching positions in La Rinconada, others – particularly women – hoped to find opportunities elsewhere. I asked the teachers how difficult it was to relocate to another school. Percy summed it up in the following manner:

If someone is just a teacher or a teaching assistant, it might take on average maybe 3 to 4 years before you can relocate, but if you have been designated as an administrator “*nombrado*,” it is difficult to change schools and locations.

The teachers, like the miners, emphasized that they were in this insufferably cold and harsh city because they had the opportunity to work. However, the teachers had a professional motivation not addressed by the miners. For example, Ricardo, a 56-year-old primary teacher from Huancaya has spent the past 10 years living and working in La Rinconada. When he was asked about why he had come to La Rinconada he responded with a one-word answer: *work*. I asked him what expectations and goals he has established for himself throughout his time in La Rinconada. He stated, “Expectations? What do you mean expectations? Given that I work here I have from the beginning come to work and serve in the education of the children in this part of La Rinconada.” Ricardo highlighted a common sentiment I heard repeated by 13 of the 14 teachers I interviewed. Yes, they had come to La Rinconada for “*motivos de trabajo*”, or reasons related to work; however, when asked what they hoped to accomplish during their time there, they emphasized their desire to provide the students they taught with the best education possible, and a sort of structure and feeling of normalcy in a place that they seemed to feel was anything but normal.

Percy, a 38-year-old teacher who spent over 4 years living and working in La Rinconada, characterized his expectations and goals in the following manner:

More than anything, my goal is to support – above anyone else – the parents by being able to reach the students because if we don't also help the parents as well as the students they will never make it because it seems to me that we need to change their orientation because in the end they are the ones who will be correcting and raising their children to help them make it and accomplish their goals.

Several physical education teachers described a desire to serve the families of La Rinconada by providing a strong education, in hopes of a better future for the children. Andres is a 45-year-old physical education teacher from Lampa who was just concluding his first year in La Rinconada.

I asked him why he had come to La Rinconada:

I came here to support the youth, to be with the children, because I am specialized teacher, I like working with the kids. I want them to excel, to accomplish their objectives, who knows, maybe a few even get to participate in the Olympics? I am a physical education teacher.

Lucio, a 48-year-old physical education teacher from Puno who has been in La Rinconada for close to 4 years, told me:

I am here for work. Yes, I came for work, but my objectives are to help the children develop their abilities so that maybe they can qualify for the regional sports competition or maybe even the national competition. I see that expectation in the looks of the students I work with.

The physical education teachers were not alone in their expressed desire to help the students they were tasked with teaching, but the dedication to the development and success of their students

they expressed to me stood out. Perhaps this is due to the emphasis placed on physical education by the students themselves.

Additionally, some teachers focused on the opportunity to develop themselves professionally. For example, Herminio, a 56-year-old teacher from Pedro Vilcapaza stated, “My goal being in La Rinconada is to always be working and bettering myself. I know I need to be an autodidact to improve my teaching.” Only one teacher mentioned that he had come to La Rinconada with the idea of potentially working in the mines in his free time. Aniceto, age 43, from Arequipa stated, “Well, in the beginning, I contemplated the possibility of spending my free time working in the mines but I haven’t actually done that because it’s really cold and also because I am not in the best of health.” Alejandro, a 38-year-old teacher from Bocanera who had spent the previous 5 years in La Rinconada, told me that in addition to being an education administrator, he was studying for another career. I asked him what career he was studying for and he told me:

I am studying to be a lawyer. It’s not easy because there are no online courses. I have to try to go back to Juliaca at least twice per week to attend classes. I get there tired, I get here tired. I am always tired. But in three more years I won’t have to come back here anymore. And I will be making a lot more money. I want to have my own business.

For the parents employed in mining then, the primary reason for coming to La Rinconada is to access the perceived financial opportunities the informal gold mining industry provides as compared to the perceived lack of work opportunities in other industries in other locations. They are willing to endure the harsh conditions for the opportunity to earn more than they believe they could in their hometowns. The teachers’ reasons for coming to La Rinconada related to their profession of teaching and the fact that they were assigned to work in La Rinconada by the

Ministry of Education. All the teachers stated that they had come to La Rinconada for work, three of the women referenced their desire to relocate from La Rinconada. Seven of the 14 teachers discussed their commitment to their profession and serving the students and their parents to the best of their ability. As previously mentioned, the physical education teachers in particular talked to me about their desire to facilitate the development and success of their students.

Theme Two: Importance of Higher Education and Obstacles to Pursuing it

The second theme stems from the questions pertaining to the role of higher education in the lives of the study participants interviewed. In conducting the interviews with the teachers, I did not find it surprising that they all put a great emphasis on higher education and cited it as the reason why they were able to get the jobs they had, jobs they considered to be better than those they would have gotten without higher education. Only two of the teachers earned their bachelor's degrees from public universities, the rest had either completed bachelor's degrees at private for-profit universities or had first completed technical degrees in private, for-profit institutes and then went on to finish their bachelor's degrees at private, for-profit universities.

In interviewing the parents employed in mining, I was surprised by several recurring themes: prioritization of higher education for their children despite not having earned degrees themselves and a stated desire to pursue higher education themselves after leaving La Rinconada. The students were unexpectedly nonchalant about the fact that they were pursuing higher education and did not exhibit the feeling that such a pursuit was ever in doubt. Neither of the two groups of university students (private or public) raised any concerns regarding the costs of higher education, which for all but one student was being paid for by their parents.

I start by analyzing how the interview participants characterized the value of higher education. I address the teachers and the parents employed in mining separately because of the difference in higher educational attainment between the two groups. This is important because Harris and Halpin (2002), Coy-Ogan (2009), Temple (2009), and Castro et al. (2011) posited that parents who have not themselves pursued higher education are less likely than those who have to prioritize higher education for their children. It is essential to account for the possibility that this may prove to be the case for the interview participants I spoke with in La Rinconada and such a distinction is easier to make by examining the two groups separately. I address the students' perspectives in a separate section. This is due to the vast differences in circumstances and living conditions between the parents employed in mining and the teachers who currently reside in La Rinconada, and the students who are all living and studying in Juliaca.

Teacher perspectives on the value of higher education. The teachers all completed at least a Bachelor's degree, some had also earned or were in the process of earning a master's degree. In addition to addressing the expected financial benefits of higher education, most of the participating teachers also addressed the personal benefits that come from higher education which make an individual a better adjusted and more well-rounded person. Noemia, a 33-year-old teacher from Juliaca who had earned her bachelor's degree in teaching, spent two years in La Rinconada. Her views are representative of those of all but one of the participating teachers. She stated:

Of course, higher education is essential to enabling you to have a better job and earn more money, but what is also important is that it makes you a better citizen, a more complete person. Cost is an obstacle, and distance. There is no place to study close to La Rinconada.

I asked her whether she felt that her views were shared by the parents of the students in her classes to which she responded, “Ninety percent of the parents do. They value education for their children and want higher education for them because they know it is important to their future, so that they can become professionals.”

Rene, a 53-year-old teacher from San Juan de Loro who has his bachelor’s degree in education and has spent the past 27 years in La Rinconada, talked about his personal experience in his decision to pursue higher education:

It was something I wanted for myself. My parents didn’t finish high school, they worked in agriculture. I wanted to do something that had an impact on society and teaching allows me to do that. Higher education changed my life, I don’t earn a lot but I earn a lot more than I would have without it. I work in the mines on the weekends sometimes in order to supplement my income, but I don’t have to rely on physical labor for a permanent income. I have benefits and money saved up for retirement.

I asked Rene the same question as I posed to Noemia regarding his perspective on whether or not the parents of the students at the school shared his view regarding the importance of higher education for their own children. He responded:

That’s why they are here. To pay for their children’s education, and of course that includes higher education. Work is freely available to people, they can work and no one asks them to prove that they can do the work. But they don’t want this type of work for their children. It’s a hard life. Some of the people who work the mines are actually students and they pay for their studies by working in the mines. The distance and the cost of higher education are big obstacles. People have to want to pursue higher education, then they will do whatever it takes to accomplish that.

William, a 35-year-old teacher from Huancané who has a bachelor's degree in education, discussed his personal experience in pursuing higher education, as well as his observations regarding the parents he interacts with at the elementary school. He was the only teacher who specifically emphasized the fact that he did not believe that higher education made students better people. He stated:

I completed my technical degree first and then finished my bachelor's degree. My parents didn't know anything about higher education but they respected my decision. They did not help me to pay for school, I worked and attended classes. What I can tell you for certain, and I am witness to this, is that not all higher education helps students earn more money, in fact, it can be a complete waste of time and money. Not universities, but the institutes. The universities actually help student get ahead, but the institutes are in it for their own interests. If students can go to a university, that's where they earn money. But of course, you have to be admitted and you have to pay. One thing I want to add is that education doesn't make someone be more respectful to others. What I try to explain to the parents of our students here is that education, be it primary, secondary or higher education, won't automatically make someone a better person, but it will give them the tools they need to create their own opportunity. But it's expensive and it's far. The parents who are here have to understand that they cannot stay here if they want their students to become professionals.

Carmen, a 30-year-old teacher from Puno, introduced one additional consideration as to the importance of higher education for students when she stated:

Yes, higher education is important because it enables us, in this era where knowledge is so important, the ability to at least get a job and if our children are well-educated they can sustain themselves in this society which is so competitive.

Carmen was the only teacher to emphasize the competitive nature of the labor market and the manner in which it relates to the importance of higher education. I inferred from her colleagues' responses to the question regarding the value or importance of higher education that they believed that earning a degree was sufficient for obtaining a "professional job," whereas Carmen seemed to feel that while higher education helped in this endeavor, it did not in and of itself guarantee a good job due to the competitive nature of the labor market.

The teachers were united in their expression of their belief that higher education provides greater opportunities for earning potential. All but one of the teachers, William, alluded to the belief that higher education was not only beneficial in the sense of financial gain, but also that it allows people to be better citizens and to contribute more to society. In other words, while they did not explicitly define it as such, they appeared to believe that higher education is a public good as well as a private good and they seemed to place equal importance on higher education's properties as a public good as they did for its role in enabling those who pursue it to earn higher salaries and have more stable jobs. Rene addressed one specific aspect related to job stability when he distinguished between his weekend work in the mines to generate additional income and his full-time employment as a teacher when he spoke to the physical nature of working as a miner and the toll it takes on the body. He was thankful that he had a professional job, one that enabled him to earn money without the physical exertion required by a job like mining. He also touched upon his age and health and how these could impact his earning potential if he were not a professional.

Parents employed in mining perspectives on the value of higher education. The miners all expressed their belief that higher education was not only important, but essential to enabling an individual to have a good, stable job. Of the 16 miners, three mentioned that they had attempted some form of higher education, one completed 7 of 10 semesters required to complete a bachelor's degree prior to dropping out after finding out she was pregnant. They had a slightly different perspective on the value of higher education than the teachers in that there was less emphasis placed on the public good elements of education – their focus was on the private, economic advancement one could attain with a degree. Additionally, eight of the 16 miners interviewed referenced the increase in status and cache that earning a degree can bring. This was an element that was not touched upon by the teachers. The following excerpts are from the interviews I conducted with the miners and are representative of the views shared by most of the individuals I spoke with. I also include the perspectives of those whose views were not shared by others because they provide insight into the diverse nature of the people who have made the move to La Rinconada.

Edith, a 31-year-old miner from Apruimac, has spent 8 years working in La Rinconada and has two children. She shared her experience with me:

I attended university, but never finished because I got pregnant and had to leave so that I could find a job and raise my child. There was nothing for me to do in my hometown, I couldn't make enough money to raise my son so I came here to La Rinconada. But I am not successful because I didn't finish my degree. I am not a professional. I want my kids to be professionals, and to accomplish that, they need to earn at least a bachelor's degree. I am no longer together with the father of my children, he didn't want to stay up here because he didn't like the climate. I told him we needed to be here so that we could earn

enough money to pay for a university, not an institute, but a university education for our children. And he left!

Angelica, the 51-year-old miner whose interview is cited in the previous section told me that:

I have eight children, 4 have already left and are attending either university or an institute of higher education in Arequipa, so I have four here with me I am preparing to follow their older siblings to pursue higher education. They work and pay for their studies, two of them are at the public university in Arequipa. I worked with them to prepare them for the admission exam. They got in on their first try. The other two had more difficulty with the entrance exam so I told them go to an institute. They are working full-time to be able to pay for their tuition, you know it's almost free at the university where the other two are, but that's why it's hard to get in!

I asked Angelica about her thoughts about potential obstacles for her children to pursuing higher education. She explained:

I can't afford to help them with their tuition because I have the other children here I am also responsible for. So cost is an issue, and distance too. I have to send them to Arequipa because I have family there so I am lucky. They have people they know there, people they can stay with. Family. But cost and distance make studying difficult. I had to drop out you know, because I couldn't pay for my studies after I got pregnant. I don't want that for my kids. I want them to finish.

Ruth, a 29-year-old part-time miner and owner of a kiosk she uses to sell water and batteries, shared with me that she has two children and is no longer together with her children's father. She had studied mining engineering at the Universidad Andina Nestor Cáceres Velásquez but dropped out after 2 years when she became pregnant. She came to La Rinconada 5 years prior

with her parents, with whom she and her children live. Her father is a miner, her mother works as a *pallaquera*, a term that is defined in Chapter One that refers to the women who collect the debris that has already been mined in search of small flakes of gold that may have been overlooked. I asked her about her perspective on higher education and her opinion differed from what I had heard from others. She stated:

I think it's important you know, to be a well-educated person, to have actually done something with your life. I don't think it's essential to earning more money though. I have a cousin who spent 8 years at the public university in Puno earning her bachelor's degree and now she works for the ministry of health and she earns 1500 soles per month. If I work really hard, I earn between 2100 and 2300 soles per month, and I don't have my degree. I know that if I had finished my degree my parents would have been really proud, but I still earn ok. But I am not satisfied with myself for not having done anything.

I asked if what she meant by *not having done anything* was in regard to not having earned her degree and she replied:

Yes. I didn't earn my degree, I didn't do anything with my life academically and professionally but my vision is now with my children. I want my two children to be professionals, economically not like me when I lived in complete poverty, I don't want them to make the same mistakes I did, and higher education is essential to accomplishing that. I think the government could help a lot here in La Rinconada, you have seen the conditions in which the children study and they are very poor. I also think that the teachers should be more strict in their teaching. They should expect more from their students.

While Ruth clearly valued higher education, it was less for the financial benefits she felt it could generate and more for the status that having completed a degree would have brought her family. For her, the two aspects were separate so despite the fact that she felt that she earned well, she didn't feel that she had accomplished anything meaningful.

One miner noted the manner in which the economic uncertainty brought on by his job as a miner – a physical laborer who did not earn a stable salary – impacted his personal relationships, specifically with the mothers of his children. Enrique is a 27-year-old miner from Arequipa with two children by two different women, both of whom reside with their mothers in Juliaca. He had spent the last 6 years in La Rinconada. Enrique told me that he tried to spend every weekend in Juliaca so that he could see his children, despite the fact that he was no longer together with their mothers.

Higher education is important, of course it is. Only one of my friends growing up earned a bachelor's degree in business I think, from a university in Arequipa. He has a good, stable job now and he is married to the mother of his children. He has that stability you know? Maybe that would have made a difference for me in my relationships. It's hard to have stability when you are a miner – overall I earn well, but it's hard to know how much I am going to earn each month and to budget correctly. That makes things stressful, and I know for my ex-girlfriend, she just couldn't live like that. At one point she lived up here with me in La Rinconada. She's now back in Juliaca which is where she is from and she is studying to get her degree in nursing. Her parents are there so they help her take care of my son. I would like to see him more. For me higher education would have allowed me to have a good-paying job in Juliaca and maybe we would still be together.

Enrique didn't mention anything about the mother of his other child apart from the fact that she also lives in Juliaca. His statements were interesting in that he viewed higher education as the mechanism through which he could have a more stable financial situation and how that could have allowed him to have a less stressful relationship with his significant other. Because he was one of the younger people I interviewed, it was not surprising to me that the girlfriend he mentioned was more independent than some of the older women in La Rinconada who had come there with their husbands. The older generation tended to be more traditional in the sense that the women were more dependent on their partners and less likely to leave them even in stressful situations. For Enrique however, he was cognizant of the impact that economic uncertainty and life in La Rinconada could have on his personal relationships. He was the only person I spoke with who emphasized these aspects and how they related to higher education.

Amaru is a 48-year-old miner from Puno with one adult child and a wife who was living in Juliaca. Amaru's son had just graduated from the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano de Puno with a degree in mining engineering. For him, an earned degree from a university was essential because it protected those who had a degree from the economic uncertainties faced by manual laborers like himself who worked as a miner. For him, this uncertainty was exacerbated by age and physical limitations. Amaru told me:

Higher education has always been a priority for me. In my life it was not accessible because I am from a very poor, rural town two hours drive from Puno. I came to Puno looking for work and quickly realized that for manual laborers like myself, La Rinconada's mines are the best place to be. I met my wife in Puno and she came with me to La Rinconada. She lived with me up here for 9 years before I could afford to buy a house in Juliaca and her and my son were able to move. I paid for the best schools for

my son because I wanted him to be a professional, I wanted him to attend a university, not just an institute. He didn't get admitted to the university in Puno right away, he had to take the exam twice before he got in. It's really competitive, but now he has his degree and no one can take that away from him. He will always have that, and with that he can always get a good job.

Amaru's perspective was interesting because his perspective allowed me to understand that for him, his son's degree would shield him from the vulnerabilities faced by those without a degree. He did not elaborate how, but it was clear to me that for Amaru, helping his son to earn a bachelor's degree was an extension of the protection that he as a father sought to provide for his son.

The miners I spoke with clearly valued higher education and prioritized it for their children. For all but one of them, a degree was viewed as a stalwart against financial insecurity. Ruth was the only miner who did not link higher education with greater financial earnings but who valued a degree for the added status and cache it would have brought her and her parents. Stability, both financial and personal, were the recurring perspectives highlighted by the participants I spoke with.

Obstacles. The two obstacles to higher education cited by each and every teacher and parent employed in mining I interviewed were the costs associated with study (tuition, books, transportation to get to university, etc.) and the distance from the place of study. The teachers discussed how their monthly household expenses did not allow for a great deal of spending on non-essential expenses such as food, housing and transportation. I asked them about whether the public universities helped mitigate the financial obstacles. Nearly all replied that admission to the public universities in Puno and Juliaca was next to impossible for someone with an average

primary and secondary education. Most felt that the public universities offer a very high level of education but assert that the private, for-profit universities are just as good and allow students to graduate more quickly than their public school counterparts. It is important to examine the variations and similarities between parents employed in mining and teachers' views on the value of higher education and for this reason, I will address each group separately.

Teacher perspectives on obstacles to higher education. I asked Freddy, one of the administrators at the school, what his thoughts were regarding the parents in his community's perspectives higher education and whether he perceived obstacles to accessing it. He told me:

Of course, higher education is important. Look what it did for my life. I would say that 90% of our parents value education and what that does for their children. What I don't understand is why they make it so difficult to get into public university, the place where even poor students can go because they don't have to pay tuition. But they can't get in because those universities make their admission exams so difficult. Our students up here are taught in accordance with the average primary and secondary education curriculum which is simply not sufficient for them to be admitted to those schools (Juliaca and Puno). Rather than waiting another year they begin studying at the private universities. They can't wait to finally be admitted to the public universities, even if it costs them more money.

Aniceto, a teacher with two sons who live in Juliaca with their mother, talked about what he believed to be the primary obstacles to pursuing higher education for himself which highlight the impact of economic restrictions as well as the physical accessibility to institutions of higher education when online courses are not an option:

As I told you, the distance, the cost of the bus fares, you can pay those, but the problem is you arrive tired, and your economic means are limited. Right now it isn't possible because I am too far away, but if I lived closed to Juliaca I would definitely consider making that investment. My kids will pursue higher education, university, of course. I have another business on the side so I can make money that will go to pay for them.

Ricardo, a 56-year-old teacher from Huancaya, talked about his perspectives regarding the obstacles to pursuing higher education, specifically as they related to his children and emphasized the impact of economic constraints in his family:

No, higher education is not accessible, it's not that easy because for example, in my case, two or three people are studying so everyone needs something and I have to prioritize the needs of my children. In my house I am the only one working so everyone depends on my income.

Beatriz, a 28-year-old teacher from Puno who studied at Universidad Nacional Altiplano del Puno, talked about her personal experience pursuing higher education and the obstacles she overcame and again, the economic constraints were prominent, "For me the obstacles were primarily economic. I lived close to the university where I studied so distance wasn't an issue, but I had to cover my own expenses because my parents didn't help me economically." It should be noted that the Universidad Nacional Altiplano del Puno is a public university and admission is very competitive. Tuition is free as the university is entirely subsidized by the government which is what makes admission to the institution so competitive. Beatriz did not mention whether she was admitted on her first attempt, but for many students just being accepted is a huge accomplishment.

The teachers cited cost and distance as the primary obstacles for themselves in the pursuit of higher education. Freddy's perspectives on the obstacles for the children of the miners were particularly salient in that he addressed the difficulties they often face in being admitted to public universities due to the level of competition and the lack of high-quality public primary and secondary education as well as the difficulties in navigating the required curriculum necessary to graduate due to the lack of availability of the required courses offered by the universities.

Parents employed in mining perspectives on obstacles to higher education. The miners identified similar limitations as those described by the teachers. Most talked about the cost of higher education and several mentioned feeling that they lacked the academic preparation to pursue higher education due to the poor quality of the public primary and secondary education in their regions of origin. In general, this was not touched upon by the teachers I spoke with. Interestingly, several teachers, miners and students highlighted the lack of availability of courses specifically at the public universities to enable students to move efficiently through their degree programs.

Ruth, a 29-year-old part-time miner who had actually pursued higher education before dropping out after getting pregnant, told me:

I think one of the obstacles is a lack of financial resources, but not directly to pay for tuition. I think most students can manage those expenses. The problem is that if you are paying tuition and you are studying, you aren't working and bringing in money for your family. So it's the loss of revenue while you are studying that is what makes higher education unaffordable.

Jhonathan, a single, 26-year-old miner recently arrived to La Rinconada from Juliaca, shared his perspectives on the primary obstacles to pursuing higher education:

I spent 2 years studying at a university in Juliaca (the Universidad Nestor Caceres Velasquez Juliaca). I had some friends who were working up here in the mines and they were already making good money, enough to support a family on. I decided to come up here to work part-time and I had the intention to use my earnings to pay for my studies, but for right now, I like the life style, I earn well, so I will consider going back to school when I don't want to do this anymore.

He added one more observation I feel is important to mention:

Here in the Puno region, especially the city of Juliaca, people really watch the gold markets. Whenever there is a boost in the price of gold, people leave whatever they are doing and they come here to La Rinconada to work the mines. Students who are in their last year of study take six months off to come and work the mines and universities like mine allow you to do that. They work with you on that so you can always come back and finish. It is different with the public universities. They are really strict and when you leave it is hard to come back and they make you take courses you don't need.

The fluctuations in the value of gold and the way this is dictated by global economic factors is particularly germane given the recent economic downturn caused by the Coronavirus. When the world economies start to show signs of an economic downturn, the cost of gold goes up.

Everyone I spoke with in La Rinconada mentioned the sharp increase in the cost of gold during the mortgage crisis of 2008 and it is likely that the economic impacts of the Coronavirus are generating a similar response. What is interesting is the extent to which the for-profit institutions have adapted themselves to these realities as compared to the public universities which have not allowed their students to take a leave of absence in order to participate in the gains generated by the booming price of gold.

The availability of required courses for students as they move through their degree programs was cited by multiple interview participants in each of the three groups (miners, teachers and students) as a challenge for students attending the two aforementioned public universities. Edith, a 31-year-old miner talked about her cousin who attended the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano de Puno and how it took her 8 years to complete her degree program, largely due to the lack of availability of the courses she needed to graduate.

It took her 8 years to finish her degree. She wasn't failing courses, they just didn't offer the courses she needed in the corresponding semesters she needed to take them. When they did offer a course it filled up immediately and she wasn't always there on-campus to enroll when they opened the courses up for enrollment.

I asked her how in her opinion the number of years to degree completion impacted her cousin and she explained:

She couldn't really move on and get a good-paying job until she had the degree and she couldn't work full-time either because she was studying. Because the employers always ask you about your previous salary and they use that to calculate the salary they offer you when she finally finished her degree her salary was a lot less than mine and I don't even have a degree. The people I know who attended the private universities finished a lot quicker and they still have higher salaries than her.

In general, the miners I interviewed expressed their belief that public universities were difficult to access and once admitted, complicated to navigate. They concluded that because they lacked the funds to pay for a private, for-profit university and could not get admitted to a public university that their best option was to seek out work in the informal mining industry. The cost

of higher education was cited by every miner I spoke with, and the time to earn a degree was the second most frequently cited obstacle to pursuing higher education.

Student perspectives on the value of higher education and the obstacles. The student group was interesting in that both groups (private and public institutions) appeared to take their participation in higher education for granted. The students at the private university referenced the high cost for tuition on several occasions, but more just to lament the fact that they were not left with a great deal of money for social events. The students at the public university stated that despite the fact that they did not have to pay for tuition, they did have fees associated with their studies, and that the courses they needed for their degree were almost never available. They told me that they worked very hard to be admitted to their institution, and none of the five was admitted on their first attempt. Two of the students had taken the admission exams three times before they were finally admitted to the university. I asked them whether they had ever considered attending one of the private institutions to avoid having to wait a year to reapply and was informed that their private secondary schools were feeder schools to the public universities because they were considered among the best schools (public and private) in Juliaca. It was something I took note of given that those students appeared to be better off financially than their private university peers which would make them better able to afford the tuition at the private institutions.

The students attending the for-profit, private university in Juliaca discussed why they chose this university over a public university. Ernesto, son of a miner in La Rinconada in his first year of study at the private, for-profit Universidad Andina Nestor Cáceres Velásquez told me: “I didn’t even bother to apply to one of the public universities, I knew I couldn’t get in.” Fernanda, the daughter of a miner and shopkeeper currently in her third year of study at the same

institution talked about her desire to finish her degree as quickly as possible and why this would not be possible at a public university:

The most important thing to me is to finish my degree as quickly as possible. I have friends at both of the public universities in Juliaca and Puno who have been students for the past 8 years and still have at least 2 years to go before they will earn their degrees. The classes you need aren't offered or they are full and so you need to wait to take them when they are available. I don't have that problem at my university, I can take them when I need them.

Astri, a student in her second year at the public university in Juliaca, explained to me:

My parents worked in La Rinconada when I was much younger and we left when I was five and moved here to Juliaca. They told me that my dad made a lot of money in the mines there so that he could afford to start a cold storage transport business here in Juliaca. His trucks go all over the region of Puno now, including La Rinconada.

I asked her why she chose to attend the Universidad Nacional de Juliaca and whether cost was a contributing factor and she told me:

A lot of students from my high school go to this university, plus they had the major I was interested in studying (medicine). No, my parents could have paid for me to attend the Universidad Andina Nestor Cáceres Velásquez but I wasn't interested in studying there because they didn't offer the major I wanted and the classes are too big.

Enrique, a classmate of Astri, told recounted his story:

I was actually born in Lima – my parents moved our family here when I was 10 in order to get involved in the mining industry here. My dad consults for some of the mines in La Rinconada, he's an explosives specialist and they need him whenever they are digging a

new mine or adding to an existing mine. I considered studying mining engineering at the Universidad Andina Nestor Cáceres Velásquez but decided that I want to go back to Lima at some point, we have family there. Mining engineering isn't practical for a city like Lima, so I picked a major that would be useful in Lima – medicine.

Based on my conversation with Enrique, it became clear that a lack of resources was not a consideration for him in determining where he wanted to attend university and that his major was his primary consideration. Both Enrique and Astri reflect what I found to be true among the students at the public university in Juliaca – they tended to be wealthier than their peers at the private, for-profit university and as a result had been able to afford a better primary and secondary education which enabled them to be admitted to the public university. Of note is the fact that the public universities do not charge tuition so the costs for study are lower than those at the private, for-profit university.

In general, the students seemed to value higher education and felt that it was necessary for them to achieve their objectives. They did not seem to feel as though higher education was something out of the ordinary or difficult to pursue, both groups of students viewed it as more of a mechanism through which they could achieve their professional objectives. Unlike the miners I spoke with, neither group of students felt as though earning a degree was in and of itself an objective – rather it was more of a means to an end. This was especially true of the group of students studying at the private, for-profit university. My interviews with the students made clear that there seems to be a generational shift in attitudes towards higher education and how difficult it is to pursue.

Theme Three: Perceived Role of Higher Education in Future Success

I asked each of the interview participants how they would define success both for themselves and for their families. Each person took at least 5 seconds to ruminate about the question prior to responding. Again, the teachers and miners shared a similar perspective on this question in that in large part, they believed that financial stability was an important factor in defining success. They also tended to define success in terms of their children and providing them a better life than they had growing up. Lastly, most also mentioned setting a goal and accomplishing that goal as a component of success, at least short-term success. The students I interviewed were much more likely to define success solely in terms of happiness in one's personal and professional life. I examine these perspectives more fully for each group next.

Teachers. Both the teachers and the miners who had children tended to define success in terms of their families, specifically their children rather than in personal terms. Of the 14 teachers, only two of the women did not have children so of the 12 teachers with children, the perspectives on success tended to incorporate the interview participant's hopes and desires for their children. Aliceto, a 47-year-old teacher in La Rinconada, from Arequipa with two children, shared his views on success:

For me, success is being a professional. And of course, happiness, but if we are honest with ourselves, it's difficult for an individual to be truly happy when they are poor.

That's what I tell my children. I am not in good health anymore, I accumulated enough money to buy a *torrito*, a moto-taxi I operate in Juliaca so when I can no longer make the trip up here to La Rinconada to teach, I can rely on my taxi business to make ends meet.

You cannot be a professional without higher education, it is essential to having a better salary. I want my children to be professionals. I want them to have a better life than what I had. I want them to be financially secure, and for that they need higher education.

Ricardo, a 56-year-old teacher from outside of Puno, also has two children and echoed the sentiments of his colleague, Aliceto:

When I think of success, I think of what I want for my children. I want them to be able to accomplish what they set out to accomplish, accomplish their goals. And what parent doesn't want their children to earn a university degree? But I want them to become professionals. That, to me, is success. To be professionals and to be financially secure, that is success.

Carmen, a 30-year-old teacher from Puno who earned her bachelor's degree from the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano de Puno, told me that she was the first person in her family to pursue her higher education, and as a result, her siblings followed in her footsteps. She is married with two children and has been in La Rinconada for 2 years.

My primary objective is to do my job to the best of my abilities, so success for me is to accomplish what I set out to accomplish. I want to leave La Rinconada and move up in my job, be given a leadership role in the administration of a school. Success is doing what you set out to accomplish. I think higher education should be part of how people define success. I want my children to be professionals, of course I want them to be happy, but I want them to do better than I did. What parent doesn't want that?

It is interesting to note that Carmen defines success in terms of being a *professional*, which for her is likely synonymous with financial success. So while she does not specifically reference financial success in her definition, it is likely that she equates *professionals* with financial success.

Yucra, a 47-year-old teacher from Lampa and mother to one son, did not directly mention her 18-year-old son in her definition of success, but explained that her definition of success is

something she hopes he will learn, “Success is to be able to overcome obstacles and come out ahead. To always stand out in everything.” As a woman who earned her degree from the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano de Puno in an era when not many women were accepted for study, Yucra struck me as a strong, independent woman, intelligent and hardworking. She told me that she had separated from her husband and raised her son on her own. He lives with her sister and is attending university in Juliaca. This is important because her definition of success, succinct and direct, is a reflection of her life and who she is as a person.

Andres, a 45-year-old teacher from Lampa, defined success in the following way, “Well, I would define success as one striving to get ahead, keep moving forward to always be first I admire those people, one, I believe always aspires for success.” What struck me about Andres’ definition of success was his emphasis on overcoming obstacles and moving forward in the face of adversity. Many of the people I spoke with in La Rinconada mentioned how they were just happy to survive each day. *Sigu luchando* – continuing the struggle, is an expression I hear frequently to describe life in La Rinconada, and Andres summed it up in his definition of success.

Alejandro, a 37-year-old teacher from Bocanera, defined success for himself, and how he believed the miners whose children he taught would describe success:

Happiness after having accomplished the goals you set for yourself. You’re happy because you have accomplished your goals. That’s success. For the miners, the parents have their goals. They set their goals to work for a set period of time, they shout, they silence themselves and they take their bread home with them. They are creating their success. And yes, higher education or university is important in order to create that success.

In defining success, the teachers spoke frequently about overcoming obstacles, surviving every day, setting goals and accomplishing them. They talked about wanting a better life for their children than they had, and they talked about being professionals. Each teacher I spoke with defined success differently, but these elements were touched upon by every teacher I interviewed. It should be noted that of the 14 teachers I interviewed, they all stated that they pursued higher education of their own volition and that they were not encouraged to do so by their parents or family members. All 14 of the teachers did not receive financial support from their parents to pursue higher education nor did their parents pursue higher education themselves. When they define success as overcoming obstacles, setting goals and accomplishing them and seeking better lives for their children than they themselves had, it reflects their personal experiences and how they were able to accomplish their goals and earn their degrees.

Parents employed in mining. The miners defined success in terms of financial stability and happiness. Financial stability was viewed as helping to contribute to happiness. In my interviews with the miners, stability was the most frequently cited word when describing success. Of the 16 miners I interviewed, 11 referenced stability in their responses. This is likely due to fact that financial instability is pervasive among the miners, specifically those who have recently relocated to La Rinconada. It is one of primary factors contributing to their decision to come to La Rinconada. Financial instability contributes to the personal instability that four of the miners I interviewed made mention of during the interviews. For individuals who have not known stability in their lives, it is not surprising that achieving stability in all aspects of one's life could be viewed as success.

Percival, a 38-year-old miner from Puno who has spent 4 years in La Rinconada, told me that his wife and children live in Juliaca, and he makes sure to tell his children that mining is not a good future for them:

Mining isn't an easy job. You work 24 hours per day and aren't guaranteed earnings.

But that's what happens to people like me who don't have a degree. You have to rely on your body to generate an income. And yes, I earn ok, I can support my family and all but if I get sick or if something happens to me I won't get paid, and then what happens? For me success is financial stability, a job that enables you to take vacation and still get paid, take sick days and still get paid. Peace of mind, that's success for me. Higher education is essential to accomplishing that. That kind of stability only comes with a professional job. You know it's mandated by law that as a professional you get 30 days of guaranteed vacation and you only have to work 48 hours per week. I work double that!

Emilio, a 56-year-old miner and father of five children from Pedro Vilcapaza shared that he had been admitted to the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano de Puno and that at the time it had been a big honor for his family.

I had to drop out after my first year because I just didn't have the academic preparation to be successful at a university. I studied for the entrance exam and I did well, but the expectations of the professors were very high and I just felt like I didn't fit in, like maybe I wasn't supposed to be a student. So I guess I am happy with where I am in life, so for me, success is happiness. The reality is that it's hard to be happy if you're poor though, no? So maybe I will add that while success is happiness, financial stability can help to make you happy. Don't you think? I don't know anyone who is poor and happy. They are always looking to escape their poverty. That was me at least. I wish I had finished

my degree, I wouldn't have to be coming here every week and only have the weekend to spend with my family. I want my kids to be happy, and I don't want them to have to rely on the mines for their salary. That's why pay for private school for them. I have one at the Universidad Andina in Juliaca, she will be starting her fourth semester in March. I think her brother will also go there to study.

Luzio, a 48-year-old miner from Puno who has been in La Rinconada for 3 years, said:

One aspires to pursue higher education at a university, sure. Today, everyone aspires to go to a university and I would say that it is an important factor in what they consider to be success. As a parent, you do what is necessary to provide your kids the best life possible. You want them to do better than you did, to have an easier life than you did. In that, I consider myself successful. My children have a better life than me, they will have more opportunities than I did, and they are already attending university. I want them to finish, I hope they finish, that would make their lives easier than mine. At this point in my life, for me, my children's success is my success too.

Ruth, a 29-year-old miner from Sandia, defined success in the following manner:

My definition of success, what would be success for me and what would be huge would be to see my two children be professionals but I don't know, that they maybe not be economically like me. I grew up in total poverty and I would say that success for me and the best for me is that my children be professionals.

Edith is a 31-year-old miner from Apurimac whose husband is also a miner. She pursued higher education prior to coming to La Rinconada but did not complete her degree. I asked her how she would define success and told me:

Higher education is fundamental and essential in my family and my son even tells me that he wants me to finish my degree. My greatest wish is for my son to earn his degree and be a professional because I couldn't. Success is when you accomplish all of your goals as a professional. And at this moment, I don't feel successful because I didn't finish my studies and I haven't accomplished my goals. To have a skill or a profession a job or a business then I would say I was successful, but not now because I haven't yet done those things. That would be success.

The miners spoke about stability, they spoke about wanting more for their children than what they had themselves. Of the 16 miners, nine emphasized their desire to see their children become professionals so that they would not have to work as miners like their parents.

Students. The students had a very different perspective on success as compared to the teachers and the miners living and working in La Rinconada. This is likely due to the fact that they do not live in La Rinconada and are of a different generation than those I interviewed in La Rinconada. None of the 10 students I interviewed had children, and for this reason did not speak of success in terms of their families or their children. Four students talked about the possibility of having children and families and how this would impact their lives. The remaining six did not make a reference to having children or families. All 10 students I spoke with discussed their professional futures and all wanted to work and have a career. Interestingly, two students stated that they did not equate financial earnings with success at a job and felt that job satisfaction was an important factor in achieving success.

Javier, a 21-year-old student at the Universidad Andina Nestor Cáceres Velásquez, defined success in the following manner:

I don't think you can define success only in terms of how much you earn. There is so much more to success than that because I know a lot of people who earn a lot, but they aren't happy in their lives because they work all the time. I don't think you can have success without happiness. Money can contribute to happiness, but it isn't the only thing that matters. I think I will make money, that's why I am here, but I also want to be happy you know? Enjoy life with my friends and family.

Alejandra, a first- year student at the Universidad Nacional de Juliaca, said:

I would consider myself to be successful already. I was admitted as a student here which isn't easy, it's very competitive. I want to make my family proud and finish my degree of course, and I want to find a good job and probably start a family. Yes, I think that would be success for me.

Marcia, a student in her final year at the Universidad Nacional de Juliaca, told me that:

I think success depends on the individual person and at point in life they are. Success for my parents is different than what it is for me and I will probably come to share their perspective when I am older and have a family. For me at the point in my life, success is finishing my degree and getting a job, at least in the short-term. In the long-term I guess success would be being happy, starting a family and raising kids. I want to work though, I want to be a professional even when I have children. That is my long-term perspective on success.

In general, the students were positive about their futures and felt that they would achieve the success they outlined in the interviews. Two students stated that being admitted to the public university in Juliaca was something that they believed already made them successful. All 10 planned to work following the successful completion of their bachelor's degree, and five eluded

to the fact they might pursue master's degrees following graduation. Interestingly, three students stated that they believed that success depended on the phase in life an individual was in and was something that evolved with age.

Conclusion

The observations I recorded and documented in La Rinconada demonstrate the harsh conditions of day-to-day life for its residents and highlight the extent to which the parents I interviewed are willing to go in order to provide a better life for their children; a life which for most participants included the pursuit of higher education. I conducted interviews with three groups of study participants, 14 teachers, 17 parents employed in a mining-related industry and 10 students and in the resulting thematic analysis I identified three themes: acceptance of harsh conditions for more opportunity, importance of higher education and the obstacles to pursuing it and the perceived role of higher education in future success. My findings indicate that for the parents employed in mining-related industries higher education was a priority because of the perceived financial and personal stability it would enable their children to enjoy and the social status and prestige a bachelor's degree would signify for their children because they would now be considered *professional* as opposed to a laborer.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I first address the extent to which the findings address the three research questions identified in the introductory chapter. Next, I analyze whether the findings support or contradict the culture of poverty argument identified by Castro et al. (2011) and then propose alternative explanations for the lack of pursuit of higher education among Peru's poor. I then identify the strengths and limitations of the study, discuss the theoretical and policy implications of the study and conclude with a discussion of the transferability of the study and make recommendations as to potential studies that could be undertaken to further develop on these findings.

Addressing the Research Questions

I identified the following three research questions in Chapter 1:

RQ1: What role does higher education play for families in La Rinconada?

RQ2: What opportunities and obstacles to higher education (economic, social, cultural, other) are perceived by parents and children from La Rinconada?

RQ3: What futures do the parents envision for their children and do their children envision for themselves?

Using the data obtained through the observations of La Rinconada and Juliaca, the interviews conducted at these locations and the three themes constructed from these participant interviews, I address the research questions posed in chapter one.

What Role Does Higher Education Play for Families in La Rinconada?

Many of the teachers and parents employed in mining I interviewed asserted the importance and value of higher education specifically as it relates to enabling people to earn a better income and enjoy more financial stability. Both groups confirmed that providing their

children with the best education possible, and by extension higher education, is one of the primary reasons why people come to La Rinconada. They have the possibility, while not guaranteed, to earn more money than they would working in other jobs. The teachers all pursued higher education and earned bachelor's degrees – a bachelor's degree is required to be able to serve as a full-time teacher or administrator at a public school in Peru. Many spoke of their own experiences with higher education and emphasized that they had been the first in their families to pursue higher education. Many stated that while their parents were supportive emotionally, most did not have the resources to contribute financially. They confirmed that in their families, higher education was extremely important and would be something they would encourage their children to pursue. The teachers also stated that based on their interactions with the parents of the children at their school they believed that most parents valued education for their children and would encourage their children to pursue higher education. Several stated emphatically that affording higher education for their children is one of the primary reasons people come to La Rinconada. They earn more and devote these extra earnings to educating their children.

The parents employed in mining confirmed the perceptions of the teachers; for them, higher education was not only something that several of them had themselves pursued, it was something they believed would enable their children to become financially stable professionals, and played a role in their decision to relocate to La Rinconada. In their interviews all of the 16 parents interviewed expressed that higher education was a priority for them, specifically as it related to the upbringing and opportunities they wished to provide their children. Those who pursued higher education placed a particular emphasis on the significance of finishing the degree, and two equated success and having accomplished something with the successful

completion of a bachelor's degree program. For them, a bachelor's degree facilitates social mobility – it enabled them to refer to themselves as professionals as opposed to manual laborers.

The students were less passionate in their characterization of the importance of higher education in their lives. They were nonchalant in their descriptions of how they had determined that they would pursue higher education and did not appear to have struggled with the decision to pursue higher education. For both groups of students, cost did not appear to be a factor in the decision as to whether or not to pursue higher education. While none clearly identified the prioritization of higher education in their families as a reason for their decision to pursue higher education, that appeared to be a contributing factor. Nine of the 10 students I interviewed confirmed that their parents provided the financial support for their higher education. The only student whose parents were not supporting him was receiving money from his grandparents.

What Opportunities and Obstacles to Higher Education are Perceived by Parents and Children from La Rinconada?

Similar to the first research question, both the teachers and the parents employed in mining share the same perspective regarding opportunities and obstacles to higher education. As stated above, higher education is something both groups assert they value and prioritize. The opportunities identified by both groups were economic as well as personal. The obstacles to pursuing higher education identified by the interview participants, cost and distance, were mentioned by all but two. The opportunities provided by higher education were touched upon by all of the participants. The most important of these opportunities, potential to earn a better salary, was addressed by every interview participant. Additionally, roughly half of the participants cited the importance of higher education in helping people to be better people. The

last opportunity cited by the participants was the positive impact earning a degree had on the graduate's family members.

The students I interviewed did not specifically identify either opportunities or obstacles to higher education. They appeared to view it as a sort of next step following graduation from high school. They did not seem to feel as though it was a momentous decision in their lives, but rather a foregone conclusion. I had expected the students to convey a more personal level of involvement in their pursuit of higher education, but this was not the case. They did not identify any obstacles to pursuing higher education, all felt that it was accessible for students like them.

What Futures do the Parents Envision for their Children and do their Children Envision for themselves?

Overall, the parents I interviewed, teachers and parents employed in mining, appeared to have a positive outlook for the future of their children. They believed that higher education was an important factor to their children's future success. Every parent I interviewed asserted that their focus was no longer on themselves but on their children. They told me that they were prepared to help their children in any way they could in order to ensure that they would receive all the advantages they could provide to their children. Two teachers and three parents employed in mining asked me to convey to the individuals in the Peruvian Ministry of Education that additional financial support was essential to providing the students a better primary and secondary educational experience.

The students I spoke with were positive about their futures and the role that higher education would play in helping them to accomplish their objectives. They believed that they would graduate with their degrees and obtain jobs in a field related to their area of study. They did not discuss the role of their parents, other than to confirm whether they were paying for the

tuition and fees associated with their institutions of study. This contrasts sharply with the experience pursuing higher education that was described by the teachers where all 14 pursued higher education of their own volition and without the financial support of their parents. It is not clear whether this difference is due to a generational difference between the teachers and the students I interviewed where higher education is more valued and prioritized now than it was 20 years ago or other factors not addressed here.

The findings of this study indicate that a culture of poverty does not account for the lack of pursuit of higher education for the students of miners in La Rinconada. The interview participants indicated that higher education was a priority for them and their families and that paying for better education for their children was in fact one of the reasons they cited for coming to La Rinconada. This contradicts the theory initially proposed by Lewis (1959) and then politicized by Moynihan (1966) . It also directly contradicts the conclusions of Castro et al. (2011) when they cited lack of prioritization of higher education among Peru's poorest members of society as the primary factor to account for the disparity between pursuit of higher education between Peru's wealthiest and poorest populations.

A Culture of Poverty and Accounting for Disparity in Pursuit of Higher Education for Peru's Poor

Oscar Lewis's theory of a *Culture of Poverty* forms the basis of Castro et al.'s (2011) study. In this section I analyze what the findings in my research indicate about the conclusions drawn by Castro et al. in their study on higher education decision in Peru and the role played by financial constraints, academic preparation and family background. Castro et al. identified three potential explanatory factors contributing to the discrepancy in pursuit of higher education between Peru's poorest 20% of society and the wealthiest 40%. They ran statistical analyses

based on the numeric data provided by the World Bank's survey of economically challenged populations in Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador. The data were obtained by researchers employed by the World Bank who interviewed poor families in urban centers located throughout the three aforementioned countries. The data contained a mix of responses to a survey including questions on their personality traits as well as an optional academic aptitude exam each study participant could choose to take. The questions were not specific to the city or country in which the participant resided and the researchers were often not from the same country or region of the participant. Castro et al. relied on the data collected in Peru for their study.

Castro et al. (2011) concluded that higher education was not a priority for the majority of the individuals they interviewed and that this was the primary reason they did not pursue higher education. Additionally, they used the results of the academic aptitude exam to conclude that the participants lacked the academic skill necessary to pursue higher education. They cited financial constraints as a potential contributing factor, but as outlined in Chapter 2 of this study, they discarded the significance citing the low numbers of students belonging to the lowest fifth of income earners in Peru at public universities, which do not charge tuition, as evidence. They argued that if financial constraints were an important factor inhibiting poor students from pursuing higher education than this would result in a large number of these students studying at the public universities.

My findings indicate that higher education is a priority for these families. While several interview participants questioned whether higher education directly contributed to a better income, all stated the importance of higher education in their lives and the lives of their family members. Many cited the increased opportunities higher education provides graduates to become professionals, some also discussed the importance of higher education in relation to

forming better people who contribute more to society and all agreed that higher education provides students with the best chance to permanently escape poverty.

When asked to identify the obstacles they, their family, and community members encountered in pursuing higher education, they named the costs associated with higher education and the distance from their physical location and that of the institutions of higher education as the primary obstacles. When I asked them about how the costs of public universities compared with those of the private institutions the miners and the teachers both responded that the public universities were not accessible to students who had relied on public primary and secondary schools for their education. Freddy, the director of the public school in La Rinconada stated:

It makes no sense why the public universities don't match their admission exam requirements to the academic preparation students receive at an average public primary and secondary school. They make the exams so difficult that only students from the best private schools actually pass.

Freddy's response directly addresses the factors cited by Castro et al. (2011) in their assertion that financial constraints could not account for the limited participation of financially challenged students in higher education because there would be more of these students attending Peru's public universities if this were true. Castro et al. did not explore the reasons why students from the poorest 20% of society did not attend public universities. They assumed that these students *chose* not to attend these institutions, not that they could not attend them because they were unable to achieve the results necessary for admission on the admissions exams. As was referenced in my introductory chapter, The National Survey of University Graduates and Universities (2017) highlighted the competitive nature of gaining admission to public universities in Peru and shows that on average, for any given opening at a public university, there

are at least 200 applicants vying for the opening. For some of the most competitive programs at the most sought-after public universities, the number of students competing for admission can exceed 400 students for each available opening (The National Survey of University Graduates and Universities, 2017).

The underperformance of these students on the admissions exams at the two public universities I studied, the Universidad Nacional de Juliaca and the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano de Puno, is not attributable to their lack of academic skill as might be argued by Castro et al. (2011) because such an assertion presupposes that they received an equivalent primary and secondary education to their wealthier peers. If this were the case and they were still unable to perform equivalently on the admissions exams, one might conclude that they lacked both the academic skill and desire to pursue higher education. When there is a clear discrepancy between the quality of education delivered at public primary and secondary schools and their private counterparts one can conclude that these students lack the academic preparation necessary to be admitted to the public universities in Peru. Academic preparation is not the same as academic skill and this distinction leads to a very different conclusion regarding the reasons why Peru's poorest students do not pursue higher education, and specifically why they do not attend Peru's public universities in large numbers. My findings on this point mirror those of Rodriguez and Montorro (2013), when they concluded that the quality of the primary and secondary education received by a student is more important in determining whether or not they will pursue higher education and whether they will attend a private for-profit institution as opposed to a public university than the actual academic performance of the student in the primary and secondary schools they attended.

Teachers, parents employed in mining and students all touched upon one additional aspect that was not addressed by Castro et al. (2011) and the culture of poverty argument, serves as an additional impediment for financially challenged students seeking to attend the public universities of the Universidad Nacional de Juliaca or the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano de Puno. Edith, the 31-year-old miner touched on this when she described how many years it took for her cousin, as a full-time student, to complete her bachelor's degree at the prestigious public university in Puno. The 8 years it took for Edith's cousin to complete her degree cost her the income she could have been generating throughout this period, the professional experience she could have accrued throughout that time in addition to the costs associated with her studies.

The time to degree completion and lack of course availability at the public universities analyzed in this study has a greater impact on students coming from poor families where an earned degree translates into higher earnings both for themselves and the families many of these students are supporting and a delay signifies lost earnings. Wealthier students are less impacted by this because most are receiving financial support from their parents and family members and can afford to work part-time or even not work at all for a longer period of time while they finish their degree. Poor students are more disadvantaged by the lack of course availability and prolonged time to degree completion than their wealthier counterparts which accounts for their decreased presence at Peru's public universities.

My findings indicate that for the community members of La Rinconada and Juliaca, the culture of poverty argument does not explain the lack of participation in higher education among poor students. I now propose an alternative explanation for this phenomenon that is supported by my findings.

Alternative Explanation for why Peru's Poorest Students do not Pursue Higher Education

My findings indicate that the families and the students of La Rinconada value higher education. They indicate that the primary obstacles to pursuing higher education are cost and distance. Neither is consistent with the culture of poverty theory (Lewis, 1959). A more likely explanation is the lack of financial resources of poor families to be able to afford to send their children to study at a college or university. Additionally, because institutions of higher education are typically concentrated in urban hubs across Peru, they are only accessible to the students living in their vicinity. Students living in more rural areas are complicated by distance in addition to cost in their pursuit of higher education.

The existence of cities like La Rinconada are a direct result of the lack of well-paid job opportunities for non-college-educated individuals across Peru. As cited previously, the National Peruvian Institute of Statistics and Information (INEI) estimates that nearly half (48.6%) of what they term the *economically active population* earns less than the government mandated minimum wage of 930 soles (INEI, 2018). A total of 59.9% of this population are women and 40.6% are men (INEI, 2018). The minimum wage was last raised by President Kuczynski in 2018, and prior to that was raised to 850 soles by President Humala in 2016. The data showed that the percentage of Peru's working population earning less than minimum wage has not decreased in the past 12 years and has fluctuated between 43 and 55% (INEI, 2018). One important reason for this is the number of Venezuelans relocating to Peru (between 800 to 900 thousand Venezuelans are estimated to have relocated to Peru since 2015) (INEI, 2018). Venezuelans account for 7% of the total *economically active population* in Lima; statistics are not yet available on the numbers of Venezuelans in other cities in Peru (INEI, 2018).

The large numbers of workers coming from Venezuela are believed to contribute to the lack of increase in wages for workers in Peru as the competition for well-paid jobs, specifically

those available to non-college-educated individuals has increased (INEI, 2018). These are the individuals who comprise the population in cities like La Rinconada – those who are seeking the opportunity for better-paying work that will enable them to provide a better life for their children. These are also the people who rely on the public primary and secondary education systems in Peru until they can generate enough income to pay for private school for their children. They come to La Rinconada seeking opportunity, but they aren't always lucky enough to find it.

The individuals I interviewed during my time in La Rinconada cited figures ranging from 20 million dollars per day to 20 million dollars per week of gold that is extracted from its mines. Whatever the figure, there is little doubt that La Rinconada's mines are generating revenue for the community, a fact that is drawing additional opportunity-seekers from all over Peru. The central questions of this study were what the objectives of those coming to La Rinconada are and how these relate to higher education.

My findings establish that the reason they came to La Rinconada is because of a lack of job opportunities in their cities of origin. They establish that the personal objectives of the miners coming to La Rinconada are to generate enough income to be able to launch a sustainable business in a city outside of La Rinconada. Their objectives for their families are to provide their children with more opportunities than they themselves had – they want their children to be professionals who are not dependent on physical labor to earn a living. They confirmed to me that higher education is an important factor in accomplishing this objective. Several miners pursued higher education and were not able to complete their degrees for a variety of reasons. They want to ensure that their children can complete their degrees.

My findings also establish that the objectives of the teachers are to carry out the responsibilities of the job they were hired to do despite the harsh conditions and lack of school resources. The vast majority are seeking to leave the city of La Rinconada as soon as they can apply for a transfer within Peru's Ministry of Education. They value higher education within their own families and for their own children because it provides the best opportunity for their children to attain financial stability. Their observations of the parents of the students they teach confirm that the parents share this perspective on higher education. Several teachers asserted that generating the financial resources necessary to cover the costs of higher education was in fact one of the reasons many of the parents chose to come to La Rinconada.

Lastly, my findings confirm that many of the children of miners who have succeeded in generating income from their time working in La Rinconada's mines are pursuing higher education. These students plan to complete their degrees and go on to become professionals. Seven of the 10 students I interviewed stated their intent to pursue a master's degree.

With 17% of Juliaca's population pursuing higher education, there is evidence to suggest that those who can afford to pursue higher education do so. Lack of financial resources limit those who would otherwise pursue higher education from doing so. Those who seek opportunities outside of the urban hubs in Peru forgo the access to higher education because of the lack of institutions of higher education outside of Peru's larger cities. These are the primary factors that contribute to the low numbers of students in the bottom 20% of income earners in Peru from pursuing higher education. The fact that the public universities are financially accessible to these students notwithstanding, the admission requirements and number of students competing for admission limit access for students who have relied on the public-school system

for primary and secondary education. Additionally, the time to degree completion has a disproportionately large negative impact on poorer students.

Strengths and Limitations

I start by identifying the limitations of this study and will then address its strengths. This study is limited in scope in that it is focused exclusively on the community of La Rinconada and the manner in which the residents perceive the role of and access to higher education in Peru. It is also limited in the time spent by the primary researchers observing the community members of La Rinconada due to the harsh and dangerous conditions of the city. It is also limited to the informal mining industry in Peru and does not examine other informal or illegal industries in the country which may or may not be similar to the informal mining industry. Lastly, and I addressed this limitation at length in Chapter 3, I am a White woman from the United States and I conducted interviews with people of a variety of different non-White ethnic backgrounds, predominantly Quechua and Aymara.

As the primary researcher I went to great lengths to mitigate the limitations of this study. I selected the city of La Rinconada because it is one of the largest cities dedicated to informal mining in Peru. In that respect it exemplifies this industry and because it attracts people from all over Peru it is a sort of microcosm of the country's people. Juliaca is essential to include in the study because of its close link with the city of La Rinconada and its role as the epicenter of mining in Peru. It is also located near the Bolivian border and in addition to mining, its population relies on commerce and trade (both legal and illegal) with Bolivia making it one of Peru's wealthier cities.

The primary strength of this study is that it was conducted over a period of 3.5 years and I spoke with several of the same people on both visits to La Rinconada. They provided essential

insight into the realities of life in La Rinconada and the manner in which the city operates. An additional advantage provided by the time gap between my first and second visits to La Rinoconada is that Peru has undergone quite a few substantial changes both politically and socially. Peru's president in 2016 during my first visit to La Rinconada, President Kuczynski, was forced to resign following charges of corruption. The country has been in political turmoil since his resignation in 2018. The first of Kuczynski's two vice presidents, Martín Vizcarra, is Peru's current president. In the opinions of the individuals I spoke with, the political turmoil has contributed to an increase in the numbers of people coming to La Rinconada in search of work. As previously eluded to, the large influx of Venezuelan immigrants has also had a substantial impact on the job market for non-college-educated Peruvians which has also contributed to the increase in people seeking work in La Rinconada.

My study takes these changes into account in that the perspectives of the interview participants are consistent with what I observed and was told in 2016. They are unique to the location but have turned out not to be unique to the specific time in which the interviews were conducted. The perspectives shared with me during my initial visit in 2016 are identical to those I was told on my return visit in 2019. The second strength of my study pertains to my own extensive experience living and working in Peru for 6 years during which time I was employed by a Peruvian university which has contributed to my familiarity with the people, the culture and the country. Additionally, I spent a great deal of time in the Puno region of Peru, having made half a dozen visits in the past 4 years. I drew upon the knowledge-base I accumulated throughout these visits for the purposes of this study.

Theoretical Implications

This study is hermeneutically dense (Lynham, personal communication, April 27, 2020) and incorporates several disciplines in addition to the field of education including elements of sociology, poverty studies and the economics of informal industries in developing countries. Of importance is the impact of this study on the culture of poverty theory (Lewis, 1966) and its role in accounting for the discrepancy in participation in higher education between Peru's wealthiest and most economically challenged communities. The study identified additional factors that may better explain the reasons for this discrepancy. These factors are not attributable to the decisions made by those who are poor but rather to the system that determines which populations have access to higher education in Peru. It is important to further explore how systemic poverty in developing countries impacts access to higher education among the poorest populations and the extent to which financial constraints are a factor.

While not the focus of this study, economic theories pertaining to informal industries in developing countries could also be explored. The economic reasons why people seek out informal employment in industries such as gold mining in La Rinconada rather than formal employment subject to the rules and regulations of the state are touched upon in this study. The parents employed in a mining-related industry I interviewed viewed the informal mining opportunities in La Rinconada as preferable to the employment opportunities in their cities of origin. Is this due to over-regulation of formal employment by the state, an undervaluation of labor in general or other factors? This study can contribute to the existing theories in this area.

Policy Implications

The policy implications of this study pertain to admissions policies of the public universities in Peru as well as the opportunities for students to access low interest loans to help them pay for the cost of higher education. This study demonstrates that in the case of both the

teachers and the parents employed in a mining-related industry I interviewed, the vast majority of the study participants did value higher education and had come to La Rinconada with the hope of generating the income necessary to afford higher education for their children and in some cases, for themselves as well. The competitive nature of admission to the tuition-free, public universities in Peru that favors those students whose families can afford private secondary education demonstrates that despite being tuition-free, the public universities are not serving the poorest segments of the population in Peru.

To make the public universities more accessible to Peru's economically challenged communities it is necessary to change the manner in which admission to these institutions is granted. Peru's Ministry of Education could evaluate the possibility of implementing a similar admissions policy to the University of Texas's *Top Ten Percent Law*, passed in 1997, that guarantees admission to a public institution in Texas to the top 10% of all high school graduates in the state of Texas (University of Texas News, 2020). The University of Texas at Austin currently admits the top 6% of high school graduates in the state of Texas (University of Texas News, 2020).

Peru could implement a similar policy based on districts and regions served by the public institutions and could identify a percentage of high school graduates the university could admit from the public and private high schools located in those regions. Such a policy would facilitate admission for all high-performing students regardless of whether they attended a public or a private secondary school. This policy would account for the disparity in financial resources of the students' families by allowing students to compete against their classmates and peers for admission rather than compelling low-income students who attended public secondary schools to compete for admission against wealthier students who attended private secondary schools.

One additional policy recommendation for the Peruvian Ministry of Education is to compel Peru's banking industry to provide low-income students with low-interest or interest-free student loans. This could be done by subsidizing the loans thereby minimizing the risks for the banks and by working with the universities (both public and private) to receive the loan disbursements directly from the banks thereby ensuring the borrowed funds are used for educational purposes. Currently, student loans are extremely difficult to procure for financially challenged families and if approved, the interest rates for such a loan are between 50 and 75% on average (Morón et al., 2009). There has been an increase in the number of student loans authorized by banks in Peru, but these loans have been directed to middle class families and have not been authorized for the poorest members of Peruvian society (INEI, 2018). Enabling people to have access to low-interest loans to pay for higher education would make higher education more accessible for all segments of Peruvian society.

Opportunities for Future Research

The most important opportunity for future research this study presents is the investigation of additional informal or illegal industries in Peru, specifically cocaine production. For the purposes of this section it is useful to establish the difference between an illegal industry and an informal industry: an illegal industry is one that is strictly prohibited by the law whereas an informal industry is allowed by the law but where the operators have not obtained proper authorization from the government and as such, do not pay taxes to the government. The cocaine production industry is designated as illegal. The mining industries can in fact fall into both categories. Mining can be illegal when it is practiced in an area that for environmental reasons is not legal to use for the purpose of mining. Such is the case in the region of the Madre de Dios National Preserve where illegal gold mining and the mercury used in this process has destroyed

large swaths of the rain forest. Mining is informal when the owners of the mine have failed to obtain the requisite government approval and do not pay federal taxes. La Rinconada is an example of informal mining.

The cocaine industry is the largest of the illegal/informal industries in Peru. The VRAEM Valley is now the epicenter of cocaine production for the world, although the honor of the largest producer of cocaine alternates between Peru and Colombia (United Nations, 2018). Like gold mining, it generates a great deal of revenue, but unlike gold mining, this revenue does not go to benefit the community, but goes to those at the top, those controlling the market. It is my belief that there is a great deal to be learned about the differences between how the illegal and informal industries in Peru operate and how these differences impact the communities they operate within and their access to higher education. I intend to further research the cocaine production industry soon to compare my findings here with those of my next study. This will provide a more complete picture of the impact of the two largest informal/illegal industries in Peru and their impact on higher education for the surrounding communities.

Conclusion

What factors account for the remarkably regressive nature of the pursuit of higher education in Peru among Peru's poorest families? The purpose of this study was to identify the factors contributing to this phenomenon and La Rinconada was selected as the venue to conduct this research. To accomplish this objective, I conducted an ethnographic case study in the city of La Rinconada and interviewed a total of 41 people, 14 teachers, 17 miners and 10 students. I visited La Rinconada on two occasions and maintained contact with the individuals I came to know from my first visit in 2016 through my second visit in 2019.

They shared details about their lives and families with me, they told me about their reasons for coming to La Rinconada, the highest city on the planet. They told me about their short-term and long-term goals for themselves and their families and what they hoped to accomplish during their time in La Rinconada. In sharing with me what success meant to them, many shared what failure meant as well and the ways in which they had not achieved success in their own estimation. They were honest, they were open, and they welcomed me into their community. They allowed me to have a glimpse into the realities of their lives. I grew to know them not just as participants in a study but as people who felt as though La Rinconada was their best hope for success.

The miners shared with me their views on higher education and the role it has in their personal and family lives. The teachers shared their perceptions of the perspectives of the parents of their students as to whether they viewed higher education as a possibility and potential goal for their children. Their candor and openness in our interviews enabled me to identify how they viewed the role of higher education in their lives and that of their children and what they considered to be the primary factors that inhibit them from pursuing higher education.

I learned of the high value they place on higher education and that not just the teachers but some of the miners as well had pursued it. They told me that they wanted to be able to offer their children more than what they had received and that the ability to pay for their children to attend an institution of higher education was extremely important to them because they wanted their children to be professionals in order to ensure their financial stability. Neither the teachers nor the miners wanted their children to work in the mines of La Rinconada, and none of the 10 students I spoke with had considered the possibility of working in the mines.

When I asked them what they believed were the principal obstacles to pursuing higher education all named cost and distance as the biggest impediments. The residents of La Rinconada are unique; they are willing to brave unimaginably harsh conditions in order to have their chance at success. I concede that they may not be representative of all of the people in Peru who comprise the lowest 20% of income earners, but their voices are essential to understanding the reality of access to higher education in Peru for those who value it but cannot afford to access it. It is simply not accurate to attribute a lack of participation in higher education among the poorest members of society to the fact that they don't value or prioritize it. The people of La Rinconada are proof that this is not the case.

The Peruvian Ministry of Education would do well to start by changing the manner in which students are admitted to Peru's public universities by allowing a student's socioeconomic status to be factored into their applications. The admission decision should not be based solely on the results of the admission exam. The public universities should ensure that the classes the students require to progress in the completion of their degree should be available to them. Additionally, Peru should invest more money in the primary and secondary public education system to ensure that students attending these schools receive a better education than what they are currently receiving. Lastly, the teachers in these schools should be better remunerated for their work which would enable them to focus solely on teaching rather than how they will be able to make ends meet.

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