

# Risky Migration and the Pursuit of Authentic Success and Happiness

Sapphire Jule King

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## Summary

**Date:** January 2006 – February 2008

**Location:** Spain, Italy, UK, Mexico, Bulgaria

**Design:** Phenomenology

**Purpose:** Descriptive exploratory

**PI:** Sapphire Jule King, CEO-Shalom Healing Homes

**PI Role:** Participant Observer

**Funding:** Fully self-supporting

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## Background

The Principal Investigator (PI) mentored at-risk youth in various community and school settings for four years. Her volunteer work revealed that the adults at home negated progress made with the children in the mentor-mentee relationship. Thus, the PI began coaching and advising parents and adult caretakers to address the problem. Two years of volunteering as a life coach and recovery coach revealed the problem is that clients:

- 1) keep coming back when faced with a new personal or work-related upheaval,
- 2) seem unwilling to take action to change their unsatisfactory circumstances, and
- 3) are not happy even with material wealth, family, and successful careers.

## Methodology

A phenomenological study design was chosen for the purpose of exploring diverse perceptions of success and being “healed” (i.e., whole, happy, and at peace) and to discover the key to permanent healing and lasting change.

In particular, the study sought to answer the following question:

Is there one “key” that will unlock one’s personal power to resolve their own issues, their sense of fulfillment, and their readiness to take positive action?

## Data Collection Strategies

Data were collected via participant and field observations, informal conversations listening to participants’ personal stories, private life coaching sessions, and personal artifacts. The PI kept a reflex journal from which she publicly shared excerpts to reduce subjectivity.

## Entry into the Field

To achieve total cultural immersion, the PI traveled to selected sites as an American on a one-year backpacking trip through Europe. Initially, the study was to begin in Greece. However, upon arriving in Greece, the PI felt unsettled in the environment. She left the

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same day, flying to Barcelona upon recommendation of the airline desk agent. Over the two-year study period, the PI spent two months in Barcelona, Spain; two weeks traveling through Italy; one month in Alicante, Spain; one month in Phoenix, AZ; three months in Mexico; one month in Houston, TX; and the final 16 months in Barcelona with trips to London, United Kingdom and Sofia, Bulgaria.

## **Sample Characteristics**

Purposeful sampling at the sites was achieved through dynamic, ad hoc, and snowball sampling in hostels, cafes, tourists' sites, and on the street as well as by participating in local Spanish and acting classes.

An estimated 300+ individuals between the ages of 15 and 60+ were included. The participants originated from at least 20 different countries and represented a wide array of socioeconomic backgrounds and professions, including: homeless, immigrants, students, artists, professors, musicians, rugby players, actors, movie producers, and directors.

## **Findings**

Participants defined success and happiness as being able to live according to their heart's desires, their individuality, or their personal "truth" rather than according to outside expectations. Many with material wealth, families, and lucrative careers are unhappy because they feel unable to behave, speak, and live according to their "truth."

For instance, the majority reported a desire from childhood that they had to let go of "because it was time to grow up." However, the desire still lingered and caused feelings of discontent when their present lifestyle did not support or include that desire.

Specifically, the lives of immigrants and their pursuit of the success and happiness emerged as the central theme of the study. Participants from Romania, the Czech Republic, Africa, South America, and Mexico shared stories of either their own or their parents' pursuit of these ideals. Many risked their lives to escape political and social oppression such as Romanians under Nicolae Ceausescu's rule. Others, such as Africans and Mexicans, risked their lives for greater economic success in neighboring, wealthy countries. Many vowed to face the dangers again if deported to their home countries, while others had already made the trip repeatedly.

## **Conclusions**

- Economic, political, and social oppression increased risky migration behaviors in pursuit of freedom and increased career and personal opportunities.
- Identifying, accepting, and expressing the totality of one's personal truth emerges as the common "key" that leads to perceptions of success and happiness.

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- A comprehensive adult success-readiness program is needed to teach participants a sustainable self-guided process for identifying and separating one's personal truth from other's dictates and for navigating the stages of change.
- The design and methodology of this study was too informal to confirm results as valid and reliable. Yet, results are worthy enough to form the basis of formal explanatory and emancipatory studies.
- The PI needs to enroll in MAED/Adult Education & Training program of study to learn how to design and implement an effective program for adult learners.