

2007

Dealing with migration loss : the resilience of Latinas and their coping strategies

Aurora Perales

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Aurora Perales
Dealing with Migration Loss:
The Resiliency of Latinas and
their Coping Strategies

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to discover resiliency factors and coping strategies utilized by Latinas in dealing with migration loss. Research conducted on people of color and particularly on women is limited. Strengths-based research on these communities is also minimal available. This study aimed to address the various gaps of information.

Twelve Latinas with diverse ethnic backgrounds were interviewed. The women demonstrated an ability to articulate their experiences with migration loss and an ability to identify coping strategies. The participants of the study utilized many resiliency tools and coping strategies in order to survive and thrive in spite of having endured the challenges of migration loss. The three major themes found are: (1) Relationships as Sources of Resilience and Coping, (2) Self-Directed Strategies that Enhanced Resilience and Coping, and (3) Spirituality/ Religion as a Source of Resilience and Coping,

There were various implications for social work identified from the analysis of the data collected in this study. Some of these are (1) clinicians need to be culturally competent to work with women of color, specifically Latinas, (2) clinicians need to be aware of effects of migration loss, (3) assistance with identifying and utilizing resiliency skills and coping strategies, (4) group and family therapy recommended as treatment modalities when working with Latina immigrants.

DEALING WITH MIGRATION LOSS:
THE RESILIENCY OF LATINAS AND THEIR COPING STRATEGIES

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been accomplished without the assistance of many people whose contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

I wish to thank Rosalind Grushkin LCSW, Ms. Rojas, Angela, Farrell LCSW, Javier Iribaren MSW and Ms. Mata, for their help recruiting participants for this study.

Thank you, to my thesis advisor, Peter Titelman for his guidance and support. A very special thank you to Debra Carney MFA and Mary Koncel, MFA, writing counselors, at the Jacobson Center for Writing, Teaching and Learning for their invaluable help through the editing process.

I also want to thank my friends and colleagues at Smith College who cheered me on and supported me. To my friend, Nicole Young thank you for your help.

To the twelve Latinas who participated in this study, a special thank you. For sharing their life stories and migration journeys with me even though many were challenging and at times painful experiences. I hope that their strength and resilience serve as an inspiration for other immigrants who face similar struggles. This study would not have been possible without their cooperation and openness.

My most sincere and heart felt appreciation and mil gracias to my family for their love, and support. Oscar y Ana, hermanos, llegamos para quedarnos. Uno para todos y todos para uno. ¡Los quiero mucho y si se puede! Jorge and Lupita I'm grateful that you are part of our family, gracias por todo. Minami, Martin, Oscar, Carlos, Melina – Mis niños, you are our family's future and my hope for tomorrow.

And last but not least to Liz, my life partner and best friend, I could not have gone through this process without your monumental support, love, and encouragement. Gracias corazón for believing in me at every step of the way.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my dear mother, Sra. Cecilia Rojas.

Después de pasar por una ardua tempestad, te armaste de valor y desprendiéndote de todo, diste marcha sin voltear atrás. Siguiendo la luz, abriste tus alas y volaste muy lejos a un destino desconocido. Armada de determinación, con una gran fuerza de espíritu, con tu amor infinito y una dignidad admirable, cogiste a tus hijos y te enfrentaste con la vida como una gran mujer y una madre admirable. Con grandes sacrificios y siempre buscando nuestra felicidad, saliste adelante y emergiste triunfal.

Por esto y por mucho más eres y serás para siempre mi mejor modelo a seguir, mi amiga más entrañable, mi maestra de la vida, mi confidente más leal y el mejor regalo de Dios.

Yo quería aprender y saber ¿Como es que la mujer Latina, que llega como emigrante a este país, encuentra fuentes de fortaleza internas y sabiduría para enfrentar la adversidad? Fuiste tú la inspiración para mi proyecto, mamá ¡puesto que tú lo hiciste, lo lograrse y lo estas viviendo! Por eso, es a ti a quien dedico esta investigación, mi título, y mi vida entera. Solo tú mereces recoger los frutos de la semilla de esperanza que plantaste en mí.

Con todo mi amor infinito y eterno agradecimiento, gracias querida mamá.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify the strategies Latinas use to cope with the experience of migration loss.

Although some theorists frame immigration as an opportunity for exploration and personal growth, most experts in the field deem the migration experience to be stressful and as a source of personal grief and loss. The impact of leaving the homeland and the subsequent process of migration can prove to be daunting. A person may experience multiple losses which include loss of family, friendships (social and work), language, cultural heritage, and familiar environment, and these losses could impact negatively on the identity of the person (Garza-Guerrero, 1974). The experience of this phenomenon as stressful is particularly true for women of color because it is exacerbated by issues related to racism, sexism, discrimination, prejudice and oppression. Mental health practitioners and clinical assessments have traditionally focused on identifying symptoms, problem behaviors, emotional concerns, deficits, and functional difficulties in addressing and studying vulnerable populations. In contrast, social work focus is on clients' strengths, resilience, coping styles, wellness enhancement, and growth.

This study was designated to examine and identify the coping strategies used by women of Latin descent as they relate to the experience of migration loss. Given the growing numbers of Latino immigrants in this country, the current study is especially

important for social work practice. Many clinicians will likely work with Latinas due to the growing number of immigrants and their mental health needs. Social workers will play an important role in advocacy for immigrant rights and services and in clinical work with this population. Therefore, it is important that clinicians know about the coping strategies used by Latina clients with the process of migration loss. As more clinicians begin to increase the utilization of strengths-based practices, more empirical findings on factors and dynamics related to furthering and promoting resiliency and utilization of coping strategies need to be accessible.

This study is consistent with social work values: to focus on the client as bearer of unique talents, skills, resources, life experience, knowledge and culture.

The next chapter of this study will present some of the important conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature on the concept of migration loss, resiliency, coping strategies and the phenomenon of migration in the US. The literature review will focus on previous research relating to the research questions posed in this study: How do Latinas cope with the experience of migration loss? How does assimilation and acculturation stress impact Latinas? What is the importance of family in the lives of Latina immigrants? How can resiliency help Latinas cope with migration loss?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In seeking to provide a framework for this study on the coping strategies used by Latina immigrants to deal with migration loss, this chapter will include a literature review organized as follows: The first section will focus on the history of immigration in the U.S., with an emphasis on statistical data and the characteristics of the Latina/o population. In the next section the term migration loss will be defined in the context of the Latina/o immigrant experience. The last section will explain the importance of family in the lives of Latinas and the use of resiliency as a coping mechanism. It will also describe the role of gender, social economic status, language, culture, social networks and the phenomenon of acculturative stress in the lives of Latina/o immigrants.

Borrowing Falicov's (1998) terminology, this researcher used the term Latina/o instead of Hispanic in this study because it reaffirms Latinas/os native pre-Hispanic identity. Politically conservative groups often use the term Hispanic to refer to their Spanish European conquerors and to demonstrate superiority to those of indigenous descent. Latina/o also makes sense because it refers to people from Latin America. This writer chose to use the term Latinas/os throughout the study because it is a cultural category that has no precise racial signification. Indeed, Latinas/os are white, black, indigenous, and every possible combination thereof. Yet, upon entering the United States, Latinas/os undergo a rapid regime of racialization" (Suarez-Orozco & Paez, 2002,

p. 3). However, this term is not without limitations because it does not represent all those who migrated from Africa, Asia, or Europe. Latina/o also has gender that is reflective of the Spanish language, the language that unites Latinos. The feminine form, Latina, will be predominately used for simplification when needed (Falicov, 1998). Latina/os have neither geographical specificity nor historical significance. The term Latina/o only has meaning here in the U.S. Outside of the U.S., people are referred to by their country of origin, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Salvadorian, among other nationalities (Suarez-Orozco & Paez, 2002). Furthermore, despite the fact that the term Latina/o does show some similarities, such as being from Latin America and speaking Spanish, it must be noted that the participants are from different countries, have experienced different migration journeys, and have different life stories.

Immigration

Throughout history, immigrants have come to the U.S. in search of a better life, for economic opportunity, or for relief from economic hardship or political instability and are then confronted with discrimination, racism, and continual change in immigration policies. Some changes have been favorable, while others greatly affect the welfare of immigrants in this country. Their continuous arrival and its subsequent impact on American society have been reviewed by historians, sociologist, and educators.

Immigration is a process that stimulates mixed and varied responses at unpredictable periods of time (Arredondo, 1981). The years after 1965, is a time known for the diverse wave of immigration, described as the “revolving door” era. At this time, immigration from Europe significantly decreased after years of high numbers of

immigrants. In the 1970s new immigrants were overwhelmingly Asian and Latina/o, with 34% from Asian countries, 34% from Central and South America, 10% from the Caribbean, only 16 % from Europe, and 6% from Canada or other countries (LeMay, 2004).

Many factors led to this unprecedented increase in international migration and refugee waves. A large number of refugees continued to enter due to increasing stability in the U.S. and decreasing economic and political stability in many other countries. Consequently, the last 40 years have seen several changes in immigration laws and policies, which have directly affected the lives of immigrants in the United States. The flow of immigrants changed in many ways, including the number of immigrants, country of origin, reasons for immigrating, and legal status. At this time overall immigration increased by 60%, yet there was a huge decrease in immigrants from Europe and an increase in immigration from Asia by 663% (LeMay, 2004). As a result, there were also many more immigrants of color coming to the country.

Demographics on Latinas/os

Latinas/os are among the oldest and newest immigrants in the U.S. Nearly two-thirds of all Latinas/os in the U.S. are either immigrants or children of immigrants (Falicov, 1998). According to 2004 US Census data, Latinas/os represent 14.2 % of the national population, a number that has been steadily increasing. Between 1990 and 2000, the Latina/o population of the United States increased by 60% from 22.3 to 35.3 million. Of the Latina/o population, 40.3% are reportedly foreign born (US Census, 2004). Furthermore, there is currently an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the

country, most of whom are Latinas/os. Immigration has brought to America millions of persons from all parts of the world. It is estimated that there are 9.3 million undocumented immigrants in the USA. Mexicans make up over half of undocumented immigrants 50 percent of the total, or about 5.3 million. Another 2.2 million (23 percent) are from other Latin American countries. About 10 percent are from Asia, 5 percent from Europe and Canada, and 5 percent from the rest of the world. Women make up a substantial share- 41 percent of the adult undocumented population. There are about 4.5 million undocumented men (18 and over) and 3.2 million undocumented women (Passel, Capps & Fix, 2004).

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the estimated Latina/o population of the United States as of July 1, 2005 is 42.7 million, making people of Latina/o origin the nation's largest ethnic or race minority. Latinas/os constituted 14 percent of the nation's total population. (This estimate does not include the 3.9 million residents of Puerto Rico.) There was a 3.3% percentage increase in the Latina/o population between July 1, 2004, and July 1, 2005, making Latinas/os the fastest-growing minority group. U.S. Bureau projects that the Latina/o population of the United States will be 102.6 million as of July 1, 2050. According to this projection, Latinas/os will constitute 24 percent of the nation's total population on that date. In 2005, there were 107 Latinos per every 100 Latinas. This was in sharp contrast to the overall population, which had 97 males per every 100 females (US Census, 2004). Latinas/os or are a large, fast growing segment of the nation's population. The Latina/o population grew over seven times as fast as the rest of the nation between 1980 and 1990 (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). While a few years back Latinas/os were the second largest minority group in the country (U. S.

Census Bureau, 1993), most recently the US Census Bureau news release on May 10, 2006, indicated that Latinas/os are now the “largest” minority group at 42.7 million, exceeding Blacks in numbers (39.7 million). With a 3.3 percent increase in population from July 1, 2004, to July 1, 2005, Latinas/os are the fastest growing group in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau report accounts for the following specific Latina/o groups: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, South American, Dominican, Spanish, and all other general Latina/o-origin respondents. Mexicans were the largest Latina/o group with approximately 20.9 million people. While other Latina/o (> 5.5 million) were second, and Puerto Ricans (> 3.4 million) were third largest (U.S. Bureau, 2000). In 2000, about 60 percent of Latinas/os were born in the United States. About 7 out of every 10 Latina/o residing in the United States were either native or naturalized citizens...”(U. S. Bureau, 2000). The various Latina/o groups are concentrated in different regions of the country: Mexicans in the Southwest and Midwest, Puerto Ricans in the Northeast, Cubans in the Southeast. The other Latina/o populations are found in areas with concentrations of Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban populations (Chapa & Valencia, 1993). Chapa and Valencia (1993) point out that Latinas/os are highly urbanized, and that 67% of all U.S. Latinas/os reside in 16 metropolitan areas.

Indeed, there are commonalities among Latinas/os, often including “Spanish language use, the valuing of cultural maintenance, a cultural focus on family, and religious traditions” (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001, p 38), yet it is impossible to make sweeping generalizations that apply to all Latinas/os. Latinas/os are considered one of the most heterogeneous groups in this nation. There are a range of factors - including

cultural, historical, sociological, political, and others – that contribute to the diversity among Latinas/os in the United States (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001).

Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) contend:

Latinos have had an uneasy relationship with prevailing racial constructs in the United States. These “either/or” notions, typically Black/White or White/not White, have not easily incorporated or allowed for the polychromatic (that is, multicolored) reality of Latinos. Latinos generally trace their heritage to the indigenous peoples of the Americas, to Africa, and to Europe, in varying combinations, and there are some with Asian roots as well. This means that, in terms of color and other markers used to categorize race in the United States, Latinos can span the complete range (p. 38).

One important element of Latina/o “groupness” is that as a large group, sociopolitical power is gained. Combining the external and internal factors of Latinos creates a unified Latino identity which brings “increased visibility, potency, and even political power to a large proportion of those so identified” (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001, p. 38). Thus it pulls Latinas/os together, across subgroups.

Migration Loss

Migration can be one of the most powerful events in a person’s life. Its impact galvanizes dramatic and profound changes that insistently ripple through generations (Sluzki, 1979). Many immigrants come to the U.S. in search of a better life or better economic opportunities, otherwise known as the “American dream”. Migration offers a new beginning, a chance to learn a new language and gain confidence in one’s self. Falicov (1998) writes, “migration can also be an adventure that opens possibilities of living a better life and provides an opportunity to prove oneself capable of hardiness and survival” (Falicov, p. 32). On the other hand, there is often another side to that story. Often the American dream becomes a nightmare due to the difficulties in the migration

and resettlement processes. Immigrants experience the loss of their homeland, family, friends, social networks, and sense of personal security. This researcher chose to use this definition due to its focus on loss of social support and the fact that many immigrants leave behind their homes, families, and familiar ways of life. Additionally they arrive to the US, to a country that has an increasingly anti-immigrant sentiment. Often immigrants do not speak the dominant language and are not able to navigate the system due to many barriers. Falicov (1998) notes the hardships of this experience.

Even when freely chosen, the experience of migration is replete with loss and disarray- there is loss of language, the separation from loved ones, the intangible emotional vacuum left in the space where 'home' used to be, the lack of understanding of how jobs, schools, banks, or hospitals work (Falicov, 1998, p. 31).

The continuous arrival of immigrants and their subsequent impact on American society have been reviewed by historians, sociologists, and educators. Immigration is a process that stimulates mixed and varied responses at unpredictable periods of time (Arredondo, 1981). When immigrants come to the United States, they are closing the door on part of their lives and saying goodbye to their homeland. Narratives describing the immigrant experience suggest that this caused both exhilaration and pain. Whether their leaving was voluntary/ anticipated, forced/anticipated, or unexpected there is a period of settlement faced by all. Despite the immigrants' desire to be in America and to establish a better life for themselves and for their families, confronting the realities of living here may arouse feelings of sadness and disorientation (Padilla, Cervantes, Maldonado & Garcia, 1988). Migrants may be exposed to stress as they leave loved ones and familiar surroundings, experience difficulties in passage, and settle within the

receiving society. Several researchers that have studied the psychological effects of migration, report that relative to nonimmigrant adults, immigrant adults experience a variety of psychological problems. The overall findings show that there is a link in the stress of migration to problems in mental health. It is also noted that there is a heightened risk for depression, schizophrenia, and anxiety-related difficulties, substance abuse, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In a study by Wolff (2002), The experiences of Mexico-U.S. border crossing for undocumented Mexican immigrants were studied to see if they are consistent with the symptoms for PTSD. Twelve undocumented immigrant men, ages ranging from 22 to 55 and two women from ages 28 to 54 participated in this study. This study used qualitative flexible methods design. The study found that border crossing for Mexican immigrants may be experienced as dangerous and for some, traumatic, though their symptomatology and the way they experience border crossing may not match up with all of the criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD. There was a significant difference among genders, for example women met criteria for PTSD more than men. None of the males met PTSD criteria in the study.

Other researchers note subclinical adjustment problems among immigrants related to language, employment, and family issues (Perez Foster, 2001). The literature reports a myriad of complex emotional and physical tasks that must be accomplished by people who leave their homelands. A large number of these immigrants are known to be at significant risk for poor living conditions, economic exploitation, oppression and racist or prejudicial treatment, from their host locations. A downturn in socioeconomic status is the unfortunate norm for most immigrants across the social and educational spectrum, particularly those who are people of color (Shorris, 1992).

The emotional dimension of the migratory process is not often identified or explored. It can be explained by Bowen's concept of differentiation of self, which deals with the interplay between the emotional forces of individuality and togetherness (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Individual differentiation refers to the ability of family members to express their own individuality and act autonomously while remaining emotionally connected to others. Family differentiation refers to the degree to which difference and individuality is tolerated within the family system (Bowen, 1988). Attempts at differentiation by means of migration are frequently triggered by important family events and developmental transition throughout the family life cycle. Bowen's concept of differentiation of self provides a useful framework for understanding the emotional dimension of the migratory experience.

A significant emotional dimension colors the migration process; consequently, moves can be used or misused to deal with a variety of family challenges and problems. Since differentiation of self is on a continuum so will migration coping and resilience be on a continuum. For those less differentiated families, the migration process can be based on immature reasons. "Undifferentiated families", refers to families with low levels of differentiation who are "emotionally stuck together." Individual family members' individuality is viewed as disloyal and threatening to the family's stability (Bowen, 1988). A continuum of emotional cutoff and contact is present in the migration process. Migration is a multidimensional phenomenon; neither the decision to migrate nor the act of migrating simply "happens" to the individual and her/his family. The migratory experience is pursued, as well as reacted to, by family members for diverse, complex, and often contradictory reasons (Mattei, 1995).

The “phenomenology of migration” is a subjective experience that can best be understood and shaped by the family through a “migration narrative”. The construction of such a narrative, reveals the personal meanings of migration events and processes for each family and for individual family members (Falicov, 1998).

Familismo and Social Networking

The concept of *Familismo* can be generalized to most Latina/o cultures, and stresses subordination of the individual to the family. In other words, Latina/o families stress family loyalty by pushing for interdependence over independence, placing a high emphasis on the family rather than the individual, and teaching children at an early age the importance of commitment, obligation, and responsibility—the needs of the family always comes first. In developing appropriate and necessary services for Latina/o immigrants, it is important to consider the impact of culture. As opposed to the dominant individualistic society, the Latina/o culture is one of collectivism (Falicov, 1998). Therefore it emphasizes the importance of family and community ties. For many immigrants, when they leave their country of origin, they also leave behind all those ties.

Social networks are extremely important to the process of immigration because they provide resources and social capital and community. In addition to easing the process of moving to the new country, social networks often assist immigrants in finding employment, a process that is often difficult for new immigrants who face many barriers. Social networks and community are significantly important to the immigration process. These networks, in fact, make the adaptation somewhat easier, and the connections that are made increase social capital. A study by Garcia (2005) in El Tree, Oklahoma

researched the social networking of Mexican immigrants, looking at the social capital theory and cumulative causation as explanations for migration (Massey et al., 1998 as cited in Garcia, 2005). The study used a semi-structured design to interview 35 male and 15 female Mexican workers. It explored how social networks that support immigration develop, how these networks impact group members, and the different types of networks created. The results showed that the network in El Tree was comprised of three subnetworks: a traditional, a church, and a contract subnetwork. The study found that social networks are extremely important to the process of immigration because they provide resources and social capital. In addition to easing the process of moving to the new country, social networks often assist immigrants in finding employment, a process that is often difficult for new immigrants who face many barriers. Resources and social capital are important points to pursue and consider for this study because social networks have a strong significance to the process of Latina/o immigrants. This study does present with some limitations because it excludes ethnic and cultural diversity.

Based on the literature, the importance of social networks in the Latina/o community is evident. However, because many immigrants do not arrive with social networks in place, they are often faced with more difficulties until they become part of a social network. Women often encounter this situation more than men because they are less likely to work than men. Therefore, there is little opportunity for the recreation of the social networks left behind. The following study by Domínguez and Watkins (2003) explored the social networks of low income Latin American and African American mothers. The participants were 5 Latina women and 5 African American women from 19 to 40 years old. The study looked at family based networks, friend based networks, and

institution based networks and found that the participants relied on family and kinship networks for social support. However, when these networks were not available, they replaced those networks with alternative ones. These alternatives included social service organizations, which are increasingly becoming part of women's support networks. "Some institution based networks provide clear advantages such as reliable, high quality resources and relationships that are less stressful and burdensome in terms of reciprocity" (Domínguez & Watkins, 2003, p. 129). Although these studies were based on women, it can be inferred that male immigrants experiencing the same loss and adaptation processes would need to find similar alternative support networks. Despite the importance of these social networks, it is often difficult for immigrants to access these networks due to the complexities of resettlement.

Another consideration when working with this population is utilizing the concept of empowerment within the context of their social surroundings, especially due to the strong familial ties of the Latino culture (La Roche, 2002; Miranda, 1996). One author posed the need to incorporate the environment for oppressed populations, such as Latino women. Zentgraf (2002) stated the following in regards to Latino immigrant women:

...women's empowerment-by which I refer to personal experiences such as individual "self-assertion"... or the psychological experiences of feeling more self-confident and autonomous- must be analyzed not as individual isolated processes but as processes that take place in relationship with family, community, and the larger context. (p.629)

Experience of the Latina Immigrant

Among Latina/o immigrants, the loss of familiar social networks is especially hard on women, who often find themselves isolated, forced to deal on their own with the

multiple demands of life in a foreign environment. (Perez Foster, 2001) The immigrant woman often encounters a dual-edge phenomenon: more willing than men to accept menial and low-paying jobs, they more quickly become wage earners and are thereby introduced to new configurations of traditional gender roles, especially in the United States. However, those with male partners are often confronted by unemployed and despondent men who feel threatened by the power shifts in the dyadic relationship and family system. Indeed, for some recent immigrant groups, these conditions have been associated with an increase in domestic violence and substance use/abuse (Vasquez, Han & De Las Fuentes, 2006).

Studies researching the impacts of migration on Latina women (Leon & Dziegielweski, 1999; Espin, 1987) have found that although many people would suspect that the immigration and acculturation process would be complex, for women it is particularly difficult and traumatic. Many women are confronted with the integration of the values of the new country, the change in the family system, and racism. Often the values and family roles are different in the new country and therefore cause distress to the mother and the family system as a whole.

American culture values the individual and expects individuation and separation in contrast Latina/o culture values the extended family or familismo. These differences in values can create great complexity in resettlement process for both women and men. Additionally, a change in the family roles may occur. For example, the wife may go to work or the husband work two jobs, which would create both a change in the larger family system and in the spousal relationship. Many women feel alone in a new country, with different values and a new role to assume. “This lack of support and isolation can

create depression and other mental health problems for Hispanic women” (Leon & Dziegielewski, 1999, p. 79). In leaving one’s country, one loses his or her social capital and therefore is more isolated until social capital is regained or recreated (Falicov, 2006).

Assimilation and Acculturative Stress

Many theories have addressed the issue of migration and adaptation, including assimilation and acculturation theories. The assimilation theory refers to the immigrant actually losing his/her identity and taking on that identity of the new culture, whereas the acculturation theory refers to the immigrant fitting into the new culture. Thus the immigrant tries to conform to aspects of the dominant culture’s model. The alternation model, as defined by Falicov (1998), defines the process of adapting to the new culture, while maintaining old cultural roles and codes. Based on this model, it is important to consider the cultural codes for the immigrant groups, for example, familismo or collectivism in the case of Latina/o immigrants. Nevertheless, it is necessary and perhaps liberating for immigrants to acculturate to some aspects of the dominant culture’s norms, for example, learning the language and learning how to navigate systems. Therefore, bicultural individuals, individuals who maintain aspects of their own culture and adapt to aspects of the new culture, have less acculturative stress because they are able to negotiate both cultures (Falicov, 1998; Sue & Sue, 2003).

There are numerous causes for stress in the resettlement process for all immigrants. In addition to the stress caused by one’s legal status and the migration experience itself, Latina/o immigrants also face other factors that contribute to their subjective well-being. These factors include learning a new language, discrimination,

poverty, lack of knowledge of how to navigate the system, and mourning the loss of homeland, family, friends, and community.

For many Latinas/os, developing the skills to overcome the challenges that poverty and poor social conditions bring are also impaired by a lack of education and language barriers. These barriers are known to affect the immigrants' level of acculturative stress. Many definitions of acculturative stress are found in the literature, as it is a phenomenon not well understood. Latinas/os have been the subject of a wealth of research on acculturation and mental health due to their growing numbers, yet this research does not offer clear definitions due to the increasingly diverse population. Smart & Smart (1995) defined acculturative stress as the loss of social support and personal identity. This particular study by Smart and Smart (1995) was a meta analysis, which reviewed other literature and studies on the topic. The purpose was to identify the effects of acculturative stress on Latina/o and advocate for more studies and interventions to treat acculturative stress. The study found a difference between European and Hispanic acculturation processes. The differences included discrimination based on skin color and the emphasis on family and social ties for Latinas/os. Another factor affecting acculturative stress was illegal immigration, which increasingly affects Latina/o immigrants.

In coming to a new country, immigrants are not only faced with a new culture and new way of life, but they are also faced with the loss of their homeland and culture. Studies have shown that available resources for coping with stress, degree of acculturation, English language competency, degree of family unity, and length of residency in the U.S. all impact the degree of acculturative stress (Miranda & Matheny,

2000). The factors that contribute to acculturative stress must be identified to create effective interventions.

Miranda and Matheny's (2000) study tried to predict the acculturative stress experienced by Latino adults from socio-psychological factors. The study examined environmental, demographic and familial factors, which are known contributors to acculturative stress and resources for coping with stress. The study hypothesized that the environmental, demographic, and familial factors would determine the degree of acculturative stress and that resources for coping would act as buffers. They used a random sample of 197 members, 63% female and 37% male, from two social service agencies. The sample represented different parts of Spanish-speaking America, including Mexico, Central America, and South America. The average age of the participants was 28, and the average residency in the U.S. was 4 years. Additionally, 52% of the participants had documents and 48% were undocumented. Half of the participants were married, and 78% indicated living in a household where the income was less than \$20,000 per year. The participants filled out demographic surveys, and instruments were used to measure family cohesion and adaptability, acculturation, acculturative stress, and stress coping-resource effectiveness. The study found that five of the predictor variables, coping resources, acculturation, language use, family cohesion and length of residency, explained acculturative stress in Latinas/os. The study also showed that insufficient resources for coping were the largest predictor of acculturative stress. Therefore it is important to not only look at causes of acculturative stress, but also to examine resources for coping and how to increase these resources.

Unlike the previous study Torres & Rollock (2004) looked at protective factors rather than causation of acculturative stress. This study showed that protective factors, such as intercultural competence, may actually decrease acculturative stress. The study used a fixed design to examine the aspects of cultural adaptations, such as intercultural competence and general coping, and the relationship with acculturative stress. There were 52 male and 44 female adult Latina/o participants, age 18 to 62 years. The participants were recruited from Latina/o churches, community centers, and university based organizations in a Midwestern city. Fifty-eight percent were first generation to live in the U.S., 28% were second generation and 5% were third generation. Most of the participants had lived in the U.S. for less than 10 years. The study sought to explore the relationship between acculturation (from the dominant cultural model), general coping, and intercultural competence (from competence based models) and acculturative stress in the Latina/o population.

The study concluded that acculturation was not strongly associated with acculturative stress, but rather that active problem solving was strongly associated with less acculturative stress. Intercultural competence, or the ability to adapt to and function within the new culture, may prevent acculturative stress more than active coping styles. Additionally, the study found that commonly used socio-demographic indicators are less useful predictors of acculturative stress than functional capabilities. A limitation of this study was the small sample, which was chosen from a Midwestern city, therefore limiting the generalizability of the results. Protective factors and resources for coping with adaptation to the new culture impact the immigrant's adaptation and decrease the acculturative stress. It is important to look at the ways to protect against acculturative

stress rather than assuming that the socio demographic variables predict the level of acculturative stress. This clearly emphasizes the importance of increasing access to additional support systems in order to decrease acculturative stress.

Coping Strategies

Several definitions and classification systems of coping have been proposed (e.g. Costa et al., 1996; Hobfoll, 1998; Hobfoll et al., 1994; Holahan et al., 1996; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984) define coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and /or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p.141). This frequently cited definition focuses on how the individual interprets his or her situation and how he or she behaves in response to a particular stressor. The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (CandenBos, in press) includes the importance of context and development in their definition: “Adaptation to stress. This involves the use of social and psychological resources to reduce the negative emotional and conflict caused by stress associated with changes in life.”

Women are socialized to value and to care for relationships (Gilligan, 1993). The importance of communion to women may have a neurophysiological basis. Taylor et al. (2000) suggest that women may be primed toward relational coping for survival. The traditional model of stress and coping is the flight-or-flight response, which Taylor asserts may be more applicable to men. Instead, women may tend to their offspring and befriend others in their community to cope during stressful times. Tending and befriending have psychological and psychological bases, and both increase a woman’s

chance for not just survival but also growth. Tending to offspring promotes a secure mother-child attachment, which is associated with healthy child development (Carlson & Sroufe, 1995). Taylor suggests that attachment is beneficial for the mothers as well. Likewise, befriending other women affords a woman the greater safety of numbers as well as access to more resources. Taylor's model proposes that women's tendencies to use coping strategies that are focused on relational needs may be beneficial. This contrasts with other research literature, which suggest not only that problem-focused coping (Tamares, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002). The model may explain the tendency of women to use emotion-focused strategies, which generally involve a relational component. The model suggests that these coping strategies may be beneficial as they may increase the attachment response and engage social support networks. Coping strategies and resilient behaviors, or responses, fluctuate under different relationship circumstances. Coping responses and the ability to respond resiliently vary and they are part of a reciprocal nature in relationships. Coping strategies can include a thought, action, behavior, feeling, instinct, or any mixture of these that is adaptive, flexible and aware. It resolves problems and promotes survival (Baege, 2005).

Resiliency

The phenomenon of resiliency refers to a person's ability to successfully adapt, effectively cope, mature, and recover from negative life events, including trauma (Connolly, 2005; Fredrickson & Tugade, 2004; Frueh et al, n.d.; Maddi, 2005; Masten, 2001; Newman, 2005; Waller, 2001). Many researchers agree that more people are

resilient than what is currently thought while some researchers agree that most people are resilient (Bonanno, 2005a; Masten, 2001). Resiliency can refer to an individual or a community. Cultural resiliency refers to a culture's ability to maintain their cultural knowledge, ability to survive and thrive, and ability to effectively adapt across generations (Neill, 2004). A resilient individual is a person who encounters difficult and/or traumatic circumstances, but is able to thrive, increase competence in the face of adversity, not be overcome by the negative consequences of the stressful situation encountered, and maintain positive mental health functioning (Gordon-Rouse, 1998). Some resiliency factors are derived from a person's temperament or way of coping, while some forms of resiliency are enhanced by the community in which the individual is embedded (Kilmer & Tedeschi 2005; Waller, 2001).

Some resiliency factors that stem from a person's individual characteristics are positive self-worth/efficacy, problem solving skills, hopefulness, and optimism (Bowleg, et al., 2004; Fredrickson & Tugade, 2004; Gordon-Rouse, 1998; Kilmer & Tedeschi 2005; Waller, 2001). In times of hardships, the ability to find meaning in a challenging situation allows some people to derive positive lessons from negative situations (Fredrickson & Tugade, 2005; Gordon-Rouse, 1998). Researchers state that resilient persons are sociable and have good social skills (Gordon-Rouse, 1998; Waller, 2001). This exemplifies the importance of interactions with other people in resiliency factors.

Caring supportive relationships are crucial protective factors against damaging encounters. Support factors that rely on interactions with other people are more commonly found forms of resiliency in studies on minorities. Supportive and warm environments also foster resiliency, such as family support and nurturance, community

resources and support (Bonanno, 2005b; Connolly, 2005; Frueh, et al., n.d.; Kilmer & Tedeschi, 2005; Waller, 2001). Families that provide general support, positive interactions, and support around specific hardships, greatly add to a person's capacity for resiliency (Connolly, 2005; Gordon-Rouse, 1998).

Conclusion

Based on the literature, it is evident that immigrants face many stressors upon migration to the U.S., including the migration experience itself, migration loss, and adjustment to the new culture. From what this researcher has read in the literature on migration, there has not been a lot of recent work done in the study of migration loss as it pertains to the experience of women of color, particularly in relation to Latinas. This researcher is personally invested in this study because it is an area of research that is often overlooked, which continues to make women, in particular Latinas, invisible and silent. This research project aims to explore and identify the intimate juncture of adaptive resilience as enhanced by coping strategies; the development of ways to deal and survive migration loss and stress in a cultural context.

This study will serve as preparation for clinicians in understanding the lives of Latina immigrants in the U.S. This is especially important given the current political climate and the increasing number of immigrants in need of services in the U.S. Additionally, focusing on the resilience of women and their coping strategies when having suffered migration loss is in line with the value of strengths perspective in the practice of Social Work (Saleebey 1992; Weick et al. 1989). This study may possibly provide a framework for understanding the cultural context of Latina immigrants, and

may even provide some insight to clinicians working with other women of color in immigrant populations. In conclusion, it is clear that migration loss may be experienced by many ethnicities and cultures. However, the literature is significantly lacking data on the experiences of Latina immigrants, their resilience and coping strategies utilized to deal with this phenomenon. It is the researcher's hope that this study may potentially provide a framework from which clinicians can understand some important aspects of migrant Latinas' lives.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The research question explored the following: How do Latinas cope with the experience of migration loss? A qualitative, flexible research method design was utilized. This design allowed for the exploration of the experience of Latina immigrants by using narrative and exploratory measures. The snowball method was used to obtain a non-probability sample of convenience. The advantage of this method is that it is convenient and it makes it easier to reach a population that is otherwise difficult to access (Anastas, 1999). The data analysis was qualitative utilizing a content analysis method. An interview guide, containing open-ended questions, was created in order to capture the narrative “in vivo.” The data was collected via an open-ended, face-to-face interview in duration, which included demographic questions and took approximately one hour to complete. This semi-structured format provided a guideline of questions to follow and allowed for further probing and clarification of specific topics. This method provided clarity that a questionnaire would not, which is especially important when language is possibly a barrier to effective communication. Literature about migration loss exists, but not much research has been done on the resilience and coping strategies used by Latinas. Consequently this project aims to focus more on the impact of migration loss on the lives of Latinas. This chapter will outline the demographics of the research sample and the process of the data collection and analysis.

Sample

Since this exploratory study used a non-probability sample of convenience with a snowball method, generalization to the larger population is limited. This method was used because it is the recommended way of gathering information from an immigrant population, which is generally a hard group to reach. The feasibility of this study was increased with the employment of the snowball sampling method due to the researcher's professional/community connections. Most of the participants were involved with colleagues in community-based organizations known to the researcher.

The sample consisted of twelve participants: (1) self-identified as Latina with as diverse ethnic background as possible, (2) were age eighteen and over, (3) immigrated from a Latin American country to the US for a minimum of one year, (4) resided in the state of California, (5) were assessed to be free of additional traumas, (6) demonstrated an ability to articulate their experiences with migration loss and an ability to identify coping strategies utilized, (7) were assessed to not have any mental or physical condition that would make it difficult to participate and (8) were able to speak English or Spanish.

Due to the small sample size, the researcher does not expect the participants to be representative of all Latinas/Hispanic women. However, the experiences collected captured some of the richness and variety experienced by these individuals within the context of this study.

Data Collection

Following approval of the design of this study by the Human Subjects Review Board of the Smith College School for Social Work (see Appendix A), this researcher contacted the potential interviewees by telephone to confirm their qualifications for the

study and schedule an interview. Interviews were scheduled with the individuals, and arrangements were made to ensure the convenience and accessibility of location and time. Each person was asked whether she preferred to do the interview in English or Spanish, and all instruments were available in both languages. This researcher explained to the participants that the interview was not designed to measure their level of English proficiency, but rather explore their experiences in the language most comfortable for them; consequently, all participants chose Spanish. Given the personal nature of the interviews, it seemed most appropriate to conduct the interviews in the preferred and most comfortable language for the participants.

The participants were then asked if they wanted to read the consent form or if they wanted the researcher to read it to them. The researcher offered them this option in order to ensure that literacy level did not impede the understanding of the study. None of the participants asked that this researcher read the consent form to her. Each respondent then signed two informed consent forms, one for the researcher and one copy for the participant's records. The informed consent outlined the purpose of the study, nature of participation, risks, and benefits (see Appendixes B and C). After reading the informed consent, this researcher informed the participants that their immigration status was not a criterion for the study and that documentation would not be an issue. This statement was added after the initial participants asked if they could participate without documents. Then, after any questions regarding the study were answered and the informed consent was signed, the researcher provided the participants with a copy of the interview guide (see Appendixes D and E) for them to read before the interview to help them better understand the questions.

Next, the individuals participated in an interview, which lasted anywhere between 30 and 90 minutes, regarding their experiences as Latina immigrants dealing with migration loss as it relates to their resiliency and coping strategies.

All the interviews were conducted in a neutral location, such as a library, café, or restaurant. The interviews were audio recorded, and the researcher took notes on any nonverbal cues or observations. The researcher attempted to remain neutral and tried to conduct the interviews consistently to increase the reliability of the method. After finishing interview with the participants, they were asked if they had additional questions or comments. Then, they were given a copy of the signed informed consent form (see Appendixes B and C. Lastly, they were thanked for their participation.

The interview questions (see Appendixes D and E) asked the participants to provide their country of origin, cultural/ethnic/racial identity, current age, family composition, and age at immigration, marital status, and family in country of origin, family in the U.S., job status and level of education. Also, the researcher included questions regarding their immigration experience, the impact of migration loss, their coping strategies and support systems. The questions were developed from the literature review and the researcher's experience, and they were reviewed by the researcher's thesis advisor. There were no adjustments made or needed to the interview questions.

Semi-structured interviews in Spanish provided increased clarity because they provided the opportunity to ask for explanations as well as facilitated participants understanding of the questions and ability to express them. Due to the personal nature of the interviews, the participants were told in advance that these interviews may cause feelings of nostalgia, sadness or stress. Therefore, all participants were provided with a

list of mental health center resources (see Appendix G) available should the interview have caused any discomfort or should they need future services.

Twelve women participated in this study; all completed the interview process, and all agreed to have the interview audio recorded.

Precautions were taken to safeguard confidentiality and identifiable information. All participants were informed in advance that the name of the community-based organizations would not be used in order to assure them that there was no legal risk involved. The participants were also told that the interview would be recorded and transcribed and all agreed to this process. The primary precaution taken to protect each participant's confidentiality was to provide her with a number, which corresponded with the informed consent, demographic information, and interview. The informed consent forms, which contain the name and corresponding number, are stored separately from the demographic data and interview, which contain only their number.

Safeguarding confidentiality also included coding and disguising all demographic and descriptive data. The names and exact locations of the community-based organizations were not disclosed at any point. All participants' tapes were assigned a matching numerical code, were kept separate from the identifying information, and were transcribed. The transcriber was also not provided with any identifying information. Once the transcriber returned the transcriptions, the researcher reviewed them for accuracy. The researcher will keep the tapes and transcripts in confidence for three years as required by federal regulations. During this time, tapes, transcripts and consent forms will be kept in locked cabinets. After the three-year time period has elapsed, all materials will be kept secured or destroyed if no longer needed.

Data Analysis

The data gathered for this study were analyzed using the content analysis method. The researcher utilized thematic content analysis (Anastas, 1999). All of the transcriptions were first analyzed individually, looking for meaning and themes within each one. The researcher read through the transcription and highlighted all related data. Codes to reflect highlighted data/themes were written in the margins on the transcription. Next, the transcriptions were analyzed and compared to one another in a search for commonality or differences with regard to themes. While reading further transcriptions, it was easier to identify possible themes. Last, all of the transcriptions were analyzed in order to examine at the entire sample as a group.

To guarantee accuracy and to address issues of validity and reliability in the analysis, the tapes were compared to the transcripts. Further since the researcher's own biases influenced the manner in which statements were categorized and chosen, the framework was anchored and clearly illustrated in the verbatim data from which they arose (Anastas, 1999).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this project was to explore the resilience and coping strategies utilized to deal with migration loss. Specifically, this project targeted women of Latin descent who immigrated to the U.S. and are now residing in the state of California.

Although there has been some research done on topic, there has been little research available on the resiliency factors and coping strategies utilized by Latina immigrants to survive migration loss and thrive in a new country. Consequently, this project aims to explore this subject. This project also looked at other variables, such as immigration characteristics, the importance of family and assimilation/ acculturation stress which impacts the lives of Latina immigrants in the U.S.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the study instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide which included demographic questions. The order of interview questions was maintained throughout the interview. The first seven questions focused on the participants' demographic information. Questions #8, #10 #11, #13, #14 were related to the concept of familismo. Furthermore, questions #9, #12, #15, #16, 17 focused on the impact of migration, assimilation and acculturation stress. Question #18 specifically explored the participants' migration experience as women and the last seven questions explored the participants' resiliency and coping mechanisms. In all interviews, additional questions were asked to clarify or expand the participants' responses. Given

the exploratory nature of this research, the findings focus on the significant themes found throughout the interviews and are reported primarily in the participants' own words through the use of direct quotes. Pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' identities. The first section will discuss the findings that emerged from the demographic data, and the next section will discuss the themes that emerged through the interviews. The data that was analyzed from the interview transcripts produced three major themes: (1) Relationships as Sources of Resilience and Coping, (2) Self-Directed Strategies that Enhanced Resilience and Coping, and (3) Spirituality/ Religion as Sources of Resilience and Coping.

Demographics

Twelve immigrants of Latino descent were interviewed between March and April of 2007. The subjects who participated in the study ranged in age from 30 to 65, at the time of study. There were 33.3 percent of the respondents (n=4) respondents in each of the following age ranges: 30-32, 43-50 and 53-65 (M=43.08). The marital status of the subjects was varied; 41.66 percent (n=5) married, (n=1) separated, (n=4) single, (n=1) divorced, (n=1) widowed. Most of the participants 75 percent (n=9) reported having children and (n=3) did not. The family composition of the study participants was also varied. Almost all of the subjects 99.66 percent (n=11) reported living with some family member, except for a woman (n=1) who reported living alone. Of the participants (n=2) reported living with their children and/or adult children, (n=1) with their husband and step-children, (n=5) with their husbands and children, (n=1) with her sisters, niece & nephew, (n=1) with her daughter, son-in-law and two grandchildren (n=1) with her children and her parents (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: *Age Range, Marital Status, Children & Family Composition*

Ages Range	Frequency
30-32	4
43-50	4
53-65	4
Marital Status	Frequency
Married	5
Separated	1
Single	4
Divorced	1
Widowed	1
Children	Frequency
Have children	9
Do not have children	3
Family Composition	Frequency
Children/adult Children	2
Husband & step-children	1
Husband & children	5
Sisters, niece & nephew	1
Daughter, son-in-law & grandchildren	1
Children & parents	1
Living alone	1

Of the study, participants (n=3) reported no specific culture/race denomination, referring to themselves simply by the membership of their country of origin: Salvadorian, Guatemalan, Mexican, and so on. Of the participants (n=9) did report a cultural/ethnic/racial background as follows: (n=2) reported being Hispanic, (n=1) participant reported being multi-racial, stating that her father is Spanish, her grandparents Italian and her mother Mexican. Of the subjects 33.33 percent (n=4) reported being Latinas, (n=1) participant identified herself as “White-Hispanic, explaining that her family’s ancestry is German (both on her mother’s and on her father’s side) but that several generations have been born and raised in Argentina. Another participant (n=1) reported being “Mestiza,” a mix between the indigenous population and the Spanish conquerors (Falicov, 1998). Subjects emigrated from seven different Latin American countries. Of the participants, in the study 33.33 percent (n=4) come from Mexico. Additionally, participants represented some of the major geographic regions in Latin America: Mexico, Central America and South America.

The participants’ occupations were reported as follows: (n=1) reported working in a white-collar job as an administrative secretary. While the specific employment varied, most of the participants, 91.66 percent (n=11) reported being employed in semiskilled jobs: (n=2) cashiers, (n=1) clerk, (n=2) nannies, (n=1) janitor, (n=1) dressing room attendant, (n=1) nurse’s aid (n=1) sanitation worker and (n=1) housekeeper. Of the participants (n=1) reported being unemployed, explaining that prior to a recent breast cancer diagnosis she worked in a bakery as an attendant. The education level varied amongst the participants: (n=1) reported having graduated from college with a Bachelor degree in Communication, (n=1) participant reported having completed two years of

college but did not graduate, (n=3) completed a technical career as secretaries in their country of origin and (n=2) graduated from High School. Of the participants 33.33 (n=4) reported having completed 8th or 9th grade in middle school, and (n=1) reported only having completed the 6th grade (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: *Ethnicity, Culture, Race, Occupation & Education Level*

Ethnicity	Frequency
Mexican	4
Guatemalan	2
Salvadorian	2
Argentinean	1
Chilean	1
Honduran	1
Peruvian	1
Culture/Race	Frequency
Hispanic	2
Multi-racial	1
Latina	4
White-Hispanic	1
Mestiza	1
No specific culture/race	3
Occupation	Frequency
Administrative secretary	1
Cashiers	2
Clerk	1
Nannies	2
Janitor	1
Dressing room attendant	1
Nurse's aid	1
Sanitation worker	1
Housekeeper	1
Unemployed	1
Education Level	Frequency
College	1
Technical Career (secretarial)	3
Some College	1
High School	2
Middle School	4
Elementary School	1

When the participants migrated to this country varies considerably; the time frame ranges from 7 years ago to 40 years ago (M=18.83).

The subjects' age when they migrated to this country also varied greatly. The youngest woman stated that she was 8 years old when she first came to the US, and the oldest was 42 years old (M=24.25). Of the participants 25 percent (n=3) reported being 22 years old, and only (n=2) stated that they were minors. Several participants (58.33%) (n=7) reported that they migrated alone, (n=3) with their husbands and children, (n=1) with a friend and (n=1) with her parents and younger sister (see Table 1.3).

Table 1.3: *Time in the US, Migration Age and Migrated with*

Time in the US	Frequency
7 years	2
9 years	1
11 years	1
12 years	1
15 years	1
19 years	1
20 years	1
22 years	1
34 years	1
37 years	1
40 years	1
Migration Age	Frequency
8 years old	1
16 years old	1
19 years old	2
21 years old	1
22 years old	3
25 years old	1
35 years old	1
40 years old	1
42 years old	1
Migrated with	Frequency
Husband and children	3
Friend	1
Parents & younger sister	1
Alone	7

Migration narrative

Migration narrative emerged as an important part of the discussion during the interviews. The participants explained how difficult, painful and at times challenging the process of migration can be. Yet they were able to pull from those experiences to identify resiliency strategies to manage and cope with their loss and despair. In addition to gaining valuable data from the interviews, the researcher also believes that by sharing their migration journeys, the women felt validated by their experiences.

Numerous factors emerged when participants were asked the reasons for leaving their country of origin to migrate to the U.S. All of the participants (n=12) provided more than one answer in their migration narratives. Consequently, this question proved to be the most complicated to answer. Of the participants, (n=3) cried when telling their stories. It seemed to trigger feelings of nostalgia and a sense of loss, as participants talked about missing their family, friends, country, and culture, yet at the same time many had made new lives here and wanted to stay or felt divided. Luz Maria explained that “I miss the warmth of my family, the food we used to eat, and the trips we made together. The hardest thing was not been able to say goodbye to my parents.”

Several participants, (n=7) reported leaving their countries of origins due to socioeconomic problems, which included poverty and economic insecurity. Of the participants (n=7) specifically cited having more work opportunities in the U.S. and creating a better life for their families as the primary reason for coming. Ana said, “In my country, all I ever dream of was to come to the U.S. I migrated because of the insecurity and poverty in my country. There are no jobs or opportunities for advancement.” Like Ana, many participants reported precipitating factors in their native

country that related to the situation in their countries. Evangelina, a 32-year-old, also emphasized the bad circumstances in her country that caused her to leave. Of the participants, (n=5) mentioned personal development, specifically education, as a reason for migration. For Guadalupe, a 30-year-old, it was more of a combination of bad economic conditions, job opportunities, and the attraction of a new life style: “The situation back home was getting very hard. My husband got a visa for a job, and we both came to the US, looking for a better life for our family.”

There were also participants (n=5) who cited reunification with family living in the U.S. as the primary reason for migration. Of the participants, (n=1), Marta a 29-year-old, reported coming to the U.S. to be with her mother and her two sisters: “my mother sent for me to help with my sisters and to work to send money to my family back home.” Another participant came to be reunited with her husband who had come two years before her. Other less common reasons for migration were personal reasons, such as marital/family problems and personal safety.

One participant reported leaving her country of origin because of her husband’s alcoholism and abusive behavior: “My husband drank a lot and I got tired of it so I finally left him. I have a sister here in the US who helped me with my passport.” Another participant reported coming because her life was in danger due to the political war in her country: “I had to leave El Salvador in a hurry. My life was in danger because the army was following me and my family. I was afraid for my life.” Manuela, a 43-year-old, also emphasized the bad circumstances in her country that caused her to leave:

“It’s sad because you love your country and you don’t want to leave. But when the economy is so bad, goods are expensive, jobs are scarce; you don’t have a choice. We were so poor that my parents could not afford to send us to

school...It's very difficult to leave your family, your children, your way of life, your culture...you home.'

As part of their migration narrative, participants were asked if they felt that being a woman made a difference in the process of migration. Of the participants, (n=7) related that the process is the same for either gender. Subsequently, of the participants (n=5) felt that it makes a difference to be women when dealing with the migration process and the loss. Of those who felt that there are gender differences, (n=3) felt it was easier for women, and (n=2) said that it is harder for women.

Sources of Resilience and Coping in the Migration Process of Latinas

Three major themes involving resiliency and coping strategies were found in this study: relationships as sources of resilience and coping with the sub-themes of familismo, beyond kinship, social network, self-directed strategies that enhanced resilience and coping with the sub-themes of education, personal development, migration status, and spirituality/religion as a transpersonal source of resilience and coping with the sub-themes of religious/spiritual membership, hope and optimism.

This section describes the major themes and sub-themes that the subjects identified as strategies that they used to survive and thrive in spite of migration loss. The participants gave individualized descriptions for the many sources of support they utilize but predominately they felt connected to their family, other people and their communities that shared their experiences. The resiliency factors and coping strategies utilized helped the women to mentally, physically, and spiritually deal adaptively with

the experience of migration loss. Specific examples drawn from the narrative data are presented to illustrate the above themes and their sub-themes.

Sources of Resilience and Coping Strategies Involving Relationships

Familismo

Family emerged as a dominant theme in the participants' experience. The participants reported family support or familismo as a vital aspect of their lives, which they received from their nuclear family and extended kin. Marta spoke about this concept: "I'm very luck to have my uncle, aunt and cousins living with us. It's almost like if I was back in my country with my family looking after me." The participants highly regard the relationship to their family as a source of resiliency that supplies them with a variety of types of emotional and psychological support: affection, strength, nurturance, support, love, and understanding. As Sandra stated, "My family is my rock, they keep me grounded and strong." Family for Latina immigrants is not only a source of emotional support, but also provides financial, physical and spiritual support. Some feel that utilizing their family support is how they are able to get by in life, maintain mental health, and cope with the loss of migration. Another participant shared that "my family is everything for me, I'm very lucky to have them all here with me in the US. Not every person can say that and to me, family separation, is the saddest thing."

Latinas who were interviewed in this study talked about the role of their families in the decision to migrate to the US. Many reported that migration provided them with hope for better lives for their families. This clearly portrays the importance of the familismo in the lives of the participants. Other immigrants face the dilemma of having

left family members behind in their country of origin. Without immigration documents, some of the participants are not able to travel back and forth. Therefore, if they were to leave, they would not be able to return. Some of the participants, (n=9) reported having family here in the U.S. while all of them (n=12) left parents, grandparents, siblings or extended family members in their country of origin. This also creates great stress as illustrated in Inez's statement; she has lived in the U.S. for 6 years. She refers to her mother and brother whom she left behind in her country when she talks about never seeing her family again. Other participants (n=2) responded similarly, stating that although they had planned on going back at some point, now they have children born in this country, they think of staying for future opportunities for the children.

Aside from (n=1) participant, the other (n=11) participants lived with family members. Most lived with immediate family members, such as spouses, children, parents, or siblings. Furthermore, the participants (n=2) without documents talked about having young children in their countries of origin and not being able to travel back and forth to see family. Of the participants (n=4) mentioned losing a family member while they lived in the U.S. and not being able to return to their country at that time. Claudia lost her grandmother a few years ago and reported not being able to attend the funeral service. She has become more worried about other family members since the death of her grandmother. Of the participants (n=2) mentioned that they had all their family here, so it was not hard for them to be here in the States.

While many of the women spoke about the painful separation from their family and the stress it caused them; they were able to identify resilient ways to cope with their loss. Through the foundation of familismo, the participants maintained ties with their

family living in their county of origin and a bond with their roots. They focused on maintaining frequent communication with their family members and on providing them with financial support to make better their lives. Lola statement exemplified this point: “If I would not be here in the U.S my family wouldn’t have a house to live or food to eat. It’s a big sacrifice for me but knowing that they live well, makes me feel it’s all worth it.”

Beyond Kinship

Kinship is an important factor in the lives of the immigrant Latinas interviewed for the study. In addition to their family, they receive support from other sources, such as friends and other relationships, for example Godparents. All of the participants (n=12) reported a variety of support that includes emotional, spiritual, and recreational and community resources. The participants reported that they often create friendships and social networks in order to reconnect to their ethnic roots and to maintain cultural meaning. This point is illustrated by Blanca’s comment:

“Having a circle of friends and acquaintances from my own culture, that speak my same language, listen to the same music and eat the same food that I enjoy, it’s vital, to survive in a country that is so different to me and my family.”

Interpersonal relationships, particularly friendships, are significant sources of support for Latina immigrants from this study. Friends and other important relationships were reported to provide understanding, unity, assistance with problems and challenges and a source of recreational support. Luz Maria, a 31-year-old, explained that her friends are an extension of her family and she also said that “many of my friends are from Mexico so when I’m with them, I feel like I’m still in my country.” The majority of the participants (n=11) reported having friendships comprised of people whom they feel are similar to themselves in various ways. Friends who share ethnicity, language and cultural

affinity are often chosen. Lola, a 65-year old, explains that "...most of my friends are Hispanic so I don't have to explain myself." Extended kinship support, as reported by the participants in this study, helps them to endure stressors of society and to cope with migration loss. Creation of circles of friends and extended kinship relationships has similar benefits for these women as accessing social networks.

Social Network

Participants in this study utilized affiliation to community and a social network as a resiliency factor. The sense of belonging to and being involved in their community provides these women with an environment that is supportive, affirming, and nurturing. Sandra spoke of receiving this type of support: "when I'm in my community, I feel like I belong in a group of people that understand me and support me." Of the women in this study (n=11) noted that connections in a social network are important in creating and accessing a sense community that meet their needs. Through their networks, the participants are able to have access various resources. All of the participants (n=12) in the study access communities and social networks that reflect who they are and provide them with the freedom to be their true selves. These communities are mostly comprised of other immigrants who share a common identity and migrant narrative. They may share cultural values, ethnicity and a common language (Spanish). Blanca stated "it feels like I'm home when I can speak Spanish with people around me." The reasoning is that the participants want to relate to those who shared similar experiences of migration loss and to have an understanding of their experience. They do not want the stress of having to explain themselves or their situations to someone who does not have an inside understanding of some of the dynamics and issues face by the process of migration.

Marta explained, “when I’m in the company of other immigrants, I don’t have to explain my love for my country, the values that I hold, the food that I eat or my way of life.”

Of the participants (n=9) also mentioned as an essential form of support within their community: their ability to network, share information and to create relationships.

Rosa Maria stated that “When I first came to the US, I didn’t know where to go to get medical care since I was pregnant. Some of the people in my community pointed me to a local clinic where I could get help. They also told me about other resources like WIC. I don’t know what I would have done without their help. It was a very scary time for me.”

They notify one another about job opportunities, assist with finding housing, locate community resources, support each others businesses and orientate one another to the way of life in the States. The women experienced through these forms of support within the immigrant social networks a sense of communal nurturance and connection.

Self-Directed Strategies that Enhance Resilience and Coping

Education

This study uncovered pursuing an education and learning English as sources of resiliency for coping with migration loss. Some of the participants enrolled in school or college seeking to develop new skills, gain abilities and expand their knowledge base. A participant (n=1) obtained a BA degree in communications upon migrating to this country. Of the women in the study (n=3) reported having completed technical careers as secretaries in their country of origin. These participants mentioned a change of status they experience here in the U.S. They were paraprofessionals in their countries and now they find themselves performing low skill jobs; consequently, they experienced a loss of social status. Inez said, “I used to be a secretary in my country but now I’m a nanny.”

All of the participants (n=12) recognized learning English as essential to their betterment and that of their families. Some of the women learn English in school, while others are self-taught and learned experientially in their community. Most of the participants (n=10) agreed that advancing their education would yield more job opportunities, higher income, better life style and personal satisfaction.

All participants (n=12) reported that English is very important in their lives for multiple reasons. Blanca, a 37-year old, said, “We are in America and it’s important to try to learn the language to defend ourselves and to prosper. I’ve had more opportunities since I learned English.” Similarly, Manuela said, “The most important thing for me living in this country is being able to speak English. If you don’t speak English, many times you will have problems and your life will not be easy” Evangelina also said, “It’s so important to learn because now I don’t feel afraid.” All participants (n=12) noted positive changes in their experience in the U.S. as a result of gaining English language skills. Of participants in the study (n=4) reported having no or very limited English language skills, out of which, (n=3) are undocumented. For those who are currently undocumented, the opportunities for employment are limited.

Immigration status

Immigration status and documents are a vital aspect of immigrants’ lives in this country. All the women in this study (n=12) acknowledged the essential importance of the attainment of immigration documentation for themselves and for their families. Blanca stated, “It is essential to have you immigration document to work, travel and live comfortable in this country.” Moreover, they agreed on the advantages of having a status change from undocumented to a documented immigrant in this country. Luz Maria

pointed out “I’m legal now. It cost a lot of money and time but with me being legal, a lot of doors open up for me and my family.” Of the participants (n=3) reported having a current undocumented status. Of the (n=9) participants with documents, (n=5) had been undocumented prior to fixing their immigration status. Even for those participants who obtained documents, it was clear that life was very hard when they were undocumented. A participant (n=1) from El Salvador currently has Temporary Protected Status (TPS), although she reported frequently worrying that they may not renew her TPS: “...if I get deported I will have to leave my children behind with their father. She says that, what kind of future can they have in El Salvador? My family will also be affected because I send money to them to buy food to survive.” Of the Latinas in this study (n=5), who are now legal residents or U.S. citizens, reported having been undocumented until the last Amnesty was granted. All of the Latinas (n=12) interviewed in this study identified the attainment of immigration documents or change of status as a resilient coping strategy to deal with migration loss and social disadvantage.

Personal development

Personal development is another resiliency factor which supports the lives of the participants as a means of dealing and coping with migration/acclimation stress.

Manuela eloquently described:

“I enjoy writing poetry and water color painting. When I write I express my emotions as a woman, as an immigrant and, as a mother. Painting also allows my creativity to flow. I like painting landscapes and cultural representations from my country. That’s how stay connected to my roots.”

Various calming activities such as pursuing hobbies, developing new interests and engaging in expressive art assist the participants with maintaining a sense of well being in

spite of life stressors. Sandra, who is 30 years old, said that she enjoys going out dancing and shared, “it’s great to get out there and do something that makes me feel happy and alive.” These activities lead them to feel revitalized and satisfied. Additionally, all of the participants (n=12) reported that they actively participate in culturally relevant events, sports and recreational activities with their families. Evangelina said, “My children are part of a soccer team, so my husband and I often go their games to enjoy the day as a family” These activities help support the development and maintenance of a healthy self-esteem and self-concept. As illustrated by Ana: “I’m always looking to attend events that showcase Latino talent. I enjoy the music, the food and the celebration of my heritage.” Moreover, many of the women reported taking care of their physical health and that of their family as a means to increase mental and emotional health. This point is exemplified by Luz Maria’s statement: “maintaining good health and a good attitude are vital for me to face the many challenges of immigrating to this country.”

Spirituality/Religion as a Transpersonal Source of Resilience and Coping

Religious/Spiritual Membership

Having a spiritual connection is a coping strategy and a prominent factor of resiliency within the lives of the participants of this study. Nearly all respondents (n=10), except for two, stated that they rely on spiritual support to help them deal with their migration process and loss. Manuela stated, “I remember when I first came to the U.S. I used to pray every day asking for peace in my heart and wisdom to deal with the pain.” Several participants (n=6) reported needing to take time to be by themselves and retreat from the world through prayer and meditation. Some of the participants, (n=8) are

affiliated with organized religion, mostly Catholic. Other participants reported an individualistic spirituality that barrows from various sources. Along with emotional wellbeing, many participants reported a sense of comfort and support from their spiritual and/or religious connections. Claudia illustrated this source of support: "...going to church, getting closer to God and the Saints is what keeps me strong. Asking for help when you are feeling despair and being grateful when you receive blessings."

These women find that going to service or church creates a sense of community and network that they report as an enriching, welcoming and nurturing experience. Ana stated, "when I go to church and pray with other Latinas, I feel like we are one strong voice" The women who participated in the study stated that they gain spiritual strength and a sense of belonging and peace when they connect with their God, higher power or spiritual affiliation. Accessing spirituality was a self-care act utilized by the participants. Having a connection to spirituality and/or religion gives the participants security that there is something larger than them that loves them and takes care of them. Manuela shared "I used to feel lost and scared when I first came and all I could do was pray."

Optimism

Another transpersonal source of resilience and coping factor found was the participants' use of optimism. Positive thinking skills and a good attitude are factors that are interwoven into the lives of most of the participants, and enforce their optimism. The majority of the participants (n=10) self-identified as being optimistic women.

Rosa Maria stated, "I wake up every morning and give thanks to God and the Virgin of Guadalupe for being alive and well. I focus on my good fortune to have my family and concentrate on all the good things that I have received. I think that having a good attitude helps people work harder and prosper."

For the Latinas in this study, utilizing productive positive thinking skills and having a good outlook on life maintains a view of the world as a positive place. Of the participants (n=7) reported being optimist as correlating to maintaining a strong faith and spiritual/religious affinity. Guadalupe illustrated this point “If you believe and have faith, then good things happen to you and to your family.”

The participants noted a good attitude, positive thinking skills and optimism as buffers to the effects of oppression, prejudice and racism.

Hope

Many participants (n=11) identified maintaining hope as a coping strategy and is an expression of resiliency that helps them deal with the loss of migration. They maintain hope for the dream of a better life for themselves and their families and a prosperous future for their children. Some participants (n=5) find meaning or lessons in experienced hardships, challenges and pain. Rosa Maria spoke to this ideology by stating: “life as an immigrant in the U.S. is very hard but these are lessons and opportunities that make you stronger.” All of the participants (n=12) came to this country following “the American dream” hoping for the betterment for themselves, their families and, their communities. Marta’s statement exemplified this point:

“I migrated to this country, hoping that my children will have a better life than I did. I dream of seeing them, happy with their families, working at a good job, and having a nice house. It’s the hope to seeing this dream come true, that will make all of my sacrifices coming to this country be worthwhile”.

The women noted that hope is what keeps them going and reaching for further development. All participants (n=12) agreed that it is not easy to maintain hope when faced with multiple losses as a result of migration. However, they recognize that if they

continue to maintain their sense of hope that will enable them to develop and utilized their coping strategies. Often times, the participants refer back to their hope to attain ‘the American dream’ when faced with challenges and life hardships. Maintaining hope keeps them focus on achieving their goals. For example, the hope of getting their immigration documents to stay in this country, the hope to learn English to get a better job, their hope to make more money to provide for their families and their hope to secure their children’s futures by making their lives better.

Conclusion

The qualitative findings in this study show how complicated the lives of migrant Latinas are in the United States. The women constantly have to identify and draw upon their resilience in order to develop and utilize coping strategies which help them thrive and survive despite migration loss. For these women to maintain hope and to remain optimistic in the face of all odds is a demonstration of the strength of the human spirit.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the resilience of Latinas and their coping strategies in spite of the migration loss they experienced. The term, migration loss, refers to the "Immigrants experience the loss of their homeland, family, friends, social networks, and sense of personal security" (Falicov, 1998). The research questions explored in this study were how do Latinas cope with the experience of migration loss? How does assimilation/acculturation stress impact Latinas? What is the importance of family in the lives of Latina immigrants? How can resiliency help Latinas cope with migration loss?

The data found in the literature and the data found via the interviews substantiated the findings of previous research conducted. The data collected in this study yielded various implications for social work and other mental health professionals. Some of these are (1) clinicians need to be culturally competent to work with women of color, specifically Latinas; (2) clinicians need to be aware of effects of migration loss; (3) Latinas may need assistance with identifying and utilizing resiliency skills and coping strategies; (4) group and family therapy are the recommended treatment modalities when working with Latina immigrants.

Major Findings

The participants' responses to questions regarding the migration and resettlement processes were consistent with the literature reviewed. All participants reported having experienced a sense of loss after migrating to this country. Their definition was similar to that of Falicov's (2005) where the author states that immigrants experience a loss of social capital, as most lose their communities when they migrate and resettle in the U.S.

The literature reports a myriad of complex emotional and physical tasks that must be accomplished by people who leave their homelands. For immigrants the migration and resettlement process is extremely difficult, since immigrants experience the loss of family, homeland, community and physical environment. The literature shows that the migration journey itself is often stressful, depending on the duration and level of danger of the trip. Then upon arriving in the U.S., immigrants are faced with the difficulties of resettlement, such as finding a job, housing, and community support.

The findings demonstrated that the participants have diverse and mixed feelings regarding their country of origin and the process of migration and resettlement. As they related their migration narratives, their response was overwhelmingly one of nostalgia, sadness, fear, and ambivalence when talking about their home countries, which is consistent with the literature. However, despite these feelings, many of the women expressed hopefulness regarding their migration to the U.S. seeking the "American dream" and a better future for themselves and their families.

An area of disagreement between the literature and the participants in this study is in relation to their experience as women immigrants. Research done by Leon and Dziegielweski (1999) found that the complexity of immigration and acculturation is

particularly difficult and traumatic for women. Only two participants in this study agreed that dealing with the migration process and the loss is harder for women.

The participants of the study utilized many resiliency tools and coping strategies in order to survive and thrive in spite of having endured the challenges of migration loss.

Three major themes involving resiliency and coping strategies were found in this study: (1) Relationships as sources of resilience and coping with the sub-themes of familismo, beyond kinship, social network; (2) Self-directed strategies that enhanced resilience and coping with the sub-themes of education, personal development, migration status; and (3) Spirituality/religion as a transpersonal source of resilience and coping with the sub-themes of religious/spiritual membership, hope and optimism.

Relationships as sources of resilience and coping

The results indicate that the collective experience of family and community positively impacts the daily life experiences of Latino immigrants. Considerable commonalities existed between the findings generated by this study and the findings that emerged from the existing literature regarding the role of family extended kinship and other important relationships like friends and community in the lives of Latinas/os. This is particularly important to consider because for Latina/o people; collective experiences are paramount to their communal culture.

The participants reported coming to the U.S. for better opportunities for their families and especially their children. The women in the study demonstrated the cultural value of familismo. They talked about the importance of having family here in the US with them as well as the family members living in their home countries that they often financially support. They also discussed the importance of the role of family in their

decisions to immigrate, their plans to permanently stay in this country or return back to their home countries. This study suggests that Latina immigrants who express a considerable degree of resilience, manifested in a variety of coping strategies that help them to survive and thrive in the U.S., maintain good relationships with both family members they left in their country of origin, and those family members who whom they are living, and/or with whom they are in less intimate contact in the U.S, the country to which they have migrated. These findings were consistent with Bowen's (1988) concept of differentiation of self which provides a useful framework for understanding the emotional dimension of the migratory experience.

The findings in this study were consistent with the literature on the importance of social networks in the lives of Latinas/os. Garcia concluded (2005) that social networks are extremely important to the process of immigration. The social networks and communities provide immigrants with social capital, reconstruct their community, rebuild ethnic networks and provide other resources, thus increasing the women's coping skills and resiliency.

Self-directed strategies that enhanced resilience and coping

The women in the study emphasized the importance of education, the attainment of their documented-immigrant status, and personal development as resiliency tools to help them cope with migration loss.

As supported by Perez Foster (2001), a downturn in socioeconomic status is the unfortunate norm for most immigrants across the social and educations spectrum. This is often a bitter surprise for those who harbored hopes of fresh horizons in a country of new opportunities. The women in the study felt that advancing their education and learning

English impacts their social status and job mobility in this country. Furthermore, learning English impacts their ability to negotiate their new lives and supports self-sufficient. Moreover, for the participants, their ability to speak English is vital to changing their immigration status.

Literature on resiliency highlights that mental and physical health and resiliency are connected (Newman, 2005). The participants of the study noted that taking care of their physical health was a means of taking care of their mental health. Some of the women indicated that calming activities such as pursuing hobbies, developing new interests and engaging in expressive art assist them with maintaining a sense of well being in spite of life stressors.

Spirituality/religion as a transpersonal source of resilience and coping

The women in this study endorsed optimism, having a religious/spiritual membership, and maintaining hope as resiliency strategies to manage their migration loss. Having a positive outlook on life and optimism were noted by the participants as coping strategies and supported by research on people of color (Fredrickson & Tugade, 2004; Kilmer & Tedeschi, 2005; Maddi, 2005; Waller, 2001). The participants maintain hope about the betterment of their lives and about reaching a brighter future for their families.

Latinas foster hope and support optimism when faced by the hard reality of resettlement, the many struggles, and the loss associated with the migration process

With the exception of two women, all of the participants utilize spirituality and/or religion as a means to overcome hardships and prosper in life. Previous researchers found that utilizing spirituality/religion increases a person's resiliency (Frueh, et al., n.d.;

Tedeschi & Kilmer, 2005; Waller, 2001). Some of these researchers found that this resiliency factor is very common amongst people of color. The Latinas reported receiving support and encouragement from their spiritual/religion membership. The women also believe that their spiritual/religious relationships provide them with a sense of strength that helps them cope with migration loss and grounds them in their new life.

Although this study did not directly inquire about the experience of discrimination and racism encountered in this country, the theme surfaced in many of the interviews. Falicov (2005) wrote that immigrants who come to the U.S. for a more stable life are often confronted with racial, ethnic, class discrimination and anti-immigrant sentiment.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The study is limited by the small sample attained, amount of resultant data available for analysis and the narrow geographic location of the participants (Greater Los Angeles area). It is also important to note that the population surveyed is a selective subgroup (immigrant women) of a minority group (Latina/o), therefore, findings cannot be generalized or transferred to other immigrant or minority groups. Although there are commonalities, often including “Spanish language use, the valuing of cultural maintenance, a cultural focus on family, and religious traditions,” it is impossible to make sweeping generalizations that apply to all Latinos (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001, p 38).

There are a range of factors - including cultural, historical, sociological, political, and others—that contribute to the diversity among Latinas/os. Thus, it is important to be cautious against overgeneralizations about Latinas on the basis of this study. The process of participating in this study was potentially therapeutic because as lived experiences

move to verbal experiences there is an opportunity for therapeutic reflection, which is the foundation of growth and development.

The researcher also acknowledges that the conceptualization and design of this study it is based on the perspective of an immigrant Latina, trained in clinical social work, with firsthand experience counseling Latina/o immigrants. A strength of this study is that it was beneficial to participants, since they were able to voice their personal experiences and educate clinicians on their needs and experiences.

In order to address the validity of this study, the audiotapes and transcripts were compared to assure accuracy. Also, since this researcher's biases, from working with this population, may have influenced the themes chosen and labeled. Verbatim data was used to allow the reader to come to conclusions about the impact of migration loss on the lives of these women, their resiliency and the coping strategies they utilized.

Implications for Social Work Practice

There were various implications for social work identified from the analysis of the data collected in this study. Some of these are (1) clinicians need to be culturally competent to work with women of color, specifically Latinas, (2) clinicians need to be aware of effects of migration loss, (3) assistance with identifying and utilizing resiliency skills and coping strategies, (4) group and family therapy recommended as treatment modalities when working with Latina immigrants.

Cultural competency

Given the complicated mental health issues resulting from migration, culturally competent mental health treatment is extremely important. Social Workers

need to be sensitive and culturally aware when working with this population. They constantly have to work on developing and updating their cultural competency skills.

Clinicians who work with Latinas/os migrants should familiarize themselves with the cultures of these groups. Despite the fact that the term Latina/o does show some similarities, such as being from Latin America and speaking Spanish, it must be noted that these communities are multi-faceted and diverse. The participants are from different countries, ethnic backgrounds and cultures. They experienced different migration journeys, have a variation of life stories and subscribe to different values and belief systems.

Awareness of effects of migration loss

Social workers also need to be knowledgeable of the effects of migration and “ambiguous loss” on the mental health of immigrants. Smart and Smart (1995) found that clinicians should understand acculturative stress and the effect on their clients and consider the additional stressors associated with migration experiences in general as well as immigration status. Social workers and other mental health professionals need to be culturally competent and attuned to the difficulties and oppressions faced by Latina/o immigrants.

Undoubtedly, issues of racism, discrimination, oppression, and poverty are raised in therapy when working with impoverished communities. This is especially true in areas that have a high immigrant population. Moreover, it is very important that practitioners utilize culturally appropriate and creative social work when working with the Latina/o clients. Clinicians are required to adhere to principles of social justice, it is imperative that clinicians not assume a neutral stance in terms of oppression, racism, and

discrimination. Therefore, it is essential that therapists working with low-income Latina/o clients, especially monolingual clients be aware of the social and political climates surrounding the client, more so in an area such as California that targets these groups through state propositions.

Assistance with identifying and utilizing resiliency skills and coping strategies

In the course of treatment, Latinas may need assistance identifying and utilizing internal resiliency skills. A significant portion of the research conducted on women yields the findings that Latinas often disclose external resiliency factors and under-report internal resiliency factors. The women easily identified and discussed self-directed strategies that enhanced resilience and coping, such as family, community, and friends. Yet they found it was difficult to readily identify and discuss transpersonal sources of resilience and coping factors that they utilize in their lives in order to survive and thrive in spite of migration loss.

Group and family therapy are the recommended treatment modalities

Group treatment modalities may be helpful with Latinas since these communities are very communal group oriented. Group modalities may prove to be a productive and culturally conducive tool. The group members would be able to give each member support and a sense of reflection. The women in this study mentioned that they feel healthier and more supported when their communities are healthy and cohesive. They also stated that they receive healing through helping others. The group members would benefit from the group as a whole, moving towards more productive ways of dealing with stress and life's hardships. Clinicians would be able to facilitate the process interjecting

clinical knowledge, skills, and reflection, while the other group members could interject culturally relative information and support.

Additional areas of consideration

Clinicians should be aware of the importance and role of support systems for Latinas. A sense of Community, social support and family are important to Latinas. When working with these populations, it will be helpful to explore the clients' relationships. Having an awareness of the importance that community support and resources may play in the clients' lives may prove to be helpful with identifying resources and strengths clients have access to. Clinicians may utilize an individualistic type of support, which may alienate the cultural value of familismo for Latina culturally sensitive.

Social workers need to be more involved in creating cultural bridges between the immigrants and the available services. Russell and White (2001) studied social work interventions with immigrants and found that effective interventions include cultural bridging, brokering for services, and advocating for system sensitivity. The clinicians and migrants clients in their study described the nature of their work as proactive and meeting of the client's needs.

Social workers' knowledge of mainstream culture could be a great asset if it is used to the benefit of the client. In their work with Latinas, Social Workers need to provide information about available services, community resources, education programs, financial assistance, and immigration services, amongst others. It is not sufficient to make clients aware of available services, but necessary to assist clients in negotiating the system and facilitating the process.

Future Research Recommendations

Research can be used both to reify and delegitimize oppressed populations. Although this study did yield a great deal of information, future research could produce more useful information if it's extended upon by a larger and more diverse sample. The utilization of a study sample that is geographically diverse would increase generalizability.

Although much of the literature on the experiences of immigrants in the U.S. is applicable to the Latina/o population, future research studies could examine the experience of other immigrant similar groups. Future studies should also examine the differences and similarities between men and women from the same cultural/ethnic group. Exploring how gender, culture and ethnicity intersect in the context of migration could yield some interesting data. Additionally, while this study analyzed the resiliency strategies utilized by Latinas to cope with migration loss, future research could build on this by surveying migrant children and/or elderly immigrants to discern generational issues.

Although longitudinal field studies have been the most successful thus far in allowing researchers to build trusting relationships with subjects, participants in this study indicated a willingness to share very personal aspects of their experiences via face to face interviews. As a result, it seems valuable to expand on the narrative experiences of Latina migrants by developing interviews that would allow the researcher to tailor a study to its subjects and give the participants the ability to respond to, pursue, or clarify unanticipated themes as they arise.

Closing Remarks

As the number of immigrants grows in the U.S., it is important to understand the experience of the Latina/o migrant population. In accounting for the lives of these immigrants, clinicians must take a political stance on issues that threaten to negatively affect immigrant populations. Clinical social workers and other mental health professionals can play an important role in the lives of immigrants. Not only in acknowledging their stories, but also by providing the necessary mental health services, bridging cultures, brokering for services, and advocating for system change.

This project was designed and aimed to explore and document the resiliency coping strategies utilized by Latinas to deal with migration loss. It is the researcher's hope that it may guide larger, future studies on migration issues across other cultures/ethnic oppressed groups. It is also the researcher's hope that this study and its results will shed light onto this topic and population with the goal to better understand the clients. Additionally, this study may inform and expand on the therapists' cultural competency and awareness when preparing to work with this group.

In closing, it is important to value and respect the stories of the participants in this study as well as other immigrants. The researcher believes that by telling their personal stories of suffering, loss, hope, and determination the Latinas will add their own invaluable voices to the literature and own perspective to the research literature.

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Appendix A

HSR Approval Letter

February 23, 2007

Aurora Perales
630 Naranja Drive
Glendale, CA 91206

Dear Aurora,

I am sorry that your revisions did not reach us. Cyberspace cannot really be trusted! Your revisions have been reviewed and all is now in order and we are glad to give final approval to your study. As it is almost March, you may want to make the withdrawal date a little later, say April 15th.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

Cc: Peter Titelman, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

My name is Aurora Perales, and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work in Northampton, Massachusetts. I am conducting a study on the coping strategies used by Latinas in dealing with migration loss. Your unique perspective is important and valuable to further the development of research on the experiences of Latina immigrants. This study is being conducted in fulfillment of the Master's thesis at Smith College School for Social Work and for possible future presentations and/or publications on the topic.

As a self-defined immigrant Latina, you are being asked to volunteer in order to provide your personal experiences around migration loss and to identify any coping strategies utilized. If you choose to volunteer you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take approximately one hour of your time. Your interview will be recorded using an audiotape. You will be asked to provide demographic information and asked questions around your experience. You will be able to elaborate on any of the questions and/or insert any additional comments you may have on the subject at the end of the interview.

There are some potential risks or discomfort associated with participating in this study. The questions will ask you to reflect on your experiences around immigration which, may bring up memories or painful feelings such as stress, sadness, hopelessness, nostalgia, anger or frustration. You will be provided with a list of referral sources to contact after the interview if you feel any sense of discomfort during or after the process. The resources provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services to Latina immigrants, in the County of Los Angeles area.

The information you share with me will contribute to my development as a clinical social worker, as I plan to continue to work with immigrants upon completion of my degree. I hope that it is helpful for you to talk about your experiences in a safe and confidential manner. This conversation may also encourage other Latinas to share their stories. Also, participating in the study may contribute to a greater understanding of the experience of immigrants, a field that is important, but often not recognized. Your contributions will provide important information and education that may be helpful to professionals working with immigrant Latinas. There is no financial compensation for participating.

Your participation in this study will be strictly confidential. You will not be asked to provide your address, phone number or your family's identifying information. You will be given a number at the bottom of this form, which will correspond to your interview. The organization/agency, from which you were referred, will not be named in the study.

I will responsible with the language translation and with the collection of data including transcripts. All data; paper copies, audio recordings, and electronic information will be kept locked in personal files for three years, consistent with federal regulations. After the three year period has expired, all material will be destroyed. If any of your statements are included in the final project they will be carefully disguised. The data will be used for my thesis, and may be used for future presentations and publications.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You have the right to not answer any questions asked during the interview without any repercussions. If you choose to participate in the study you will be given this informed consent form, which includes your participant number. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time: before, during, or after the completion of the interview, until March 30, 2007, when the report will be written. If you should have questions or choose to withdraw form the study, please include your participant number, and contact:

Aurora Perales, BSW
(818) 359-1349
aperales@email.smith.edu

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORAMTION; THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTJUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIAPTION AND YOUR RIGHTS; AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIAPTE IN THE STUDY.

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date	Participant #
_____	_____	
Signature of Researcher	Date	

Please keep a copy of this form for your records so that you can contact me later as needed or to use the referral numbers.

Sincerely,

Aurora Perales BSW

Appendix C

Informed Consent – Spanish

Formulario de Consentimiento Informado

Estimado/a Participante,

Me llamo Aurora Perales, soy estudiante del programa de la Maestría de Trabajo Social de “Smith College School for Social Work” en Northampton, Massachusetts. Estoy conduciendo una investigación acerca de las estrategias que usan las Latinas para hacer frente y lidiar con la pérdida migratoria. Su perspectiva única es importante y valiosa para adelanta el desarrollo de las investigaciones sobre las experiencias de las emigrantes Latinas. Esta investigación está siendo conducida en cumplimiento de la tesis de la Maestría de “Smith College School for Social Work” y para posibles presentaciones futuras o publicaciones en esta área.

Habiéndose identificado como emigrante Latina, como voluntaria le pediré que comparta su experiencia personal acerca de la pérdida migratoria y que identifique las estrategias que Usted utilizo. Si decide ser voluntaria, le pediré que participe en una entrevista que le tomara aproximadamente una hora de su tiempo. Su entrevista será grabada usando grabación de audio. Le pediré que provea información demográfica y que conteste preguntas acerca de su experiencia. Al final de la entrevista Usted podrá elaborar en cualquier de las preguntas y/o hacer comentarios adicionales sobre el tema.

Ahí posibles riesgos o inquietudes asociadas con la participación en esta investigación, Se le pedirá que reflexione acerca de sus experiencias con la pérdida de migración, lo cual puede traerle memorias o sentimientos dolorosos como; estrés, tristeza, desesperanza, nostalgia, enojo o frustración. Por tal razón, se le dará una lista de servicios que puede consultar en caso de que se sienta molesta o mal durante o después del proceso. Todos los servicios son apropiados para inmigrantes Latinas que hablan español y que se encuentran en el área del Condado de Los Ángeles.

La información que comparta durante la entrevista, contribuirá a mi desarrollo profesional como Trabajadora Social Clínica, puesto que planeo continuar trabajando con emigrantes cuando termine mi carrera. Espero que le ayude hablar de su experiencia en forma confidencial y segura. Esta conversación puede animar a que otras Latinas también quieran compartir sus historias. Además su participación puede contribuir a un mejor entendimiento de las experiencias que tienen los emigrantes, un área importante, pero no muy bien reconocida. Su contribución proveerá valiosa información y educación para ayudar a los profesionales que trabajan con emigrantes Latinas. No hay compensación monetaria por participar en este proyecto.

Su participación en esta investigación será estrictamente confidencial. No se le solicitará que provea su dirección, numero de teléfono o información que pueda identifique a su

familia. Se le asignará un número que corresponde a su entrevista. Esta investigación no mencionará a la organización o agencia cual le refirió. Yo me haré responsable de la traducción del español y de la colección de la información incluyendo las transcripciones.

Todos los datos; copias, grabaciones de audio y medios electrónicos, serán archivados Después del periodo de tres años, todo el material será destruido. De incluirse cualquier declaración hecha por ustedes en el proyecto final, su confidencialidad será protegida. Los datos de esta investigación serán utilizados en mi tesis y posiblemente en presentaciones futuras o publicaciones.

Su participación en esta investigación es totalmente voluntaria. Usted tiene derecho de negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta sin repercusiones. Si Usted decide participar en esta investigación, se le proveerá el formulario de Conocimiento Informado, cual incluye su número de participante. También tiene el derecho de retirarse de la investigación antes, durante o después de la entrevista, hasta el 30 de marzo de 2007, cuando el reporte será redactado. Si usted tiene preguntas acerca del estudio o si desea retirarse del mismo, por favor provea su número de participante y contacte a esta investigadora:

Aurora Perales, BSW
(818) 359-1349
aperales@email.smith.edu

SU FIRMA ABAJO INDICA QUE HA LEÍDO Y COMPRENDIDO LA INFORMACIÓN EN ESTE FORMULARIO, QUE HA TENIDO LA OPORTUNIDAD DE FORMULAR PREGUNTAS ACERCA DE LA INVESTIGACION, DE SU PARTICIPACIÓN EN EL MISMO Y SOBRE SUS DERECHOS; Y QUE ESTÁ DE ACUERDO EN PARTICIPAR EN EL ESTUDIO.

Firma del Participante

Fecha

Participante #

Firma de la Investigadora

Fecha

Por favor conserva una copia de esta forma para tus registros personales. Gracias por Su participación.

Atentamente,

Aurora Perales, BSW

Appendix D:

Interview Guide

- 1) What is your present age?
- 2) What is your marital status?
- 3) Do you have children and if so how many?
- 4) What is your country of origin?
- 5) What is your cultural/ethnic group?
- 6) What is your current occupation?
- 7) What is your highest level of education?
- 8) Who do you live with now?
- 9) How long have you been in the USA?
- 10) How old were you when you immigrated to the country?
- 11) Who came with you to the USA?
- 12) Why did you migrate to the United States?
- 13) What/Whom did you leave behind in your country of origin?
- 14) What is your relationship like with your family members left behind in your country of origin?
- 15) What does the term “migration loss” mean to you?
- 16) Have you ever experienced migration loss?
- 17) If so, how did it affect you and/or your family? If not why not?
- 18) Do you think it made a difference that you are a woman, if so how?
- 19) What have you done/use to help you deal with your process of migration?
- 20) Can you identify any coping strategies that you have used to deal with migration loss?
- 21) Did you seek help during this time?
- 22) What was helpful for you/your family during the process of migration?
- 23) Can you identify any sources of strength for you and/or your family?
- 24) What support systems are available to you now?
- 25) Is there something positive you can identify in your experience of migration?

Appendix E

Interview Guide – Spanish Guía de Entrevista

- 1) ¿Cual es su edad presente?
- 2) ¿Cual es su estado civil?
- 3) ¿Tiene hijos/as y si es así, cuantos son?
- 4) ¿Cual es su país de origen?
- 5) ¿Cual es su grupo cultural/étnico?
- 6) ¿Cuál es su ocupación?
- 7) ¿Cual es su nivel más alto de educación?
- 8) ¿Con quien vive ahora?
- 9) ¿Cuanto tiempo ha estado en los USA?
- 10) ¿Que edad tenia cuando emigró a este país?
- 11) ¿Quién vino con Usted a los Estados Unidos?
- 12) ¿Por qué emigró a los Estados Unidos?
- 13) ¿Que o a quien dejo Usted en su país de origen?
- 14) ¿Como es su relación con sus familiares que se quedaron atrás en su país?
- 15) ¿Qué significa para Usted, el termino “pérdida migratoria”?
- 16) ¿Ha sentido alguna vez la pérdida migratoria?
- 17) Si es así, ¿Como le afecto a Usted y/o a su familia? Si no, ¿Por que no?
- 18) ¿Usted piensa que hizo alguna diferencia el echo de sea mujer, como?
- 19) ¿Qué a utilizo/que a echo para manejar el proceso de emigración?
- 20) ¿Puede identificar alguna estrategia que haya usado para hacer frente a la perdida migratoria?
- 21) ¿Buscó ayuda durante este tiempo?
- 22) ¿Que le ayudo a Usted/a su familia durante este proceso?
- 23) ¿Usted puede identificar sus fuentes de fortaleza?
- 24) ¿Qué sistemas de apoyo están disponibles para Usted ahora?
- 25) ¿Hay algo positivo en la experiencia migratoria?

Appendix F

Volunteer or Professional Transcriber's Assurance of Research Confidentiality

STATEMENT OF POLICY:

This thesis project is firmly committed to the principle that research confidentiality must be protected. This principle holds whether or not any specific guarantee of confidentiality was given by respondents at the time of the interview. When guarantees have been given, they may impose additional requirements which are to be adhered to strictly.

PROCEDURES FOR MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY:

1. All volunteer and professional transcribers for this project shall sign this assurance of confidentiality.
2. A volunteer, or professional transcriber, should be aware that the identity of participants in research studies is confidential information, as are identifying information about participants and individual responses to questions. Depending on the study, the organizations participating in the study, the geographical location of the study, the method of participant recruitment, the subject matter of the study, and the hypotheses being tested may also be confidential information. Specific research findings and conclusions are also usually confidential until they have been published or presented in public.

It is incumbent on volunteers and professional transcribers to treat information from and about research as privileged information, to be aware of what is confidential in regard to specific studies on which they work or about which they have knowledge, and to preserve the confidentiality of this information. Types of situations where confidentiality can often be compromised include conversations with friends and relatives, conversations with professional colleagues outside the project team, conversations with reporters and the media, and in the use of consultants for computer programs and data analysis.

3. Unless specifically instructed otherwise, a volunteer or professional transcriber upon encountering a respondent or information pertaining to a respondent that s/he knows personally, shall not disclose any knowledge of the respondent or any information pertaining to the respondent's testimony or his participation in this thesis project. In other words, volunteer and professional transcribers should not reveal any information or knowledge about or pertaining to a respondent's participation in this project.
4. Data containing personal identifiers shall be kept in a locked container or a locked room when not being used each working day in routine activities. Reasonable caution shall be exercised in limiting access to data to only those persons who are working on this

thesis project and who have been instructed in the applicable confidentiality requirements for the project.

5. The researcher for this project, Aurora Perales, shall be responsible for ensuring that all volunteer and professional transcribers involved in handling data are instructed in these procedures, have signed this pledge, and comply with these procedures throughout the duration of the project. At the end of the project, Aurora Perales, shall arrange for proper storage or disposition of data, in accordance with federal guidelines and Human Subjects Review Committee policies at the Smith College School for Social Work.

7. Aurora Perales must ensure that procedures are established in this study to inform each respondent of the authority for the study, the purpose and use of the study, the voluntary nature of the study (where applicable), and the effects on the respondents, if any, of not responding.

PLEDGE

I hereby certify that I have carefully read and will cooperate fully with the above procedures. I will maintain the confidentiality of confidential information from all studies with which I have involvement. I will not discuss, disclose, disseminate, or provide access to such information, except directly to the researcher, Aurora Perales, for this project. I understand that violation of this pledge is sufficient grounds for disciplinary action, including termination of professional or volunteer services with the project, and may make me subject to criminal or civil penalties. I give my personal pledge that I shall abide by this assurance of confidentiality.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Aurora Perales: _____ Date: _____

Appendix G

Referral Sources Lista de referencias - Spanish

The following is a list of referrals that you may want to contact should any issues arise as a result of participating in this study. Your insurance may also provide a list of providers.

La siguiente lista de referencias es para que Usted llame en caso de que resultara con alguna preocupación, debido a su participación en esta investigación. Su seguro medico también podría proveerle con una lista de proveedores de salud.

- Los Angeles County **211**
(Can refer you to Health and Human Services programs)
(Le pueden referir a Programas de Servicios Humanos y de Salud)

- Community Family Guidance Center (562) 924-5526
- UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute (310) 825-0250
- San Antonio Mental Health Services (323) 266-3230
- Hollywood Sunset Free Clinic (323) 660-2400 (Service/Intake)
- Commonwealth Counseling Center (323) 388-6711
- Bienvenidos Family Support Center (323) 728-9577 (Service/Intake)
- Enki Health - East LA Mental Health Pico Union (213) 480-1557
- Didi Hirsch CMHC Psychiatric Services Los Angeles (310) 751-1200
- L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center (323) 993-7400
- Bienestar Human Services (818) 908-3820
- Hathaway Children and Family Services (323) 257-960
- Latino Mental Health Center (310) 668-3112
- Los Angeles County Mental Health (323) 226-7085

LATINAS NEEDED AS PARTICIPANTS FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

Are you or someone you know a Latina immigrant?

Latinas are invited to participate in a research study to evaluate the coping strategies used in dealing with migration loss. Your participation is voluntary and will help the field of Social Work to understand how to better serve the Latino community.

The study is not paid and will include an interview for 1 hour. This is scheduled at your convenience. To participate you must be a woman 18 years old and over, self-identified as Latina who migrated from any Latin American country to the US for a minimum of one year. Participants must reside in the State of California and would need to be able to articulate their experiences with migration loss and to identify the coping strategies utilized.

This research study is being conducted by Aurora Perales, BSW in fulfillment of the Master's thesis at Smith College School for Social Work.

Your participation will be greatly appreciated!

If you would like further details and information, please call (818) 359-1349 or by email contact aperales@email.smith.edu

SE SOLICITAN LATINAS COMO PARTICIPANTES PARA UNA INVESTIGACION ESCOLAR

¿Es Usted una emigrante Latina o conoce a alguien quien lo sea?

Latinas están invitadas a participar en esta investigando escolar para evaluar las estrategias que usan para hacer frente y lidiar con la perdida migratoria. Su participación es voluntaria y ayudará al campo de Trabajo Social, a como mejor servir la comunidad Latina.

Su participación no será reembolsada e incluyera una entrevista por una hora a su conveniencia. Para participar deberá ser mujer de 18 años de edad o mas, que se auto-identifiquen como Latina y que hayan emigrado de un país Latino Americano a los Estados Unidos por un mínimo de un año. Las participantes deberán residir en el Estado de California y deberán poder articular sus experiencias con la perdida migratoria e identificar las estrategias que utilizaron para hacer frente.

Esta investigación será conducida por Aurora Perales, BSW en cumplimiento de la tesis de la Maestría de Smith College Escuela de Trabajo Social.

¡Su participación será muy apreciada!

Para más detalles e información, por favor llame al (818) 359-1349 o por Internet contacte a aperales@email.smith.edu