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Despite the large number of Latinx immigrant couples living in the United States (U.S), there is limited knowledge on their experiences and how counselors may best support them. Hosting 44.8 million immigrants, the U.S. is home to more immigrants than any other country in the world, 50% of whom are of Latinx origin (Budiman, 2020). Latinxs who immigrate to the U.S. face numerous stressors linked to deleterious mental health outcomes, including experiences with trauma (Vila & Pomeroy, 2020), acculturative stress (Cheng, 2022), discrimination (Bruzelius et al., 2019), and for some, challenges related to documentation (Giano, 2020; Rayburn et al, 2021). Simultaneously, culture-based values, such as *familismo* and the strong family support that comes along with it, have been found to act as protective factors for Latinx immigrants in the face of these stressors (Alegría et al., 2007; Ayón et al., 2010; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). While there have been efforts to better understand the role of family support on Latinx mental health, much less is known about Latinx immigrant couples (Falconier et al., 2013). Learning more about this population from a relational perspective can be an important area of inquiry as most Latinx immigrants are in a committed relationship (Budiman et al., 2020), making it exceedingly likely that counselors will work with these couples.

The purpose of this study was to address the knowledge gap on Latinx immigrant couples and their strengths by exploring the following two research questions: (1) What are Latinx immigrant couples' relationship experiences after arriving to the U.S.? and (2) What are Latinx couples' perceptions of how their relationship positively influenced their immigration experience after arriving to the U.S.? Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was deployed as the

methodology to explore the proposed research questions, while Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) served as the theoretical framework.

Data from 16 semi-structured interviews conducted with eight Latinx immigrant couples was analyzed to gather study results. A total of seven themes and 23 subthemes emerged from the analyzed data. These seven themes included: (1) *Family is important*, (2) *Varied and meaningful motivations to immigrate*, (3) *Immigration brings challenges for the individual and the couple*, (4) *Experiences of trauma and acute stress*, (5) *“Nunca sabes de lo que estas hecho hasta que inmigras”*: *The use of resources, tools, and strategies for success*, (6) *“En la unión esta la fuerza”*: *The relationship as a resource to face challenges*, and (7) *“Valió la pena”*: *The benefits of immigrating*. The themes, which described the challenges and stressors faced by the couples, as well as their strengths and resilience, provide with valuable information that may inform the development of effective assessment, treatment planning, and intervention tools. As a result, study findings also have implications for how counselor educators train students on the provision of multiculturally competent services to the large Latinx immigrant community living in the U.S.

THE RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF LATINX IMMIGRANT COUPLES
LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES: AN INTERPRETATIVE
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Gabriel. None of this would've been possible without your unwavering confidence in me. I love you.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

Despite the large number of Latinx immigrant couples living in the United States (U.S), there is limited knowledge on their experiences and how counselors may best support them. The U.S. hosts more immigrants than any other country, with one fifth of all the world's immigrants residing here (Budiman, 2020). It is estimated that close to 50% of the 44.8 million immigrants living in U.S. are of Latinx origin (Budiman et al., 2020). For these communities the process of immigration can be a significant life changing event with the capability of impacting family systems, including couple relationships (Falconier et al., 2013; Negy et al., 2010; Helms et al., 2014). Focusing on the couple relationships of Latinx immigrants is of particular importance given this population exhibits higher marital rates than U.S.-born populations. Latinx immigrants are more likely to be married when compared to U.S. born adults, whose marriage rates approximate 47.9% (Budiman et al., 2020). Reports indicate that 61.4% of Mexican immigrants, 52.2% of Central American immigrants, and 58.6% of South American immigrants are married (Budiman et al., 2020). These numbers suggest that, even without accounting for other type of intimate partner relationships (e.g., cohabitating couples), the majority of Latinx immigrant adults are in a committed relationship.

Surprisingly, there is a limited amount of research dedicated to learning more about Latinx immigrant couples and their experiences. Among the small body of existing research, most studies are of a quantitative nature (Alvarez et al., 2020; Austin & Falconier, 2013; Curandi, 2009; Falconier et al., 2013; Flores, 2004; Helms et al., 2014; Negy et al., 2010) and seem to primarily focus on intimate partner violence (Alvarez et al., 2020; Curandi, 2009), acculturation and acculturative stress (Flores, 2004, Negy et al., 2010), as well as other challenges present in this community (Falconier et al., 2013; Helms et al., 2014). Much less is

known about Latinx couples' strengths or about their relational experiences through the immigration process. This lack of knowledge presents challenges for the development and provision of culturally relevant interventions and clinical services. The large number of Latinx immigrant couples living in the U.S., combined with increases in Latinx populations across all 50 states over the last 11 years (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2021), necessitate for counselors to have increased access to knowledge about Latinx immigrant couples in order to best support them.

Stressors and Challenges

Latinxs who immigrate to the U.S. face numerous stressors that have been linked to deleterious mental health outcomes. These stressors include potential experiences with pre-migration, in-transit migration, and post-migration trauma (de Arellano et al., 2018; Rojas-Flores et al., 2017; Vila & Pomeroy, 2020), grief and loss of the social networks and family members who remain in their country of origin (Galvan et al., 2022; Gonzalez et al., 2021; Solheim et al., 2016), as well as acculturation and acculturative stress (Caplan, 2007; Cheng, 2022; Torres, 2010). Latinx immigrants often also navigate societal-level challenges, such as experiences with daily and policy-level discrimination (Araújo Dawson, 2009; Bruzelius et al., 2019; Cook et al., 2009), and for some, challenges related to documentation status (Giano, 2020; Raffaelli, & Wiley, 2013; Rayburn et al, 2021).

Immigration-related challenges may be exacerbated by limited access to important healthcare, educational, and economic resources (Institute for Latino Studies, 2008; Pérez-Escamilla, 2010; Quandt et al., 2021). For example, Latinx immigrant families are disproportionately likely to be uninsured, creating disparities in access to healthcare services, including mental health services (Whitener et al., 2021). Lack of accessibility to mental health

services are of distinct concern because many of these societal and individual-level stressors (e.g., discrimination, documentation status, trauma) have been linked to poor mental health outcomes.

Experiences with daily discrimination and policy-level systemic discrimination have been shown to have a negative relationship with several mental health outcomes for Latinx immigrants living in the U.S. (Bruzelius & Baum, 2019; Cariello et al., 2022; Cano, 2020). In a sample of 2,222 Latinx immigrant adults, Cano (2020) found that perceived ethnic discrimination was associated with alcohol use disorder for men. Similarly, Cariello and colleagues (2022) found a higher frequency of discriminatory and racist occurrences was linked to depression in a sample of 204 Latinx immigrants. Additionally, Bruzelius and Baum (2019) found a significant increase in self-rated poor mental health days following increases in arrest rates due to changes in immigration policies.

Less is known about how discrimination impacts intimate partner relationships for immigrant Latinx couples, who may be more vulnerable to the impacts of discrimination (Trail et al., 2012). In studies sampling African American, as well as Latinx immigrant and U.S.-born couples, increased experiences with discrimination were associated with decreased marital satisfaction and marital quality (Lincoln & Chae, 2010; Trail et al., 2012), suggesting a link between discrimination and couple functioning. Although these findings should be interpreted cautiously due to their correlational nature, they point to discrimination as a harmful source of stress for minoritized communities, such as Latinx immigrants.

These discrimination-related stressors may also be particularly poignant for undocumented Latinx immigrants, who are often the intended target of discriminatory practices and policies. There is a large variety of documentation statuses for Latinx immigrants living in

the U.S. For example, immigrants may be permanent residents or citizens, asylum-seekers, refugees, have temporary work permits, or be undocumented. There are approximately 10.5 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. (Budiman, 2020), with 70% being from a Latin American country of origin (Passel & Cohn, 2019). Undocumented Latinx immigrants face increased risks for negative mental health outcomes due to the high-level of stress and limited resource accessibility associated with their status (Galvan et al., 2021). Latinx undocumented populations have been found to be at increased risk for major depressive disorder, anxiety, and PTSD (Garcini et al., 2017; Ornelas & Perreira, 2011; Rasmussen et al., 2007). It is important to note that these findings are difficult to generalize to the Latinx undocumented population more broadly due to the study samples being primarily composed of Mexican-origin immigrants. However, the increased risks found in the sampled undocumented populations may be the result of a combination of conditions (e.g., such as poverty, experiences with discrimination, and history of trauma) that are common among the general undocumented population in the U.S.

Traumatic experiences are another important stressor to consider when understanding the mental health needs of both documented and undocumented Latinx immigrants. Researchers have found a high incidence of trauma in Latinx immigrant populations, with rates as high as 75% to 83% (Garcini et al., 2017; Kaltman et al., 2010). Latinx immigrants may experience trauma prior to their arrival to the U.S. (i.e., pre-migration trauma), trauma during their immigration journey (i.e., in-transit trauma), and trauma after their arrival to the U.S. (i.e., post-migration trauma). Pre-migration trauma can include experiences of gang violence, physical or sexual assault, political oppression, domestic violence, and gender-based violence (Li, 2016; Peña-Sullivan, 2020). In a sample of 234 Central American immigrants, Keller and colleagues (2017) found that 60% of immigrants cited gang-related violence as the primary reason for

immigrating to the U.S. Immigrants, however, can also suffer through additional traumatic experiences in their journey to the U.S. In-transit trauma can include experiences of physical/sexual abuse and assault, witnessing violent acts, while simultaneously experiencing grief and loss of their family and friend relationships in their country of origin (de Arrellano et al., 2018; Monico et al., 2019). Post-migration trauma can include being detained at the U.S. Mexico border (Franco, 2018), family separations resulting from detention (Monico et al., 2019), or family separations resulting from deportation (Lovato et al., 2018).

Although traumatic experiences don't ubiquitously equate to psychiatric disorders, they have often been linked with greater risks of negative mental health outcomes in Latinx immigrant populations, including increased incidence of mood disorders (e.g., depression), anxiety disorders, PTSD, and general psychological distress (Kim, 2016; Rasmussen et al., 2007; Sangalang, 2019). Surviving traumatic events has also been linked to an increased likelihood of experiencing acculturative stress (Li, 2016), which is discussed in greater detail below.

Generally, however, the research on the traumatic experiences of Latinx immigrants has focused on individual mental health outcomes, with little exploration of the impact of traumatic experiences on couple relationships. In addition, there has been limited exploration of how couple relationships may buffer the negative impact of trauma on mental health. This is an important area of exploration as couple relationships have been shown to act as protective factor against psychological distress for Latinx immigrant couples (Darghouth et al., 2015), suggesting the existence of a relational capital that may be useful in facing immigration-related challenges.

Acculturation

Acculturation is a widely studied component of the immigration experience, with researchers exploring this concept as early as 1918 (Rudmin, 2016). Acculturation refers to,

“those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). Therefore, acculturation is a normal and expected part of the immigration process. Due to its long-standing popularity as a field of study, a multitude of acculturation models have been developed to explain this process (Rudmin, 2003). But perhaps the most popular is Berry et al.’s, (1987) model, which recognizes that an immigrant’s acquisition of the host culture does not necessarily equate abandonment of their heritage culture. Under this model, acculturating individuals are categorized based on their level of endorsement of the host culture and their level of retention of their culture of origin, yielding four possible acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry et al., 1987). For example, an individual that both endorses their new host culture and retains their culture of origin would fall under the integration acculturation strategy (often referred to as biculturalism; Rudmin, 2003). Although Berry’s model has been widely used by researchers since its inception, it has also been subject to critique due to its categorical nature, which ignores the gradient and fluid nature of acculturation, and for taking a “one size fits all” approach that doesn’t explicitly address contextualizing factors for immigration (e.g., type of immigrant, age, conditions, and attitudes in host country) (Rudmin, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2010). The emergence of new and mixed findings on acculturation has prompted scholars to argue for the need of a more complex understanding of acculturation or for an expansion of immigration research beyond acculturation (Bostean & Gillespie, 2008; Rudmin, 2003).

Acculturation may impact Latinx individual wellbeing through eliciting acculturation gaps within family systems, as well as experiences with acculturative stress. Acculturation gaps occur when different family members (e.g., parents and children, couples) have differing degrees

of adaptation to U.S. values, attitudes, and behaviors (Phinney et al., 2000). Acculturation gaps have been linked to family conflict, as well as negative internalizing and externalizing mental health outcomes for Latinx youth (Schofield et al., 2008), but are rarely examined in the context of couple relationships. In one study that did examine acculturation gaps in Latinx couples with a sample of 348 Mexican origin spouses, similarities in cultural orientation (e.g., preference for the same language) between husbands and wives was linked to higher marital quality (Cruz et al., 2014). Still, to better understand acculturation gaps in couple relationships, more in-depth and qualitative information is needed about the experiences of these couples as they individually and relationally adjust through the acculturation process.

For some, the process of acculturation may also result in the experience of acculturative stress, which can include declines in mental health, feelings of marginalization, and identity confusion (Berry et al., 1987). A substantial amount of research has linked acculturative stress to poor mental health outcomes in Latinx immigrants (Capielo Rosario & Dillon, 2020; Sirin et al., 2013; Torres, 2010). For example, in a sample of 148 Latinx adults, 79 of whom were immigrants, Torres (2010) found acculturative stress to be positively associated with depression. Similarly, in a sample of 113 Puerto Rican adults, Capielo Rosario and Dillon (2020) also found a positive relationship between acculturative stress and depression. Acculturative stress can be impacted by various environmental, interpersonal/social, and societal conditions such as language barriers, loss of social status, and experiences with discrimination (Caplan, 2007). Lueck and Wilson (2011) found that discrimination experiences predicted higher acculturative stress, while English language proficiency, voluntary immigration, and social networks predicted lower acculturative stress. Acculturative stress has also been found to predict higher levels of family conflict (Bostean & Gillespie, 2018). While acculturative stress, and many other of the

unique stressors discussed above, have been linked to negative mental health consequences for Latinx immigrants (Capielo Rosario & Dillon, 2020; Torres, 2010), it is important to note inconsistent findings regarding the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among Latinx immigrants, with some researchers finding evidence of improved mental health and physical health outcomes for Latinx immigrant populations (Alegría, 2008; Cook et al., 2009).

The Immigrant Paradox

Although higher risks of mental health concerns have been documented among some Latinx immigrant subgroups (e.g., undocumented immigrants; Garcini et al., 2017), Latinx immigrants often exhibit lower rates of psychiatric disorders when compared to the general U.S.-born Latinx and non-Latinx populations (Alegría, 2008; Cook et al., 2009). This phenomenon, where foreign nativity appears to act as a protective factor against psychiatric disorders, is referred to as the *immigrant paradox* (Alegría, 2008). The immigrant paradox has been widely documented in both physical health and mental health outcomes for Latinx immigrants living in the U.S (Alcántara et al., 2017). In the mental health field, Latinx immigrants have been found to have decreased rates of alcohol and drug use (Cobb et al., 2020; Mancini et al., 2015), decreased rates of depression and anxiety (Hernandez et al., 2022), and reduced risks for other psychiatric disorders. These improved outcomes hold even when comparing Latinx immigrants to US-born Latinx individuals, although results do seem to vary based on Latinx immigrant subgroups (e.g., based on nationality; Alegría et al., 2008).

Researchers have proposed various explanations for the immigrant paradox. Some have noted methodological limitations (e.g., aggregation of Latinx immigrants into single samples despite significant within-group variabilities [Alegría et al., 2008; Cooper et al., 2020]), while others cite the *salmon bias hypothesis* as a possible explanation for the paradox. Researchers

utilize the salmon bias hypothesis to theorize that mentally and physically ill immigrants are more likely to return to their home country and therefore positively skew health outcome data for immigrants who remain in the U.S. (Cook et al., 2009). Researchers testing the salmon bias hypothesis, however, have yielded mixed or unsupportive findings, as health does not seem to predict likelihood of return migration (Diaz et al., 2016). In addition, the immigrant paradox has been documented in immigrant communities where return migration is not possible (e.g., Cuban immigrants; Abraído-Lanza, 1999), further diminishing the salmon bias hypothesis as a viable explanation. Another hypothesis for the immigrant paradox is that immigrants' connection to their heritage cultures enables a host of protective factors, such as the maintenance of ethnic identity and access to sources of social support (Cooper et al., 2020). This is because social support, and in particular family support, seems to ameliorate negative mental health outcomes for Latinx immigrants (Alegría et al., 2007; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). However, despite marriage/cohabitating statuses being linked to higher social support for Latinx immigrants (Held, 2018), social support has been primarily explored as a broad construct or within general family relationships (Alegría et al., 2007; Bostean & Gillespie 2018; Lee et al., 2020) with little emphasis on couple relationships specifically.

The Importance of Family Support

For Latinx immigrants, higher social support has been linked to lower levels of depression (Cooper et al., 2020), lower levels of loneliness (Lee et al., 2020), and better self-reported mental health (Alegría et al., 2007). Family support appears to be a particularly impactful source of social support (Alegría et al., 2007; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). When testing the association between family conflict, friend support, and family support with self-rated mental and physical health, family support had a significant negative relationship with self-

reported mental health illness, even while controlling for education level, income level, and English language proficiency (Alegría et al., 2007). Inversely, increases in family conflict, which rise with exposure to acculturative stress (Bostean & Gillespie, 2018), were found to have a significant positive relationship with poorer self-rated mental health (Alegría et al., 2007). Cook et al. (2009) reported similar findings indicating that increases in family conflict have a positive association with psychiatric disorders. These findings may be related to the Latinx cultural value of *familismo* (i.e., strong family attachments) (Hurtado-de-Mendoza, 2014), and suggest family relationships are key when considering Latinx mental health.

Familismo is defined as a “strong identification and attachment with their families (nuclear and extended) and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the same family” (Triandis et al., 1982 as cited in Sabogal et al., 1987) and is tied to a sense of duty towards family members (Dillon et al, 2013). Familismo has been theorized to be composed of attitudinal and behavioral components (Sabogal et al., 1987) and involves social, emotional, and financial support within family members (Diaz & Niño, 2019). Familismo acts as a protective factor against alcohol abuse (Dillon et al., 2013) and depressive symptoms (Ayón et al., 2010) for Latinx immigrant young adults, but there is a dearth of research on how it might impact couple relationships.

Latinx Immigrant Couples

Latinx immigrant couples have been primarily studied through an exploration of the challenges and stressors they face. Much of the body of research on Latinx immigrant couples is dedicated to investigating intimate partner violence (IPV; Alvarez et al., 2020). In their meta-analysis of 21 studies, Alvarez et al. (2020) found a positive but small correlation between acculturation and self-reported IPV. However, there are mixed findings on the

prevalence of IPV among Latinx populations (Ingram, 2007). When controlling for socioeconomic status and education level, IPV does not seem to occur at a higher rate with Latinx populations (Ingram, 2007; Neff et al., 1995), and rates seem to be lower among Latinx immigrant populations (Aldarondo et al., 2002; Ingram, 2007). Focusing primarily on IPV runs the risk of decontextualizing the experiences of Latinx immigrant couples from the societal-level stressors they face, such as discrimination and stigma, and reduced access to education, health, and economic resources. This shifts the focus away from social inequities and advocacy needs towards deficit-based perspectives that imply cultural deficiencies in the Latinx community. In this way, a sole focus on IPV also neglects to explore the cultural capital and relational strengths that may be present for Latinx couples undergoing immigration.

Generally, immigration stress seems to be negatively correlated to marital satisfaction for Latinx immigrant couples (Falconier et al., 2013). A significant portion of the research on Latinx immigrant couples is also dedicated to better understanding the impact of one facet of immigration stress: acculturation and acculturative stress (Curandi, 2009; Flores et al., 2004; Grzywacz et al., 2009; Le Sage & Townsend, 2004; Negy et al., 2010). Higher degree of acculturation towards U.S. culture and acculturative stress, seem to be positively correlated to higher levels of conflict and marital distress for Latinx couples (Flores et al., 2004; Negy et al., 2007; Negy et al., 2010). However, this body of research is limited by a lack of consideration on the role of socioeconomic status (e.g., employment, access to resources, education) and other contextualizing factors (e.g., stigma and discrimination) that may play a role in the link between acculturation and marital quality for Latinx immigrant couples. It is also important to note that many of these studies sample Mexican-origin couples only, leaving a knowledge gap on how acculturation and acculturative stress may impact Latinx couples of other nationalities.

Therefore, using a qualitative inquiry with a more diverse sample, could provide researchers with a helpful avenue to learn more on how adjustment to U.S. culture impacts Latinx couple relationships. Such research could also support the identification of important contextualizing factors that influence the immigration experience from the couples' perspective.

As mentioned earlier, very few researchers have explored the potential strengths present within Latinx immigrant couple relationships. Those who have, have found encouraging evidence for the existence of protective factors within these relationships. Austin and Falconier (2013), for example, found that higher levels of spirituality had a negative effect on the psychological aggression of partners and a positive effect on supportive dyadic coping. In another study, Falconier and colleagues (2013) used an Actor-Partner Independence Model (APIM) to analyze the relationship between immigration stress and relationship satisfaction, while looking at dyadic coping as a moderator for this relationship. They found that supportive dyadic coping can attenuate the negative impacts of immigration stress on relationship satisfaction for Latina women, but not for men. These studies suggest the existence of some helpful resources within Latinx couple relationships. However, both studies exploring these potential protective factors in Latinx immigrant couples were quantitative designs, leaving room for additional exploration on how immigration-related experiences influence Latinx immigrant couples' relationships and how Latinx couples perceive their relationships in the context of immigration.

Relational Cultural Theory

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) will serve as the theoretical framework for this study. RCT, which has roots in feminist theory, was developed in the late 1970s primarily through the work of psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller (Jordan, 2017). Miller highlighted how psychodynamic

theory's emphasis on a separate-self misunderstood the more relational experiences of women (Jordan, 2017). Since then, RCT has evolved to recognize the importance of growth-fostering relationships in the attainment of personal wellbeing for *all* people (Jordan, 2017). Using RCT as a framework to study the experiences of Latinx immigrant couples may prove particularly useful when considering that couple relationships may influence and be influenced by the experience of a phenomenon such as immigration.

RCT's foundational tenets include the following: (1) "People grow through and towards relationship throughout the lifespan"; (2) "Movement towards mutuality rather than separation characterizes mature functioning"; (3) "Relationship differentiation and elaboration characterize growth"; (4) "Mutual empowerment are at the core of growth fostering relationships"; (5) "Authenticity is necessary for real engagement and full participation in growth fostering-relationships"; (6) "In growth fostering relationships, all people contribute and grow or benefit. Development is not a one-way street"; and (7) "One of the goals of development from a relational perspective is the development of increased relational competence and capacities over the lifespan" (Jordan, 2017). These core tenets reflect a movement away from the dominant culture values of independence, individualism, and competition and towards values that are more congruent with Latinx cultural beliefs, such as collaboration, interdependence, and collectivism (Jordan, 2017). Despite this overlap in Latinx cultural values and RCT tenets, research on RCT has primarily been used with samples of White women (Lenz, 2016), leaving a knowledge gap on the theory's applicability with minoritized communities.

RCT theorists believe that relationships in which individuals practice mutual empowerment, mutual empathy, and relational authenticity will produce growth fostering relationships characterized by *The Five Good Things*. The Five Good Things include: (1) a sense

of zest (i.e., a sense of invigoration and energy), (2) an increased sense of self-worth, (3) clarity (i.e., a better understanding of yourself, your partner, and your relationship), (4) productivity, and finally (5) an increased desire for more connection (Jordan, 2017). These five components are essential in growth-fostering relationships, even as partners move through connection and disconnection (Jordan, 2017). Latinx couples undergoing the process of immigration and its related stressors may face challenges and successes that both prompt moments of connection and disconnection that they must work through. Learning more about the relational experiences of these couples as they undergo immigration-related changes can potentially inform researchers and counselors on the relevance of The Five Good Things in Latinx immigrant couple relationships.

RCT provides a useful framework for understanding the experiences of Latinx immigrant couples through the application of various key concepts. First, the centralization of relationships and interdependence is highly congruent with any study seeking to understand couple dynamics. Regardless of ethnicity, RCT posits that growth-fostering relationships are the primary tool through which people can grow and attain wellbeing (Jordan 2017). Given that partners in a couple, by definition, are in relationship with each other, RCT concepts, such as The Five Good Things, may assist in contouring present relationship dynamics. For example, a Latinx immigrant may feel energized (i.e., a sense of zest) in their English-language acquisition process due to the support and encouragement from their partner (i.e., mutual empowerment), therefore attenuating a significant immigration-related stressor. Learning more, from the couples, about how their relationship changes and is changed by the immigration process, as well as examining the applicability of RCT to explain these changes, could assist in the identification of language to better define these experiences and in the development of interventions.

Second, RCT theorists have continuously ensured that the role of culture and society are acknowledged when considering how people show up in their relationships. RCT theorists posit that systems of oppression create and maintain categories of gender, race, class, etc., through the propagation of *controlling images*. Controlling images as false and stereotypical notions about marginalized groups that ultimately impact how members of that group are perceived (e.g., stereotypes about black women as “mammies” or “jezebel”; Hill Collins, 2009). Controlling images impact minority group members’ *relational images* (i.e., inner constructions about how we believe we can relate to others; Eldridge et al, 2013), further support isolation, and entrench people in the *central relational paradox* (Stiver et al., 2013). The central relational paradox refers to keeping important aspects of the self out of relationships for fear of what might happen if attempting to fully connect because those parts of the self have been previously understood to be unacceptable or dangerous (Baker Miller, 2013). For foreign-born and U.S.-born Latinxs living in the U.S., stereotypes held by the host community (e.g., Latinxs as criminals, uneducated, or unskilled; Harris et al., 2020, pp. 132 – 137) are examples of controlling images that may impact the experiences of Latinx immigrant couples. Other controlling images that could impact the relational images of Latinx immigrant couples is the representation of these couples as particularly burdened with IPV and machismo. RCT theorists note that such exposure to societal oppression can contribute to personal disconnection (Duffey & Trepal, 2016). Consequently, it is important that researchers don’t contribute to the creation and dissemination of controlling images by ensuring they design studies that allow Latinx immigrant couples the space to define themselves and their experiences, as well as explore strengths present in this population.

Third, RCT may be a particularly useful framework for exploring Latinx experiences due to an extensive overlap between RCT core tenets and various Latinx cultural values. Although not a monolith, Latinx communities have been generally regarded as having a collectivistic orientation (Ojeda et al., 2011), which, much like RCT components, prioritizes community, collaboration, and interdependence. Moreover, specific cultural values, such as *familismo*, *personalismo* (i.e., the prioritization of interpersonal engagement and connection; Ojeda et al., 2011), and *confianza* (mutual trust, confidence, and commitment; Dyrness, 2007) further highlight that for Latinx communities, authentic and mutual connections with others are of extreme importance.

Despite the strong applicability potential for the use of RCT with the Latinx immigrant population, there are also some noteworthy critiques of RCT that must be taken into consideration. Although RCT has been in existence for over 30 years, researchers have noted that there is still a need for more robust empirical support confirming the theory and its tenets (Lenz, 2016). Lenz (2016) notes several limitations in the existing body of research investigating the applicability of RCT, including a lack of experimental and longitudinal research designs, as well as a lack of diversity in the samples of RCT studies (with most of the participants being White women). Although these limitations speak to the clinical applicability of RCT, they may also explain the lack of literature addressing the use of RCT as a theoretical framework to understand the experiences of Latinx populations. This study, therefore, would be a novel contribution to the research on RCT with minoritized communities.

Purpose of the Study

Researchers exploring Latinx immigration have primarily focused on individual experiences and outcomes (Falconier et al., 2013), with much of the literature emphasizing

acculturation. The limited body of research that is dedicated to couples tends to focus on deficits, such as IPV and acculturative stress (Alvarez et al., 2020; Helms et al., 2014; Falconier et al., 2013). Considering that the majority of adult Latinx immigrants are in an intimate partner relationship (Budiman et al., 2020), and that family support is a promising protective factor for immigration-related stress in Latinx-origin individuals (Alegría et al., 2007; Cooper et al., 2020), learning more about the relational experiences of Latinx couples as they navigate immigration could address an important gap in the current body of literature.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relational experiences of Latinx immigrant couples after their arrival to the U.S., as well as to learn more about how these couples perceive their relationship as an asset for the immigration experience. Given previous findings noting the importance of family support for Latinx immigrants (Alegría et al., 2007), I seek to use an RCT framework to better understand how couple relationships may impact the immigration process and how the immigration process may impact couple relationships in the Latinx population living in the U.S.

Research Questions

In this study, I seek to explore the following two research questions:

1. What are Latinx immigrant couples' relationship experiences after arrival to the U.S.?
2. What are Latinx couples' perceptions of how their relationship positively influenced their immigration experience after arriving to the U.S.?

Significance of the Study

Findings from this study may be used to clarify the pathways through which social support, in the form of couple relationships, impacts how Latinx immigrants navigate different dimensions of their immigration experiences. In addition, findings may illuminate if and how

Latinx immigrant couples believe their immigration experiences impact their relationship. This information may prove valuable in the development of culturally sensitive clinical interventions and may have implications for counselor training. For example, if study findings suggest that the expression of mutual empathy is a helpful element for couples undergoing stressors related to immigration (e.g., language acquisition, discrimination), then this may have a bearing on how to engage in the assessment, conceptualization, treatment planning, and intervention phases of counseling. In addition, the strengths and struggles identified by couples in this study may provide future directions for researchers interested in exploring the impact of immigration on couples and potential moderating and mediating factors. Results from this study may also help inform advocacy strategies through the identification of systemic stressors that impact Latinx immigrant couple relationships. Lastly, study findings may have implications for how counselor educators teach counselors-in-training about providing services to the large Latinx immigrant community living in the U.S. from a multiculturally competent perspective.

Definition of Terms

Latinx immigrants: Defined as anyone who immigrated to the United States as an adult from a primarily Spanish-speaking Latin American country.

Couples: Defined as two adults in a heterosexual or same sex committed relationship. Inclusion criteria for this study will require that participating couples have been in their relationship for three more years and that each partner is a Latinx immigrant.

Mutual empathy: Refers to as “openness to being affected by and affecting another person” (Jordan, 2012). Mutual empathy requires for all parties to engage each other with respect and a capacity for connection (Jordan, 2012).

Mutual empowerment: Refers to the idea that all people in the relationship have the capability of impacting their experience and their relationship (Hartling, 2013)

Relational authenticity: Refers to a more complex process, in which we honest while still assessing and considering the impact of our truths on the other and where we respect and honor the needs of the relationship. In RCT, authenticity is therefore distinguished from the simplistic notion of being totally honest without regard for how that might impact the other person or the relationship (Jordan, 2013).

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The large number of Latinx immigrants living in the United States (U.S.) requires that counselors be well equipped in supporting the individuals, couples, and families within this community. With over 61 million people - about 18% of the general population - Latinxs are the second largest ethnic/racial group in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Approximately 33% of this sizable Latinx population are immigrants (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019), with nearly 50% of all immigrants living in the U.S., approximately 22 million people, being of Latinx origin (Budiman et al., 2020). The large number of Latinx immigrants in the U.S. has prompted efforts to better understand the mental health of this community and the factors that impact it. For example, research has been dedicated to learning about the prevalence of psychiatric disorders, the impact of acculturation, experiences of trauma, discrimination, and more (e.g., Alegría et al., 2008; Sangalang et al., 2019; Yoon et al., 2020). The family dynamics of Latinx immigrants have also been emphasized in the research (e.g., Alegría et al., 2007; Bostean Gillespie, 2018; Buckingham & Brodsky, 2015; Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2016), justifiably so, given the Latinx cultural value of *familismo*, which prioritizes family connections and support. Interestingly, less research has been dedicated to understanding the experiences of Latinx immigrant couples (Falconier et al., 2013).

Learning more about Latinx immigrant couples can be an important area of inquiry because, like most foreign-born populations, Latinx immigrants have higher marital rates than U.S.-born populations (Mayol-Garcia & Gurrentz, 2021). In their Pew Research Center report, Budiman and colleagues (2020) noted that while U.S. born populations' marriage rates are approximately 48%, Mexican, Central American, and South American immigrants had marriage

rates of 61.4%, 52.2%, and 58.6% respectively. These numbers, however, do not fully account for all Latinx immigrant couples living in the U.S., as they exclude non-marital intimate partner relationships (e.g., cohabitating couples). As such, even without the inclusion of all types of relationships, the existing data shows that most Latinx immigrants living in the U.S. are in a committed relationship, increasing the likelihood that counselors will be called to provide services to these couples.

The knowledge gap on Latinx immigrant couples presents challenges for counselors hoping to provide culturally sensitive services to this population. Researchers studying Latinx immigrant couples have primarily focused on challenges and deficits, such as intimate partner violence (Alvarez et al., 2020; Curandi, 2009) and acculturative stress (Flores, 2004, Negy et al., 2010). In addition, much of this research has been conducted using quantitative methodologies (Alvarez et al., 2020; Austin & Falconier, 2013; Curandi, 2009; Falconier et al., 2013; Flores, 2004; Helms et al., 2014; Negy et al., 2010), which are helpful when seeking to generalize findings, but less conducive to understanding people's nuanced lived experiences. In-depth information on how the lifelong immigration process impacts the relationships Latinx couples can prove valuable in the development of effective assessment, treatment planning, and intervention tools. Similarly, information on how couples use their relationship resources to navigate immigration-related changes can inform counselors on existing resilience and protective factors, which can then be leveraged to attain treatment goals and improve mental health outcomes. For example, if dyadic support is described by Latinx immigrants as integral for their ability to cope immigration-related stressors (e.g., discrimination), then a counselor's work would be enhanced by assessing, leveraging, and/or working with clients to strengthen this type of couple support.

An emphasis on strengths can also prove to be helpful in combating deficit-based perspectives that further alienate Latinx immigrant communities from mental health services. Latinx immigrants already face extensive barriers to mental health service accessibility, including lack of insurance, language barriers, economic restrictions, and documentation status (Brides et al., 2012; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2011) For these reasons, it is critical that Latinx immigrants who do access mental health services are encountered with culturally-competent clinicians, who actively avoid deficit-based approaches that diminish the cultural wealth in their community. In other words, recognizing the resilience factors present in the Latinx immigrant community, such as strong familial relationships, may be a helpful avenue to craft more culturally responsive practices that support service accessibility. These efforts are of importance not just due to the high number of Latinx immigrants living in the U.S., but also due to some of the unique stressors and challenges they face.

The Latinx Immigrant Experience

Immigration is life-long process that requires cultural, socioeconomic, and psychological adjustments (Segal et al., 2009). As a result, it can be a significant life event with the power to impact individual wellbeing (Cook, 2009), as well as family and couple relationships (Cook, 2009; Falconier et al., 2013; Negy et al., 2010; Helms et al., 2014). The experiences of Latinx immigrants vary widely depending on the individual characteristics of each person and the socioeconomic contexts they experience in their country of origin and in the U.S. (Segal et al., 2009). For example, the social, political, and economic contexts of the U.S. at any given moment (e.g., immigration policies, societal attitudes towards immigrants, available assistance) can impact an immigrants' experience (Philbin, 2018). In addition, an immigrant's race (Hersch, 2011; Perkins et al., 2014), socioeconomic status (Leong et al., 2014; Mahin, 2016), and

immigration conditions (e.g., voluntary vs. forced immigration; Segal et al., 2009) can also impact their transition to their host country, making each immigrant's experience rather unique. It is helpful, then, that counselors and researchers be aware of the uniqueness of each story when working with Latinx immigrant communities, while simultaneously being knowledgeable of some common themes and challenges faced by this population. Many Latinx immigrants contend with acculturation (e.g., the acquisition of the English language), grief and loss for who/what was left behind in their country of origin, and the necessity to quickly learn and integrate themselves into their new environment (e.g., entering the workforce, enrolling their children in school).

Despite the many challenges associated with immigration, a sizable number of Latinx people embark on this journey. The motivation to immigrate is influenced by various “push” and “pull” factors (Segal et al., 2009). Push factors often entail evading risks, and can include poor socioeconomic or political conditions in an immigrant's country of origin, such as community violence, political persecution, extreme poverty, natural disasters, etc. (Donato & Massey, 2016; Segal et al., 2009). Pull factors are generally related to seeking opportunities, and can include reasons such as family reunification, educational advancement, economic opportunities, etc. (Donato & Massey, 2016; Segal et al., 2009) For some, like many refugees and asylum-seekers, immigration is a matter of survival, while for others, like for some voluntary immigrants, immigration is a matter of seeking improved opportunities for themselves and/or their families (Donato & Massey, 2016). In addition to expected increases in immigration, global trends towards civil violence and climate change, point to threat evasion (i.e., push factors) becoming the primary motivation for immigration in the near future (Donato & Massey, 2016). The reasons people immigrate (e.g., experiences with pre-migration trauma), in tandem with exposure to the multitude of stressors they may encounter after arrival in the U.S., have a bearing

on the mental health of Latinx immigrants and the health of their family relationships (Cook, 2009; Falconier et al., 2013; Negy et al., 2010; Helms et al., 2014).

To gain a holistic understanding of Latinx immigrant mental health, it is important to explore the significant number of stressors survived by this population. Latinx immigrants may face experiences with trauma (before, during, and after immigration; de Arellano et al., 2018; Rojas-Flores et al., 2017; Vila & Pomeroy, 2020), experiences with interpersonal and systemic discrimination (Araújo Dawson, 2009; Bruzelius et al., 2019; Cook et al., 2009), acculturative stress (Caplan, 2007; Cheng, 2022; Torres, 2010), challenges related to documentation statuses (Giano, 2020; Raffaelli, & Wiley, 2013; Rayburn et al, 2021), transnational grief and loss (Galvan et al., 2022; Gonzalez et al., 2021; Solheim et al., 2016), among many more stressors. These stressors, which are explored further in this chapter, are exacerbated by limited access to important economic, educational, and health care resources.

Limited Resource Accessibility

Latinx immigrants face precarious conditions due to a lack of access to helpful resources, such as economic/financial assets. Poverty rates among Latinx immigrants vary across their countries of origin, but when aggregated Latinx immigrants tend to experience much more limited economic resources when compared to other groups living in the U.S. (Thiede et al., 2021). In their Pew Research Center report, Budiman and colleagues (2018) indicated that close to a third of Mexican and Central American immigrants have income levels of \$20,000 or less, making their poverty rates the highest among all immigrants, as well as higher than all U.S.-born populations. In addition, a recent report from the Hispanic Research Center (Guzman & Chen, 2021) noted that poverty rates for Latinx immigrants have increased since the start of COVID-19, rising from 36.3% to 42.4%. This rise was explained to be the result of increased

unemployment rates during the pandemic. Increases in the unemployment rates disproportionately impacted Latinx populations due to the high concentration of workers in the industries most affected by the pandemic (e.g., food and lodging service, construction; Guzman & Chen, 2021). Limited economic assets have a negative impact on both couple relationships (Hardie & Lucas, 2010; Schramm et al., 2012) and individual wellbeing (Villatoro et al., 2022).

One of the ways in which poverty negatively impacts the wellbeing of immigrants is through reduced access to other important resources, such as healthcare. Non-citizen immigrants are the least likely to have health insurance, with 31% of these immigrants reporting they have no coverage at all, compared to 7.5% of U.S.-born populations (Budiman, 2018). Latinx populations in the U.S. have also experienced low access to health insurance coverage, having double the uninsured rates of non-Latinx white populations (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2021); Latinx immigrant families are especially underinsured (Guzman, et al.; 2020). In their Hispanic Research Center report, Guzman et al. (2020) showed that the uninsured rates of Latinx children of immigrant parents have consistently been the highest of any other group in the U.S. since 2010. Low rates of health insurance are detrimental to the health outcomes of these communities as they limit access to health care services, including mental health services (Hoffman & Paradise, 2008). Lack of health insurance has been reported as a leading barrier to seeking mental health services among Latinx immigrants (Bridges et al., 2012), who already display low levels of mental health care utilization. In a study that sampled over 50,000 participants in California, for example, Ortega et al. (2018) found that immigrant Latinxs had worse access and less utilization of mental health services when compared to U.S.-born Latinx populations, with access being even worse for undocumented Latinxs. This lack of access to mental health services is particularly alarming because these services could help ameliorate

the impact of the various stressors Latinx immigrants face, stressors that have been linked to negative mental health outcomes.

Latinx Immigrant Stressors and Mental Health

Trauma

Trauma is an important element of consideration when examining the mental health needs and outcomes of Latinx immigrants. Trauma, in relation to immigrants, is generally categorized by when the traumatic event occurred in the immigration process. Immigrants may incur experiences of acute and complex trauma in their home countries prior to their immigration journey (i.e., premigration trauma), during their immigration journey (i.e., in-transit trauma), and/or after their arrival to the U.S. (i.e., post-migration trauma). Premigration trauma can include experiences of community violence (e.g., gang violence), gender-based violence, intimate partner abuse, political oppression, natural disasters in their home country, etc. (Li, 2016; Peña-Sullivan, 2020). In-transit trauma refers to traumatic experiences that occur while in route to the U.S. and therefore may be more common among immigrants who enter the country through dangerous journeys (Segal, et al., 2009), such as crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Instances of in-transit trauma can include physical and/or sexual assault, witnessing violent acts inflicted upon others (e.g., seeing a dead body), or family separations in U.S. detention centers (de Arrellano et al., 2018; Monico et al., 2019). Finally, once they have arrived in the U.S., immigrants may face traumatic experiences in the form of race-based trauma (e.g., experiences of ongoing discrimination; Chavez-Dueña et al., 2019), trauma from family separation due to deportation (Lovato et al., 2018), or trauma due to increased risks of crime victimization (Barranco & Shihadeh, 2015).

As a result, there are high rates of traumatic experiences among Latinx immigrants living in the U.S. For example, in a sample of 248 Mexican undocumented immigrants, Garcini et al. (2017) found that most participants, approximately 83%, reported a history of trauma. Similarly, in a sample of 540 recently arrived Latinx immigrants living in South Florida, Vazquez et al. (2021) found that 66% of women and 68% of men had experienced pre-migration trauma, as measured by exposure to violence and/or threats to the health and safety of themselves or their family. While trauma rates may vary widely depending on the immigration conditions of each person (e.g., asylum-seekers and refugees may have higher rates of pre-migration trauma than other immigrants), many Latinx immigrants also face traumatic experiences after their arrival to the U.S. (Chavez-Dueña et al., 2019). These high rates of traumatic experiences among Latinx immigrants must be taken into consideration when attempting to understand Latinx immigrant mental health and Latinx immigrant couples.

Experiences of trauma have been linked to increased risk for developing mental health disorders in Latinx immigrants (Rasmussen et al., 2007; Kim, 2015; Sangalang et al., 2019). Trauma experiences can lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (Rasmussen et al., 2007), as well as increased risks for depression, anxiety, and other forms of psychiatric distress (Kim, 2015; Sangalang et al., 2010). For example, in a sample that included 303 Latinx refugees, Kim (2015) found that post-migration trauma was linked to increase risk of mood disorders. Sangalang and colleagues (2019) found that both pre-migration and post-migration trauma were linked to poor mental health outcomes, with pre-migration trauma being associated with increased psychological distress for Latinx refugees and post-migration trauma being linked with increased depressive symptoms and psychological distress for Latinx non-refugee immigrants.

Although trauma and its resulting mental health outcomes have been found to negatively impact couple relationships in other populations, a limited amount of research has been conducted on the impact on traumatic experiences on the couple relationships of Latinx immigrants. A wide range of traumatic experiences have been linked to poorer relationship satisfaction, poorer couple communication, and decreased relationship quality among couples (Garthus-Niegel et al., 2018; Monk & Nelson Goff, 2014; Ruhlmann et al., 2018; Witting & Busby, 2019). But less is known about the impact of immigration-related trauma on Latinx couples, as most of the research on the association between trauma and wellbeing appears to focus on individual mental health outcomes. As a result, there is a need for more research on how Latinx couple relationships are impacted by immigration-related trauma.

The negative correlation between family cohesion and traumatic symptoms (Singh et al., 2011) suggest that an increased understanding of how couple relationships impact the connection between trauma and negative mental health outcomes may also be an important area of exploration. Since increased family conflict seems to worsen mental health outcomes for Latinx immigrants (Alegria et al., 2007; Sangalang et al., 2015), while family support acts as a protective factor (Alegría et al., 2007), learning more about how Latinx immigrants leverage their family ties to cope with traumatic events could be valuable knowledge for counselors seeking to support this population. Couple relationships have also been found to act as a protective factor against psychological distress for Latinx immigrants (Darghouth et al., 2015), making learning more about these relationships a promising area of inquiry for the establishment of strength-based therapeutic approaches that consider the relational resources that may be available to this population. Attentiveness to strengths and resilience factors may also help combat pervasive deficit-based narratives of Latinx immigrants.

Discrimination

To truly understand the Latinx immigrant experience, it's also necessary to consider the extent to which immigrants experience discrimination and prejudice (Zunida, 2002). This is because, after their arrival to the U.S., Latinx immigrants must contend with various forms of discrimination rooted in racism, ethnocentrism, and nativism (Chavez-Dueña et al., 2019). Latinxs immigrants may face everyday experiences of discrimination (e.g., being followed/harassed at a store, being ignored/denied service at a restaurant), but also face major racist events (e.g., being denied access to vital educational, housing, or employment resources), and systemic or policy level discrimination. Experiences of discrimination have been linked with negative mental health consequences for Latinx immigrants.

Everyday discrimination, which refers to chronic and routine forms of unfair treatment that are sometimes subtle (Williams et al., 1997), has been associated with risks for various mental health disorders. In a sample of 1,620 Latinx refugees and immigrants, discrimination, as measured by the Everyday Discrimination Scale, was positively linked to poor mental health outcomes, including increased risk for psychological distress, depressive disorders, and anxiety disorders (Sangalang et al., 2019). The negative relationship between discrimination and mental health has also been found in various Latinx subgroup. In another large sample of 2,222 Latinx immigrant adults, perceived ethnic discrimination was linked with alcohol use disorder for men (Cano, 2020). Among Latina immigrant women, experiences with discrimination and racist occurrences are connected to higher risks of depressive symptoms (Cariello et al., 2022). Similarly, in a sample of Dominican immigrant women, Araújo-Dawson (2009) found that both everyday discrimination and major racist events predicted stress levels. Higher levels of discrimination experiences for Latinx refugees also increase their risks for being diagnosed with

an anxiety disorder (Kim, 2015). One study, by Garcini and colleagues (2018), found that experiences with discrimination were more predictive of psychological distress than trauma among undocumented Mexican immigrants. And some researchers have suggested that prolonged exposure to discriminatory experiences can be processed as trauma (e.g., ethno-racial trauma; Chavez-Dueña et al., 2019). These prolonged exposures to discrimination may be amplified by policy-level discrimination.

Policy-level discrimination, which can include state and federal policies, has also been linked to negative mental health outcomes for Latinx immigrants. In a study that included 293,081 immigrant and U.S-born Latinxs respondents from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), Hatzenbuehler and colleagues (2012) explored the relationship between 31 states' immigration policy climate and mental health; they found that Latinxs living in the states with the most exclusionary immigration policies had 1.14 times the rate of poor mental health days than Latinxs living in states with more inclusionary immigration policies. In congruence with Hatzenbuehler et al.'s findings, Bruzelius and Baum's results (2019) showed a significant increase in self-rated poor mental health days following increases in arrest rates due to changes in immigration policies. Latinx immigrants have also identified discrimination against them as a major component of the current sociopolitical climate (Lee & Zhou, 2020). In their qualitative study exploring the link between sociopolitical context and health, for example, Lee and Zhou (2020) found that discrimination was a central theme of how Latinx immigrants perceived the current sociopolitical climate. Latinx immigrants in this study reported that this discrimination was evident in the neglect of immigrant communities, the propagation of negative stereotypes about immigrants (e.g., lazy, delinquents), and violence against immigrants.

Discrimination also seems to have a negative impact on couple relationships (Trail et al., 2012;). In a sample of 330 recently married Latinxs, nearly half of whom were immigrants, Trail et al. (2012) found that husbands' perceived discrimination impacted wives' marital quality, but that this relationship was buffered when husbands had strong ethnic identity. Similar findings have been reported in samples of other minoritized communities. In a sample of 962 African American participants, Lincoln and Chae (2010) found that unfair treatment, as measured by the Everyday Discrimination Scale, predicted lower levels of marital satisfaction. Interestingly, they also found that marital satisfaction buffered the relationship between unfair treatment and psychological distress, suggesting that couple relationships may be a protective factor against the negative impacts of discrimination.

Although many of these findings are correlational, they point to experiences of discrimination having a negative impact on immigrants and their mental health. There is a dearth of research, however, that looks at how discrimination impacts Latinx immigrant couple relationships and about how Latinx immigrants, who often use their social and family networks as a source of support, may be leveraging their most important relationships in the face of racism, ethnocentrism, and nativism. Learning more about these dynamics could assist counselors in better recognizing and using relational wealth as a cultural asset for Latinx immigrants to reach their treatment goals.

Documentation status

Latinx immigrants living in the U.S. hold a multitude of documentation statuses. Immigrants, for example, may be naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, asylum-seekers, refugees, have some other form of conditional residence (e.g., visa), or be undocumented (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2021). It is important to note that

contrary to the popular believe that a large portion of Latinxs are in the country “illegally” (Latino Donor Collaborative et al., 2021), the majority of Latinxs living in the U.S. are U.S.-born and therefore American citizens (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019). When combining Latinxs from Mexico, Central American, South America, and the Caribbean, however, Latinxs do make up most of the undocumented immigrant population in the U.S. (Hugo Lopez et al., 2021); it is estimated that 77% of the 10.5 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are from Latin America (Hugo Lopez et al., 2021). As a result, documentation status is an important consideration when exploring the mental health of Latinx immigrants. It is also important because the documentation status of an immigrant has a bearing on the type of resources they have access to (e.g., healthcare, education, employment), creating additional stressors, and consequently augmenting the risk of mental health concerns.

Undocumented Latinx immigrants have high risks for negative mental health outcomes (Garcini et al., 2017; Ornelas & Perreira, 2011; Rasmussen et al., 2007). In a sample of 248 undocumented Mexican immigrants, Garcini et al. (2017) found that one-quarter of the immigrants (23%) met criteria for a mental health diagnosis, with major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders being the most common. These negative mental health outcomes may be the consequence of unique stressors incurred by this population. Undocumented Latinx immigrants have high rates of pre-migration and in-transit trauma (Rasmussen et al., 2007), yet also have very limited access to important economic, healthcare, and educational resources, and often experience discrimination (Cha et al., 2019; Galvan et al., 2021; Ornelas et al., 2020).

Undocumented immigrants are also often the target of policy-level immigration laws that carry the threat of family separation and deportation, and that create an additional barrier to seeking mental health services (Ornelas et al., 2020).

Many Latinxs also live in mixed-status families, where one or some members of the family are undocumented (Moslimani, 2022). For example, in a report by the National Research Center of Hispanic Children and Families (Clarke, 2017) it was noted that a quarter of all Latinx children have an undocumented parent. In congruence with this report, a more recent report by the Pew Research Center (Moslimani, 2022) notes that 4 in 10 Latinx people worry about themselves or someone they are close to being deported, with immigrant Latinxs worrying about it the most. Therefore, regardless of a person's individual immigration status, the fear of deportation, and the consequent family separation, is an aspect of the Latinx immigrant experience that impacts many members of this community. The fear of deportation has a negative impact on the mental health Latinx immigrants (Cavazos-Rehg, 2007) and impacts the everyday lives of these families (e.g., uncertainty about fair pay for their work, fear driving, avoiding reporting crimes, fear of going to work, avoiding seeking mental health services; Ayón, 2018; Becerra, 2016; Messing et al., 2015). Although more research is needed in this area, it is plausible, and perhaps likely, that documentation statuses also impact the relationship dynamics of many Latinx immigrant couples.

Acculturation and Acculturative Stress

Acculturation is a widely studied component of the immigration experience, with researchers showing interest in this topic as early as the beginning of the 20th century (Rudmin, 2016). The most used definition of acculturation describes it as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). Acculturation, therefore, is the normal and expected bidirectional processes of change that occur when groups from differing cultures interact.

The process of acculturation has been conceptualized using various models (Rudmin, 2003), but the most popular model seems to be the Berry et al.'s (1987) four-pane model. With the goal of acknowledging that the acquisition of a new culture does not equate the loss of one's origin culture, Berry et al. created a model in which someone may retain or discard their culture of origin, and independently adopt or reject their host culture. The model results in four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Assimilation is characterized by a rejection of the culture of origin and adoption of the host culture; separation is the opposite, wherein a person rejects the host culture and maintains their culture of origin; integration, sometimes also referred to as biculturalism (Rudmin, 2003), involves both retention of the origin culture and adoption of the host culture; and finally, marginalization, for which there is limited empirical evidence (Schwartz et al., 2010), involves a rejection of both the host culture and the origin culture.

Berry's model of acculturation has been critiqued for underemphasizing contextual factors that impact an immigrant's experience and the acculturation process (e.g., race, conditions under which they immigrated, discrimination; Schwartz et al., 2010). In addition, others have pointed to its categorical nature as deficient and overly simplistic because it ignores the more fluid nature of acculturation and different life domains in which acculturation may occur (Rudmin, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2010). For example, an immigrant may choose to adopt cultural practices of the host culture (e.g., celebration of holidays), but adopt a few or none of the host culture's values (e.g., individualism). For these reasons, scholars have argued that a more complex understanding of acculturation is necessary (Schwartz et al., 2010; Bostean & Gillespie, 2008).

In response to that call, Schwartz et al. (2010) developed a competing model of acculturation that is multidimensional. The Schwartz et al. (2010) model explicitly considers context of reception (i.e., host country context), context of origin, as well as the various dimensions through which the degree of acculturation may vary. They proposed a six-component model that includes the cultural practices, values, and identification of an immigrant's heritage and receiving cultures (Schwartz et al., 2010). Cultural practices refer to behavioral activities tied to culture (e.g., language, traditions, food). Cultural values refer to the system of beliefs integrated into a specific group (e.g., collectivism). And finally, identification refers to an individual's attachment and belonging to a community, and the positive esteem this attachment provides (Schwartz, et al., 2010). With the inclusion of these dimensions on a bidirectional continuum, the Schwartz et al. (2010) model addresses the multidimensional nature of acculturation and the contexts in which it takes place. A significant amount of research has been dedicated to better understanding acculturation using both the Berry and the Schwartz et al. model as theoretical frameworks.

Many scholars have focused on the impact of acculturation by way of acculturative stress. Although acculturation is the normal and expected result following exposure to different cultures, it may sometimes result in the experience of acculturative stress. Acculturative stress refers to the stress resulting from acculturation processes (e.g., language acquisition) and can involve declines in mental health, feelings of marginalization (i.e., lack of belongingness), and identity confusion (Berry et al., 1987). Acculturative stress has been linked to various negative mental health outcomes for Latinx immigrants, including increased risk for depression (Capielo Rosario & Dillon, 2020; Torres, 2010) and anxiety (Hovey & Magaña, 2010; Sirin et al., 2013). Acculturative stress also seems to be related to various immigration-related experiences. In a

sample of 2,059 immigrant and non-immigrant Latinxs from various countries, Lueck and Wilson (2011) found higher English proficiency to be negatively related to acculturative stress, while higher native-language proficiency was positively related to acculturative stress. In addition, they found that the immigration conditions of an immigrant predicted the rate of acculturative stress, with refugees experiencing higher levels of acculturative stress than voluntary immigrants. Lastly, Lueck and Wilson found that higher rates of experiences with discrimination predicted higher levels of acculturative stress in their sample. These findings are congruent with Caplan's (2007) assertion that acculturative stress is impacted by various environmental, interpersonal/social, and societal conditions.

Acculturative stress may also negatively impact family relationships. In a national sample of 1,618 immigrant Latinxs, Bostean and Gillespie (2018) found that acculturative stress predicted lower levels of familism attitudes and higher levels of family conflict. Acculturation may also impact the family dynamics of Latinx immigrants by way of acculturation gaps. Acculturation gaps refer to differences among family members in their acculturation strategies and their adoption of U.S. values, behaviors, and attitudes (Phinney et al., 2000). For example, an adolescent child may adopt the American cultural value of individualism, while their parent retains the Latinx cultural value of collectivism. Schofield et al. (2008) found that acculturation gaps between parents and youth resulted in increased family conflict, and in negative mental health outcomes in Latinx youth. The research on acculturation gaps seems to primarily focus on parent-child relationships, but there are some indications that acculturation gaps can also impact Latinx immigrant couple relationships. In a study conducted by Cruz et al. (2014), it was found that couples with similar cultural orientations were more likely to have higher marital quality. This study, however, only sampled Mexican couples and therefore could not be generalized to

other Latinx immigrant populations. In addition, the quantitative nature of this study, prevents any in-depth exploration of how differences in cultural orientations within couple dyads impact their relationship functioning.

Critique of Acculturation Research. Acculturation is a single facet of the immigrant experience. Overemphasizing acculturation in counseling research and clinical work risks having a myopic view of immigration that conflates the immigration experience and the acculturation experience. This can ensue neglect in the exploration of other important aspects of immigration. Scholars have noted that it is important for researchers to investigate other aspects of immigration that may also have a bearing on the mental health of Latinxs, such as missing family, experiences of discrimination, occupational and economic challenges, etc. (Falconier et al., 2013).

Another important critique of acculturation comes from examining its history as a field of study. Rudmin and colleagues (2016) have pointed out that the origins on the study of acculturation are rooted on the idea that a more “primitive” culture undergoes improvements once exposed to a more “civilized” culture. On this matter Rudmin and colleagues (2016, p.7) state “...the concept of acculturation arose in an era of ethnocentric arrogance, such that acculturation described inferior people being improved by acquiring the cultures of superior people.” Such a history may still be reflected in the way acculturation research continues to be conducted today. For example, acculturation research continues to be primarily focused on the study of how the minoritized community (e.g., immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities) changes when in contact with the dominant culture (Rudmin et al., 2016). This is despite the recognition that, by definition, acculturation is meant to capture changes in all parties involved in the cultural exchange. Other examples illustrating the impact of a colonial legacy in acculturation research

include ignoring the impact of socioeconomic status on mental and physical health outcomes, expressing surprise when minority groups have better outcomes than native-born populations (e.g., the immigrant paradox, see below), and the study of minority groups as if they were monoliths (e.g., Latinx communities, Asian communities; Rudmin, 2016).

Lastly, acculturation research has been primarily studied as an individual process and not a systemic one. The focus on individuals requires researchers to take the position that each person (with their unique experiences and identities) will undergo an independent acculturation process that may be impacted by relationships (e.g., available social support), but is not relational in nature. Such a position would be in opposition to the cultural values of interdependence (i.e., collectivism, familismo, personalismo, confianza) held by many members of the Latinx community. Given that empirical research has also supported the idea that social support and family relations may have an important role to play in the process of acculturation (Alegría et al., 2007; Bostean & Gillespie, 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010), viewing acculturation from a strictly individual perspective may be contraindicated for those wanting to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomena.

Latinx Immigrant Strengths

Although Latinx immigrants and their families experience a substantial number of ongoing stressors that can have a negative impact on their mental health, they also display the presence of some significant strengths. An emphasis on strengths can disrupt dominant narratives about Latinx immigrants as a damaged community with cultural deficits that require intervention. Some scholars have theorized that those who embark on the immigration journey, leaving behind all they know in exchange for a gamble at a better life, represent a particularly

resilient and courageous segment of the population. In their book “Immigration worldwide: policies, practices, and trends” Segal and colleagues (2009) state:

Even under the most deplorable circumstances, it is not the most needy, weak, and oppressed who leave but those who have, at the very least, physical, emotional, and psychological fortitude. Without personal strengths, individuals are less likely to leave their homelands, and if they do, they are less likely to survive. It is essential to view immigrants through Saleebey’s (2002) “strength perspective,” identifying their human capital, namely their assets and capabilities, to understand their responses to the process of migration (p.8).

A strength-based perspective, therefore, allows researchers and clinicians to capture a more holistic view of immigrants and their experiences. The presence of these strengths is supported by findings documenting positive mental and physical health outcomes in many immigrant populations.

The Immigrant Paradox

The *immigrant paradox* is a term used to describe the phenomenon of improved mental and physical health outcomes in immigrant populations when compared to U.S.-born populations (Alegría et al., 2008), despite the high number of stressors and healthcare barriers experienced by immigrants. The immigrant paradox has been documented for various Latinx immigrant populations in reference to multiple mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and substance use (Alegría, 2008; Cook et al., 2009). For example, in a sample comparing 2,554 Latinx immigrants, U.S.-born Latinxs, and US-born non-Latinxs, Alegría et al. (2008) found evidence of the immigrant paradox, with Latinx immigrants exhibiting lower risk of depression, anxiety, and substance use disorder than Latinx and non-Latinx U.S. born populations. When the

sample was disaggregated by nationality however, the immigrant paradox held for Mexican immigrants across all three outcomes and held for all other nationalities for reduced risk of substance abuse. These findings provide support for the immigrant paradox, while also pointing to the need for a more complex understanding that moves away from looking at the Latinx population as a monolith. In addition, there is some evidence suggesting that the improved mental health outcomes of Latinx immigrants are diminished as they spend more time in the U.S. Latinx immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for 11 years or less have been found to have lower risks for psychiatric disorders, including depression, when compared to U.S.-born Latinos (Cook et al., 2009). However, these differences disappear for immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for 11 years or longer.

Several hypotheses have been proposed to help explain the phenomenon of the immigrant paradox. Some researchers have argued that the improved outcomes of Latinx immigrants are explained by the type of people who chose or are able to immigrate. This explanation, which known as the “the healthy migrant hypothesis” (Abraído Lanza et al., 1999), however, is subject to some critiques given that the immigrant paradox is observed even among folks who are forced to immigrate as refugees (i.e., Cuban immigrants) and therefore did not choose to immigrate. The healthy migrant hypothesis is also called into question because even U.S.-born Latinos (who did not immigrate) appear to have better mental health outcomes than U.S.-born non-Latinos (Alegría et al., 2009). Because U.S.-born Latinos are not immigrants, they do not support the probability of a self-selected health bias.

Another explanation for the immigrant paradox has been offered using the “salmon bias hypothesis,” which states that immigrants who become sick or who struggle with mental health concerns are likely migrating back to their countries of origin and therefore skewing the results

of the immigrant populations that remain living in the U.S. (Abraído Lanza et al., 1999). This explanation, however, can also be refuted by the documentation of the immigrant paradox in Cuban immigrants, who do not have the opportunity of return migration due to the political circumstances of the island (Abraído Lanza et al., 1999). In addition, the plausibility of the salmon hypothesis has been called into question due to findings indicating that health does not seem to predict return migration for immigrants (Diaz et al., 2016).

An additional explanation for the immigrant paradox is rooted in the idea that immigrants benefit from a host of protective factors, such as ethnic identity and *familismo*, that are the result of remaining connected to their cultures of origin (Cooper et al., 2020). This explanation seems to have some support given that social support, and especially family support, appear to buffer the negative impact of immigration-related stressors on mental health (Alegría et al., 2007; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010).

The Importance of Family Support

Social and family support have been recurrently studied within Latinx immigrant populations, and consistently found to have a positive impact on mental health outcomes (Alegría et al., 2007; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). Alegría and colleagues (2007) studied the impact of social cohesion and social support on the self-rated mental health with a sample of 2,554 Latinx immigrants. They specifically looked at friend support, family support, and neighborhood cohesion, as well as family conflict as predictors of self-rated mental health. After controlling for various demographic factors (e.g., language, education, income), only family support and family conflict were found to have a significant relationship with self-rated mental health; higher family support predicted higher self-rated mental health, while higher family conflict predicted poorer self-rated mental health. Similarly, Leong et al. (2013) found family

conflict to put Latinx immigrants at risk for poor mental health outcomes. Additionally, in a sample of 114, mostly Mexican, Latina immigrants living in new immigrant destinations, Zapata Roblyer et al. (2017) found that lower family cohesion was linked to higher risks for depression. Similar results have also been found among Latinx immigrant youth (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). These findings point to the important role family may play in protecting Latinx immigrants from the negative mental health consequences of the many stressors they face. However, additional research is needed to understand how couple support, in particular, may impact the mental health outcomes of Latinx immigrants.

Familismo. Family relationships may play a big role in the mental health of Latinx mental health due to the cultural value of familismo. In their widely used definition, Triandis et al. (1982, p. 1) explain familismo to be “a strong identification with the family, great importance being assigned to the nuclear and the extended family, the presence of mutual help and obligations, and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity and solidarity among members of one same family.” Familismo has been identified as a core cultural value for Latinx communities and has been conceptualized to include both attitudinal and behavioral aspects (Sabogal et al., 1987). Attitudinal components of familismo refer to a person’s beliefs and attitudes towards family, such as loyalty or reciprocity. The behavioral components of familismo refer to the actions people take based on these feelings and attitudes, such as providing emotional support (Sabogal et al., 1987). Familismo can therefore include social, emotional, and financial support among family members (Dillon et al, 2013). In their study comparing 452 Latinx participants to 227 non-Latinx white participants, Sabogal et al. (1987) found that familismo was true for Latinx participants regardless of country of origin and that it is characterized by three dimensions: family obligations (i.e., perceived obligation to provide emotional and material support to family

members), family support (i.e., perception of family members as reliable providers of help and support to solve problems), and family as referents (i.e., referring to family for determination of attitudes and behaviors).

Familismo has been found to act as a protective factor against negative mental health outcomes. Using a sample of 405 Latinx immigrants from various countries, Dillon et al. (2013) found that premigration familismo had a negative relationship with alcohol use quantity and hazardous alcohol use among men. Ayón et al. (2010) looked at child-parent dyads of 150 immigrant and U.S.-born Latinxs to explore the effect of familismo on internalizing mental health symptoms. They found that familismo was a significant predictor of depressive symptoms for the parents in their sample, with higher familismo predicting lower depressive symptoms. Among the children, high familismo was predictive of lower levels of internalizing mental health symptoms. In another study looking at the predictive power of familismo and simpatia for Mexican American parents (over 90% of whom were immigrants), Sotomayor-Peterson et al. (2012) found that these cultural constructs predicted better shared parenting, which in turn predicted positive family climate. Less research, however, has been dedicated to understanding the impact of familism on couple relationships and whether similar positive protective effects result from it.

Latinx Immigrant Couples

Most Latinx immigrants are in intimate partner relationships. However, there is a smaller body of research investigating Latinx immigrant relationships, and most of it is dedicated to understanding the challenges and stressors, such as intimate partner violence (IPV), that these couples may face. While there are mixed findings about the prevalence of IPV among the Latinx population (Ingram, 2007), there is some evidence to suggest that IPV does not occur at higher

rates among Latinxs once you control for socioeconomic status and education (Ingram, 2007; Neff et al., 1995). There is also some evidence suggesting that IPV rates are lower among the Latinx immigrant population (Aldarondo et al., 2002; Ingram, 2007). Still, many researchers have explored IPV as a facet of Latinx immigrant relationships. For example, in their meta-analysis looking at the relationship between acculturation and IPV, Alvarez and colleagues (2020) were able to include 21 studies and found a small but positive correlation. Although IPV is an important area of research for any population, an overemphasis on IPV in research about Latinx immigrant couples runs the risk of reinforcing dominant narratives that present Latinx relationships as being particularly troubled by violence and strict gender roles (e.g., machismo and marianismo). In addition, such a limited scope on the breadth of research dedicated to Latinx immigrant couples may unintentionally contribute to a deficit-based perspective that places blame on culture, and neglects to acknowledge the social and material inequities faced by Latinx immigrants living in the U.S.

Other researchers interested in learning more about Latinx immigrant couple relationships, have focused on the impact of acculturation and acculturative stress on relationships (Curandi, 2009; Flores et al., 2004; Grzywacz et al., 2009; Le Sage & Townsend, 2004; Negy et al., 2010), with some finding a positive relationship between acculturative stress (and acculturation towards U.S. culture) with poor relationship outcomes. For example, using a sample of 95 immigrant Latinas, Negy et al. (2010) investigated the impact of acculturative stress on marital distress. They found that acculturative stress and social support were significant predictors of marital distress and argue for the importance of considering acculturation in couple's counseling. Although not solely immigrants, in a sample of 151 Mexican American married couples, Flores et al. (2004) found that husbands who had higher levels of acculturation

towards U.S. culture reported higher levels of marital conflict, higher level of verbal aggression, and higher levels of physical aggression by their wives.

To my knowledge, at least one study has looked beyond the impact of acculturation and acculturative stress on relationship functioning, and instead focused on immigration stress more broadly (Falconier et al., 2013). Falconier et al. (2013) argues that a sole focus on acculturation misses other important dimensions of the immigration experience (e.g., missing family left in their countries of origin) that may also have a bearing on the wellbeing of Latinx immigrant couples. In their study with a sample of 107 Latinx immigrant couples, Falconier et al. (2013) used an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) to examine the impact of immigration stress on relationship satisfaction, while accounting for dyadic coping as a moderator for this relationship. They measured immigration stress with the Demands of Immigration Scale, which considers experiences of loss, and difficulties with facing new situations, with language acquisition, and with occupation challenges, as well as experiences with discrimination and not feeling at home. Dyadic coping was measured with the Dyadic Coping Inventory, and relationship satisfaction was measured with the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Falconier et al., 2013). They found that supportive dyadic coping buffered the negative impacts of immigration stress on relationship satisfaction for Latinx women, but not for men. In a different study, also using APIM, Austin and Falconier (2013) looked at spirituality as a potential protective factor against psychological aggression in Latinx immigrant couples. They found that higher spirituality predicted lower levels in each partner's own psychological aggression and higher levels of supportive dyadic coping. These findings point to the existence of some relational strengths within Latinx immigrant couples that warrant additional attention in the research.

Most of the research on Latinx immigrant couples is of a quantitative nature (Alvarez et al., 2020; Austin & Falconier, 2013; Curandi, 2009; Falconier et al., 2013; Flores, 2004; Helms et al., 2014; Negy et al., 2010), leaving a knowledge gap on the lived experiences of Latinx immigrant couples. Qualitative studies foster opportunities to explore the immigration experiences of Latinx couples from their perspective, creating space for the ontological autonomy of this population. Findings from qualitative studies can contribute to a deeper, more complex, and contextualized understanding of the relational experiences of Latinx immigrant couples, thereby providing researchers and clinicians additional components of consideration when doing work with this population.

Relational Cultural Theory

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) will serve as the theoretical framework for this study. RCT is a psychological theory of growth and development that was developed with the purpose of centralizing relationships as the essential ingredient for well-being (Jordan, 2012). Due to its theoretical roots, main tenets, and consideration of culture as a powerful influencer of individual wellbeing, the utilization of RCT to understand the experiences of Latinx immigrant couples offers various advantages, which will be discussed in the following sections.

History

Rooted in feminist and social constructivist thought, RCT was first developed in the 1970s as a psychological theory for women (Jordan, 2012). Although psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller's book *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (1976) is commonly attributed as the seminal text for RCT (Jordan, 2012), the theory was the result of a collaboration between multiple women psychologists, including Irene Stiver, Judith Jordan, Janet Surrey (Jordan, 2012). They developed RCT as an alternative to the mainstream psychological theories of the

time, which prioritized autonomy, independence, and the separate self as the pinnacle of wellbeing (e.g., “individuation,” “differentiation”; Jordan, 2012). RCT theorists noted that these dominant theories seemed to pathologize the more interdependent, connection-driven, and collaborative experiences and needs that they observed in women clients (Jordan, 2012).

Through the creation of RCT, Baker Miller and her colleagues wanted to resist dominant images that perpetuated the myths of a separate self, of meritocracy, and of invulnerability as a strength, as well as the myth that competition brings out the best in people (Jordan, 2013). Instead, they wanted to centralize relationships, authenticity, vulnerability and interdependence as necessary components for achieving wellness. Since its original development, RCT theorists have expanded the theory to be applicable and helpful for all people, not just women. RCT theorists highlight connection as not only vital for the growth and development of *all* human beings, but that growing through those connections are the essence of living (Stiver et al., 2013). This emphasis on connection and interdependence lends RCT to be particularly apt for exploring couple relationships. In addition, the centralizing of relationships positions RCT to have significant overlap with various Latinx cultural values.

Seven Core Tenets

RCT is grounded in 7 core tenets that serve as guiding principles for understanding human growth and development towards wellbeing. As noted by Jordan (2012, Core Concepts section, para. 1) the core RCT tenets are as follows:

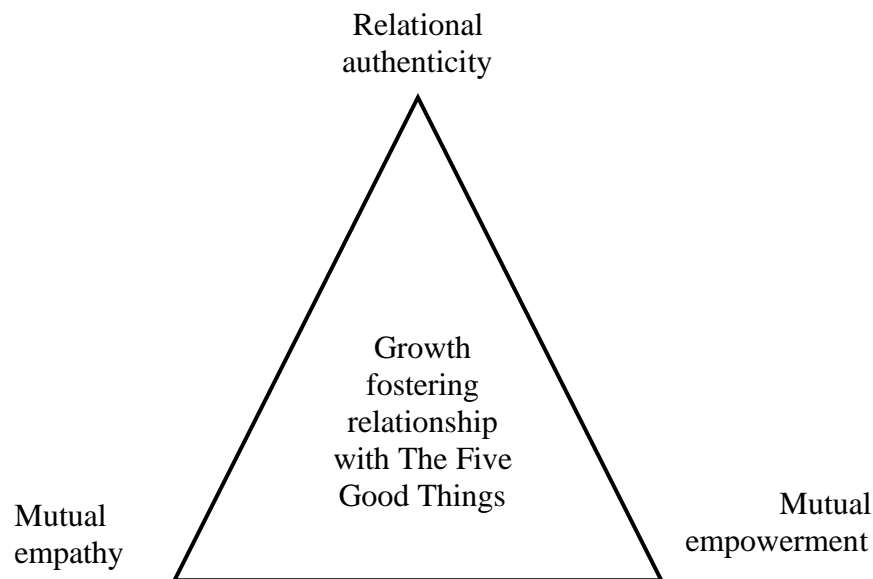
1. “People grow through and towards relationship throughout the lifespan
2. Movement towards mutuality rather than separation characterizes mature functioning
3. Relationship differentiation and elaboration characterize growth

4. Mutual empathy and mutual empowerment are at the core of growth fostering relationships
5. Authenticity is necessary for real engagement and full participation in growth fostering-relationships
6. In growth fostering relationships, all people contribute and grow or benefit. Development is not a one-way street
7. One of the goals of development from a relational perspective is the development of increased relational competence and capacities over the lifespan”.

The RCT core tenets point to relationships as the main tool through which people can grow and attain wellbeing. In addition, these tenets specify the necessary components for the establishment of a growth-fostering relationship. These components include mutual empowerment, relational authenticity, and mutual empathy. In RCT, mutual empowerment refers to a greater sense of agency and aliveness that can often be grounded on the knowledge that we have the capacity to impact the people who we are in relationship with (Hartling, 2013; Jordan, 2012). Empathy is referred to as “an affective-cognitive skills that allows us to ‘know’ (resonate, feel, sense, cognitively grasp another person’s experience)” (Jordan, 2012, Glossary of Terms section). Mutual empathy requires an openness to “being affected by and affecting another person” and for all parties to engage with each other with respect and the capacity for connection (Jordan, 2012, Glossary of Terms section). Finally, relational authenticity refers to being transparent and honest while still considering the impact of one’s truth on the other person and the relationship. In this way, RCT theorists distinguish relational authenticity from the notion of unabashed honesty (e.g., “telling it like it is”) by acknowledging each person’s capacity to impact the other (Jordan 2013).

In her chapter “Valuing Vulnerability: New Definitions of Courage,” Jordan (2013) describes that the core tenets of RCT may be visually represented with the model shown below (Figure 1), where relational authenticity, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment are joined to create growth-fostering relationships that result in The Five Good Things.

Figure 1: Core Tenets of RCT & Growth Fostering Relationships



The Five Good Things

In RCT, the Five Good Things are said to be the qualities resulting from being engaged in growth-fostering relationships. They include: (1) A sense of zest; (i.e., a sense of invigoration and energy resulting from the relationship); (2) an increased sense of self-worth; (3) clarity (i.e., a better understanding of yourself, your partner, and your relationship); (4) productivity; and (5) an increased desire for more connection (Lenz, 2016).

RCT theorists would posit that each partner in a Latinx couple relationship grounded on mutual empowerment, mutual empathy, and relational authenticity would exhibit and benefit from The Five Good Things. For example, a couple in a growth-fostering relationship might feel

energized and confident (i.e., a sense of zest, productivity) in accomplishing some of their immigration-related goals/needs, such as finding employment or learning a new language. A couple may also find that an increased sense of self-worth, and a sense of clarity about themselves, their partners, and their relationship could be helpful resources when managing immigration related challenges, such as experiences with discrimination. These benefits would then result in a desire for increased connection and a retention of Latinx cultural values that prioritize interdependence (e.g., familismo).

Relational Images and Disconnection

Based on RCT principles, our ability to engage in growth-fostering relationships will be impacted by our relational images. Relational images refer to inner constructions of ourselves and our ability to be in connection with others. Relational images shape our expectations around relationships and therefore impact how we believe we can relate to others. These internal constructions of the self, which are often outside of our conscious awareness, are developed because of the relational experiences we have throughout our lifespan (Eldridge et al, 2013). RCT theorists believe that unhelpful relational images can be brought into awareness and changed for the benefit of the individual (Miller, 2013, p.106). Some relational images, however, may be deeply entrenched, due to past experiences, making them more difficult to change. RCT theorists believe that relational experiences of disconnection (e.g., rejection, hurt, abuse) can lead someone to believe that they are the reason for the disconnection. This relational image, of the self as bad or unable to truly connect, leads people into *condemned isolation*. Jean Baker Miller (2008, p. 375) notes that condemned isolation is the experience of feeling “locked out of the possibility of human connection”, and feeling isolated, immobilized

and self-blaming. A person experiencing condemned isolation fears they cannot be heard or understood, and ultimately feels powerless (Miller, 2013).

Unhelpful relational images, and the condemned isolation that can accompany them, keep people out of connection with others. These relational images can prompt the deployment of *strategies for disconnection*. Strategies for disconnection refer to the multitude of tools people use to avoid genuine connections with others. Strategies for disconnection can include using power over others, lack of vulnerability, etc. (Miller, 2013). For example, if a Latina woman has created a relational image of herself as unlovable, perhaps resulting from recurrent family separations, then she may deploy a strategy for disconnection involving lack of authenticity and genuineness for fear of further abandonment, leaving her stuck in isolation as she avoids the vulnerability required for authentic connections.

The deployment of strategies for disconnection can also be the result in the *central relational paradox*. When people are stuck in the central relational paradox, they are actively keeping important parts of the self out of connection because previous experiences have taught them that these elements of the self are perceived as unacceptable or dangerous (Miller, 2013). Keeping these parts of the self out of important relationships stunts the potential for relational authenticity and prevents the development of the genuine connection needed for growth-fostering relationships (Miller, 2013). In other words, the paradox emerges because in trying to gain acceptance and connection a person might omit important parts of themselves, which then prevents the establishment of true acceptance and connection. The central relational paradox, and the strategies for disconnection that maintain it, lead people into further isolation and further fear to authentically connect (Baker Miller, 2013).

The Role of Culture

In addition to centralizing relationships as the main tool through which wellbeing can be attained, RCT recognizes that culture, including systems of oppression, impacts how people can relationally engage with others and the society in which they live. To explain the connection between culture and individual relationships, RCT theorists borrow the concept of “controlling images” from Black feminist theorists Patricia Hill Collins. Hill Collins (2009) discusses controlling images as false and stereotypical notions about marginalized groups that ultimately impact how members of that group are perceived, therefore robbing people of the power of self-definition (e.g., stereotypes about black women as “mammies” or “jezebel”). These controlling images serve as powerful tools for the dominant group to justify the continued use of oppressive systems. In addition, controlling images can have an impact on how people view themselves (Hill Collins, 2009). RCT theorists apply Hill Collins’ concept of controlling images by highlighting how these images can affect how people act and behave in relationships (Miller, 2013). In other words, RCT theorists believe that controlling images play a role in the construction of relational images and can serve to further entrench people into isolation and disconnection. Therefore, from an RCT perspective controlling images are harmful societal constructs that ultimately impact individual wellbeing (Miller, 2013). In her chapter “How Change Happens: Controlling Images, Mutuality, and Power” Miller (2013) succinctly explains the impact of controlling images:

Controlling images define who and what we each are. They determine what is acceptable and what is not, what people can do and cannot do. They exert a powerful impact on how we can act and how we construct relationships. Consequently, CIs [controlling images] create the framework within which people make the kinds of relationships that go into the

constructions of RIs [relational images]. We fashion RIs in the immediate interactions in our lives. They form the psychological constructions we then carry in our minds, often without awareness. But the RIs are very determined and in many societies constricted and limited by the CIs. We are often not fully aware of the operation of CIs, although members of marginalized groups may be more conscious of them than members of the dominant group (p.107).

The current body of research on Latinx immigrant couples could be inadvertently reinforcing controlling images about this community. Often, research on Latinx and immigrant couple relationships appear to focus on intimate partner violence (Alvarez, 2020; Curandi, 2009), challenges and stressors of acculturation and immigration (Falconier et al., 2013; Flores et al., 2004), and *machismo* as a cultural value (Pardo et al., 2013). Such research, although important, may be contributing to the propagation of controlling images that present Latinx immigrant couples as unhealthy, riddled with IPV, and universally burdened with unhealthy male dominant/women submissive roles. The overwhelming number of damage-centered perspectives when looking at Latinx immigrant couples may inadvertently perpetuate notions of inferiority (Rudmin, 2016) and deficits. This is despite evidence that family relationships are consistently found to be a protective factor for Latinx immigrants (Alegría et al., 2007; Leong et al., 2013; Zapata Roblyer, 2017).

Application to the Latinx Immigrant Population

RCT provides a useful framework for understanding the experiences of Latinx immigrant couples through the application of various key concepts. Firstly, because it centralizes interpersonal relationships as the main source of wellbeing, RCT is particularly apt for studies seeking to understand relational processes, such as couple dynamics. For that reason, it is likely

that RCT can provide applicable language to name and understand the experiences reported by the Latinx immigrant couples in this study.

Secondly, RCT attends to systems of oppression and the role that culture and society play in how individuals view themselves and their capacity for connections with others. RCT theorists take on a social constructivist approach, agreeing that gender, race, class, etc. are socially constructed and maintained categories used to keep a few in a position of power. Controlling images about these groups are then incessantly reproduced to further maintain hierarchies of power; these controlling images result in the creation of relational images and further entrench people in the central relational paradox (Stiver et al., 2013). In their qualitative study exploring how Latinx immigrants viewed the current sociopolitical context, Lee and Zhou (2020) found that the discrimination experienced by participants was fueled by negative stereotypes (i.e., controlling images) about the Latinx community. One participant reported “the majority of people come to think that they [immigrants] are delinquents, they’re criminals, drunkards, lazy, unkempt...everything bad”. RCT theorists would posit that these controlling images about immigrants not only further marginalize them as a group, but also have the power to impact how immigrants view themselves and how they feel they are able to be in relationship (or not) with others. Similarly, stereotypes of Latinx immigrant couples as having unhealthy and strict gender roles (e.g., machismo and marianismo), or being particularly burdened with violence (e.g., IPV), and personal challenges (e.g., acculturative stress) can also act as controlling images that negatively impact the relational wellbeing of those in this community.

Lastly, RCT’s usefulness as a theoretical framework for this study is rooted in an extensive overlap between the core tenets of the theory and many Latinx cultural values. Many Latinx immigrant communities, across different countries of origin, have been identified as

having a collectivistic orientation (Ojeda et al., 2011) that values independence and human connection as vital for wellbeing. This collectivistic orientation can be observed in cultural values such as *familismo*, which is discussed earlier in this chapter, as well as *personalismo*, and *confianza*. The RCT components of mutual empathy, authenticity, and mutual empowerment are reflected in how Latinx families prioritize the maintenance of strong bonds with one another through *familismo*. *Personalismo* refers to giving importance to interpersonal engagement and connection and can be fostered through learning about the other person (e.g., self-disclosure, talking; Ojeda et al., 2011). This value is highly congruent with RCT's conceptualization of connection, namely that it is a bidirectional process and manner of engaging with others that requires authenticity and vulnerability. *Confianza* refers to mutual trust, confidence, and commitment within relationships (Dyrness, 2007), and is regarded as something that exists in relationships when there is authenticity (i.e., the ability to be oneself), honesty, respect, and a genuine interest in the other person (Dyrness, 2007; Fitts & McClure, 2015). Once again, these qualities are strikingly similar to the conditions that RCT theorists state are necessary for a growth fostering relationship (i.e., mutual empathy, authenticity, and relational responsiveness). The orientation towards these values in many Latinx communities indicate the prioritization of connection, collaboration, interdependence, and community, all of which are central to how RCT theorists view the nature of human beings.

Critiques of RCT

Although RCT offers many advantages as a theoretical framework for use with the Latinx immigrant population, there are also some noteworthy critiques of RCT that must be taken into consideration. An important critique is the need for a more robust body of empirical research supporting the theory, its tenets, and its usefulness in clinical and research settings. Lenz (2016)

noted that although there are some promising results pointing to the usability of RCT, additional research is needed to make this determination. He points to a lack of experimental and longitudinal designs when investigating RCT-based interventions. In addition, Lenz (2016) notes a lack of diversity in the samples of RCT studies (with most of the participants being white women).

Other critiques of RCT include concerns that the theory takes an essentialist position regarding gender. Some feminist authors (Barnett & Rivers, 2004) offered the critique that RCT is too fixed on the idea that there are innate differences between men and women. RCT theorists were giving value to women's relational skills, which can be interpreted as an essentialist position with the power to support the continued subjugation of women into caregiving roles (Jordan, 2012). RCT theorists have responded to this critique by noting that since its inception, RCT has been rooted in social constructivist thinking, endorsing the idea that gender is socially constructed and that power over minoritized groups (e.g., women) occurs through the creation of limiting expectations for these group (Jordan, 2012). Robb's (2006, p. xxiii) words offer a powerful clarification to assuage the critique of RCT as essentialists: "Relational psychologists are saying not that women are essentially nurturant but that nurturant human connection is essential."

Like the previously mentioned critique, critics of RCT also presented concerns that the theory was encouraging self-sacrifice among women and ultimately supporting systems that perpetuate male privilege (Weskott, 1997). RCT theorists however have countered this critique by highlighting the concept of mutuality, a central tenet of RCT, which moves away from one-sided relational dynamics (e.g., power over) and towards two-way engagement, connection, and empathy in relationships (e.g., power-with; Jordan, 2012). This critique may also have been

addressed by developments in RCT, which has evolved to consider relationships as the tool through which *all* human beings attain wellbeing and move towards growth (Jordan, 2012).

Early RCT theorists' work was also criticized due to its lack of inclusion of perspectives from non-white women, which invertedly recreated the very dynamic of domination RCT was trying to resist (Jordan, 2012). RCT theorists recognized the validity of this critique and have since taken steps to ensure the voices of minoritized groups were centralized and integrated (not simply added) into the development of the theory (Jordan, 2012). Perhaps because of this critique, RCT tenets have grown to highlight how social identities (e.g., race, affectual/sexual orientation, gender identity) and cultural contexts (e.g., sociopolitical, economic, media) are interconnected and ultimately impact individuals and groups (Jordan, 2012). Despite these changes, as noted above, in a more recent reviews of empirical research investigating the effectiveness of RCT, Lenz (2016) noted a lack of diversity in RCT study samples, with most of the studies sampling primarily white women. Therefore, a study that samples minoritized community members, such this study design sampling Latinx immigrant couples, may be a meaningful contribution to the utilization of RCT with more diverse populations and support RCT theorists' goals of being more inclusive of diverse voices.

Despite the limitations and critiques noted above, RCT remains a powerful framework to contour the proposed research design. Namely, RCT's centralization of relationships and systemic considerations, make it apt for better understanding the experiences of marginalized populations, such as Latinx immigrant couples. In addition, the overlap between common Latinx cultural values and RCT central tenets add to the theories usefulness for working with this population.

As the theoretical framework for this study, RCT tenets have been utilized to guide both the research questions, which focus on relational experiences, as well as the interview questions in the data collection process. For example, some interview questions ask the couple to reflect on how their immigration-related experiences, which can often be systemic [e.g., experiences with discrimination] have impacted their couple relationship. In addition, interview questions also assess how the couple relationship has perhaps impacted the immigration experiences of each partner (e.g., Can you tell me about a time in which your relationship helped you with an immigration-related experience?). Both of these types of questions point to a connection between culture/society and individual relationships, an important aspect of RCT. In addition, RCT tenets will be used to understand and analyze the collected data. RCT terms, such as strategies for disconnection, power over vs. power with, relational images, etc., may be useful language to name and frame the experiences reported by couples during the identification of themes in the data analysis process. However, it is important to note, that RCT may not contain all the necessary terms or language to appropriately name or capture the experiences reported by the couples in this study, presenting some potential limitations on the applicability of RCT during data analysis. If such is the case, it will be explicitly reported in the discussion of the findings.

Conclusion

To better assist and support the large Latinx immigrant couple community living in the United States, it is important to understand their relational experiences in the face of immigration. Immigration is tied to a multitude of stressors that can negatively affect the mental health outcomes of Latinx immigrants, yet family ties, such as couple relationships, have the potential of serving as powerful protective agents. Learning more about the experiences of Latinx immigrant couples, as well as learning more about their relational strengths, can provide

counselors and counselor educators with vital information needed to effectively work with this population from a strength-based and multiculturally competent perspective.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Overview

In Chapter I, I outlined the importance of learning more about the relational experiences of Latinx immigrant couples. Due to the high number of Latinx immigrant couples living in the U.S. it is critical that counselors and counselors-in-training have access to information on how to best support these couples through the unique challenges they face. It is of equal importance that counselors understand more about the relational strengths of Latinx immigrant couples in order to leverage these strengths to meet treatment goals. Chapter II was dedicated to completing an in-depth literature review on Latinx immigrant couples, the immigration-related stressors they incur, as well as how these stressors are linked to negative mental health outcomes. In Chapter II, I also presented the body of literature highlighting the role of family support as a significant protective factor for Latinx immigrants. As was noted in the last two chapters, however, a limited amount of research has been dedicated to qualitatively investigate the experiences of these couples as they undergo immigration-related processes, or to investigate the strengths present in their relationships. This study was designed to address this knowledge gap using the methodology outlined in this chapter.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to address the following two research questions:

- (1) What are Latinx immigrant couples' relationship experiences after arriving to the U.S.?
- (2) What are Latinx couples' perceptions of how their relationship positively influenced their immigration experience after arriving to the U.S.?

Research Design

I utilized the qualitative methodology Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to learn more about the relational experiences of Latinx immigrant couples. IPA was suitable to address the research questions due to its emphasis on understanding how people perceive their lived experiences and how they make sense of them (Smith, 2009). IPA is most useful when seeking to understand phenomena that is perceived as significant, yet not often consciously reflected upon by the participants (Smith & Nizza, 2022), such as relational experiences through immigration. In addition, IPA acknowledges that participant and researcher interpretations are inherent parts of the research process (i.e., double hermeneutics). IPA researchers posit that “our being in the world is always perspectival, always temporal, always ‘in relation to’ something – and consequently, that the interpretation of people’s meaning-making activities is central to the phenomenological inquiry in psychology” (Smith, et al., 2009, p.18). In the double hermeneutic process participants shares their interpretation of an experience and the researcher is interpreting the given interpretation. However, the researcher’s interpretative analysis is not viewed as better or more accurate than that of the participants. Instead, the researcher’s interpretation is viewed as additive insight that grows out of what the participant has shared (Smith et al., 2009). As such, both the participants’ and the researcher’s interpretations and perspective are of value to an inquiry.

As a methodology, IPA is also idiographic (Smith & Nizza, 2022). IPA researchers moved away from transcendental phenomenology’s more traditional goal of finding the “essence” of an experience. The goal of IPA is not to find essential qualities that may transcend one situation and can be applied to others more universally (Smith et al., 2009). Instead, in IPA, each person’s experience is expected to be unique (i.e., idiographic). To honor the idiographic

nature of participants' experience, IPA researchers look for both similar and dissimilar themes across participants. This philosophical underpinning is congruent with the research questions for this study, as participants were asked to recall and make sense of their immigration experiences as a couple, which are unique and specific for each case. The idiographic nature of IPA also allowed for the recognition of the Latinx immigrant population as a non-monolithic culture.

Participants

Participants for this study were first generation Latinx immigrant couples. I opted to recruit couples because involving both partners is of benefit when the phenomenon of interest is the relationship (Freeman et al., 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018). To reach a reasonable level of homogeneity (Smith et al., 2009), participating couples met the following inclusion criteria: (1) both members of the couple were first generation immigrants, who were 18 years of age or older at the time of immigration, (2) both partners identified as Latinx or Hispanic, and (3) the couple must have been in their relationship for a minimum of three years. Due to safety concerns, the exclusion criteria for this study specified that the participants' relationship did not involve any form of intimate partner violence.

Inclusion criteria was limited to first generation immigrants who entered the country as adults in an attempt best sample participants who will be able to reflect on their immigration experiences, including challenges, soon after immigration and beyond. While experiences with immigration are likely present for all immigrants regardless of age of arrival, there are findings suggesting that those who immigrate as children (i.e., the "1.5 generation") more easily acquire host culture practices, values, and identifications (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001 as cited in Schwartz et al. 2010) and have similar mental health outcomes to U.S.-born Latinx people (Alegría et al., 2007). However, a limit of the number of years since immigration was not imposed, due to

evidence suggesting that increased time in the U.S. does not diminish immigration-related challenges for Latinx couples (Falconier et al., 2013). In fact, higher amounts of time in the U.S. appears to increase risks for negative mental health outcomes among Latinx immigrants, a relationship that has been found to be partially explained by experiences with discrimination, acculturation, and increased family conflict (Alegría et al., 2007; Bostean & Gillespie, 2018; Cook et al., 2009). Therefore, it was expected that the relationships of Latinx immigrant couples had not cease to be impacted by the immigration process, making their experiences still relevant to the research questions. Participating couples were asked for a relationship duration of three or more years to avoid sampling couples who are in the “infatuation phase”, which may positively skew couples’ perceptions. The infatuation phase can last up to two years and is characterized by neurological arousal, as well as preoccupation and idealization of the partner (Merrill, 2018).

Sample Size

Although there is no fixed recommendation for number of participants in IPA, possible sample sizes range from three (Smith et al., 2009) to twelve (Smith & Nizza, 2022). However, it is unclear if and how these sample size suggestions apply to studies in which participants are couples. Other IPA researchers who have sampled couples have worked with sample sizes ranging from seven to ten couples (14 to 20 participants; Freeman et al., 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018). In these studies, the data collection procedures were limited to a single couple interview, with interview lengths ranging from 45 to 120 minutes (Freeman et al, 2017; Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018). Since this study design asked couples to participate in two 60-to-75-minute interviews, as well as one 20-to-30-minute member check meeting, I opted to pursue a sample size of eight to ten couples. The selected sample size, along with the interview and member-check meeting structures, ensured that I obtained a minimum of 21 hours of data.

Procedures

Sampling Strategy

As recommended by Smith et al. (2009), purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit a homogenous sample. Participant recruitment for this study relied on passive strategies, including the distribution of recruitment materials through email listservs of Latinx serving organizations in various states. More specifically, I sought the assistance of the University of Central Florida's Marriage and Family Research Institute, to distribute marketing materials among their clients and participants. I also rely on my social network and social media for additional support in distributing recruitment materials.

Recruitment materials included a brief recruitment video recording and flyer, both available in English and Spanish, containing information about the study goal, participation requirements, and participation incentives, as required by UNCG's Institutional Review Board. Recruitment materials are included Appendix A. Interested couples were able to follow a QR code to a Qualtrics landing page (Included in Appendix B) where they reviewed the informed consent, confirmed study eligibility, reported basic demographic information (i.e., race, age, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation) and completed an IPV assessment. If eligible to participate, potential participants were asked to leave their contact information (i.e., email and phone number) for study participation to be arranged. Both partners were asked to complete the Qualtrics survey prior to scheduling the initial interview. A printout of the Qualtrics survey can be found on Appendix B. IPV resources (e.g., national DV hotline) were offered to all prospective participants who follow the QR code, regardless of study eligibility.

To safely exclude couples with IPV in their relationships, all prospective participants who visited the Qualtrics landing page were screened utilizing the HITS (hurt, insulted,

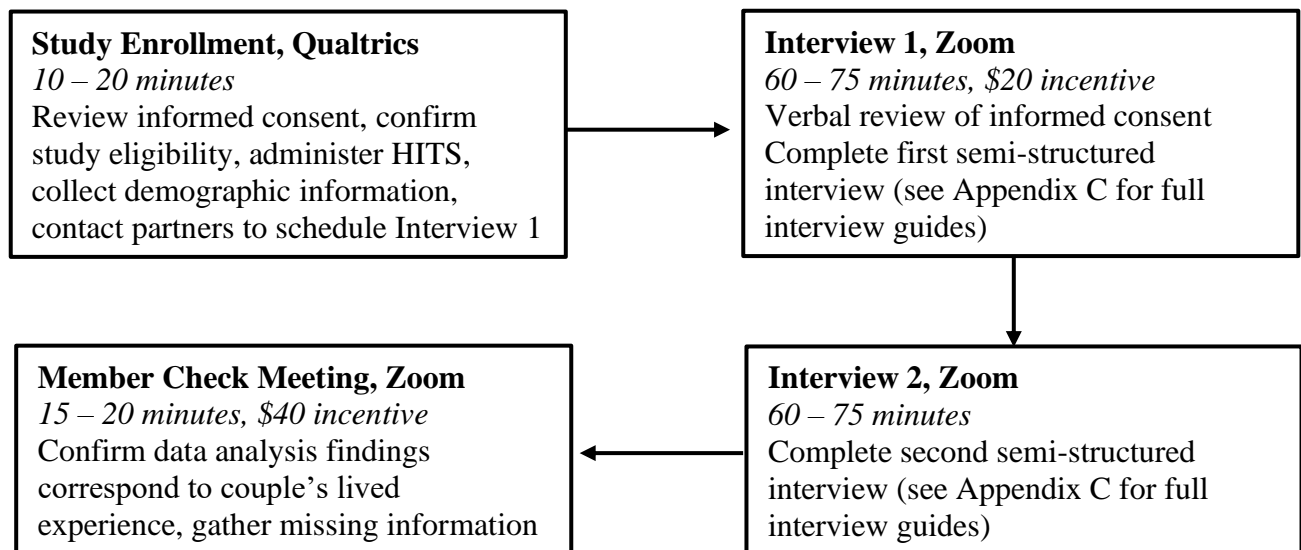
threatened with harm, screamed at them) screening tool for domestic violence (included in Appendix B). The HITS is four-item assessment; scores from the HITS can range from 4 to 20, with scores above 10 indicating the presence of abuse and scores between 8 and 10 indicating risk for abuse. Prospective participants with HITS scores of eight or were excluded from the study. The HITS has been found to have good reliability ($\alpha = .80$) and strong convergent validity (correlation of .85 with the Conflict Tactic Scale; Sherin et al., 1998). The HITS screening tool, which also exists in Spanish, has been used with Latinx samples also demonstrating acceptable reliability for the Spanish and English versions ($\alpha = .61$ to $\alpha = .71$; Chen et al., 2005). Lastly, the HITS is one of the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (2015) recommended screening tools to identify intimate partner violence in healthcare settings due to its brevity and psychometric properties. The HITS was adequate for this study given that goal of using an IPV screening tool is for sampling purposes, not data collection. Partners whose HITS score indicated the presence or high risk of IPV were be informed of study ineligibility, thanked for the interest in participation, and redirected to the IPV resource page.

Data Collection Methods

Once the Qualtrics survey was completed by both partners, I contacted participants via their indicated preferred contact method to schedule the data collection meetings. Specifically, couples were asked to schedule two recorded 60-to-75-minute semi-structured interviews and were informed that a third 15-to-20-minute member check meeting following data analysis would be scheduled at a later time. As a result of the nation-wide recruitment effort, study participants resided in distant geographic locations. To address this, all data collection procedures took place virtually utilizing the web-based meeting platform, Zoom. Zoom meetings were password protected. In addition, all data collection procedures were be offered in English

and Spanish to increase accessibility and accommodate participant language preferences. All of the couples chose for data collection interviews to occur in primarily in Spanish. Participants received reminders through the mode of communication of their choice for each of the scheduled appointments. These reminders will contain the date and time for the interview, along with a reminder for the couples to join the meeting together from a private space, using a device that is fully charged and that has reliable internet connectivity. For a visual representation of data collection procedures, please see Figure 2.

Figure 2: Data Collection Procedures and Incentive Structure



The first few minutes of the first interview were utilized to complete a verbal review of the informed consent, answer any questions the participants may have had, and confirm their consent for participation. Data collection primarily took place during the two 60-to-75-minute couple interviews. These interviews were audio recorded utilizing the Zoom video-conference platform and couples were instructed to join the meeting from the same device if possible.

During the first interview, audio recording was not initiated until the couple verbally confirms their consent to participate and gives permission to record.

In congruence with IPA philosophical underpinnings (Smith & Nizza, 2022), these interviews reflected an effort to gain rich data about the relational experiences of the couples through immigration. As a result, I utilized a semi-structured format in each interview that allowed for the couple to speak freely and reflectively about their dyadic experiences with immigration after their arrival to the U.S. and how they make sense of them (Smith & Nizza, 2022). The first interview was dedicated to addressing the first research question (i.e., what are Latinx immigrant couples' relationship experiences after arriving to the U.S.?), while the second interview was dedicated to addressing the second research question (i.e., What are Latinx couples' perceptions of how their relationship positively influenced their immigration experience after arriving to the U.S.?). However, while the interviews questions were built to answer the two research questions, responses that emerged across the interviews for each couple were often relevant to both research questions.

As recommended by Smith and Nizza (2022), I created and utilized interview guides to formulate questions using accessible language, that gently guided couples to reflect on the experiences that inform the research question (e.g., feelings, thoughts, concerns, stories). The interview guides were comprised of open-ended questions crafted to avoid making assumptions and to encourage expansive responses from the couple (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Smith and Nizza (2022) recommend six to 10 questions for a 45-to-60-minute interview. Although the proposed study has an increased interview length (i.e., 60-to-75-minutes), the interview guides contained six to eight questions to account for responses to each question from both partner. Sample

interview questions from both interviews can be found in Table 1, while the complete interview guides can be found in Appendix C.

Table 1: Sample Questions for IPA Semi-Structured Interviews One and Two

Question	Follow-Up Prompts
Tell me the story of how you met.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk me through that time. • What drew you to one another? • Tell me about the moment you decided to work towards a long-time relationship with another (e.g., when you knew you were serious about the other person)
When you think back to your first few months in the United States, how did the reality of being here compare to your expectations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me more about that • How did that feel? • How did that change your view of the United States?
Tell me about some things you do well as a couple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share with me an example of this <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What feelings are connected to that experience?
Tell me about an immigration-related challenge that you have been able to overcome as a couple?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What made that difficult for you? • When you recall that difficult time, what feelings do you remember having? • What did you take away from that experience?

The last component of study participation entailed completion of one 15-to-20-minute member check meeting following data analysis of their interviews. The goal of this member check meeting was to ensure that the couple agrees that the themes identified in the data analysis were representative of their experience. In addition, member-check meetings were used to prompt the couple to share or add any important component of their experience that was not addressed during the prior interview. Since additional material for data analysis may have arisen,

I recorded the member-check meetings. Throughout data collection interviews and member-check meetings, I kept memos recording visual information (e.g., participant appearance, nonverbal communication between partners) that later aided in my data analysis efforts.

Each participant was compensated up to \$60 in electronic gift cards for completion of all study activities. Participants were able to choose from Amazon or a Walmart gift cards. Incentives were distributed via email upon completion of study activities, with \$20 being distributed after completion of the first interview, \$20 after completion of the second interview, and the remaining \$20 being distributed after completion of the member-check meeting.

Positionality Statement

As part of my reflexive practice, and for the purposes of transparency, it is important that I discuss my personal investment and engagement with this research topic. I am a first-generation Latina immigrant of color, who moved from the Dominican Republic to the United States with my family of origin at the age of 14. Since arriving in 2001, I have experienced what it means to be an immigrant in the U.S. through the holding of various documentation statuses (i.e., undocumented, to legal permanent resident, to citizen) and through residence in multiple East Coast cities, including Miami, FL., Orlando, FL., and Greensboro, NC. As an immigrant I had access to much privilege and have been afforded incredible opportunities, such as a pathway to citizenship and access to higher education, which I am deeply grateful for. Simultaneously, I have also endured difficult experiences, like prejudice and discrimination. In the last decade, the public rhetoric about immigrants has evoked feelings of fear, anxiety, and rejection in me. As an immigrant of color, I vacillate between feeling unseen, misunderstood, and unwanted and feeling proud, empowered, and motivated to support those in my community. These experiences and feelings have heavily influenced my interest in learning more about others in the Latinx

immigrant population. It is also inevitable that these experiences and feelings will influence how I design and implement my research.

Belonging to a loving and supportive family-of-origin, that stayed connected through many challenges and changes, is another important part of where I come from as a researcher. Every step of my immigration journey was enriched by the relational capital I've had access to throughout my life. To reach my goals, I have received extensive support from immediate and extended family, including my parents, siblings, in-laws, and a plethora of caring aunts and uncles. Because of this, I have come to believe in the immense power of relationships to get through life's adversities. My own 11-year marriage to a second-generation Cuban immigrant has solidified this truth for me. My husband and I have supported each other in innumerable ways throughout our time together; each day I benefit from the relationship we built and the love he freely gives. From my experience, Latinx families and couples have a wealth of relational capital that is too often ignored. For me, working to have Latinx relational capital be better understood and more widely recognized is an act of resistance against controlling images that would reduce my community to narratives of a damaged, broken, and undesirable people.

Also relevant to my positionality as a researcher is my training and experience as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and my time employed at the UCF Marriage and Family Research Institute. Over the years, I have been fortunate to have contact with hundreds of Latinx couples, many of whom were immigrants. My clinical and psychoeducational work with these couples reinforced my conviction that there is an inspiring wealth of resilience in this community. I saw couples who, after long and exhausting work shifts, would invest time and energy to attend their relationship education workshops; I saw couples who, despite having lost everything in their countries of origin due to socio-political and economic destabilization,

exhibited hope for their future. I often saw couples who made incredible sacrifices for their relationships and/or for their children. These experiences and memories are deeply ingrained in who I am, how I view the world, and how I view this topic. For these reasons, although I cannot remove myself nor my experiences from how I conduct my research, I relied on various strategies to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness efforts for this study were implemented through various tools, including member-check meetings with all 16 participants, utilizing an external auditor during the data analysis process (see data analysis section), and engaging in cyclical bracketing techniques throughout the data collection and analysis phases (e.g., note taking, recording reactions, journaling). Because I am partially an “insider” of this phenomena, in that I share the experience of immigration and a Latinx ethnic identity with study participants, bracketing efforts began prior to data collection by journaling thoughts, reflections, and perceptions of phenomena to explicitly bring them into awareness (Smith & Nizza, 2022). However, because I could not possibly become aware of all personal preconceptions and assumptions prior to study implementation, cyclical bracketing was used to continually engage in reflective practices. Cyclical bracketing played a role during the formulation of the interview guides, and the data collection process, but was most heavily utilized during the data analysis process (Smith et al., 2009).

Data Analysis

All digitally recorded data was transcribed verbatim. Since all of the participants chose for interviews take place in Spanish, all data was transcribed and analyzed in Spanish, and were only translated for the purposes of disseminating study findings. Pseudonyms, as selected by

participants or assigned by me, were utilized in the transcripts to protect participant identities. In addition, all recorded data and corresponding transcriptions were be stored in password-protected folders within the HIPAA compliant cloud storage software, Box. For the purposes of this study, I followed a version of Smith and Nizza's (2022) suggested data analysis procedure, which I modified to include the use of a Spanish-speaking external auditor.

Each couple interview was be considered a data source. Data analysis will included the following steps:

1. Reading and exploratory notes: I sought to be immersed in the data by listening to recordings, reading transcript multiple times, and recording reactions while commenting on the transcribed document. Reaction notes were categorized into descriptive comments (i.e., about content of the interview), linguistic comments (i.e., about the use of language by participants, interactions between partners, use of humor, use of metaphors, storytelling), and conceptual comments (i.e., comments that are more interpretative in nature and may contain researcher questions; Smith et al., 2009). Table 2, included at the end of this section, is provided as an example of how the reading and exploratory notes were completed.
2. Formulating experiential statements: I sought to identify the meaning of the experience, as was communicated by the participants, for each statement they made. These statements were more conceptual (interpretative), to capture meaningful psychological processes within each portion of the transcript. Table 2, included at the end of the section, is provided as an example for how experiential statements worked coded in the transcript.
3. Finding connections and clustering experiential statements: I reviewed experiential statements and worked to distill them into clusters that are unified by a theme.

4. Compiling table of personal experience themes: In this stage, I organized clustered themes on a table that included the theme name, the corresponding experiential notes for each theme, and the participant quotes that supported the experiential note. This table also included a distinction regarding which partner has quotes supporting the theme. Table 3, provided at the end of this section, contains an example for how experiential themes were completed.
5. External auditor: Each couple analysis was reviewed by an external auditor, whose observations and feedback were considered for compilation of the findings.
6. Cross analysis: Once the data analysis procedure was completed for each interview, I conducted a cross-case analysis, which entailed a review of the experiential theme tables while carefully searching for similarities, differences, and connections across the cases (i.e., convergence and divergence) (Smith & Nizza, 2022). These observations may then be utilized to form a group experiential themes table containing quotes from the multiple data sources.
7. Member check meeting: Following cross analysis, I met with couples to review the findings and ensure they are representative of their experience. Corrections and amendments were made to the findings based on the couple's report during the member check meeting.

To strengthen study trustworthiness, these cross-analysis findings were once again shared with the external auditor, whose observations and questions were taken into consideration in the formulation of the final study findings. Cyclical bracketing was used throughout the data collection and analysis process. I did this by journaling about my beliefs, thoughts, and feelings regarding Latinx immigrant couples prior to data collection interviews and

prior to beginning data analysis (i.e., before reading transcripts and recording my exploratory notes and experiential statements), as well as when reviewing feedback from the external auditor.

Table 2: Example of Transcript Coding

Experiential Statement	#	Speaker	Original Transcript	Exploratory Notes
	1 2	Nicole	Nicole asks an interview question, but this will not be coded.	
Meaning in what Laura is sharing	3 4 5 6	Laura	This is an example of what Laura might say during the couple interview. She may then stop to allow for Carlos to speak.	Descriptive comment. <i>Linguistic comment.</i>
Meaning in what Carlos is sharing	7 8	Carlos	Carlos might agree with what Laura shared but add a detail she forgot to mention.	Descriptive comment. <u>Conceptual comment.</u>

Table 3: Example of Experiential Themes Table

	Page/Line	Quotes
This is the first theme identified from this transcript		
This is an experiential statement for this theme	7/46	<i>This is what Laura said to support this statement</i>
This is another experiential statement	14/22	<i>This is what Carlos said to support this statement</i>

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to gain insight on the implementation of the proposed research study. The pilot study is designed to address the following research questions:

- (1) How effective are the recruitment materials in the engagement of prospective participants towards study enrollment?
- (2) How appropriate is the interview structure for in-depth and relevant data collection and for encouragement of participant retention?
 - a. What is the necessary interview length to cover all interview questions?
 - b. Are the interview questions clear, comprehensive, and relevant to the participant's experience?
 - c. How helpful is the incentive structure in motivating continued study engagement?

Participants

One couple, who met all the study inclusion and exclusion criteria requirements, was included in the pilot study. As selected by the couple, the pseudonyms Saul and Lisa will be used to refer to them. Saul and Lisa both identified as White, heterosexual, and cisgender Latinx immigrants from Mexico. They reported coming to the U.S. in their late 20s. They were married prior to immigration, but immigrated separately, with Saul immigrating 3 months prior to Lisa. Saul and Lisa are between the ages of 45 and 54, have lived in the U.S. for 26 years, and have been married for 34 years.

Procedures

The couple was recruited through my social network. I reached out to an acquaintance, who then referred the couple for the pilot study. Lisa provided her contact information to my acquaintance and requested that I reach out to her directly. All communication with this couple was completed in Spanish. Initial contact took place through phone messaging using the application WhatsApp, where I obtained permission to call Lisa. During the first call, Lisa was provided with information about the purpose of the pilot study, the activities related to

participating (i.e., interview structure), and the incentives associated with participation. Lisa reported they would be interested in participating and an initial interview was scheduled. The couple was instructed to review the flyer and complete the Qualtrics survey prior to the first interview. The couple was also provided with the Zoom link for the scheduled interview.

The first interview was 77-minutes in duration, took place via Zoom., and was conducted using the pilot study semi-structured interview guide included in Appendix D. Saul and Lisa joined the meetings together from the same device in a private space. The first few minutes of the first interview were dedicated for introductions, a review of the pilot study details, and confirmation that the couple would like to proceed with participation. After this, Saul and Lisa were asked about their impressions about the recruitment materials (i.e., the flyer), as well as about their experience completing the Qualtrics survey and reviewing the informed consent. Following this, the couple responded to questions from the Interview 1 semi-structured interview (see Appendix C), and at the end, shared their evaluation of the interview and its questions. At the end of this interview, the second interview was tentatively scheduled (for one week later). In addition, when coordinating the distribution of the incentives, the couple asked for the incentives to be distributed all together at the end of the second interview, to which I agreed.

One day prior to the tentatively scheduled interview, the couple was contacted about confirming the appointment; the originally scheduled time was modified to take place earlier in the day based on a schedule conflict that had come up for them. The second interview was approximately 70 minutes in duration and took place via Zoom. The couple joined the zoom meeting from the same device and were in a private space throughout the interview. This interview was conducted using the pilot study semi-structured interview guide included in Appendix D, which entailed the completion of the interview questions from the Interview 2

semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C), as well as questions to prompt the couple's evaluation of the interview questions. At the end of this meeting, feedback was also solicited regarding the incentive amounts. Following both interviews, an incentive of \$120 Walmart e-gift card was sent to Lisa's email address, as per the couple's request.

Findings

Interview 1

Saul and Lisa provided useful feedback about the study recruitment materials and design. Both partners agreed that the recruitment flyer was effective and contained all the information necessary to make a decision about study participation. Saul noted however, that although there is nothing to add to the flyer, he felt that only people who are interested in helping others would likely want to engage in the study. Both partners seemed to agree that a desire to help others would be the main motivator for potential participants.

Regarding the Qualtrics survey, both Saul and Lisa reported that the informed consent was clear, and that the survey was easy to navigate. Saul noted that he felt confused about the questions asking for his contact information, immediately following the instructions to forward the survey to his partner. He explained that this was because "su" contact information in Spanish can refer to "your" contact information or "their" contact information. Saul also noted that the HITS question asking, "Does your partner scream or curse at you?" seemed to be grouping together two events that are very different (i.e., screaming vs. cursing), wherein screaming might happen more commonly, but cursing at someone is a much more serious offense. Aside from this feedback, both partners agreed that they would not suggest any other changes to the recruitment flyer or the Qualtrics survey.

The interview length, which was 77 minutes, sufficed to cover all the interview questions. Throughout the interview, couple seemed to understand the meaning of the questions asked, as they responded with thorough and relevant information each time. Both partners took turns to speak and responded separately to each of the questions, sometimes in agreement and other times sharing different perspectives. The couple often provided examples to illustrate their points. For example, when talking about challenges to their relationship, Lisa shared that the fear of deportation for her partner really hurt her; she noted that her partner has been arrested for driving without a license and that this created family difficulties and a lot of pain for their family. During the interview, the couple also indicated that their city of residence, which they considered to be an increasingly diverse, made a difference in their experiences as immigrants; they noted, for example, being able to buy food that is of Mexican origin or knowing other immigrants in their community.

Towards the beginning of the interview each partner asked for clarification on what I meant when I asked them to report what they felt during a situation. When I provided examples of feelings words, however, the couple was able to understand and respond accordingly. Once in the interview, Lisa cried when reporting the challenges they had overcome, but appeared to self-regulate as she shared how her family has become stronger and more united by facing those challenges.

When asked about their experience with the interview, the couple reported that they felt the questions were clear and that they did not believe any important questions were excluded from the interview. The couple also agreed that interview-length was comfortable, and Lisa shared that the time went by very quickly. At this time, the couple suggested that I be mindful that their experiences as undocumented immigrants will likely be very different than those who

enter the U.S. with documentation, as they have faced additional stressors and injustices due to their lack of documentation. However, they clarified that I should not directly ask participants about their documentation status, because it can create fear. Instead, they suggested to allow each couple to decide what they would like to share regarding their documentation status. When concluding the interview, couple reiterated that their interest in participating in the pilot study was rooted in a desire to help other Latinx immigrants.

Interview 2

During the second pilot study interview, there were some internet connectivity issues, which caused delays in the sound and in the picture of the Zoom meeting. A few times, the couple reported feeling confused and asked for additional clarification about some of the questions. For example, when asking about their immigration experience, Saul asked if that solely referred to the legal process of immigration. In addition, the couple asked for clarification about the following two questions: “Can you tell me about a time in which your relationship helped you with an immigration-related experience?” and “Can you tell me about a time in which your partner helped you with an immigration-related experience?” However, once they were provided with examples, Saul and Lisa were able to respond to the questions. In addition, the following three questions elicited for the couple to reflect on the same event/experience (i.e., Saul’s detention by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and risk of deportation): “Can you tell me about a time in which your relationship helped you with an immigration-related experience?” “How has your relationship impacted your immigration experience?” “Can you tell me about a time in which your partner helped you with an immigration-related experience?”

After requesting their feedback on the questions, Saul and Lisa reported that they thought the questions were clear and that they believed part of the confusion was due to technology

issues. Saul and Lisa reported that their confusion following certain questions was due to the limited ability to hear the questions. They reported that the questions were well-stated, but sometimes unexpected, so they required additional time for them to reflect. Both Saul and Lisa also agreed that there were no questions they would add to the interview, and that the interview length was comfortable and passed by very quickly.

Regarding the incentives, the couple reported they felt the incentive amount was fair and motivating for prospective participants, but also shared that those who participate would likely do so out of a desire to help. Saul reported that it felt good to have someone be interested in their experiences as immigrants, which was a form of payment for him. Lisa agreed and added that the incentive amount worked well because the time they invested amounted to \$20 per hour just to “platicar” (i.e., to converse), which she felt was a great. At the end of the interview, the couple reported a desire to help with the study by sharing the recruitment information with their network.

Implications

Several changes have been made to the study design based on the pilot study results, including changes to the study enrollment process and changes to the data collection process. While the recruitment materials will go unchanged, due to the positive feedback from the couple in the pilot study, some modifications were made to the study enrollment process. Because Saul and Lisa preferred for communication (e.g., to schedule meeting times, for meeting reminders) to take place through the text application “WhatsApp,” the use of other communication applications has been included, in addition to text message, phone calls, and emails, in the menu of options participants can select for their preferred communication mode. To further facilitate study enrollment, changes to the order of the survey questions have been made to avoid the confusion

noted by Saul (i.e., whether “su” in Spanish referred to him or to his partner). In addition, a question gathering the prospective participant’s city and state of residence has been added to the Qualtrics survey demographic questionnaire. This change is the result of Saul and Lisa report that their geographic location (e.g., amount of diversity in a city) impacted their immigration experience. Adding a question about prospective participant’s city of residence also allows for preparation of mental health resources that are local to each participant, which may be helpful if emotional dysregulation occurs during the interview or that these resources are needed by the couple. Lastly, a snowball sampling statement has been added to the last page of the Qualtrics survey, to encourage prospective participants to refer other interested people to the study. Given that Saul and Lisa shared an interest in referring others to the study, including a statement that encourages the referral of other couples to the study may facilitate snowball sampling.

In addition to the changes to the enrollment process, I have also added a meeting reminder protocol to the study, wherein participants will be contacted 2 days before their scheduled interview through their preferred mode of communication (i.e., phone call, text message, email, communication application such as WhatsApp). The reminders will contain the date and time of the scheduled interview, the Zoom link for the interview, as well as a brief reminder for the couple to join the meeting from the same device and to ensure they have reliable internet connectivity.

The final changes to the study design included modifications to the interview protocol. A statement has been added to the interview guides describing the scope of the immigration experiences that are inquired about in the interview questions and specifying that their reflections do not have to be limited to the legal process of their immigration. In addition, a

statement explaining that they might be asked to recall their feelings (not just their thoughts) as part of the interview process and specifying examples of feeling words. Lastly, the question “Can you tell me about a time in which your relationship helped you with an immigration-related experience?” was eliminated because it was very similar and elicited similar responses to the question “Can you tell me about a time in which your partner helped you with an immigration-related experience?”,

No additional changes were made to the study design based on the results of the pilot study. The pilot study participants reported that the study recruitment process, interview structure (e.g., interview length, number of questions), and the incentive structure were all appropriate to engage and retain study participants. The interview lengths were sufficient to cover all interview questions, and data yielded from the pilot study interviews effectively informed the research questions.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

I conducted this study to explore the relational experiences of Latinx immigrant couples after moving to the United State (U.S.). As discussed in the previous chapter, I utilized an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology, paired with a Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) framework to explore the following two research questions: (1) What are Latinx immigrant couples' relationship experiences after arriving to the U.S.? (2) What are Latinx couples' perceptions of how their relationship positively influenced their immigration experience after arriving to the U.S.? In this chapter, I outline the study findings, which include seven themes that emerged from 16 interviews (approximately 21 hours and 33 minutes of recorded data), and eight member-check meetings with study participants (approximately 5 hours and 40 minutes of recorded data).

Participants

Eight Latinx immigrant couples, who arrived in the U.S. as adults, participated in this study. Each couple completed two interviews, which ranged between 56 minutes to 112 minutes in duration, and one member-check meeting, which ranged between 28 to 68 minutes in duration. All participants identified as cisgender and heterosexual. In addition, all the couples opted for data collection procedures to take place in Spanish. The profiles that follow contain more in-depth information about each of the participating couples. The information on these profiles was attained through a combination of participant responses on the Qualtrics survey, the couples' responses during data collection interviews, as well as my observations during these interviews. Pseudonyms, as selected by the participants or me, have been used to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Magda and Jose

Magda and Jose are a retired couple, who have been in their relationship for 42 years. Magda is 69 years old, while Jose is 77. They are both Colombian but immigrated to the U.S. at different times. Jose voluntarily immigrated when he was 18 years old to pursue his dream of joining the U.S. Navy and has lived in the U.S. for 59 years. Magda also voluntarily immigrated to the U.S. but reports she did only so “por amor” [“for love”], given that she immigrated because of her marriage to Jose. Magda has lived in the U.S. for 39 years. They are the parents of two adult sons who no longer live with them.

Magda is a fair-skinned woman with almost-blond curly hair, which as she noted throughout the interview, makes her white-passing. This contrasts with Jose, who is tan-skinned and more easily recognizable as a person of color. During the interviews, Magda was more talkative than Jose, who often waited for my direct prompts to add his perspective. Magda was also more expressive in her body language and intonation; she often made jokes and laughed, demonstrated physical affection to Jose (e.g., stroking his head), and cried when discussing her initial immigration experiences. Jose was more stoic in his presentation, although he did smile and laugh at Magda’s jokes and sometimes made jokes of his own. Over the course of both interviews, I met with Magda and Jose for a total of 2 hours and 20 minutes.

Carla and Rafael

Carla and Rafael are a working age couple of Mexican origin, who immigrated to the U.S. 14 years ago for Carla to attend a master’s program. Carla is 41 years old, and Rafael is 38 years old. They have been in their relationship for 17 years. Because they entered the U.S. with a student visa, and later secured a work visa, Carla and Rafael reported having a long and arduous process towards attaining their permanent residency status, with Rafael describing the

experiences a “un maratón” [“a marathon”]. This marathon created significant vocational and mental health barriers for each partner at differing times. Rafael is fair-skinned and blond-haired, which as the couple notes throughout the interview, makes him white passing. Carla has light tan skin, dark straight hair, and dark eyes. In both interviews, Carla was energetic, playful, and expressive, often using humor, smiling, and laughing, showing physical affection to Rafael, and being animated in her storytelling. Rafael, who had a calmer demeanor, was more subdued in his nonverbal expressions, but often laughed and smiled at Carla’s jokes. The couple shared speaking time evenly throughout the interview and continuously asked for each other’s input by prompting their partner to speak and asking each other questions. My meetings with Carla and Rafael yielded a total of 2 hours and 37 minutes of data.

Daniel and Daniela

Daniel, who is 56 years old, and Daniela who is 46, have been in their relationship for 27 years. Seven years ago, they immigrated together to the U.S. to pursue a better and safer quality of life following the sociopolitical destabilization in their country of origin, Venezuela. In their interviews, both Daniel and Daniela expressed that prior to their immigration they had well-established and flourishing careers, as well as a large network of friends and family, which made the immigration process difficult. Years prior to their immigration, Daniel and Daniela also shared the loss of their newborn daughter; they reported this being a critical point in their relationship that ultimately prepared them for the struggles they faced as immigrants (e.g., “el saber desapegarse” [“to know how to let go”]). Daniel and Daniela are parents to a school-aged son, whose wellbeing they noted as a priority, something that was embedded in their motivations to immigrate.

Daniel is fair skinned and has white hair, while Daniela is more tan-skinned and has long, dark brown, straight hair. In contrast to most of the other couples, Daniel and Daniela did not discuss their physical appearance as part of their immigration experience. During the interview, Daniel and Daniela were calm, engaged, and present, using a lot of eye-contact and even-paced speech with a low tone of voice. They both smiled often. Daniel and Daniela shared speaking time evenly throughout the interview, often adding to a story or thought their partner was sharing. I met with Daniel and Daniela for a total of 2 hours and 31 minutes over their two data collection interviews.

Maria and Sergio

Maria and Sergio have been together for 35 years. Maria, who is a retired baker, is 64 years old, while Sergio, who is a pastor, is 58 years old. They have lived in the U.S. for 23 years, after immigrating from Argentina due to personal and national economic crises, which had been negatively impacting their family and Sergio's mental health. Because, at the time of their immigration, Argentinians did not need a Visa to enter the U.S., Maria and Sergio entered the U.S. without the need for additional documentation. They shared they were undocumented for 11 years after their arrival to the U.S., which created a series of difficulties and concerns for them. As Sergio put it "Sufrimos mucho el no tener papeles. Tuvimos muchos años indocumentados. Y teníamos mucho miedo, eso sí" [We suffered a lot not having papers. We had a lot of years we were undocumented. And we had a lot of fear, definitely].

Maria is a fair-skinned woman with short, grey, and white hair and dark eyes. Sergio is also fair skinned with dark eyes but noted that he is sometimes confused for a white person. Maria and Sergio are parents to three adult daughters, only one of whom still lives with them. Throughout the interview, Maria and Sergio both used a lot of humor and storytelling to share

their experiences. Sergio was very animated, often making jokes, speaking at a faster rate, and smiling and laughing. Maria, who also smiled often, had a calmer presentation. They both shared speaking time and sometimes added to what their partner was saying. My time with Maria and Sergio yielded a total of 2 hours and 32 minutes of data.

Teresa and Manuel

Teresa and Manuel are the most recently immigrated couple in the sample, having arrived to the U.S. only five years ago seeking an improved quality of life (e.g., safety, access to healthcare) after the sociopolitical and economic destabilization of their home country of Venezuela. Teresa is 44 years old, and Manuel is 52 years old. They have been in their relationship for 24 years. They are also parents to two children, both of whom have special needs, and who they talked about often during the interviews. Teresa is white, but has dark eyes and long black hair, while Manuel is more tanned, though still fair-skinned, and has thinning white hair. Manuel and Teresa took turns speaking, with Manuel speaking a bit more than Teresa. They sat close to one another, shoulders touching, which allowed Manuel to engage in several displays of physical affection towards Teresa (e.g., kissing her on the head, or laying his head on her shoulder). Manuel and Teresa were both very expressive, often using humor and laughing, but also crying when discussing intense emotions of joy or sadness. I met with Manuel and Teresa for a total of 3 hours over the course of two interviews.

Carlos and Carolina

Carlos and Carolina are a Colombian couple. Carlos is 80 years old, and Carolina is 65 years old. They have now been married for 44 years. They, along with Magda and Jose, are the only couples in the sample who immigrated to the U.S. at different times. They are also the only couple who met and began their relationship after they had each immigrated. Carlos, who has

lived in the U.S. for 48 years, immigrated with his children to reunite with his first wife.

Carolina, who has been in the U.S. for 45 years, immigrated with the intent to financially help her mom who remained in Colombia. Carolina shared that she entered the U.S. by crossing “El Rio Bravo” [“Rio Grande”], an experience she regarded as dangerous and deeply traumatic, leading to some long-lasting mental health concerns.

Due to some internet difficulties, Carlos and Carolina’s Zoom interviews did not include videoconferencing, and instead were audioconference only. As a result, I was not able to make observations on the couple’s appearance or their non-verbal communication. The couple shared speaking time evenly throughout the interview and sometimes interjected what their partner was sharing by adding a word, a phrase, or expressing agreement. Both Carlos and Carolina used humor and laughed at their partner’s jokes. Several times, Carlos made comments to console or cheer up Carolina whenever she spoke about sad events or topics. For instance, when Carolina remarked that she was never able to drive a car due to anxiety, Carlos joked that she would be able to drive in heaven, making Carolina laugh. My time with Carlos and Carolina over the course of two interviews yielded 1 hour and 57 minutes of data.

Angela and Ariel

Angela and Ariel are an Argentinian couple who got married in their home country and then immediately immigrated to the U.S. seeking better economic opportunities. Ariel, who arrived the U.S. a few months before Angela, had secured a work visa, and Angela was able to join him with a dependent visa. Their goal was to attain the financial independence necessary to begin their married life together, something which they shared was not possible amid Argentina’s economic crises. They have now lived in the U.S. for 20 years and have been in their

relationship for 25 years. Angela is 42 years old, and Ariel is 46 years old. They recently became the parents of a baby daughter, who was present during some points of the interviews.

Although Ariel wrote he was unsure of what his race is on the Qualtrics survey, both him and Angela and Ariel present as white, with Angela having blond hair and light eyes. They mentioned an awareness that their appearance, specifically their lighter skin, has provided them with some privilege in their immigration experiences. Both Angela and Ariel were attentive and present during the interview, as they maintained eye contact, shared each of their perspectives, and sometimes helped each other by adding to what their partner was sharing. Angela took the lead on responding to questions more often than Ariel, which they joked about in the interview. They sat in separate chairs and did not touch each other during the interview. However, when their daughter was in the room, they both engaged with her by holding her and showing her physical affection. Ariel and Angela were relaxed, as they kept an even keeled rate of speech and calm tone of voice. Ariel and Angela also used humor throughout the interview, with Angela often smiling and laughing. A total of 2 hours and 57 minutes of data resulted from my two interviews with Ariel and Angela.

Victoria ad Zeledonio

Victoria and Zeledonio (ZeZe) immigrated to the U.S. 21 years ago, to gain independence as a couple and build their family in the U.S. They are the only couple in the study who are from different nationalities, with Victoria being of Mexican origin, and ZeZe being an American citizen of Puerto Rican origin. Victoria is 56 years old and ZeZe is 52 years old, and they have been in their relationship for 23 years. They are parents to a college-aged daughter. Victoria has light tanned skin, long, black, straight hair, and dark eyes, while ZeZe has white skin and light eyes. During the interview ZeZe reported that his identity as a white Hispanic has caused him

experiences rejection and a lack of belongingness among American racial groups and Latinxs, which is something that impacts him “hasta el sol de hoy” [“to this day”].

During the interview, both Victoria and Zele were very expressive and animated, often speaking quickly, using colloquialisms, and a lot of humor. They recurrently joked and laughed with each other and with me. Although Victoria was active and engaged, often sharing her perspective, Zele spoke for longer periods of time than her. Both partners often added to their partner’s statements, often sharing agreement. In total, over our two interviews, I spent 3 hours and 39 minutes with Zele and Victoria.

For ease of reading, I have also opted to include Table 4, which contains a summarized profile for each of the couples in the sample.

Table 4: Summary of Participant Profiles

Participant Names	Description
Magda and Jose	Colombian. Magda is 69 and Jose is 77. They have been together for 42 years and lived in the U.S for 39 years. They are parents to two adult children.
Carla and Rafael	Mexican. Carla is 41 and Rafael is 39. They have been together for 17 years and have lived in the U.S. for 14 years. They are childfree.
Daniel and Daniela	Venezuelan. Daniel is 56 and Daniela is 46. They have been together for 27 years and have lived in the U.S. for 7 years. They are parents to one school-aged child.
Maria and Sergio	Argentinian. Maria is 64 and Sergio is 58. They have been together for 35 years and lived in the U.S. for 23 years. They are parents to three adult children.
Teresa and Manuel	Venezuelan. Teresa is 44 and Manuel is 52. They have been together for 24 years and lived in the U.S. for 5 years. They are parents to two school-aged children.
Carlos and Carolina	Colombian. Carlos is 80 and Carolina is 65. They have been together for 44 years and have lived in the U.S. for different

times, with Carolina living in the U.S, for 45 years and Carlos for 48 years. They are parents to Carlo's adult children.

Angela and Ariel

Argentinian. Angela is 42 and Ariel is 46. They have been together for 25 years and lived in the U.S. for 20 years. They are the parents to one infant.

Zeke and Victoria

Zeke is Puerto Rican and Victoria is Mexican. Zeke is 52 and Victoria is 56. They have been together for 23 years and have lived in the U.S for 21 years. They are parents to one college-aged child.

Overview of Themes

A total of 7 experiential themes, and 23 subthemes emerged from the data after completion of the cross-analysis. I added more information, and sometimes made slight modifications, within each subtheme based on participant feedback during member check meetings. The identified experiential themes and subthemes include the following:

1. Family is important
 - 1.1. The significant role of extended family
 - 1.2. Prioritizing the nuclear family
2. Varied and meaningful motivations to immigrate
3. Immigration brings challenges for the individual and for the couple
 - 3.1. The documentation process as a marathon
 - 3.2. Financial pressure
 - 3.3. Learning English
 - 3.4. Experiences of discrimination, while also acknowledging privilege
 - 3.5. Being uprooted and replanted
 - 3.6. Impact on mental health

- 3.7. Impact on the couple relationship
- 4. Experiences of trauma and acute stress
- 5. “Nunca sabes de lo que estas hecho hasta que inmigras”: The use of resources, tools, and strategies for success
 - 5.1. Working hard and living within your means
 - 5.2. Following the law, rules, and norms in the U.S.
 - 5.3. Receiving help from others
 - 5.4. Relocation within the U.S.
 - 5.5. The use of spirituality or religion
 - 5.6. The use of hope, positivity, and gratitude
 - 5.7. Contributing to society and helping others
- 6. “En la unión esta la fuerza”: The relationship as a resource to face challenges
 - 6.1. Giving and receiving support
 - 6.2. Teamwork
 - 6.3. Open, consistent, and respectful communication
 - 6.4. To love and be loved
- 7. “Valió la pena”: The benefits of immigrating
 - 7.1. Building the life you want
 - 7.2. Achievements in the U.S.
 - 7.3. Immigration strengthened the couple relationship

These themes are explored in depth in the sections below. To mitigate the loss of meaning that inevitably occurs when translating data from its original language, I have opted to include the original participant quotes in Spanish alongside my translation throughout the results

section. The themes and subthemes selected represent the major undercurrents of the lived experiences shared by the couples, as I interpreted them. However, I believe it is important to note the profound uniqueness that was present in each case. Although I attempt to highlight exceptions and other nuanced differences within the themes for each couple, it is unlikely that I will be able to adequately capture the full idiographic nature of each story.

Family is Important

The couples expressed that family, whether extended or nuclear, was an important part of their lives. The significance of family could be seen in the couples' decision making, how and where they invested their time and energy, and was evident in their direct comments highlighting family as central to them. In this section I will discuss how this strong orientation towards family emerged throughout the interviews by exploring both the significant role extended family plays in the lives of the couples, as well as how the couples prioritized the wellbeing of their nuclear families.

The Significant Role of Extended Family

Extended family, which often included family of origin members (e.g., parents, siblings), had an influential effect on most of the interviewed couples. This influence was observed in various forms, including the desire for family approval for the couple relationship to begin or continue, in the efforts placed to provide support to extended family, as well as in how the couples received emotional and concrete support from extended family. From the interviews, I gathered the sense that extended family plays a very active and key role in the participants' stories.

Several of the couples expressed that advice, approval, and support from their parents was an important step in formalizing their relationship. Carla, for example, relied on the

guidance of her parents to decide whether to move back to her hometown after the completion of her undergraduate degree in a different Mexican city. She was dating Rafael, who was still working on finishing his degree, and was unsure if she should remain in the same city as him, so she called her parents for advice:

Yo le pregunté a mis papás “Pues ya terminé, que hago?” y mi mamá me dijo “estás enamorada?” y le dije “si estoy enamorada” entonces me dijo “juégatela, quédate a esperarlo a ver si él también está como listo para compartir su vida contigo.”

[I asked parents “So I finished, what should I do?” and my mom said, “are you in love?” and I said “Yes, I’m in love” so she replied, “risk it, stay there and wait for him to see if he is also ready to share a life with you.”]

Carla took her mom’s advice; she remained in the city and asked Rafael to move in with her. Also displaying the importance of extended family, Rafael shared that he didn’t feel comfortable committing to move in with Carla until she had met his family: “Yo dije todavía no es porque para mí como que en ese momento no me había dado cuenta lo importante que era que también conociera a mis papás y que hubiera esta aprobación familiar también” [“I said not yet because for me, like in that moment, I had not realized how important it was that she had also met my parents and that there was also approval from my family”]. In other words, for Rafael the approval of his family was a necessary step to increase commitment in the relationship. Similar to Carla and Rafael, Teresa shared that bringing Manuel home and having him meet her parents symbolized a high degree of commitment in the relationship: “En eso sí teníamos todos mis hermanos claro, y mi papá no los hacía saber, o sea “que el que ustedes traigan a la casa ese es” [In that sense my siblings and I were clear and my dad would let us know “whoever you bring to

the house, that's the one"]. For these couples, family introductions were an avenue to elevate their commitment.

Daniel and Daniela also reported that they were especially careful to take their relationship seriously and to handle it with care because their families had a long-standing friendship that they wanted to respect, as Daniela put it: “Por estar tan involucrada en nuestras familias entonces era como que bueno ya algo serio no podemos a jugar. No era para jugar... era una amistad de muchos años de nuestra familia entonces lo hicimos como que estar seguro” [“Because our families were so involved then it was like this is serious, we can't play around. It wasn't a game ... it was a friendship of many years between our families, so we wanted to be sure”]. In her words, you get a sense of a reverence for their families and the friendship that existed between them, which made them carefully consider their relationship and the impact it would have.

Extended family also played a role in reaffirming the couples of their interest in their partner and the relationship. Angela, for example, noted that she felt much more comfortable pursuing Ariel because he had met and gotten along with her family on the same night that she met him (i.e., during her sister's birthday party). Several participants also shared a sense of reaffirmation after meeting their partner's family. Sergio, for instance, noted that seeing Maria's relationship with her mother highlighted positive qualities that drew him even more to Maria: “Pero a medida que la fui conociendo a ella y a su familia, su mamá era muy muy dulce y... cómo María cuidaba de su mamá, empecé a ver la...calidad humana” [“But as I got to know her and her family, her mom was very, very sweet and...how Maria took care of her mom I started to see her human quality”]. For Sergio, seeing Maria and her interactions with her family allowed him to notice and appreciate some of her positive qualities as a person. Therefore, it seems that

interactions with family of origin members, and more specifically parents, was often additive for the couples to either begin or continue their relationship.

The importance of extended family also emerged in the interviews mutual support between, which sometimes transpired in the form of concrete help. Examples of this include the financial support Magda and Jose received from their extended family when Jose lost his job, the steady financial support that Carlos and Carolina provided to their families back in Colombia, or Angela's uncle connecting Ariel to a U.S. employer who could provide him with a work visa that facilitated their immigration to the U.S. However, this support also included emotional assistance that was recurrently exchanged with between the couples and their extended family. Carla and Rafael described how in the last year it has been their priority to support Rafael's brother as he fought cancer, support that they agreed could have been financial (if needed) but was ultimately primarily emotional, as Rafael traveled often to spend time with his brother. In addition to providing support, partners also received emotional support from extended family. Angela, for instance, described how her parents helped her during her initial and incredibly difficult immigration process, and encouraged her to enroll in college, which she didn't think was possible due to her visa status as a dependent:

Yo tu tuve muchos momentos así de decaimiento, lloraba por el teléfono con ellos... Y ellos me veían. Yo engorde como 60 kilos en 6 meses al ratito de haber llegado, o sea hubo un cambio muy grande de mío físico, emocional, y todo...yo sé que se preocuparon...pero la conversación siempre era como me pueden ayudar, que es lo que pueden hacer...Mi mama fue en una conversación por teléfono me dice "hija, anda igual, anda averiguar, anda, anda no más" [si se podía registrar en la universidad]. Estaba muy deprimida y fui y ahí me enteré que no, que con la licencia [de conducir] podía estudiar.

En esos momentos cualquiera de ellos podrían haber dicho “No, Angela, vente, pero que estás haciendo allá, y... bueno si vos te venís vas a ver que Ariel no se va a aguantar y va a volver también.” Nunca, jamás.

[I had a lot of moments of sadness, I would cry on the phone to them... and they saw me. I gained 60 kilos in six months right after arriving, so there was a big change in me, physically, emotionally and everything... I know that they worried... but the conversation was always how can they help me, what can they do. It was my mom, during a phone conversation that said “Daughter, go anyways, go and find out, go, simply go” [to see if she could enroll in college]. I was very depressed, and I went, and it was there that I found out that with my [driver’s] license I could study. In those moments either of them could’ve said “No, Angela come back, what are you doing over there? And if you come back, you’ll see that Ariel won’t stand it and he’ll come back too.” Never, ever.]

As is reflected in Angela’s words, not only did her parents provide significant emotional backing and encouragement, but they also actively avoided discouraging her from staying in her relationship and in the U.S. In that sense, there is an acknowledgement that extended family not only has the power of supporting the couples, but also the power of detracting from their efforts and goals if so desired. On this matter Ariel reported: “es un factor que es muy, muy [importante], porque la familia, la, o sea las relaciones que uno deja atrás tiene todo el potencial para hacer el proceso más fácil o terriblemente mucho más difícil.” [“It’s a very, very [important] factor, because the family, the relationships that you leave behind, have the potential to make the process easier or much more terribly difficult”].

Maria and Sergio's story provides a vivid example of how extended family can negatively impact an immigrant couple. They reported experiencing emotional and physical abuse at the hands of Sergio's half-brother soon after their arrival to the U.S. Sergio and Maria depended on this half-brother for their housing, obtaining work, and for their pathway to documentation, which made them particularly vulnerable in their initial months after immigration. The mistreatment from their extended family included getting Maria fired from work by contacting her employers to alert them of her undocumented status, pushing Maria during her pregnancy, and emotional abuse of their young daughters. The lack of support and active abuse from Sergio's half-brother was particularly painful for the couple. Sergio expressed it in this manner:

Los primeros meses, o los primeros años fueron muy difíciles por ...[lo] emocional y relacional...Y nos costó ... tener ese apoyo de familia...Que no lo tuvimos, o sea lo tuvimos como diciendo "bueno los ayudamos con el pasaje" nos ayudaron cuando llegamos, pero después nos faltó esa contención que creo que cualquier inmigrante necesita

[The first months, or the first years were very difficult because... [of the] emotional and relational [aspects]...And it was costly for us... having that support from our family...which we didn't have, I mean we had them saying "We will help you with the airfare," they helped us when we arrived, but after that we missed that component that I think any immigrant needs]

Sergio is expressing that they needed more support than what they received from his family during their initial years in the U.S. Maria, his partner, put it more directly when she stated that:

La familia de mi esposo nunca fue una verdadera familia. Hubo mucha rivalidad, mucha envidia, y bueno entonces, como que empezamos alejarnos un poco y bueno y con mis hijas y mi esposo, más que un matrimonio, fue una familia que nos unimos mucho. Y nunca nos separábamos

[My husband's family was never a true family. There was a lot of rivalry, a lot of envy, and so when we began to distance ourselves a little, and with my husband and my daughters, more than our marriage, it was our family that got very united. And we were never apart]

Here Maria is expressing that the behavior of Sergio's half-brother violated what it means to be a family, and that the lack of access to support from extended family resulted in their nuclear family becoming more connected and united. This prioritization of the nuclear family signaled by Maria in that quote is the second way in which the couples expressed their importance of family throughout their interviews.

Prioritizing the Nuclear Family

The nuclear family was of poignant importance to the couples. This focus was reflected in making decisions that benefitted the family, as well as cultivating a sense of togetherness. Teresa and Manuel illustrated this in their brief exchange when discussing quality time. Teresa said "Siempre hemos sido nosotros cuatro. Siempre buscamos tiempo para..." ["it has always been the four of us. We always look for space for..."] and Manuel finished with "pero la familia" ["but as a family"]. Together they are indicating that the four of them, (i.e., Teresa, Manuel, and their two children) have always been a unit and that they actively look for time to dedicate to each other.

Daniela, who with Daniel is raising their school-aged son, shared a similar emphasis on the wellbeing of the family: “que hacemos bien como pareja? ...y no es fácil, porque no es todo tiempo, pero por lo menos el centro es la familia, como que todo lo que hacemos lo hacemos pensando en el bienestar de nosotros” [“What do we do well as a couple? and it isn’t easy because it’s not all the time, but at least family is the center, like everything we do, we do thinking about our wellbeing”]. While naming that this can be a difficult task, Daniela is highlighting their emphasis on family wellbeing as one of their main positive qualities as a couple.

For the seven couples who were parents, this focus on family also included a prioritization of their roles as parents and a deep care for the wellbeing of their children. When taking about this, Magda, who along with Jose raised two sons, summarized it with these words: “Nosotros siempre hemos estado muy unidos y hemos trabajado juntos por la misma causa: por los hijos” [“We have always been very united, and we have worked together for the same cause: for our children”]. This was reflected in how the couples made decisions, including the decision to immigrate. Daniel who was hesitant about immigrating stated that what helped him decide was considering the life his son might have if they remained in Venezuela: “pensé mucho en el futuro de mí hijo. Realmente el ok de, el como él iba a desenvolverse en la sociedad estando en la situación que estaba. Era una...sociedad muy peligrosa con mucho riesgo” [“I thought a lot about the future of my son. Of really, ok, how will he be able to develop in a society that was in such a condition. It was... a society that was very dangerous with a lot of risks”]. Here, we hear Daniel considering the safety and healthy development of his son to help him make the difficult decision to immigrate. Manuel and Teresa also shared that their move to the U.S. was largely based on being able to access better educational and healthcare resources for their two special

needs children, something that had become impossible in Venezuela's sociopolitical and economic conditions. The welfare of their children was therefore a critical consideration.

The couple's roles as parents and their connection to their children was prioritized in decision making even for parents of adult children. Carlos and Carolina, for instance, reported that they relocated to North Carolina to be closer to Carlos' adult son and his family, who they spend a lot of time with now. Zele and Victoria, whose only daughter has now moved out to attend college, noted that they consider their daughter when smaller family decisions, to make sure she continues to feel included:

Zele: Se le toma su... voto y su palabra dentro de todo lo que se ocurre, financiero, vacaciones, compras, compras grandes, *big ticket items* y todo. Tratamos de que para que ella sienta eso, de que [no sienta] aquello "me fui a la universidad y ahora soy de una extraña"

Victoria: No, no somos americanos

[Zele: We take into consideration her ... vote and her word within everything that happens, financially, vacations, big purchases, big ticket items and everything. We try for her to feel that, that she [doesn't feel] that "I left to college and now I'm a stranger"

Victoria: No, we are not Americans]

So even as they enter adulthood, parents prioritize connection and inclusion with their children, something that, as expressed by Victoria, they feel differentiates them from American cultural norms and values. The centralization of family as a cultural value, often referred to as *familismo* in the research literature, emerged clearly in the thoughts, feelings, and stories the couples shared with me. This emphasis on family was almost always reflected in the types of relationships the couples created and maintained with their extended family, but also in how

often and profusely the parents discussed their dedication to their nuclear family unit and their role as parents. Although I chose to highlight this strong orientation towards family as a separate theme, it is important to note that it is inextricably connected to many couples' lived experiences. As a result, *familismo* can continue to be observed in many of the remainder themes discussed below.

Varied and Meaningful Motivations to Immigrate

The couples had a wide variety of reasons to leave their home countries. Motivations to immigrate included pursuing vocational goals, seeking safety, economic opportunities, or improved quality of life, and immigrating for the sake of the relationship (i.e., to be with their partner). Partners sometimes had differing motivations to immigrate, and several of the couples had more than a singular reason for immigrating. Zele and Victoria, for example, noted that they decided to immigrate because of a desire to build their nuclear family independently from the influence of extended family, but also because they didn't view either of the places of origin (i.e., Mexico and Puerto Rico) as viable options for the life they wanted to build. Couples' reasons to immigrate were therefore mixed and complex, but never of trivial or minor importance.

Only two participants reported moving to the U.S. in the pursuit of career goals. Jose, who immigrated before his partner Magda, shared that he came to the U.S. to fulfill his dream of joining the Navy. During his tenure in the Navy, he served in the Vietnam war and learned to work on airplanes, which facilitated employment in airports for the rest of his working years. Carla also immigrated in pursuit of a career goal, given that she moved to the U.S. to attend a master's program in transpersonal psychology, a degree that didn't exist in Mexico. Consequently, both Jose and Carla had "pull" factors behind their reasons for immigrating. Their partners also experienced a "pull" factor as an immigration motivator, but in connection to their

couple relationship. As Magda put it, she immigrated “Por amor. Por amor. Simple, simple así de clarito por amor” [“For love. For love. Simply, simply, and clearly, for love”]. Magda reported she had no desire to ever leave Colombia and would not have done so if it wasn’t for her marriage to Jose. Despite Magda’s immigration being voluntary, her lack of desire to leave Colombia changed her experience and her expectations as an immigrant:

Yo lo hice voluntariamente, pero es como que te arranca...Es como que es diferente cuando uno viene así, vengo a eso y a esto, que cuando tu vienes a hacer un hogar digamos a crear tu familia, siguiendo a un ser amado y las expectativas son tan diferentes. Y uno viene y se encuentra con una vida tan diferente.

[I did it voluntarily, but it’s as if you’re uprooted...It’s different when you come like that, to do this and that, than when you come to build a home, or let’s say to build a family, following a loved one, your expectations are so different. You come and you find a life that is so different.]

She notes the sensation of being “uprooted” to indicate the shock of being in a completely new environment. Her primary aim in moving to the U.S. was related to building her life with her partner. During their interview, Rafael and Carla also reflected that if it wasn’t for their relationship, it wasn’t likely that Rafael would’ve immigrated to the U.S. Carla and Rafael shared that they got married so that they could immigrate together, allowing Rafael to access a dependent visa through Carla’s student visa. In our second interview Rafael clarified that “fue como desde un principio un proyecto de poder estar juntos y de irnos a un lugar a probar suerte” [“from the beginning it was a project so that we could be together and to go somewhere to try our luck”]. So, for Rafael, it seemed that both the desire to be with Carla, along with the potential for better “luck” in the U.S. were primary motivators for immigrating. Similarly, Angela

reported that they got the idea to come the U.S. to try their luck, but also noted that if it wasn't for Ariel, she likely would not have emigrated from Argentina:

Yo no me hubiera ido porque yo veía el hecho de inmigrar como una forma de poder estar con él y poder finalmente estar casados y juntos, vivir juntos, dormir juntos, todo eso... Para mí la inmigración fue el vehículo para poder estar con él.

[I would not have left because I saw the fact of immigrating as a way of being able to be with him and to finally be married and together, to live together, to sleep in the same bed, and all of that...For me immigration was the vehicle to be able to be with him.]

While living in Argentina, Angela and Ariel wanted to get married and start their life together, however, due to a deep nation-wide economic crisis, they were not able to gain enough financial independence to do so. Here Ariel describes how the country's economic context impacted them:

Había un monto de cuestiones económicas que hacían que no importaba realmente cuanto uno trabajara, uno no hacía la suficiente diferencia como para poder, bueno estoy saliendo adelante, estoy progresando...para estar mejor. O sea podía trabajar para más o menos sostener lo que ya tuviera uno pero no para crecer

[There was a ton of economic matters that made it so that it didn't matter how much you worked, it didn't make enough of a difference so that you could get ahead or to be better off. I mean I could work more or less to sustain the life that I already had, but not to grow]

Ariel and Angela's motivations to immigrate are an entanglement of the desire to build their married life together and the difficult economic circumstances in Argentina, signaling the presence of some "push" factors for immigration (i.e., unfavorable country of origin conditions).

Several of the couples, including Maria and Sergio, Daniel and Daniela, as well as Teresa and Manuel listed the socioeconomic and political situations in their home countries as their main reason for immigrating. Sergio and Maria, who also came from Argentina, noted that their personal financial situation in the context of their country's economic crisis led to their immigration. Maria shared that they hit a financially dire situation when they finally made the decision to move: "Hasta que al final casi tocamos fondo y dijo 'bueno sí nos tenemos que ir porque acá ya en lugar de arreglar cada vez iba peor todo.' Entonces bueno con \$50...en el bolsillo y nos vinimos" ["Until we almost hit rock bottom and he said 'well we do have to leave because here, in this place, instead of getting better things are always getting worse' And well with \$50...in our pocket we came"]. Maria's words signal that making the decision to immigrate was a last resort, something they could no longer avoid.

This sentiment of immigration as a last resort was also expressed by the other participants, who left their home countries out of necessity (i.e., in reaction to problematic social conditions). Daniel, who immigrated with Daniela from Venezuela, succinctly expressed this idea: "Realmente yo no...quería. Quería agotar todo para no salir del país. Salir del país fue la última opción" ["Really, I didn't...want to. I wanted exhaust all options to not leave the country. Leaving the country was the last option"]. Teresa and Manuel, who are also Venezuelan and who immigrated just 5 years ago, reported that they delayed emigrating because they were holding on to hope: "Todavía teníamos una esperanza de que se podía vivir en el país. Que podíamos crecer como ciudadanos y como familia, pero cada vez fue más difícil" ["We still had hope that we could live in the country. That we could grow as citizens and as a family, but that became increasingly difficult"]. These couples resisted the "push" factors as long as they

could, until their country of origin's conditions became unsustainable to the wellbeing and safety of their families.

Daniela reported that her breaking point was after an armed robbery in their home while her young son and mother were there. Reflecting on that instance, she shared:

Y en ese momento yo dije ya yo no quiero estar aquí porque es un tema de seguridad... Empecé a sentir como que no podíamos salir y que si salíamos había que volver temprano. Que todo para conseguir las cosas había que pagarle a un tercero para que, como un soborno.

[And in that moment, I said I no longer want to be here because it's a matter of safety... I started to feel like we couldn't go out or that if we went out, we had to come home early. That to get everything you had to pay a third party... like a bribe.]

Daniela's quote points to both a lack of safety for her and her family, as well as the limited access to resources due to scarcity and corruption in Venezuela. For Daniel, her partner, the decision to immigrate was also born as a reaction to an act of violence. Together, Daniel and Daniela told the story of the murder of a beauty queen and her family (i.e., husband and child) on an airport road they themselves had travelled on only a few hours earlier. When speaking about that murder, Daniel stated:

Y yo me vi reflejado en esa familia porque nosotros también éramos tres, siempre viajábamos mucho en familia. ...Y en ese mismo trayecto del aeropuerto a la casa fue donde pasó lo de ... eso me impactó mucho... Sí, yo creo que eso fue realmente el detonador y después de ahí... yo creo que tomamos la... idea ya mucho más seria [I saw myself very reflected in that family because we were also three, we always traveled as a family... And on that same road from the airport to the house is where it

happened... that impacted me a lot... Yes, I think that was really the detonator, and after that we took the idea [of immigrating] much more seriously]

As can be inferred from Daniel's quote, a fear of his and his family's safety was an important prompt for them to immigrate. Likewise, Teresa and Manuel also experienced the social and political destabilization of Venezuela. Although Manuel had been the victim of a crime (i.e., a robbery) and they were aware of a general sense of danger and feeling unsafe, they also very much highlighted the lack of access to important resources, such as food, and medical resources that were vital for the health of their children (e.g., health insurance, anti-epileptic medication for one of their children), as well as alarming inflation. When reflecting on this topic, Teresa stated:

Entonces todas esas cosas, digamos, fueron sumando para que nosotros... la calidad de vida de nosotros y nuestra familia, como nuestro núcleo, nuestros hijos y nosotros estaba mermando. Entonces fue un tema social, fue un tema de salud, fue un tema de seguridad también, importantísimo. Nos sentíamos inseguros

[So, all these things, let's say, were adding up for us... the quality of our lives and our family, like our nuclear family, and our children was dwindling. So, it was a societal matter, a matter of health, a matter of safety too, very important. We felt unsafe]

There was a sense of urgency around protecting their family and leading safer and healthier lives. The experience of the couples from Argentina and Venezuela, who immigrated to the U.S. as a last resort to ensure the wellbeing of their families blur the dichotomy of forced versus voluntary immigration, indicating the existence of some grey space that it not often acknowledged or discussed in the current body of literature on Latinx immigrants. The reasons couples decided to immigrate vary from couple to couple, and sometimes from partner to partner,

but a unifying thread across all of these reasons is the desire for something better for themselves and for their families, or as Manuel put it: “Yo creo que cada inmigrante, sea de la nacionalidad que sea, llega siempre...es a luchar. Es a querer algo bonito para su familia.” [“I think that each immigrant, no matter their nationality, always arrives...to fight. It’s because they want something beautiful for their family.”]

Immigration Brings Challenges for the Individual and for the Couple

All participants reported that a variety of challenges were tied to their lives as immigrants. However, the severity and impact of these challenges also varied, with two participants (i.e., Jose and Ariel) reporting that they found their overall transition into the U.S. to be smooth and relatively easy. During the member-check meetings, I got the opportunity to ask each of them what they believed eased their transitions. Jose reported that he came with a specific career goal (i.e., to join the Navy) and had always planned on coming to the U.S., which provided a sense of preparedness that he believed helped. Ariel reported that he was so focused on obtaining a permanent residency status, that he didn’t allow for other stressors to take up room in his life. Consequently, for both Jose and Ariel, having a very specific purpose or goal in relation to their immigration seems to have acted as a safeguard. Carla and Rafael, who had also prepared to immigrate for Carla to pursue her master’s degree, reported they didn’t really face difficulties getting accustomed to life in the U.S. but did face some other unexpected challenges (e.g., pathway to permanent resident status). The remainder of the participants regarded their immigration process as being significantly difficult. Sergio, for example, described his and Maria’s experience by listing the number of problems they simultaneously faced:

Entonces fue todo un proceso de adaptación a esta nueva cultura y también al desarraigo a lo que habíamos dejado allá ... Tenemos un frente de batalla, ahora con los años uno lo

mira... A quien le tiro primero? [risa] Porque nuestras emociones, nuestras hijas, la nueva modalidad laboral, no tener papeles, de hacer las cosas bien

[So, it was a whole adaptation process to this new culture and also to being uprooted from what we had left behind... We were at a battle front, now years later I can look back... who do I shoot first? [laughter]. Because it was our emotions, our daughters, the new work modalities, not having papers, and wanting to do things right]

Like Magda in an earlier quote, Sergio also uses the word “uprooted,” indicating the violent sensation of being ripped out of a familiar environment. While reflecting on their past, Sergio is also keenly aware that they were met with a high number of adversities as new immigrants, offering the evocative metaphor of being in a battle front deciding on which problem to “shoot” first. In describing his and Daniela’s own immigration process, Daniel would perhaps relate to Sergio’s experience. Here, Daniel describes how difficult it was to make it out of the tumultuous circumstances they found themselves after immigrating from Venezuela:

Yo creo que nos vimos reflejados como mucha gente que ha llegado aquí y le ha costado. A nosotros nos costó mucho realmente...no se nos hizo fácil ...como a otra gente que dice que si le funcionó y no sufrieron tanto. Nosotros si.... nos costó mucho... Nos costó realmente una etapa dura y... salir de ahí realmente no fue nada fácil.

[I think that we saw ourselves reflected in a lot of other people that arrived here and it has been difficult for them. For us, it cost a lot really....it was not easy for us...like how there are other people that say that it worked for them and that they didn’t suffer a lot. For us... it was very costly...it costs us a truly difficult period... and getting out of there was really not easy at all]

Many of the participants shared the experience described by Daniel, with immigration signifying a process that was laden with challenges. These challenges are explored as subthemes in the sections below and include: (1) the documentation process as a marathon, (2) financial pressure, (3) learning English, (4) experiences of discrimination, (5) being uprooted and replanted, (6) impacts on mental health, and (7) impacts on couple relationships.

The Documentation Process as a Marathon

Apart from three participants (i.e., Sergio and Maria, as well Carolina), all study participants were documented immigrants (e.g., student visa, work visa, asylum-seekers). Still, the documentation process, and more specifically the pathway to a permanent resident status was a commonly mentioned challenge. The couples named the pathway of obtaining a residency card (also referred to as a green card) as being long, complicated, and limiting. Rafael, who along with Carla waited 5 years to transition from a work visa to permanent residence, described it as follows:

El proceso de inmigración es un maratón, o sea no te puedes poner a pensar, tienes que caminar un paso a la vez y eventualmente vas a llegar, eventualmente va a llegar.

Eventualmente llegó la residencia pero... los primeros años eran muy difícil porque sabías que estabas al principio y los... últimos años eran muy difícil porque sabías que ya habían pasado ya varios años y estabas hacia el final.

[The immigration process is a marathon, I mean you can't think about it too much, you have to walk one step at a time and eventually it will arrive, eventually it will arrive. And eventually the residency did arrive, but... the first years were very difficult because you knew you were in the beginning and the... last years were very difficult because you knew that many years had gone by and that you were at the end.]

The comparison to a marathon denotes that there is a high level of endurance that immigrants must exercise while working towards a permanent documentation status. It also points to the long duration of time that is often involved in completing that process. When discussing this topic, Carla added that the pathway to a permanent residency status is so complex and lengthy, that it makes it clear that “es muy obvio, no nos quieren aquí” [“it’s very obvious, they don’t want us here”], alluding to a feeling of marginalization as a result of the documentation process. Angela, who had a dependent visa through Ariel’s work visa, reported that the length of the process was not something they had anticipated:

Yo creo que lo que fue muy distinto, pero bastante distinto, es que pensamos que el proceso inmigratorio para tener...yo permiso de trabajo después tener la residencia, todo eso demoro mucho más tiempo de lo que pensamos... Porque siempre pensamos poder hacer uno o dos años, pero no esperamos casi seis.

[I think something that was different, and I mean really different, is that we thought the immigration process to have...for me to have a work permit and then residency, all of that took much longer than we thought... because we thought we could do it in one or two years, but we had to wait almost six.]

In addition to the unexpected length of time, Angela’s quote also points to the limitations that come with the documentation process, including the inability to work due to a lack of a work permit. Because of their immigration status (e.g., dependent visas), many of the participants experienced this very same limitation while waiting to be granted their green cards. This inability to work contributed to the financial pressures described in the subtheme that follows. When recalling her inability to work Angela humorously recalled: “Yo veía a la gente trabajando en McDonald y los envidiaba! Ay si pudiera trabajar aunque sea en McDonald, algo que diera un

ingreso seguro. O algo para contribuir, era importante” [“I saw people working at McDonald’s and I envied them! If only I could work even at McDonald’s, something that would give a steady income. Or something that I could contribute, that was important”]. For Angela, there was strong desire to be employed and feel that she was helping during strenuous financial times for them.

Carla and Rafael also highlighted their inability to work as very a detrimental part of their experience as immigrants. When they first arrived, Rafael had a dependent visa through Carla’s student visa. During that time, he was actively looking for sponsored work in the field he had recently obtained a master’s degree in. However, this proved to be very challenging through the 2009 economic recession. Here, Carla and Rafael recall that time in their lives together:

Carla: El yo creo que tenía depresión

Rafael: Si, si, si

Carla: Estaba deprimido...como que no tenía muchas salidas o aspiraciones o como que no había mucho donde el pudiera desarrollarse o progresar, nada mas que en la casa, trabajos no habían, no había pero nada de trabajo

[Carla: I think he had depression

Rafael: Yes, yes, yes.

Carla: He was depressed because there weren’t a lot of ways out, or aspirations, or like there wasn’t a lot of ways in which he could develop and progress, only to be in the house, there were no jobs, no jobs at all]

This limitation of being unable to work unless he found an employer who was willing to sponsor him with a work visa had a negative impact on Rafael’s mental health. Carla and Rafael refer to this as only half of their story because these roles were reversed once Carla graduated from her master’s program and Rafael was finally able to secure employment that would sponsor

him and support their pathway to a permanent residency status. This transition now placed Carla in the dependent visa status, which meant she could no longer work. They waited 5 years to obtain their green cards, which Carla reported was “lo más duro que yo hecho en mi vida” [the hardest thing I have done in my life]. As will be discussed in a subtheme below, this inability to practice and grow in her career had a deleterious effect on her mental health. The complex and lengthy nature of immigration processes in the U.S., therefore, had a negative impact on the wellbeing on immigrants, despite their documented status.

The long pathway towards a green card is even more arduous for those who are undocumented. Sergio and Maria entered the U.S. without a visa, as was permitted for Argentinians at the time of their arrival 23 years ago. They remained undocumented for nearly 11 years, waiting to finally obtain their green card through the sponsorship of Sergio’s half-brother. While they were undocumented, both Maria and Sergio described experiencing an intense fear. On this topic, Sergio shared: “Sufrimos mucho el no tener papeles. Tuvimos muchos años indocumentados. Y teníamos mucho miedo, eso sí” [“We suffered a lot the fact that we didn’t have our papers. We were undocumented many years. And we were, indeed, very scared”]. Maria noted that this fear permeated their lives, as they avoided doing any activities that would put them at risk (e.g., traveling outside of the state, allowing their daughter to drive, sharing their undocumented status with anyone). To give me a sense of how fearful they were, Sergio animatedly shared this story with me:

Mira, para que tengas una idea, un día cuando empecé a trabajar en un restaurant yo trabajaba de *busboy*, y veo, o sea había un *waiting room* muy grande, y veo que entran tres tipos con uniformes verdes y amarillo. Yo nunca había visto algo verde y amarillo, ahí dejé todo ahí y me fui a la cocina y le digo a los mexicanos “Che! Esta la

inmigración!” [risa] Y me dicen “Vos estás loco?” y teníamos una pantalla y digo “Mira!” [ellos contestaron] “Nooo! Son los cuida bosques!” [risa] Mira que paranoico que estaba

[Look, so that you have an idea, one day when I began working at a restaurant, I worked as a busboy, and I see, there was a really big waiting room, and I see three guys in green and yellow uniforms. I had never seen anyone with green and yellow, so I left everything there and I went to the kitchen and told the Mexicans “Che! Immigration is here!”

[laughter] And they told me “Are you crazy?” and we had a camera, so I said “Look!” [they replied] “Noooo! Those are the forest rangers!” [laughter] Look how paranoid I was]

Using humor and storytelling, Sergio is communicating that their lives were permeated with a sense of fear that caused them to be in constant vigilance and fear about the very real possibility of deportation. Although Sergio and Maria are now naturalized U.S. citizens, the years they spent undocumented marked their immigration experience with additional and burdensome impediments. As undocumented individuals, their immigration story contained some unique facets (e.g., fear of deportation, instability in securing and retaining employment, risk of driving without a license), pointing to some of the special needs that may be important to consider when supporting this population.

Ultimately, the participants’ immigration status and documentation process were an important part of their lived experiences, often aggravating an already difficult transition into their lives in the U.S. The documentation process presented these couples with challenges to their financial wellbeing, career development, and mental health. This seemed to be true for both

documented and undocumented couples, highlighting the need for additional support and advocacy in this area.

Financial Pressure

Another common challenge listed by the couples was the presence of financial strife. The couples reported an awareness of having expenses that surpassed their household income. Rafael put it this way:

Teníamos muchos más egresos que ingresos al final de cuentas. O sea por más [pause], si, si, por más que trabajara ella en la universidad ... era mucho más lo que gastábamos, que lo que recibíamos, aunque no gastáramos mucho, no? Y por el puro hecho de la renta y la comida era suficiente, entonces si había como mucha presión ... era como ¿qué tan sostenible es esto a mediano y largo plazo, no?

[We had a lot more expenses than income at the end of the day. No matter [pause], yes, yes, no matter how much she worked at the university ... we spent more than what we made, right? And by the simple fact of the rent and the food, it was enough. So then, there was a lot pressure...it was like, how sustainable is this in the medium or long term?]

So, although Rafael clarified that they didn't experience a level of poverty that included food or housing insecurity, they felt a great deal of pressure because even with minimal expenses, their wages were not sufficient. When discussing their financial situation during their first years after their immigration 48 years ago, Carlos highlighted that cost of living in the U.S. is also much higher, which creates challenges when your income capability is limited:

Aquí llegaba uno y uno lo que se ganaba lo multiplicaba...en seguida pero también se daba cuenta uno que tenía que gastarlos. Así como ganabas también gastabas, de la

misma forma. Y uno llegando aquí, el sueldo que gana un principiante, sin saber el idioma ni nada, es poco

[You would arrive here and what you earned was multiplied...immediately, but you also had to be aware that you had to spend it. Just like you earned it, you spent it. And when you're arriving here, the salary that you earn as a beginner, without knowing the [English] language or anything, is small]

In these quotes by Carlos and Rafael, it is easy to recognize that the economic pressure the couples endured was closely tied to their experiences as immigrants. In other words, there appears to be some inextricable connections between the immigrant conditions (e.g., not speaking English, being here under a student visa) and precarious financial circumstances.

In addition to everyday financial stress, some of the couples also shared stories of acute economic crises. Magda and Jose, for example, described Jose's layoff from his airport job after 9/11 as traumatizing for them. Magda noted that "Eso fue una situación extremadamente difícil. ¿Qué hacemos? Y teníamos que pagar casa, y todos los *biles*, y la comida, y los hijos en la escuela, y ¿Qué hacemos?" ["It was an extremely difficult situation. What do we do? And we had to pay the house, and the bills, and the food, and our children were in school, what do we do?"]. Jose added that this incident was one of the hardest moments of their lives in the U.S., describing it as "horrible y traumatizante" ["horrible and traumatizing"]. Magda offered this metaphor to explain what it felt like to be in that situation: "Desamparados, nos sentimos completamente solos, no sentimos como en medio de una tormenta sin *shelter*, sin refugio. Sin refugio y con nuestros hijitos" ["Forlorn, we felt completely alone, we felt like in the middle of a storm without shelter...without shelter and with our little children"]. With that image, she conveyed to me a deep sense of desperation as a result of their financial situation at that time.

Like Magda and Jose, Daniel and Daniela reported their immigration rock bottom was the moment in which they lost all of their savings a few months after arriving to the U.S. from Venezuela, through a dollar exchange scam. These savings comprised all the money they had earned to facilitate their move, which they had carefully planned. On this matter, Daniela stated that “eso nos desestabilizó total” [“this completely destabilized us”]. Expressing the same sense of desperation that I had heard in Magda’s question of “What do we do?” Daniela also asked: “Dios mío, ¿cómo salimos de esta?” [“My God, how will we make it out of this?”]. As would be expected, financial struggles created a sense of uncertainty for these couples.

Financial pressure emerged as a theme for the majority of the participants but seemed to be particularly relevant in their initial months or years after their arrival, as they worked to settle and stabilize themselves. These limited economic resources placed the couples in vulnerable situations that endangered their ability to sustain themselves and cover their basic expenses. Naturally, it also prompted feelings of worry. Angela, for example, reported a sense of “angustia” [“anguish”] and “panico” [“panic”] when an unexpected expense, such as a car repair, was needed because they knew they didn’t have the money to cover it. Financial pressure, therefore, seemed to have a bearing on both the physical and emotional wellbeing of the couples, which perhaps explains the recurrence of this topic throughout the interviews.

Learning English

A few participants already spoke English upon their arrival to the U.S. For those that didn’t, however, being unable to communicate and the experience of learning a new language was commonly listed as a challenge. Arriving to the U.S. nearly 20 years after her partner had immigrated, Magda described that learning English was “un aprendizaje brutal” [“a brutal learning process”]. To support her learning process, Magda used library resources, as well as

help from her partner Jose, who would provide her with new vocabulary and who would play old movies in English to help her learn. Victoria also noted the process of learning English as a struggle in her transition to life in the U.S. Just like Magda, she described that she was determined to learn, and used library resources, help from her partner, and watching T.V. in English. She laughingly recalled her attempts to watch purely English T.V. during her initial arrival (a time when she was also pregnant): “Yo sentía que me mareaba, me vomitaba, ni siquiera el embarazo, era lo aburrida que estaba porque no entendía nada!” [“I would feel dizzy, and vomit, but not even from the pregnancy, but from the boredom because I couldn’t understand anything!"]. Both Magda and Victoria revealed a sense of frustration at not being able to understand and communicate with others.

Participants also had an awareness of the importance of English-language acquisition. Manuel, who along with Teresa immigrated only 5 years ago from Venezuela, described a desire to learn English: “En eso estamos, en una cuestión de estudio, de querer aprender más, de ponernos más con el inglés, porque yo de tanto trabajo, sonara como una excusa, pero no ha dado chance pues. Llego cansado [del trabajo] y no me he puesto” [“And that’s what we’re doing, a matter of studying, of wanting to learn more, to dedicate ourselves more to leaning English, because me with so much work, it may sound like an excuse, but I haven’t had a chance. I arrive [from work] tired and I haven’t done that”]. Here, Manuel is expressing the tension that exists between needing to learn English but balancing that with a demanding work schedule that prevents him from studying. This, again, points to connections across the themes described in the results of this study (e.g., economic pressure and learning English).

The importance of learning English was heightened by the consequences of not doing so. While sharing an experience in which she felt ostracized during a school activity she brought her

child to, Teresa, Manuel's partner, shared "Si, con todo y que uno es bien portado y bien hablado pero si no hablas ingles no sirves, no?" ["And even though we're well-mannered and well-spoken, if you don't speak English you're worthless, no?"]. As can be heard in Teresa's comment, regardless of your other positive qualities, and inability to speak English places you in the vulnerable position of being judged as unimportant or of no value. Carolina, who also noted not speaking English as a difficult part of her transition to the U.S., touched on how experiences of discrimination are worsened when the immigrant doesn't speak English:

Ajah, bastante difícil [la discriminación]. Y más si la persona no, no se defiende con el inglés. Ahí encuentro que la cosa es muy mal. Ya las cosas empiezan a cambiar cuando uno va a la escuela y entiende un poquito el idioma y se puede defender más. Empiezan a cambiar las cosas. Pero a mi me da mucho pesar, por ejemplo en los supermercados, por ahí, hasta los mismos médicos, tratando de explicar las cosas y esas impaciencia que le da porque no le entienden. Y empiezan en ingles a tratarlos mal y todo, si escuchando todo eso es muy triste

["Yes, it's very difficult [discrimination]. And more so if the person can't communicate in English. There, I find that things get really bad. Things change when you go to school and you begin to understand the language a little bit and you can communicate more. Things start to change. But I feel very bad, for example in supermarkets, and other places, or even with doctors, trying to explain things and you see that impatience that they get. And they start, in English, to treat them badly and everything. Yes, listening to that is very sad"]

Carolina is highlighting the connection between the ability to complete basic activities, such as grocery shopping or going to the doctor, and English language skills. She is also noting

the relationship between experiences of discrimination and lack of English ability, something that was noted by other participants and is furthered explored in the next subtheme.

Limited English language abilities and the experience of learning English was an important component of the immigration experience for participants who did not already speak English upon their arrival to the U.S. This importance seemed to be based on the consequences that were tied to not being able to communicate, which include both difficulties with completing necessary life tasks, but also increased vulnerability to experiences of rejection or discrimination.

Experiences of Discrimination, While Also Acknowledging Privilege

Experiences of discrimination, such as violence, workplace inequities, and microaggressions were reported by several participants in the study. Some examples of this include Carlos' experience of being given bad work shifts or being passed up for promotions due to his ethnicity, Jose's experience of being nearly ran over by a car due to his physical appearance as a brown Latino, Carla being rudely asked by a coworker to speak English, or Angela being told she doesn't speak English well because of her accent. The intersection of identities that Latinxs can hold seem to make them vulnerable to multiple systems of oppression that include racism, nativism, and ethnic-based discrimination.

It is important to note, however, that there was a great deal of variety on how these participants viewed the significance and impact of discrimination. Some participants regarded the incidents as unimportant, due their infrequency or minimal consequences, while others expressed persistent feelings of distress. For instance, Magda and Jose, who have both experienced discriminatory incidents, had vastly different reactions to these situations. Magda views discrimination as “difícil de enfrentar...porque eso es día a día,” [“hard to face...because it is daily”], while Jose states “no lo tomo a pecho, yo lo tomo como parte de estar

acá...entonces a mí nunca me afecto emocionalmente” [“I don’t take it personally, I take it as part of life here...so it never affected me emotionally”]. Here, Jose is describing the deployment of internal strategies (i.e., not taking it personal, accepting discrimination as part of life in the U.S.) to manage living with discrimination. Magda’s strategies were different, in that she felt distress and sadness over being discriminated against, but then actively sought to resist and dismantle the stereotypes that fueled the discrimination. Here, she explains how she dealt with workplace discrimination when she had limited English speaking abilities:

Notaba que mi trabajo me lo recargaban a mí. Por qué tú no puedes expresarte muy bien, pero eso no quiere decir que tú no piensas. Y eso me hacía sentir mal, porque piensan...que el hecho que lo notan a uno Hispano es sinónimo de bruto, de no inteligente, de ignorante, más bien digamos así. Y eso me fastidiaba. Yo trataba en mi trabajo de demostrar, una cosa es que yo no pueda expresarme y otra cosa es que yo no tenga la capacidad mental para hacer el trabajo. Eso sí me frustro mucho...y lo contrarrestaba dando lo mejor de mí. Lo contrarrestaba diciendo “mira, si puedo.”

[I noticed that they would overload me with work. Because you can’t express yourself very well, but that doesn’t mean that you don’t think. And that made me feel bad, because they think... the fact that they notice you are Hispanic becomes a synonym with being dumb, not smart, of being ignorant, let’s say. And that annoyed me. In my work I tried to demonstrate that just because I can’t express myself that doesn’t mean that I don’t have the mental capacity to do the work. This frustrated me a lot... and I countered it by giving my best. I countered it by saying “Look, yes I can.”]

Magda is describing how stereotypes about Latinxs materialized into unjust fair conditions (e.g., taking advantage of her by giving her more work), to which she responded by

proving her capabilities, but that nonetheless it caused feelings of frustration. Zele and Victoria also discussed intense feelings of frustrations when facing stereotypes about Latinxs. Victoria shared that she had to get used to people being surprised at her level of professional capabilities, because as Zele notes here, there were immediate assumptions made about her “No y de que *by default* lo que primero te piensan, te ven es de ‘Ahh esta recoge tomate y tiene diez muchachitos y empezó a tener hijos a los 13 años’” [“No, and that by default the first thing they think, they look at you and say ‘Oh this one picks tomatoes and has ten little kids and started having kids when she was 13 years old’”]. Zele expressed particular frustration with folks to who profess equality, while still engaging in stereotyping, highlighting it as hypocritical: “Que hipocresía... Te lo digo de corazón adentro [la] experiencia de inmigrantes [es] bregar con hipocresía, entiendes? Bregar con hipocresía de que te dicen una cosa, se ríen contigo, y por detrás están haciendo otra” [“How hypocritical... you know, I’m telling you from my heart, that [the] experience of immigrants is to have to deal with hypocrisy, do you understand? Dealing with the hypocrisy of people telling you one thing, laughing with you, but doing something else”]. With his words, Zele is pointing to the necessity of congruence between professing social justice and acting on it. Empty words are of no value, and in fact appear to add distress to the experience of immigrants.

In addition to experiences of discrimination, a few participants brought up the issue of belongingness as Latinx immigrants in the U.S. They spoke about feeling excluded from the U.S. racial binary that categorizes people into two mutually exclusive groups: people color versus white people. Carla and Rafael, for instance, talked about being unsure about which category they fall into, given that Rafael is white, and that Carla is also fair skinned (although with dark features). With confusion, Carla noted that when she entered her master’s program in the U.S,

she was informed that she was a person of color, but Rafael has never been told: “a mi nadie nunca me ha dicho si soy persona de color, o si soy persona blanca. Hasta bromeamos que decimos que yo soy *off white* o sea soy como blanco pero no realmente, porque no crecí aquí” [“No one has told me if I’m a person of color, or if I’m a white person. We even joke that I’m off white because I’m white, but not really since I didn’t grow up here”]. The racial categories that exist in the U.S. don’t seem to account for how Latinxs immigrants understand their own diverse racial and ethnic make-up. Carla succinctly summarized it with these words:

No lo sabemos [si son personas de color], estamos muy confundidos... Y en ese sentido quizás este sistema no incluye a todos.... La gente que creció en Estados Unido, tienen más claro el binario de donde quepo, pero muchos que venimos más grandes o adultos es como, “que es esto? y donde quepo?” ... y como dice el [Rafael], o sea las mismas familias mexicanas hay todos los colores

[We don’t know [if they are people of color], we are very confused... And in that sense maybe the system doesn’t include everyone.... People that grew up in the U.S. have that binary very clear, of where they belong, but for a lot us who come here as adults it’s like “What is this? And where do I fit in?”...and like he says [Rafael], in the same Mexican families there are people of all colors]

Carla explains that the current American understanding of racial categories that are dualistic and clear-cut serve as an exclusionary tool for those who immigrate from countries with more flexible understandings of race. In addition to confusion, a lack of belongingness into the pre-defined racial categories can bring consequences, including feelings of loneliness and discomfort, as well as being subjected to discriminatory experiences. Magda, for instance, described how she felt pressured and excluded from both white communities and black

communities in the U.S.: “Mucho que decir es de discriminación. Los morenos de aquí y los blancos lógicamente ponen digamos al hispano como la mitad, estamos como en la mitad del sándwich. Te presionan por aquí te presionan por acá” [“There is a lot of say about discrimination. Black people here, and White people obviously, put Hispanic people, let’s say, like halfway, like in the middle of the sandwich. They pressure from here and they pressure you from there”]. Magda brought this up as she discussed limitations in career opportunities due to her ethnicity and not clearly belonging as a White or a Black person.

Zeke, who is fair skinned with green eyes, extensively discussed the deep impact that this lack of belongingness has had on him. He expressed that his physical appearance as white-passing, combined with his Puerto Rican ethnicity, has made it difficult for him to fit into any ethnic or racial group. Zeke, who often uses Spanglish to communicate, reported feeling excluded from White circles, Black circles, and Latinxs circles:

O sea “You look white, but you speak Spanish, *so ni te voy a mirar. I’m not even going to figure you out...*” *So nadie, nadie me hace figure out. Y lo triste es de que no caigo en ningún sitio. En ningún sitio... En ningún sitio me siento cómodo. Fíjate lo que estoy tratando de decir: yo no me siento cómodo en ningún sitio en este país.*

[So ‘You look White, but you speak Spanish, so I’m not even going to look at you. I’m not even going to figure you out’ So nobody, nobody tries to figure me out. And the sad part is that I don’t fit in anywhere. In any place... In no place do I feel comfortable. Mind what I’m trying to tell you: I don’t feel comfortable anywhere in this country.]

The intensity and emphasis that Zeke put into his words are resonant of the deep feeling of pain these circumstances have caused him. He noted that he is impacted by this lack of belongingness to this day, and that he has grown less sociable and “comfortably numb” to the

situation. Interestingly, Zele, like many other of the participants, also disclosed an awareness of the privilege he knew he experienced as a white-passing person, which also bothered him:

Zele: no te voy a negar que hay un punto de privilegio. Sigo siendo blanco y la gente me da trato preferencial por ser blanco y yo lo siento

Victoria: Y lo odia

Zele: Yo lo siento que me lo dan. Y me, no te voy a decir porque se te va a sangrar los oídos, me revienta, me revienta pa' no decirte más.

[Zele: I won't deny that there is point of privilege. I continue to be White, and people give me preferential treatment for being White and I feel it

Victoria: And he hates it

Zele: I feel that they give it to me, and it, I'm not going to tell you because it will make your ears bleed, it makes me angry. It makes me angry not to say more]

For Zele, the experience of privilege is also troubling. Rafael, Magda, as well as Victoria and Ariel all also spoke of benefitting from privilege because of their lighter skin complexion. As Magda put it “Yo creo que me aceptaban porque me veía más o menos como ellos” [“I think they accepted me because I looked more or less like them”], while noticing that those with darker skin were treated differently in her same work environment. Several of the participants then struggled not only with understanding and fitting in to the U.S. notions of racial understanding, but also observed and sometimes benefitted from advantages that were awarded based on their physical appearance. Various participants also recognized privilege in their stories based on their documented and voluntary immigration, based on their education level, or even based on having had access to American culture prior to their immigration. During our member check meeting, Carla and Rafael added that they felt economic privilege had also greatly

facilitated their experience as immigrants (e.g., ability to travel back home, ability to have paid for visas, having had access to higher education in Mexico). A few couples even expressed concern that these privileged experiences meant their lived experiences were not helpful to me in my research, prompting me to reassure them of the value and importance of their unique stories, which inevitably contained a blend of privilege and marginalization.

Discrimination then, seemed like a common theme among the couples, but each person had distinct ways of making meaning and coping with those experiences, with some participants regarding discriminatory incidents as more significant than others. Discrimination also seemed to be connected to a lack of belongingness into the U.S. racial binary system, which for some had concrete and emotional consequences. Experiencing discrimination, however, did not preclude the couples from also acknowledging privilege. Interestingly, there were couples, such as Daniel and Daniela, who didn't discuss discrimination at all, once again demonstrating the true uniqueness of each story.

Being Uprooted and Replanted

As seen in previous quotes, a version of the word “desarraigo” [uprooting] was repeatedly used by participants. The selection and use of the term conjures up the idea of being ripped out of a familiar environment, and a severing of the network of connections to your familiar environment, in this case the participants' countries of origin. Many of the participants reported that it's difficult to leave an entire life behind, and that there was a sadness involved in letting go of things like your career, your home, your family members, and your culture.

Most of the participants reported missing their family back home. Daniel notes that leaving his family behind was one of the most difficult aspects of his immigration process: “Bueno por mi parte es muy dudoso el desprenderse de la familia. Este a mí, por ejemplo, no

paraba de pensar en dejar a mi mama” [“On my end it was very doubtful to let go of the family. Like for me, for example, I could not stop thinking about leaving my mom behind”]. Daniel found that leaving family behind weighed heavy on him and, as he explained in the interview, it was an important consideration that delayed his decision to immigrate. For Daniela, his partner, one of the most difficult parts of the transition was leaving her well-established and successful human resources career:

A mí me da tristeza, lo que me da tristeza sería el tema profesional porque ha sido muy difícil este empezar, empezar de nuevo acá, tratar de llegar a un nivel bien. En este tema es lo que a mí me pega

[What brings me sadness, what brings me sadness is the professional component, because it was been very difficult to start, to start again here, to try to reach a good level. In that topic is where I get hit hard].

Daniela proceeded to offer the metaphor of having to start again from the first rung of a ladder, when she had already reached higher levels in her career in Venezuela. This was also the case for Teresa and Manuel, who reported letting go of their careers, and having to “pasar el switch” [“flip the switch”] on their expectations around their vocations when entering the U.S. (i.e., transitioning from having corporate careers to manual labor, such as washing cars and cleaning homes).

For others, the difficulties of being uprooted were related to longing for the culture in their home countries. Sergio reflects on this when he shared what he missed the most:

Es mas las cosas con que uno se crio, con que uno amo desde chico, y yo tuve pues, no se si una virtud o defecto, creo que fue un defecto, mucho arraigo con mi cultura, con mi

identidad. Entonces, eso se esfumo, no? Así como las aguas, como el agua se van de las manos.

[It was more of the things that I grew up with, the things that I loved since I was boy, and I had well, I don't know if it's a virtue or a defect, I think it's a defect, but I'm very rooted in my culture, in my identity. So, that vanished, no? Just like water, just as water seeps through your hands.]

Sergio used the imagery of water escaping your hands to represent the impossibility of holding on to some of the cultural components of his life in Argentina. Magda reported difficulties with missing the more collectivistic culture from her life Colombia, especially because they didn't live in a community with other Latinxs:

Nunca hemos estado en un área Latina realmente, entonces no tienes la confianza de ir, y aquí uno ve que no se usa eso, de llegar a la casa del vecino a pedir ayuda, de eso como que no y la gente es "hola, hola," si acaso uno los ve, porque ellos salen directamente a sus carros y se van. Uno no ve la cara de los vecinos por tiempo.

[We have never really been in a Latino area, so you have don't have the *confianza* of going, here you don't do that, of going to a neighbor's house to ask for help, and that's like no, and people are like "hi, hi," if you even see them, because they come out directly to their cars and they leave. You don't see your neighbors for a long time.]

Magda signals missing out on the sense of community that you could build with neighbors in Colombia, something that she discerned was abnormal or incongruent with cultural norms in the U.S. Therefore, in addition to grieving what was left behind, participants also had to content with getting adjusted to their new environment. For some, these adjustments were difficulties with getting accustomed to topography and climate of their new area of residence.

When discussing their first places of residence in the southwest of the U.S., Zele described what felt like a sharp contrast in his surroundings:

Muy inhóspito esa área, este, toda esa área, este, como yo, como te dije me crie en Puerto Rico tengo eso de verde, de los árboles, de las montaña, el clima. It's a rainforest. So completamente inhóspito toda esa área que es desértica, este, it was not fun.

[Very inhospitable that area, all of that area, and like I told you, I grew up in Puerto Rico, I have that green of the trees, the mountains, the weather. It's a rainforest. So, completely inhospitable all of that area that was desert land, it was not fun.]

In a very similar fashion, Carolina described how deeply affected she was by the change in her physical surroundings when arriving to a northeastern state:

El cambio nada más del país de nosotros de Colombia a donde yo vivía que era primavera prácticamente todo el tiempo, el llegar aquí y los árboles sin las hojas, pelaos, para mí no, yo veía todo tan raro. Ese frío tan impresionante! El cambio de temperatura, y todo eso me afecto mucho.

[Just the change from our country in Colombia, where I lived that was spring practically all the time, and to arrive here and the trees without leaves, bare, for me everything looked very strange. That cold was impressionable! The change in temperature and all of that affected me a lot.]

Consequently, depending on their area of residence upon arrival, some of the couples had to contend with the changes to their physical environment, in addition to the changes in culture and customs. For Carolina, the challenges that come along with getting adjusted to life in the U.S. were so significant, that she harbored a strong desire to return to Colombia. Here, she tells the story hoping to get caught and deported during immigration raids in her factory job:

Cuando yo trabajaba, inmigración hacia...redadas en las factorías... yo hasta me paraba que me cogieran. Y yo veía correr la gente a esconderse y yo no, y ellos pasaban encima de mí y no me paraban ni bola.... Y pues porque el objetivo era que me cogieran para que me mandaran [a Colombia] *free* que lo mandaban a uno gratis

[When I worked, immigration would do...raids in the factories...and I would even stand up so that they caught me. And I would see people hiding, but not me, but they always walked by me and didn't pay me any mind... but the goal was that they caught me and send me back [to Colombia] for free, because they would send you back for free]

The difficult changes she encountered after arriving to the U.S. were initially unbearable. Although Carolina is now documented and reports feeling accustomed to life in the U.S., as many of the other participants, she recalls that time in her life as extremely arduous.

Regardless of documentation status and immigration conditions (e.g., voluntary, asylum-seeker), most of the participants reported having some longing for some of the aspects of their lives they left behind. There were, however, several people who reported opposing experiences. For example, Carla and Rafael, who came as a young couple, reported that although they missed their family, they didn't really encounter any difficulties with getting used to their lives here, nor with longing for what was left behind. Instead, Carla reported that she felt a sense of freedom through her immigration, something that is explored as a benefit of immigration in the final theme of this chapter.

Impact on Mental Health

The challenges that immigration presents were reported to have a negative impact on the mental health of a few participants in the study. Four participants, including Carla and Rafael, as well as Angela and Carolina, explained struggling with depression and/or anxiety as they

attempted to cope with the varied circumstances that immigration brought (e.g., inability to work, experience of in-transit trauma, difficulties adjusting to new environment).

As mentioned above, Rafael disclosed struggling with depression during the period of time he could not work. When the roles reversed and Carla was placed in a position where she could not work, she also noted experiencing depression:

Pero yo no pude trabajar, no pude ser voluntaria en nada de psicología, muy limitante...

Estaba muy, estaba deprimida de no levantarme del sillón, no quería nada.... ya había estudiado una maestría de tres años y estaba como lista para ponerla en práctica

[But I could not work, I could not be a volunteer in anything related to psychology, it was really limiting. I was very, was very depressed, of not being able to get up from the couch, I didn't want anything....I had studied for a master's degree for three years and I was ready to put it to practice]

Carla emphasized the impact of having her vocational growth stunted by her inability to work and this being detrimental to her emotional wellbeing. Later in the interview, she added that it was sensation akin to being trapped:

Es una sensación, si, de estar atrapado, de que no depende de ti, de que no hay nada que puedas hacer para cambiarlo, como de desesperanza aprendida, que al menos a mí se me quedo como profundamente arraigada y me sigue impactando en cosas.

[It's a sensation, yes, of being trapped, of its outside of your control and you can't do anything to change it, like learned helplessness, that at least for me remains profoundly rooted and still impacts me with things.]

In Carla's statement, it's discernable that the effects of being in that situation have marked her as a person long past the experience has ended. In a similar fashion, Carolina

clarified during our member check meeting that the mental health consequences of her immigration circumstances have also been long-lasting. Carolina entered the U.S. by crossing Rio Grande, an experience that she described as very traumatizing and yielding permanent and debilitating mental health consequences, including anxiety for which she still takes medication.

Although Angela did not share the sentiment of long-term mental health consequences, she did describe surviving substantial mental health symptoms, which looking back she can recognize as depression and anxiety. She communicated that the difficulties she experienced were related to an awareness of the deep vulnerability she was in as a new immigrant:

De repente como consciente de la vulnerabilidad, y sea la vulnerabilidad de no conozco a nadie, la vulnerabilidad del idioma, la vulnerabilidad de la cultura, yo estuve muy como *homesick*, en el sentido que extrañaba mucho a mi familia. Muchísimo.... Yo digo, no vuelvo a inmigrar! [risa]

[All of the sudden I was aware of the vulnerability, I mean the vulnerability of I don't know anybody, the vulnerability of the language, the vulnerability of the culture, I was very homesick, in the sense that I missed my family a lot. So much. I say, I'll never immigrate again! [laughter]]

Angela was overwhelmed by the amount of change she underwent in her move to the U.S., which made her feel particularly vulnerable. Ultimately, the wide breadth and intensity of emotions that came along with these changes were difficult to process and manage, which had implications mental health implications. So, although the majority of participants did not report negative mental health outcomes in relations to their move, it seems like the variety of stressors and challenges that come along with many people's immigrations process have the potential of negatively impacting this area of immigrants' lives.

Impact on the Couple Relationship

Couples reported that the immigration process had an impact on their relationship by way of limiting the time they had for each other. Because many of the couples found themselves in situation where they had to work multiple jobs, long hours, or opposing schedules, they described having less time to dedicate to their relationship and their family. When reflecting on his relationship with Maria soon after their arrival from Argentina, Sergio noted: “Yo sentía que estábamos juntos pero estábamos lejos” [“I felt that we were together but faraway”], adding that he really missed Maria during that time. He describes the consequences of this distance in the relationship in more detail when he said:

Y es duro, duro, duro, porque termina afectando a la relación, no? Te distancias, te distancias, en el sentido de que trabajas tanto y hay tantos problemas que a veces ni los puedes hablar, o no sabes ni que hacer, ni que decir.

[And it’s hard, hard, hard, because it ends up impacting the relationship, right? You become distant, and distant in the sense that you work so much and there are so many problems that sometimes you can’t even talk about them or know what to do or what to say.]

This distance from Maria was produced by circumstance that felt out of their control, but had consequences, nonetheless. Similarly, because Jose had to work so much, Magda shared feeling lonely in her new parenting responsibilities after the birth of the first child: “Me sentí demasiado sola. Me sentí que estaba haciendo papel de padre y madre” [“I felt too lonely. I felt that I was doing the role of a father and a mother”]. She recalled asking Jose to make changes in his work schedule, even if it meant reducing their expenses even further, once she noticed that their newborn son was growing up without a father:

Ya él bebe lo veía como extraño. Que él lo quería alzar y el bebé lloraba. Y José “pero ¿qué está pasando?” entonces yo dije “pues el niño no te conoce. Tiene 3 meses y el niño te habrá visto dos o tres veces en la vida porque cuando tu llegas el niño está durmiendo, cuando tú te vas el niño está durmiendo. Y yo estoy sola con él, con el niño y tampoco te veo prácticamente”. Entonces...ahí sí me tuve que poner bien seria y decir bueno “esto se va a arreglar porque yo no puedo seguir así.” No puedo seguir como que mi niño no tiene papá.

[The baby viewed him as a stranger. He would want to pick him up and the baby would cry. And Jose: “But what is happening?” and I’d say, “Well, the child doesn’t know you. He is 3 months old, and the child has only seen you two of three times in his life because when you arrive he is sleeping and you leave he is sleeping. And I’m alone with the child and I practically don’t see you either.” So then... there I had be very serious and say “this has to be fixed because I can’t keep going this way.” I can’t continue like my child doesn’t have a father.]

In addition to feeling lonely, Magda viewed Jose’s inability to spend time with their child as a significant negative consequence of Jose’s demanding work schedule. Teresa and Manuel, who parent two school-aged special needs children, also noted that Manuel’s heavy work hours limit the amount of time they have together: “Como pareja quisiéramos que, suena egoísta, pero si tener un poquito más de espacio para nosotros, pero bueno ese tiempo que a veces no sucede, lo entendemos es dárselo a los hijos” [“As a couple we wish that, it sounds selfish, but that we had a little more space for us, but that time sometimes doesn’t happen, and we understand to dedicate it to the kids”]. Manuel and Teresa make the intentional choice of dedicating the limited

amounts of time they have available to their children and to spending it as a whole family, but the longing for more time as a couple remains.

The lack of quality time was a notable challenge that couples associated to their immigration conditions and which was connected to some unwanted consequences (e.g., feeling distant from partner or from children). This issue, however, was mostly regarded as a stressor that came from outside the relationship, as opposed to a problem with the relationship. In this way, immigration presented a direct challenge to the relationship, that the couples had to learn to navigate or cope with.

Experiences of Trauma and Acute Stress

Nearly half of the participants reported having experiences of trauma or an acutely stressful incident that significantly marked their lives. Some of the experiences occurred prior to their immigration, while others took place in-transit or after their immigration to the U.S. I have chosen to highlight them because these experiences seem to have impacted the course of the couple's lives and in some regards were connected to their identity as immigrants.

Years prior to their emigration from Venezuela, Daniel and Daniela experienced the loss of a child, which they describe as one of the most critical times in their relationship. Their first daughter was born premature and remained hospitalized until her passing away 37 days later. They recall those 37 days as incredibly difficult, but also as laden with lessons they preserve to this day. Together, they explained it this way:

Daniel: Si, cada uno de esos días, realmente eran unas enseñanzas increíble...ahí yo creo que desato todo lo que te hemos dicho hasta ahora. O sea, respeto a cada uno. Yo valore mucho la fuerza de Daniela, por ejemplo, en ese momento. Este, nada, lo agradecido, entre tanta tristeza, lo agradecido con Dios por habernos enseñado tantas cosas ...

Daniela: Yo creo que hizo una base más sólida. Pues cuando inmigramos ya teníamos una base tan sólida que pues, después de haber pasado por eso, es como que bueno podemos pasar lo que venga, si ya pasamos por eso que es tan rudo y tan horrible

[Daniel: Yes, each one of those days, really there were incredible teachings... it was there I think that everything we've told you about so far was unleashed. I mean, the respect we have for one another. I valued a lot Daniela's strength, for example, in that moment. And, yeah, the gratefulness, amidst so much sadness, the gratefulness to God for having taught us so much....

Daniela: I think that it made a more solid foundation. Because when we immigrated, we had a more solid foundation, after we had gone through that, it's like well we can overcome anything, if we have already lived through something that is so rough and so horrible]

In Daniel and Daniela's conversation they bring up both the intense pain and sadness connected to the experience, while also highlighting the growth that originated from having survived it. They view that growth as laying the groundwork for their solid relationship foundation, but also as being connected to their capacity for resilience, a resilience which they relied upon for immigration. Here Daniela described how learning to let go of her daughter, allowed her to learn how to let go in general:

Y me acuerdo que una noche, yo me arrodille a orar y dije como "Ya. Ya está. Ya está. O sea si va a estar bien, por favor, Dios déjala. Si no, te suplico que te la lleves." Daniel suplico conmigo esa oración porque me vio despierta en la madrugada, eso fue como a las tres de la mañana. Pero fue, es la primera vez que yo siento desprendimiento de corazón...Ese momento sentí tanta necesidad como de libérala, como de desprenderme.

Y cuando llegamos al hospital, a las seis de la mañana, nos dijeron que ya estaba en los últimos minutos, este, y ya, ahí murió al ratito que llegamos. Entonces así sentí, como el dejar ir, desprenderme. Yo creo que fue... la enseñanza más grande. De desprenderme de mi hija, a desprenderme a un país, de amigos. Ya ahorita no le tengo apego a muchas cosas. Ya entiendo que me puedo desprender.

[And I recall that one night, I kneeled to pray, and I said “Ok. Ready. Ready. If she will be well, please God, leave her. But if not, I beg that you take her.” Daniel pleaded that prayer with me because he saw me awake in the night, that was at about three in the morning. But it was the first time that I felt a letting go from the heart... In that moment I felt the need to free her, of letting go. And when we arrived to the hospital at six in the morning, they told us that she was in her last moments, and that’s it, she passed away shortly after we arrived. So I felt that way, like letting go. I think that was...the biggest lesson. From letting go of my daughter, to letting go my country and my friends. Now I don’t have attachment to a lot of things. I understand that I know how to let go.]

The lessons that Daniela and Daniel learned from the traumatic experience of losing their daughter were useful for what they described as the second most critical moment in their lives, which was their immigration to the U.S. Similarly, Teresa and Manuel also connected the most critical moment in their lives, their youngest son’s hospitalization in Venezuela, to their immigration process. Their child’s 3-week hospitalization was particularly frightening because of his special health conditions, but also because the hospital was not appropriately equipped to help him. They reported the hospital had unsanitary conditions, lack of medication, and that each day a child on their floor would pass away, causing them a lot of “angustia” [“anguish”]. They

left Venezuela shortly after their child recovered. Teresa and Manuel shared that this stressful experience served as a confirmation that they needed to leave Venezuela. Here Manuel explains:

Si, de hecho unos días después, nosotros ya habíamos comprado pasajes para venimos y ya era determinante. O sea, eso termino de tomar la decisión de venimos. Porque ya era caótico, si nosotros no lográbamos venimos, no sabíamos que podía pasar en Venezuela porque no iba a tener los tratamientos que necesitara.... [era] un riesgo de salud

[Yes, in fact a few days later, we had already bought the tickets to come, and it was decisive. That sealed the decision to come here. Because it was already too chaotic, if we did not succeed in coming, we didn't know that could happen in Venezuela, because he would not have the treatments that he needed...[it was] a health risk]

In their member check meeting, Teresa and Manuel clarified that this was a crucial experience that certainly marked them, however, they did not feel comfortable regarding it as trauma because they feel they have been able to surpass it. Instead, they reported that the unsafe conditions they lived through in Venezuela, which included being the victims of crime, more clearly fit the label of trauma, given that they still feel hypervigilant and cautious even as they are now in safe living conditions. Aside from Teresa and Manuel, as well as Daniela and Daniel, no other couples reported experiences of pre-migration trauma.

Carolina was the only participant who reported surviving in-transit trauma, as she was also the only participant who entered the U.S. by foot, while crossing Rio Grande. She described her difficult month-long journey, during which her family knew nothing of her whereabouts, like this:

Y para mí eso fue más traumático porque pasamos el rio ese Bravo a pie, yo no sabía nadar...No, el trauma de pasar ese rio tan peligroso al otro lado, en Laredo Texas,

esperándonos los maleantes ahí como armados con machetes y pasando y quitando los papeles y todos los documentos, y la platica que traíamos, todo. Y yo quede prácticamente con lo que tenía puesto y de ahí para adelante tomando agua caliente, porque no había más que comer ni tomar... yo llegue muy mal.

[And for me that was very traumatic because we crossed the Rio Grande by foot, and I didn't know how to swim...No, the trauma of crossing that dangerous river to the other side, in Laredo Texas, there were these ruffians waiting for us there armed with machetes, passing by and taking our papers, all of our documents, and the little money that we brought and everything. And I remained with basically only what I was wearing and from then on drinking hot water because there was nothing to eat or drink...I arrived very ill.]

Carolina's journey was full of obstacles that threatened her physical safety and wellbeing, creating traumatic circumstances for her. In the "Impact on Mental Health" subtheme explored above, I discussed how this trauma had long-term consequences for Carolina. Upon her arrival to the U.S., Carolina unfortunately experienced a second traumatic incident. She shared that not long after entering the U.S. and securing a second job in a factory, her supervisor attempted to rape her. Although Carolina did not speak about the impact of that experience, she named it as trauma in her life.

After their immigration, Maria and Sergio also reported experiences of acute stress, Namely, they spoke about Maria's traumatic hospitalization during the last months of her pregnancy, causing her a lot of distress and sadness. During the member check meeting, Maria noted that much of her distress was due to the uncertainty of her unborn daughter's survival and wellbeing. Additionally, Jose and Magda also reported experience of post-migration. They

regarded the instance in which Jose was laid off leaving them in a dire financial situation (described under the subtheme “Financial Pressure”) as traumatic for them, given that they didn’t know how they would cover their most basic expenses and were denied help from the government after applying for food assistance. They noted that the feelings of abandonment further intensified the difficulty of that experience, with Jose regarding it as the most critical moment of their lives as immigrants in the U.S.

While surviving trauma prior, during, and after immigration was not present in everyone’s stories, those that did endure traumatic experiences considered it as a significant event in their lives as individuals and as a couple. Many of the couples recalled these incidents with sadness, but also ensured to remark on their ability to survive it and at times, what they were able to gain or learn from the experience. As Manuel put it “Salimos adelante. Nos pusimos en manos de Dios. Hubo gente que nos apoyó y sobrevivimos” [“We got through it. We placed ourselves in God’s hands. There were people who supported us, and we survived”]. With his words, Manuel pointed out the many resources and strategies they used to cope, ones that they have in common with many other of the couples as they overcame immigration-related challenges.

“Nunca sabes de lo que estas hecho hasta inmigras”: The Use of Resources, Tools, and Strategies for Success

In the face of so many challenges, the couples came up with and engaged with multiple forms of resources, tools, and strategies to build their desired lives. The use of these approaches demonstrated their resilience and capacity to succeed. This is nicely illustrated by Daniela, who gained an awareness of her strength through the process of immigration: “Nunca sabes de lo que estas hecho hasta que inmigras” [“You don’t know what you’re made of until you immigrate”].

Determined to succeed, the couples deployed a variety of strategies to help them navigate challenges and meet their goals, and in the process learned what they were “made of”. In the following sections, I will describe the nature of these strategies and how they were used. The subthemes included in this theme are: (1) Working Hard and Living Within Your means, (2) Following the Laws, Rules, and Norms in the U.S., (3) Receiving Help from Others, (4) Relocation Within the U.S., (5) The Use of Spirituality or Religion, (6) The Use of Hope, Positivity, and Gratitude, and (7) Contributing to Society and Helping Others.

Working Hard and Living Within Your Means

To meet financial demands, as well as their educational and vocational goals, it was a common practice among the couples to work really hard. Working hard emerged as a strategy through several avenues, which included working multiple jobs, working jobs with difficult hours (e.g., night shifts, long shifts), taking classes to learn English, pursuing higher education degrees, and strategizing to secure more advantageous careers. Although partners sometimes engaged in different approaches to working hard, this theme was present in the stories of each participant.

In nearly all the couples at least one partner reported having to work multiple jobs or having to work difficult hours. Often, this was a matter of necessity, as the couples worked to cover their basic expenses. Carolina put it this way: “En este país que la persona que trabajaba un solo turno, no era suficiente. La vida como estaba de cara y todo. No es suficiente.” [“In this country people that work a single job, it wasn’t enough. Life was expensive and everything. It wasn’t enough.”]. Comparably, when speaking about how to ensure that Magda could remain at home to raise their sons, Jose, for example, stated: “Yo siempre tuve dos o tres trabajos al mismo tiempo...era la única forma” [“I always had two or three jobs at the same time... It was the only

way”]. These quotes from Jose and Carolina note that there was no alternative to working multiple jobs to viably sustain their lives. Earlier in the interview, Jose also expressed that working a high number of hours is “como nos ha tocado a la mayoría de los Hispanos” [“the lot of the majority of Hispanic people”].

Manuel, who is currently working multiple jobs, would perhaps agree with Jose. After Teresa, his wife, noted that he works so much that he arrives home very tired, Manuel joked: “Es un sueño Americano, pero sueño de que [pretende dormir en el hombro de Teresa] [risa] Es una broma” [“It’s an American dream, but a dream because [pretends to sleep on his Teresa’s shoulder] [laughter] It’s a joke”]. The couple’s then seemed to view working hard as part of life in the U.S., with some of them noting that they were aware that this would be the case even before immigrating.

In addition to attempts at increasing their income through working lots of hours, there was also a concerted effort to live within their means. For instance, Teresa noted that they do “magia” [“magic”] with their income through budgeting. To illustrate a similar point, Carla and Rafael shared:

Carla: Ha sido muy importante y valioso para mí es que aprendimos a vivir como con lo que hacemos, en el o sea...

Rafael: dentro de nuestras posibilidades digamos

Carla: Económicas o sea que si ganamos diez hemos aprendido de vivir con ocho y entonces con eso yo me siento que soy millonaria porque puedo pagar la renta, puedo ir al super, o sea tengo todas mis necesidades básicas cubiertas”

[Carla: It was very important and valuable for me that we learned to live with what we make, with...

Rafael: Within our possibilities, let's say

Carla: Economically, if we earned ten, we have learned to live off eight and so I feel like a millionaire because I pay rent, I can go to the supermarket, I mean I have all of my basic needs covered]

Carla indicates that learning to live within their means has been beneficial financially, but also alludes to a sense of satisfaction or peace of mind that comes with this strategy as well. Coping with limited financial resources then involved both external efforts to change their financial circumstances (i.e., increase income), but also internal efforts to live within their means whenever this was possible.

Working hard also emerged through the pursuit of better careers and higher education. Victoria and Zele, for example, talked about how it was important for Victoria to obtain a higher education degree here, even though she already had a degree from a Mexican university. Victoria stated “El me empujó a que hiciera un *degree* aquí en Estados Unidos porque tenía el síndrome de impostor bien fuerte de no soy nadie aquí” [“He pushed me to get a degree here in the United States because I had very strong impostor syndrome, of I’m not anyone here”]. Pursuing a degree for Victoria then was not necessarily a matter of meeting economic demands, but a way of coping with the immigration challenge of questioning her professional value in the U.S. Angela, who also pursued higher education after her arrival, attributed attending college as a turning point that allowed her to break away from the depression and anxiety she experienced when she first arrived: “A mi lo que me salvo... emocionalmente, fue haber empezado estudiar en la universidad. Eso para mí fue un antes y después” [“What saved me ... emotionally, was beginning my studies at the university. That for me marked a before and an after”]. Here, Angela

clarifies that the pursuit of a college degree was an avenue to cope with the negative mental health impacts that were tied to her immigration process.

Working hard, living within their means, and pursuing vocational goals were strategies deployed by the couples not only to meet the financial demands of their lives in the U.S., but also to find satisfaction. Daniela, who has an educational and professional background in human resources, summarized that very same idea:

Yo siempre promulgó que tener un buen empleo, un buen trabajo. Hacer lo que te gusta de eso marca mucho la diferencia en el estilo de vida del inmigrante, en el ánimo porque...que tú hagas algo con lo que te sientas conectado te da mucho mejor humor, te dan ganas de hacerlo

[I always promote the idea of having a good employment, a good job. To do what you like to do makes a big difference in an immigrant's lifestyle, in their disposition... because when you do something to which you feel connected, you are in a better mood, you feel energized to do it]

This strategy, of working hard, then had implications for the financial and emotional wellbeing of the couples. It appeared to be an effective, and common, way for the couples to get closer to the types of lives they were/are hoping to construct as immigrants in this country, as well as to cope with the emotional demands that come with being an immigrant.

Following the Law, Rules, and Norms in the U.S.

Another common approach for success that emerged across several couples was that of following the U.S. norms and laws. Being diligent about following law was of particular importance to nearly all the participants, who reported this was a consideration in many of their decisions (e.g., choosing not to work until they had work permits, choosing to immigrate only

when they had a viable legal pathway to do so). For example, when choosing where they were going to immigrate, Daniela specified: “Siempre buscamos era la opción legal. Lo que nos enfocamos mucho de la opción legal. Para llegar para llegar y tener un estatus legal” [“We always looked for the legal option. We focused on the legal option, to arrive and be able to have a legal status”]. Similarly, when explaining their decision not to work until they had work permits, Rafael reported: “No si es el GPS moral o el GPS legal, siempre dijimos nunca vamos a trabajar ilegalmente” [“I don’t know if it was our moral GPS or our legal GPS, but we always said we would not work illegally”]. Carla immediately added to Rafael’s statement: “Si podemos evitarlo, o sea si no hay que comer pues se hace lo que se tiene que hacer...” [“If we can help it, if there is nothing to eat then you have to do what you have to do”]. So, although they were intentional about following the law, there was also a recognition that sometimes necessity doesn’t allow for that.

Sergio and Teresa, who immigrated without documentation as a result of a deep economic crisis in Argentina, also reported a preoccupation with “hacer las cosas bien” [“doing things right”], as Sergio put it. They wanted to pay taxes and do what was in their power to abide by U.S. law. This attentiveness to following the law, disrupts commonly peddled stereotypes of Latinxs as criminals. Instead, the couples felt a yearning to be good citizens, which sometimes also extended to abiding by U.S. norms as well. Manuel, for example, viewed it as a responsibility to follow the “normas de este país” [“norms of this country”].

To explain their motivation to follow laws and norms, Magda offered this metaphor “Es como cuando tú vas a la casa de alguien tú no puedes poner reglas ahí. Yo no me puedo ir en contra” [“It’s like when you go to someone else’s house you can’t make the rules there. I can’t go against it”]. Similarly, Rafael stated the following about the ease Carla and him experienced

getting adjusted to U.S. culture: “Aquí las cosas son verde, pues vamos a hacer las cosas verde” [“Well it was like here things are green, so let’s do things green”]. These quotes communicate a desire to adapt and learn to live within U.S. cultural norms, and they signal that the participants viewed this adaptation as a sign of respect to their host country.

Receiving Help from Others

Receiving help from others, whether that meant a church community, friends, mentors, professors, bosses, or counselors, also emerged as a resource for success. Couples sometimes received concrete assistance (e.g., help finding housing, support with childcare, connecting couples to resources), but also as emotional assistance from others. And often, that help was instrumental for them to get ahead.

Sergio and Maria, who experienced a lot of rejection from their extended family in the U.S., reported receiving a high amount of support throughout the years from the people in their network. Together told the story of how the help from a Greek man, who became Sergio’s employer, was crucial for them and their daughters to establish themselves; this man gave Sergio a full-time job, and later helped him and his family move into an apartment, gifting them furniture and household items. Sergio reported that after that help “empezamos a ver un poco la luz al final del túnel” [“we started seeing the light at the end of the tunnel”]. In our interview, Maria termed that help as a blessing: “Por eso yo te decía que [Dios] puso muchas personas en nuestra vida que, personas que nos ayudaran mucho [“That’s why I was telling you that [God] put a lot of people in our lives that, people that helped us a lot”]. In these quotes you sense of the great importance that receiving that help had on their lives.

In addition to receiving help from their social network, other participants also shared seeking out and receiving help from counselors. Angela, who later become a counselor herself,

reported that the mental health services she received were tremendously helpful for her: “Yo fui a hacer terapia y todo, y la verdad que fue excelente porque en esa terapia es donde hice todo el procesamiento de inmigración y del desarraigo y todo eso” [“I went to therapy and everything, and truth is that it was excellent, because it was in that therapy where I was able to process my immigration and the uprooting and all of that”]. Similar to Angela, Carla and Rafael also attributed their ability to have succeeded as immigrants and as a couple to their experience in couple’s therapy. Here is how Carla, who is now also a practicing counselor, discussed it:

Yo creo que realmente la terapia de parejas, yo creo que salvo nuestro matrimonio porque no resolvió lo problemas, pues no te pueden dar, el terapeuta no te puede dar una visa, no puede arreglar eso, pero nos enseñó mucho como a comunicarnos y hablar como desde nuestros sentimientos y entender a la otra persona. Entonces no soluciono el problema, pero aprendimos a comunicarnos y a pelear mejor. Y a partir de ahí, estuvo, pues no es como que ya no ha habido problemas pero hemos logrado sobrellevar

[I think that truly couples therapy, I think, that it saved our marriage because it didn’t solve the problems, I mean they can’t give you, the therapist can’t give you visa, they can’t fix that, but they taught us how to communicate better, how to talk about our feelings, and how to understand the other person. From then on, there was, well it’s not like there haven’t been problems, but we have succeeded in overcoming them]

Similar to Maria and Sergio then, Carla and Rafael viewed the help they received from someone outside their relationship and crucial in effecting positive changes for the lives. Help came from many other sources in participants’ stories. During their member check meeting, Manuel and Teresa for instance, shared that they’ve received incredible support from their friends, who now feel like family.

Help and support for these couples came in varied avenues and from differing relationships, yet the importance of this support was clearly communicated by most of them. They viewed the support they had received as significant, and many expressed a deep gratitude for it. From small acts of kindness to very generous levels of support, the couples in the study seemed to deeply benefit from being seen and cared about by their communities.

Relocation Within the U.S.

Another strategy for success was relocations within the U.S., as five of the eight couples reported moving to a different state after their arrival. The relocations were all the result of seeking an improved quality of life, either by way of gaining better employment opportunities, seeking better health conditions, or living in environments that better suited their desired lifestyle. Carla and Rafael, for example, relocated after Rafael secured a better employment position that also provided a pathway to residency for both him and Carla. Likewise, Daniel and Daniela moved for an employment opportunity for Daniel, while also believing that Daniela would find a better opportunity. On this matter Daniel said "Creo que en general fue el movernos de ciudad para buscar mejores el trabajos" ["I think that we in general we moved to seek better jobs"].

In addition, to work opportunities, other couples relocated due to opportunities for improved living conditions. For instance, Magda and Jose moved for health reasons:

Bueno, la razón principal era por cuestiones climáticas...ahí el aire no es puro. El aire es muy contaminado, porque hay muchas refinerías petroleras y muchas plantas químicas. Entonces había mucho, mucha polución, mucho aire contaminado, y tuvimos muchísimas alergias.

[The main reason was due to climate conditions...the air wasn't pure. The air was contaminated because there were a lot of oil refineries and chemical plants, so there was a lot of pollution and we struggled with a lot of allergies]

Magda and Jose therefore weighed their health and benefits of an improved physical environment. The physical environment, among other things, was also a consideration in Zele and Victoria's relocation, as they sought to leave the arid heat of southwestern U.S. They were presented with the opportunity to move when Victoria's employer gave her three geographic choices for transferring. While making that decision, Zele and Victoria considered the weather, but also the cost of living in each of the areas, ultimately choosing to relocate to North Carolina. Making a very similar assessments of the benefits of a relocation, Carlos and Carolina chose to move to North Carolina for improved economic conditions (i.e., lower cost of living), but also for improved quality of life and to be closer to Carlos' sons. Here is tells the story of how he made the decision:

Porque el hijo se mundo para acá... y me dijo "Papa, tienes que venir para acá, que esto para acá está muy bueno...y es mejor ambiente que el de New Jersey." Aquí se respira más aire puro y se consigue más trabajo por donde quiera, y era mejor pago... Y yo bueno "Me esperas mañana!" y enseguida cogimos para acá

[Because my son had moved over here...and he told me "Dad, you have to come over here, things over here are very good...and it's a better environment than in New Jersey." Here you can breathe pure air, and you can find work anywhere and it had better pay... And I said, "I'll be there tomorrow!" and we soon took off]

Relocation within the U.S. symbolized access to additional resources, opportunities, and quality of life, much like what immigration to the U.S. had symbolized. Perhaps there is also an

increased openness to relocations among these couples, given that they had already made the sacrifice of leaving their home country behind. Relocation within the U.S. is not a commonly discussed area of inquiry in Latinx immigrant populations, but one that may warrant additional exploration (e.g., which states/cities are more immigration friendly and what makes them so).

The Use of Spirituality or Religion

Many of the participants relied on their spirituality, including a faith in God, to cope and draw meaning from some of the challenges they faced. The use of spirituality seemed to be especially helpful for emotional fortitude during times of crises in the couples' lives. I have previously noted Maria's traumatic hospitalization during the final months of her pregnancy, a time during which she suffered a lot due to the uncertainty of her unborn daughter's survival and wellbeing. While reflecting on that difficult moment in her life, Maria detailed the story of how a spiritual experience solidified her belief in God and ultimately allowed her to be at peace:

Bueno el día que yo recibí al señor ahí en el hospital, yo como que me quedé más tranquila y hasta que nació mi hija...Pero ahí me pasó algo que fue, yo para mí, fue un encuentro con Dios...cuando me lo recuerdo me da emoción, porque yo tenía el brazo así, porque tenía el suero y yo con esta mano me tapaba la cara y los ojos y lloraba y en una noche yo estoy así, estoy llorando y siento que alguien me agarró fuerte mi mano, pero muy fuerte. ... y yo abrí los ojos y vi una figura blanca que salió de ahí...y entonces yo ahí dije "oh es el espíritu, el espíritu de Dios que vino a consolarme, a decirme que está todo bien, que tengo que confiar" ... y si desde ese día yo creo que Dios existe y que Dios está con nosotros y que Dios nos ayuda en los momentos difíciles y nos da la

mano... Y después de eso, paso una semana de eso nació mi hija y toda esa semana yo no lloré. Yo me quede tranquila, la paz que tenía, paz interior, y que iba a estar todo bien [Well the day that I received the Lord there in the hospital, I remained more at peace until my daughter was born...But there something happened that was, to me, it was an encounter with God...when I remember it I feel emotional, because I had my arm like this, because I had the I.V., and with my other hand I would cover my face, my eyes and I would cry. And one night, I was just like that, and I was crying and I felt that someone held my hand, but firmly... and I opened my eyes and I saw a white figure that left... and then I said “Oh, it’s the spirit, it’s God’s spirit that came to console me, to tell me that everything will be alright, that I have to trust”...and since that day I believe that God exists and that God is with us. A week passed after that and my daughter was born, and that whole week, I didn’t cry. I was at ease, I had peace, inner peace, that everything would be alright]

Maria relied on her faith to unburden herself of the sadness and worry she was feeling and was able to gain hope and peace from doing so. Her use of religion has many similarities with Carla’s use of spirituality during a particularly difficult time. While dealing with depression while waiting for her permanent residency card, Carla also reported having a mystical spiritual experience that helped her shift her perspective and made the position she was in more bearable:

Yo tuve como una experiencia espiritual en la que me di cuenta que mi vida no es para mí, para que yo logre algo, era para dar a los demás, iniciando por Rafael, como que dedique mi vida a Rafael y eso me ayudó a poder sobrellevar ese esos años que fueron muy duro.

[I had a spiritual experience in which I realized that my life was not for me, for me to accomplish something, it is to give to others, beginning with Rafael, like to dedicate my life to Rafael and that helped me overcome all those years that were very tough.]

Using spirituality, Carla reports realizing her “why,” which granted her the sense of vision and purpose she needed to withstand that difficult period in her life. Magda was another participant who shared the use of her faith during a time of crisis, explaining that “Y tener esa fe lo motiva a uno a luchar” [“having faith motivates you to keep fighting”].

Many of the participants also viewed the positive events in the lives as being manifestations of God’s plan for them. When Carolina , for example, spoke about wanting to be caught by ICE so that she could be deported, Carlos replied to her with “Dios de había salvado para mi” [“God had saved you for me”]. Daniela also saw Daniel’s securing new employment and their smooth transition to a new state, which were very positive change for their family, as an intervention from God.

Participants therefore used their spirituality to as a tangible tool to cope with difficult circumstances, but also make meaning of the events that transpired in their lives. This was reflected through stories of spiritual experiences, as well as through the use of religious language in most of the interviews, which included expressions such as “Gracias a Dios” [“Thanks to God”], “Dios es grande” [“God is great”], “Que sea lo que Dios quiera” [“Let it be God’s will”], etc. In these various ways, the couples seem to have drawn strength from their belief systems.

The Use of Hope, Positivity, And Gratitude

In addition to their belief system, participants also relied in the use of hope, positivity and gratitude as a means of facing challenges and difficult changes. These attitudes, or personal dispositions, seemed to alleviate fear and sadness at various junctions of their immigration

process. For example, Maria describes both the sadness and the hope they felt as she, Sergio, and their two daughters were leaving Argentina:

Así que vinimos, sí, sí un poco triste dejar la familia, sin saber cuándo íbamos a poder volver, sin conocer acá, sin saber cómo nos iba a ir, como íbamos a estar en este país, como iban a estar mis hijas, pero siempre pensando que había algo mejor para nosotros que íbamos a salir adelante y que íbamos a poder estar mejor, sobre todo para nuestras hijas, un futuro mejor para ellas.

[So we came, yes, yes, a little sad leaving your family, without knowing when you could see them again, without knowing what it was like here, without knowing how things would go for us, how well we would do in this country, how well my daughters would be, but always thinking that there was something better for us, that we would be able to get ahead, and that we would be able to be better, and above all that for our daughters, a better future for them.]

Maria describes the uncertainty that immigration undoubtedly brings, which she countered with the hope that things would be better. In a very similar, but succinct statement, Ariel, who also immigrated from Argentina, said to me: “la línea de fondo de la situación que nosotros teníamos en ese momento en Argentina no podía ser peor acá” [“the bottom line is that it could not be worst here than the situation we had in Argentina”]. His statement includes the acknowledgement of desperate conditions in his country of origin, which is tied to a certainty that their lives would improve post-immigration.

Added to hope, participants also used positivity, which at times allowed them to shift their perspectives on challenges. This point is illustrated by Manuel’s response when I asked about the most difficult aspects of leaving Venezuela:

Bueno, al inicio como todos, [extrañar a] su gente, nuestra familia, okey? Estar lejos, el no podernos ver, el no compartir, pero siempre viendo lo positivo del momento, no? Yo cada día que me despierto veo es lo positivo, más que lo negativo. La alegría de mis hijos y de mi esposa es el combustible para que uno salga a trabajar, salga a hacer algo

[Well, at the beginning like everyone, [missing] your people, your family, right? To be far, not being able to see them, to spend time with them, but always looking for the positive in each moment, no? ...Each day I wake up and what I see is the positive, more so than the negative. The joy of seeing my children and my wife is the fuel for me to go out and work, to go out and achieve]

Manuel expresses that although there are certainly difficult parts to leaving their home country, namely missing their family, he chooses to look at what their family has gained from the change. Focusing on the positive, he notes, motivates him each day. Also included in Manuel's statement is deeply embedded orientation towards family, discussed as a theme earlier in this chapter.

All the couples also shared feeling a deep gratitude about the outcomes of their immigration process. Towards the end of our first interview, Daniela became teary when listening to Daniel talk about their relationship. When I asked what was behind the tears, she responded that it was a strong sensation of gratitude:

Más que todo agradecimiento de mirar para atrás, porque nos está invitando a mirar para atrás, y wow que bien no? Este agradecimiento con Dios, obviamente con Daniel. Este todas las cosas que hemos hecho como que uff si han funcionado mira dónde estamos. Mucho de lo que ni siquiera nos imaginamos que podría pasar... Tenemos cosas, este, todavía estamos juntos...después de esos momentos tan difíciles.

[More than anything gratefulness, of looking back because you are inviting us to look back, and wow, how great, no? Feeling grateful with God, obviously with Daniel. All the things that we have done, it's like ooof they have worked, look at where we've gotten. Much more than what we even imagined was possible...we have things, we are still together...even after all those difficult moments.]

When reflecting on their story, as they did throughout the interview, Daniela was ultimately overwhelmed with how fortunate and proud she felt of all they have overcome and accomplished, prompting a wave of gratitude that moved her to tears. Feeling thankful for their experiences, accomplishments, and the people in their lives, was a sentiment that repeatedly expressed among the couples, and seemed to foster a sense an awareness of being fortunate to be in the positions they were in.

The use of hope, positivity, and gratitude was a theme that was embedded throughout the stories the couples kindly shared with me. These dispositions seemed to be an internal strategy that effectively eased the many difficult moments the couples faced. Simultaneously, the use of gratitude allowed them to look back and feel satisfied and fortunate to have so many assets in their lives, including their partners.

Contributing To Society and Helping Others

The final strategy for success discussed in this theme is the couples' desire to be contributing members of their communities. Manuel explained it as an effort to “llegar ganándote tu espacio” [“to arrive earning your space”], noting that being a good citizen adds to the country's future wellbeing. He later described the U.S. as “un país de inmigrantes. Es un país donde todos ponemos un granito de arena para que algo se mueva. Y eso es buenísimo,” [“a country of immigrants. It's a country where we each contribute a grain of sand so that it

progresses. And that is great”]. Here, Manuel’s view of his role as a member of his adopted country is revealed, as he gives great importance to doing his part for an improved society and future.

For many, being a contributing member of society, was practiced through a calling to help others. Interestingly, three of the participants chose to pursue careers that centralize supporting others. After receiving help for her son with an auditory disability, Magda dedicated the remainder of her career to work with children in special education. Angela, who received important help from a counselor to process her difficult immigration, became a mental health counselor herself and is currently pursuing a PhD in counselor education. And finally, Victoria, who viewed her educational background and degrees as beneficial in her immigration process, has invested her career to higher education with the goal of helping immigrants and Latinxs have better educational access. She spoke about it in these terms:

De ahí fue que yo dije, yo quiero... trabajar pro-educación. Por eso estoy en universidad ahora trabajando en admisiones y haciendo lo que hago, porque me di cuenta que la gente me valido a mí, solamente por ser mujer, e inmigrante, académicamente educada [From that moment I said, I want to... work in pro-education. That’s why I’m in a university right now working in admissions and doing what I do, because I realized that people validated me, only because I was an educated, immigrant woman].

Due the value and benefits Victoria received based on her education level, she is adamant about helping others have the same access that she did. Victoria, along with Zele, also used community service as an avenue of supporting their community. For years, they dedicated themselves to different volunteer efforts, including the Boy Scouts, the Red Cross, pro-education efforts for Latinxs, and church-based volunteering. Zele, who described having a hunger for

knowledge as a child but very limited opportunities to satiate it (e.g., no access to encyclopedias, internet did not exist), volunteered as an English teacher for newly arrived immigrants and spoke about his experience in that role:

Una persona que pasó por lo que yo pasé...de querer saber y no poder saber, y ahora está de mi edad y no tiene la oportunidad todavía de saber, mira eso a mí me parte el alma.

Por eso estuve ahí dando clases ... esa gente que te traen historias de, historias de inmigrantes que no te dejan dormir... Cosas increíbles! Esa gente tiene toda mi devoción.

[A person that went through what I went through...of wanting to know more but not being able to, and now that person is my age and they still don't have the opportunity to learn, that crushes my soul. That's why I would give classes... to those people that bring stories that, immigrant stories that rob you of your sleep...incredible things! Those people have my full devotion.]

Zeke describes how strongly he feels about helping those immigrants who have a desire to learn, as he is motivated by empathy about what it's like to have limited access to knowledge.

Daniela is also very invested in helping immigrants succeed in the U.S. In her advocacy and volunteer work she relies on online platforms and tools to provide free career development education and tools that support Latinx immigrants. Daniela explained that she uses her voice to emphasize the idea that no matter their background, immigrants have assets that they can leveraged to achieve satisfying careers in the U.S.:

Nunca empiezas de cero. Jamás, jamás...eso ha sido la manera como yo he visto la inmigración. Venimos con muchas experiencias, con muchos talentos... con mucho *knowledge*. O sea como ya tú sabes que te funciona, sabes que te gusta, sabes los errores que has cometido antes, y eso de algo te va a servir en algún momento.

[You never start from scratch. Never, never...that is the way in which I have viewed immigration. We come with a lot of experiences, with a lot of talents...with a lot of knowledge. I mean you already know what works for you, what you like, the mistakes you have made, that will be useful for you at some point.]

Daniela feels satisfied with the career she has accomplished after immigration, and noted that this is why she promotes this as a possibility for other immigrants:

Por eso no me puedo quedar de callada porque a alguien le puede llegar el mensaje. Y alguien, se conecta con que... si es posible hacer cosas que a ti te gusten, si es posible hacer cosas que tú disfrute, si es posible”

[That’s why I can’t remain silent because my message could reach someone. Someone could connect with...it is possible to do things that you like, to do things that you enjoy, it is possible]

Daniela, who has a Human Resources background, freely shares her expertise in workplace advancement and satisfaction because she feels a calling to help other Latinx immigrants. During our member check meeting, she excitedly shared that the incentives she and Daniel had received from participating in this study were invested into podcast equipment she needed to support these efforts (i.e., disseminating information to help immigrants succeed).

As can be observed through all these different career and volunteer work, the couples were interested in using their experiences, skills, and knowledge to support others in different areas of life (e.g., education, vocational satisfaction, mental health). In this way, and likely many others, the couples became contributing members of the communities they resided in. This contradicts narratives of immigrants as a heavy load on society, and instead highlights

immigrants as possessing assets that they willingly donate for the benefit of others and to support their communities.

“En la unión esta fuerza”: The Relationship as a Resource to Face Challenges

“En la unión esta la fuerza” [In unity there is strength] was Jose’s way of explaining the important role that his relationship with Magda had in overcoming the challenges that unfolded before them. This was a sentiment that was echoed by all the couples. They often shared that their relationship provided them with the strength, tools, and determination necessary to succeed as immigrants in the U.S. This was so much so, that some couples reported a believe that without their partners, they would not have been able to remain the U.S. and build the lives they did.

Here are Daniel and Daniela reflecting on this very point:

Daniel: Porque si yo lo hubiera manejado individualmente yo creo que ya nosotros estuviésemos en Venezuela nuevamente.

Daniela: Uuuuy, hace rato!

Daniel: Porque hubo momentos realmente que nosotros nos hizo dudar si era la decisión correcta o no. Y yo creo que la magnitud de la relación nuestra fue la que realmente nos montó el equilibrio. Este, realmente yo le agradezco mucho en esa etapa de transición a Daniela. Yo creo que ahí fue el momento donde realmente nos tocó a los dos aprovechar la fortaleza de cada uno.... Yo reconocí realmente lo que Daniela hizo en el principio. Ella reconoció lo que el esfuerzo de lo que yo también estaba haciendo.

[Daniel: Because if I had managed it individually, I think we would already be back in Venezuela again.

Daniela: Uuuuy, a long time ago!

Daniel: Because there were moments that really made us doubt whether this was the right decision or not. And I think that the magnitude of our relationship was what provided the balance. I am grateful to Daniela for a lot during that transition period. I think that this is where we had to make the most of the strengths we each had...I recognized all that Daniela did in the beginning. She too recognized all the efforts that I was also making.]

Daniel and Daniela made it clear that their relationship, the efforts that they each put in and the help they received from one another, was a key ingredient to their success. Daniel also made sure to note the sense of gratitude and appreciation they have for one another and for the relationship they have co-constructed.

The couples were able to rely on their relationship to get through many of the individual-level and family-level challenges that immigration brought (explored in the third theme of this chapter). The ability to use their relationship as a resource emerged through the use of multiple relationship qualities and behaviors, which are further detailed below. These helpful relational qualities included: (1) giving and receiving support, (2) teamwork, (3) open, consistent, and respectful communication, and (4) to love and be loved.

Giving and Receiving Support

Among the couples there was steadfast exchange of support, which was demonstrated in concrete ways (e.g., taking over household chores when someone is working multiple jobs, helping partner learn English) and in ways that involved emotional support (e.g., consoling a partner dealing with transnational grief and loss, caring for partner who is struggling with immigration changes). The couples provided many examples through which they felt their partners had shown up for them, but also noted many examples in which they had shown up for

their partners, highlighting the mutual nature of support in their relationships. This mutuality of was nicely described by Angela:

Nos apoyamos y nos sentimos más unidos porque nos apoyamos mutuamente y...hay muchas situaciones, hay muchos momentos en que yo note ese apoyo de parte de él y él también lo notaba de parte mía y como que esos son puntos a favor de la relación.

[We support each other and we feel more united because we mutually support each other and ... there are many situations, there are many moments in which I noticed his support, and he noted my support, and those are favorable components in our relationship.]

As many of the other couples, Angela views the support that that she and Ariel give each other as a very positive aspect of their relationship. There were numerous ways in which partners gave each other support as they worked through their immigration related challenges. Magda and Victoria, for example, both reported receiving help from their partners to learn or improve their English. Others, like Carla and Rafael, took care of one another (e.g., making food, doing the laundry) when they were alternately working on career goals (e.g., working multiple jobs, attending school). And yet others, engaged in providing support by empowering their partners to pursue personal goals. This was the case with Victoria, who was encouraged by Zele to pursue a higher education degree in the U.S., as well as the case with Daniel, who was encouraged by Daniela to seek out employment that he would find more fulfilling.

In addition to empowering, motivating, and helping their partners with personal goals, some of the couples also reported receiving extensive emotional support from each other. This support seemed especially meaningful during difficult or distressing time. Here Daniel reported the how mutual support showed up for them in those times:

Yo creo que... después del fracaso o después de la tormenta, realmente yo me apoye mucho en Daniela y yo creo que ella también se apoyó mucho. Nos apoyamos mucho y las decisiones ya salían estudiadas en el momento por los dos. Yo creo que eso fortaleció nuestra relación y la ha fortalecido hasta ahora.

[I believe that...after failures or after the storm, I truly relied on Daniela a lot and I believe that she relied in me a lot also. We supported each other a lot, and the decisions would be made after being analyzed by both of us at the moment. I think that this strengthened our relationship and it has strengthened it to this day.]

Here Daniel is identifying their mutual support as an asset for their relationship that has ultimately benefited them. He is also naming their collaborative decision-making, which will be further discussed in the communication subtheme included below. Carlos and Carolina also shared the importance of emotional support during times of distress. They each had grief processes due to transnational losses (e.g., death of parents, siblings) and recalled feeling deeply supported by their partners, not only in concrete ways (e.g., financial assistance to cover funeral expenses in Colombia), but also by consoling one another and providing care in those moments. When reflecting on that support, Carlos shared just how meaningful it was for him: “Pues pa’ decirle la verdad como si [con] ese apoyo siente que nada le falta y que todo lo tiene completo” [Well to tell you the truth, with that support one feels like you lack nothing, like you have everything].

Support, in its many forms, allowed the couples to face immigration related challenges, cope with distressing situations, and pursue individual and family goals. Partners had a heightened awareness of how they have helped each other, which also led to feelings of gratitude towards their partners.

Teamwork

The relationship as a team was a commonly used metaphor throughout the interviews, as couples described using each other's strengths, tackling problems together, and working towards a common goal or vision for their relationship and their families. Magda, for instance, stated that the ability to work as a team was imperative for their success: "Tiene uno que ser un buen trabajador en equipo, porque que es lo que es la familia? Un equipo" ["You have to be a good team player, because what is a family? A team"]. The ability to work in conjunction with her partner, was viewed by Magda as a necessity. Similarly, Maria reported that this orientation towards teamwork was something that she was mindful of from the beginning of her and Sergio's immigration:

Yo siempre entendí más que todo cuando teníamos problemas que somos dos, que los dos vamos para el mismo lado, que los dos queremos lo mismo, que los dos esperamos lo mismo, y que somos una pareja. Y que si nos vamos los dos juntos para adelante... vamos a llegar a donde queremos llegar. Y yo entendí eso, y desde que llegamos acá, tratamos de los dos juntos de solucionar y hacer todo lo que queríamos hacer.

[I always understood more than anything when we had problems that we are two, that the both of us are going in the same direction, that we both want the same things, that we both hope for the same things, and that we are a couple. And that if we both move forward together, we will arrive where we want to. I understood that, and since we arrived here, we try to solve problems together and do everything we wanted to do.]

Maria then attributes their ability to succeed to having worked together and relying on their unity as a couple to achieve their common goals. Carla and Rafael also noted that they make a good team, which allowed them to take turns in seeking higher education and have each

of their careers progress over time; when one person was overwhelmed and busy with vocational responsibilities, the other took care of the home. When speaking about this shared load, Carla humorously added:

Es mucho trabajo ser humano! ... Mira, tienes que tener un lugar donde vivir, tienes que estar medio limpio, tienes que lavar la ropa, tienes que hacer comida, tienes que lavar los... o sea es mucho trabajo existir, sólo existir. Entonces en pareja yo creo que es mucho mejor porque se puede dividir la friega de lo que de lo que conlleva... sí cómo está súper difícil y horrible pero es...un poquito más fácil, más llevadero y cómo logramos pasar al siguiente pues momento

[It's that being a human is a lot of work! ... Look, you have to have somewhere to live, you have to be somewhat clean, you have to make food...it's a lot of hard work to exist, just to exist. But with a partner it's a lot better because you can divide the nuisance of everything that it [being a human] entails...It's like it's very difficult and horrible, but it's a little easier, more bearable, and it's how we make it to the next moment...]

Here Carla animatedly described all how helpful the division of labor can be just to get through everyday life, which is resonant in Daniela's statement of "la carga se divide" [the load is divided]. Some of the couples reported that even as they maintained their individuality, there was the ever-present prioritization of their relationship as a team. Angela stated it like this:

"Tenemos nuestros proyectos individuales y todo, pero siempre ha sido así, cosas así como que las hacemos en equipo" ["We have our individual projects and everything, but it has always been like this, we always do things as a team"]. This teamwork, then, facilitates the pursuit of individual goals and projects (e.g., going back to school), contradicting the idea that unity and independence are mutually exclusive.

Teamwork was also reflected in how the couples recognize strengths within their partner and then leveraged those to their advantage. Zele and Victoria reflected on this idea together:

Zele: ...yo le dije a ella de que nosotros hacíamos un buen equipo, porque yo soy extremadamente malo en muchísimas cosas, y ... ella tiene una lista de cosas buenas que compensa mi lista de cosas malas.

Victoria: Pero tiene muchas cosas buenas que yo de crianza no tenía como la. Te voy a dar un ejemplo...: la administración financiera

[Zele: ... I told her that we made a good team, because I am extremely bad at a lot of things...and she has a list of lot of good things that compensate for my list of bad things.

Victoria: But he has many good things that I never had from my upbringing. I'll give you an example...: administration of finances.]

As illustrated in Zele and Victoria's exchange, partners recognize limitations within themselves that were instead strengths for their partners. Interviewed couples reported relying on their partner's strengths for a variety of goals and tasks, including budgeting (as noted by Vitoria above), courage or positivity, life planning, household tasks, etc. It's as though the resources available to them were multiplied through their use and access each other's strengths.

Teamwork, and the many ways in which it was manifested, was an important relational quality that helped the couples meet the demands of everyday life and of immigration. Teamwork involved feeling united with one another, being willing to help each other, and using each other's strengths to achieve both familial and individual goals. As a result, teamwork required empathy, as the partners recognized the need to provide help. Through teamwork, the partners exchanged a high level of mutual support that often resulted in productivity in personal goals.

Open, Consistent, and Respectful Communication

The couples also discussed the importance of healthy communication with their partner as an avenue for facing challenges. This communication was characterized by ensuring they were respectful and honest with one another and was helpful for the couples in their ability to express emotional support, engage in mutual decision-making, and effectively resolve conflict. Magda attributed the success she and Jose had as a couple to good communication: “Lo que nos ha mantenido a nosotros ya por más de 40 años realmente ha sido el dialogo, porque como toda pareja yo pienso que uno tiene momentos difíciles, estresantes” [“What has maintained our relationship for more than 40 years has been dialogue, because like all couples we had difficult and stressful moments”]. Both Magda and Jose described how they ensured that their communication was characterized by respect (e.g., by not cursing or name-calling each other) throughout the entirety of their marriage.

Many of the couples shared Magda’s view of conflict as normal or expected in relationships, but highlighted that their ability to resolve conflict was crucial. Daniela, for instance shared, the following:

Algo...importante es ... como resolver esos conflictos, sabes? Es como siempre hay conflictos en toda relación de cualquier tipo, pero dependiendo de la base que tengamos es como más fácil. Y de estar alineados en eso, en la misma página, saber qué es lo que para donde vamos, eso nos ayuda mucho a reenfocarnos y a centrarnos en lo verdaderamente importante

[Something... that’s important...is how to resolve conflicts, you know? It’s like there is always conflict in relationships of any type but depending on the foundation that you

have it can be easier. Of being aligned, on the same page, to know where we're going, that helps us re-focus, and ground ourselves in what truly matters]

Conflict resolution skills as crucial to deal with the natural rise of disagreements was how some of the couples' emphasizing the importance of good communication. Others highlighted the emotional benefits of open communication with their partners. Rafael, for instance, noted the following:

Yo creo que ha sido mucho el poder hablar de lo que sea ... y sentir el apoyo de la otra persona. O sea cuando yo llego en la tarde por ejemplo, no sé tuve un mal día en la oficina, sé que puedo contar con ella y sé que le puedo decir “¿Sabes qué? tuve un mal día necesito contarte” y siento que recíproco también. Ella a veces pues tiene un mal día y me lo cuenta, no? Entonces es como hay como esa confianza y ese apoyo incondicional [I think that is has been a matter of being able to talk about anything...and to feel the support from the other person. I mean when I get home in the afternoon, for example, and I don't know, I had a bad day at the office, I know that I can talk to her about it, that I can tell her “You know what? I had a bad day and I need to tell you about it” and I feel that it's reciprocal too. She sometimes has a bad day, and she tells me about it, right? So, it's like there is that trust and that unconditional support]

Here Rafael is describing that communication can be an avenue for the exchange of support. He also notes the mutual quality of this type of communication, of them being there for each other by listening. Listening, as a communication quality, was something that was spoken about by Sergio, who reported learning to truly listen well was imperative to best get to know your partner:

Te das cuenta de que el amor no es solo cuando todo va bien o pasional ... el amor incluye un montón de aristas, no? Entonces es también saber comunicarse, saber escucharse, no solo escuchar lo que yo quiero escuchar, no. Saber escucharse, una escucha autentica, genuina, una escucha generosa, digamos, no? Entonces uno empieza a escuchar el corazón del otro, no solo las palabras, empezamos, ya las miradas dicen más que las palabras, entonces empezamos a descubrir todo eso... Empezamos a valorarnos y a entender lo que el otro siente

[You realize that love is not only when everything is going well or passionate...love includes a ton of sharp edges, right? So it's also knowing how to communicate, knowing how to listen, not only hearing what you want to hear, no. To know how to listen, listening authentically, genuinely, generously, let's say, right? So then one begins to listen with the heart, not only the other person's words, but also their gaze more than their words, so you begin to discover all of that... you begin to value and understand what the other person is feeling]

Effective communication, and in particular fully listening, was an important component for building the intimacy that comes with truly knowing another person. Many of the couples, then, viewed communication as integral for conflict resolution, as well as building intimacy and exchanging support. In addition, couples made connections between their open communication and their ability to engage in mutual decision-making.

Regarding their success and the importance of communication, Rafael noted, “Creo que podemos cómo tomar esas decisiones porque podemos hablarlo y podemos decir cómo ‘ok pongámonos de acuerdo’” [“I think that we are able to make those decisions because we can talk, and we can say “okay, let's reach an agreement”]. Here, he indicates that the couple's ability to

talk to one another and to value arriving to decisions together facilitated their process. This mutual decision-making was an important aspect of most of the couple's narratives. Jose, for example, shared that the fact that Magda was open to conversing and to making decisions together was a symbol of her support for him. Daniel and Daniela, who also spoke about the importance of family unity in decision-making during the immigration process, stressed the importance of recognizing or seeing the other person in order for that mutuality to exist:

Daniel: Los tres [incluyendo a su hijo] somos los que tenemos que... tomar decisiones...para salir adelante. Y para hacer eso hay que reconocer al otro... y eso es lo que hemos hecho en todas estas ... ya no es una decisión individual. Ya tú ves que realmente tú funcionas, o las cosas funcionan mejor cuando...

Daniela: cuando estas entre dos

[Daniel: It is the three of us [including his son] that have to ... make decisions ... to prevail. And to do that you have to acknowledge the other person ... and that is what we have done through all of this ... it's no longer an individual decision. You begin to see that you really function, or that things function better when...

Daniela: When it's by both]

Like several of the other couples, Daniel and Daniela viewed their equal involvement and investment in their decision making as beneficial and needed for success. Mutual decision-making, along with emotional support, and conflict resolution were all reflected in the important role that healthy and effective communication played in the couples' lives. Open and respectful communication was a strategy the couples used to build and maintain connection during the difficult stressors associated with immigration, but also a strategy that helped them overcome those stressors.

To Love and Be Loved

Many of couples expressed that there is a benefit to being in a deep relational connection with another person. In multiple ways the couples communicated that the act of loving and being loved was intrinsically valuable, as it was the fuel needed to accomplish everything else. For instance, Magda noted “En realidad el amor y la unión que ha habido entre nosotros...[que] nos ha ayudado mucho a superar todas estas situaciones difíciles.” [“In reality, it is the love and unity between us...[that] has helped us overcome all these difficult situations”]. Love, then, was the foundation beneath their success. Very similarly, Sergio also shared the important role that love played in overcoming their immigration-related challenges:

Acá, al estar en otro contexto, solos, y con problemas feos, reales, y entonces bueno, terminas acá de decir “Que hacemos?” ...Pero sobre todo, ... fue el amor lo que nos sostuvo... Lo que funciono fue que vivimos el amor en toda sus características y cualidades.

[Here, finding ourselves in a different environment, alone, and with ugly, real problems and well, you end up saying “What do we do?”...But above all...it was love that sustained us... What worked was that we embodied love in all its characteristics and qualities.]

From Sergio’s perspective, the love that he and Maria shared, was fundamental in the survival of their immigration transition. The added value and benefits of love emerged in different ways among the couples. Some spoke of the partner as a source of safety, others explained that their relationship gave them courage and strength, while others talked about what for them was the true meaning of love. Daniela, for example, explained that she viewed Daniel as her “lugar seguro, mi puerto seguro” [“safe place, my safe port”]. This secure attachment, the

assurance that you have someone that cares for you, was also viewed as a beautiful and important by Carla:

Sabes otra cosa que es muy bonito e importante, eso me hace saber que si existo... es como que eso también sí me da mucha... seguridad, paz, confianza en mí misma, puedo ser más valiente y todo, porque sé que hay alguien que existo en su mente, que está pensando en mí, que es como si alguien estuviera rezando por ti todo el tiempo, eso es como se siente, como existo y alguien está pensando en mí.

[You know another thing that is beautiful and important, is that this lets me know that I exist...it's like that also gives me a lot of...security, peace, confidence, I can be more courageous and everything, because I know that I exist in someone's mind, that they are thinking of me, it's as if you have someone praying for you all the time, that's what it feels like, like I exist and someone is thinking of me.]

Carla not only described a sense of bravery that is born out of the knowledge that you are loved, but also a sense of reassurance of her own existence. This is similarly echoed in Manuel's words when he stated the following to wrap up our final interview:

No me hayo sin mi esposa y sin mis hijos. Es fundamental, o sea, el amor, el respeto y la unión. Con eso yo podría terminar: Con el amor, el respeto y la unión que uno puede tener desde un inicio

[I can't find/locate myself without my wife and my children. It's fundamental, I mean, love, respect, and unity. I can end with that: With the love, respect, and the unity that you can have from the beginning]

For Manuel, like others, it all seemed to boil down to love. Manuel is also speaking about a reassurance of the self in connection to the experience of love. Love, for many, also

included the ability to be their full, authentic, selves without fear of rejection. When speaking about the qualities of her relationship with Ariel, Angela reported valuing the acceptance that she has received: “Yo nunca me sentí juzgada. O sea siempre sentí que el...me acepta, acepta lo que soy” [“I never felt judged. I always felt that he...accepts me, accepts who I am”]. This relationship quality of being fully accepted for who you are, supported partner’s ability to share all of themselves with each other. Maria, explained it like this:

Yo todo lo siento, lo que pienso, lo que quiero, lo que no quiero, yo se cuento a él. Yo abro mi mente... yo con el hablo como yo lo siento, como yo no estoy “Ay no voy a decir esto porque a lo mejor va a pensar que mala que soy...” no. Yo con el soy yo y yo no tengo secretos para él. Yo digo todo lo que siento y como me sale, no trato de ocultar o de maquillar nada con él. Él sabe todo de mí, todo lo pienso, todo lo siento, todo lo que quiero.

[Everything that I feel, what I think, the things I want, and the things I don’t want, I tell him. I open up my mind...with him I talk about how I feel and I’m not like “Oh I’m not going to tell him because he’s going to think I’m bad,” no. With him, I am myself, I have no secrets with him. I say all that I feel however it comes out, I don’t try to hide or beautify anything with him. He knows everything about me, all that I think, all that I feel, all that I want.]

Maria’s sense of safety with Sergio permits her to bare her whole self without concern of judgement or rejection. She feels she doesn’t have to filter out any part of who she is in her relationship with her partner. Love, then, involved the ability to be your authentic self with the knowledge that you would be accepted just as you are by your partner. And even beyond acceptance, it was common for partners to voice admiration for their partners in all of their roles.

Victoria, for instance, spoke about her admiration for Zele's hunger for knowledge and constant pursuit of additional education. This admiration allowed her to see some of Zele's ADHD symptoms, which at times felt like "moliendo vidrio" [grinding glass], as ultimately an asset in their relationship. Others shared a sense of pride for their partner's accomplishments, as Ariel did for Angela's counseling career and educational pursuit of a PhD. And others clearly admired their partner's skills and abilities (e.g., as parents, as financial administrators, as professionals in their field) and expressed that admiration verbally.

Love was centralized by the couples as the basis for everything else that was positive in their relationship, and as the fuel to accomplish all that they did. Love was demonstrated through the exchange of support, open communication, and the sacrifices they made for one another. Love resulted in a partners' abilities to be authentic, courageous, as well as in solidifying their sense of self.

During the interviews, I was able to witness many manifestations of love, as the couples interacted with each other before me and gave me access to their private two-people world. Sometimes they expressed their love through words, as partners complimented one another, expressed appreciation for each other, consoled each other, and made jokes with one another. Other times, the couples demonstrated their love through their behavior. Physical affection, in the forms of a kiss on the cheek, a stroking of their partner's hair, a resting of their head on their partner's shoulder was also a common occurrence in the few hours I spent with each of the couples. Consequently, the importance of love was communicated through both the content and the process of each interview.

The relationship as a resource to overcome challenges was a convergent theme that emerged in the stories of all the couples interviewed for this study. The relationship seemed to

provide partners with tools to overcome immigration-related challenges through the exchange of support, love, and the practice of open communication. These relational assets are resonant of the importance that family may play in the wellbeing of Latinx immigrants and can prove to be a powerful strength to be leveraged by counselors seeking to support this population.

“Valió la pena”: The Benefits of Immigrating

Towards the end of our second interview, while reflecting on all they have accomplished since their arrival to the U.S. only five years ago, Teresa began to cry. Her flood of emotion came from an awareness of how far they’ve come: “Porque cuando llegas a un país donde nada más tienes una maleta... entonces tú te ves en tu apartamento que, gracias a Dios, no te falta nada, entonces tu dices, ‘valió la pena’” [“Because when you arrive to a country where you only have suitcase ... and you see yourself in an apartment, where thank God, you lack nothing, then you say ‘it was worth it’”]. Despite all the challenges they faced, Teresa and Manuel felt that immigration was worthwhile. And they were not alone in that feeling. Most everyone I interviewed was reaffirmed in their decision to immigrate because of the many benefits that have resulted from that choice. In the following subthemes I explore how the couples talked about those benefits, which included (1) building the lives they wanted, (2) achievements, (3) and a strengthening of the couple relationship.

Building the Life you Want

Building a better life, one that would not have been possible in their countries of origin, was a benefit frequently mentioned by the couples. They reported that living in the U.S. gave them access to resources that facilitated having an improved quality of life, such healthcare and educational resources, increased safety, and for some increased career opportunities and a

healthier lifestyle. For those who were parents, this improved quality of life extended to their children as well.

In addition, a few couples reported that moving away from their countries of origin allowed them to build the type of relationship and life that they wanted for themselves, without succumbing to the family or social pressure to conform with the norms and expectations of their country of origin. Carla, for instance, talked about their ability to be child-free, to step outside gender norms, as well as to make other choices that would be outside the norm in Mexico (e.g., not own a T.V., not drink alcohol). On this matter, Carla said:

Pudimos como conectar con nosotros mismos qué es lo que realmente queremos, que es lo que nos importa y de ahí tomar la decisión, y no como sólo seguir el patrón en México o en la presión o lo que se espera

[We were able to connect with what we truly wanted, what is important to us and from there make decisions, and not only follow the norms from Mexico, or the pressure of expectations]

Aside from social pressure, some of the couples also recognized the benefits of increased privacy and decreased influence from extended family. This was the case for both Ariel and Angela, as well Zele and Victoria. Most participants also discussed improved quality of life as an immigration benefit. An exception to this was Angela, who during our member check explained that although there are many benefits to society in the U.S., she is hesitant to name it as a better quality of life, because she believes that access to family back home is more valuable for her. Most other participants, however, seemed to believe they experienced a higher quality of life in the U.S. Magda for example, noted that here she can live in peace and tranquility, while “nuestros países están cada vez peor” [“our countries are getting worse every day”]. When

discussing this same idea, Carolina and Carlos emphasized the increased sense of security and better quality of healthcare in the U.S.:

Carolina: En cuanto a nosotros a Colombia yo hoy en día, yo no quiero vivir en Colombia. Para nada. Desafortunadamente, hay mucha inseguridad

Carlos: Hay mucha política, hay mucho ladrón, es la palabra correcta

Carolina: Si, demasiada inseguridad, desafortunadamente, en la cuestión de la salud supremamente mala. Yo si vivo muy agradecida de este país porque yo pues he tenido mucho problemas de salud y a mí siempre me han atendido muy bien acá ...

[Carolina: In terms of us in Colombia, me, nowadays, I don't want to live in Colombia Not at all. Unfortunately, there is a lot of unsafety

Carlos: There is a lot of politics, a lot of thieves, is the correct word

Carolina: Yes, too much unsafety, unfortunately, on the topic of health it is supremely bad. I live with a lot of gratitude for this country because I have had a lot of health problems and I have always been cared for very well]

Like many others, Carolina values the safety they enjoy as part of their lives in the U.S. and is particularly grateful for the medical care she has had access to. A few moments later she added that she would never exchange all that she has in the U.S. for a life in Colombia.

Similarly, Daniel reflected:

En todo este tiempo hemos construido y hemos obtenido lo que hemos buscado Y por supuesto esto no nos lo ofrecía lamentablemente nuestro país. Entonces yo creo que ahorita esto es como el premio, de realmente estar donde estamos

[After all this time we have built and we have achieved what we were looking for ... And of course this something that our country, unfortunately, could not offer us. So, I believe that right now this is like the reward, of being where we are].

Daniel is expressing satisfaction with the life they were able to achieve, and alludes to improved living conditions in the U.S., which were an impossibility for them in Venezuela. Daniela, his partner, also spoke about the benefits of living in a safe society, where you don't have to fear being robbed or killed for a cellphone or a nice pair of shoes. Safety, was also mentioned by Teresa and Manuel as a major benefit of living in the U.S.

The couples who are parents expressed that living in the U.S. has allowed for their children to have a better quality of life and access to important educational resources. Daniel expressed that immigration has “ofrecido a mi hijo una gama de posibilidades” [“offered my son a gamut of possibilities”], which Daniel explained included being involved in a sport that his son loves, doing well in school, and having a healthy social life with friends. Similarly considering the wellbeing of her children, Magda expressed a deep sense of gratitude for the educational resources that helped her son when he became deaf:

[Estoy] muy agradecida también con el gobierno porque Dios no desampara a nadie y encontramos la conexión para que la escuela debiera a al niño chiquito de nosotros toda la terapia y todo lo que necesito para el salir adelante de su de su problema de audición porque él se quedó completamente sordo ...

[(I am) very grateful to the government because God doesn't abandon anyone and found us the connection so that the school gave our youngest son all the therapy, he needed to get ahead with his hearing problem, because he became completely deaf...]

She added that loving that in the American education system every child, regardless of their ability status, has the right to an education. As noted earlier, this experience with her son led Magda down a career in special education, which she recently retired from. Teresa and Manuel, who are the parents of two children with special needs were also thankful for the resources that are available for their children. During the interview, they discussed how their youngest child, who has cerebral palsy and is epileptic, has had health improvements after their move to the U.S.:

Y entonces aquí la atención de salud para con él. O sea nosotros nos damos por pagados, ya. Y no va a ver esfuerzo que pueda sobrepasar el que estemos aquí también y es este recibiendo esa salud, y las terapias, y el colegio. O sea aquí, de alguna manera también están si hay más inclusión para niños especiales. Y lo vemos hasta desde la calle, la ceras todas están diseñadas para que alguien en silla de rueda vaya. En nuestro país ni se te ocurra en silla de ruedas, no vas a poder!

[And so the health care here with him, I mean, we consider ourselves paid already. And there is no effort [sacrifice] that could outweigh the value of us being here and receiving that healthcare, that therapy, and that schooling. Here, in a certain sense there is more inclusion for special needs children. And we see it in the streets, in the sidewalk that is designed so that a person in a wheelchair can travel. In our country don't think about traveling in a wheelchair, you won't be able to!]

Much like Magda, Teresa is highlighting the improved attention and consideration of those with disabilities in the U.S. infrastructure and its various systems (e.g., healthcare, education), when compared to their home countries. Naturally, they considered these resources be of great importance, given that they assist in the long-term wellbeing of their children. The

couples, therefore, not only considered the benefits to themselves as immigrants, but also the benefits that their children have been able to utilize as well.

Generally, because of the benefits experienced, participants seemed to feel that immigration was worth the challenges it brought. The freedom to build the life you wanted, accompanied by improved access to vital resources (e.g., healthcare, education, safety) for both themselves and their children were important factors in determining how worthwhile immigration was. When speaking about this, Magda offered the metaphor of putting the challenges and the benefits on a scale, and asserted that the benefits weigh more and were more valuable than any of the struggles they faced. The naming and recognition of these benefits seemed to help the couples to draw meaning out of their strife.

Achievements In the U.S.

Another mentioned benefit of immigration among the participants included their achievements as a result of their immigration. These achievements ranged from the ability to speak English, to being able to buy a home, to finding financial stability, to raising successful and educated children, among others. Many reported having a sense of pride over some of the goals that both they and their children were able to succeed in. Succeeding in meeting these goals often symbolized the fulfillment of their intentions behind immigration. Maria expressed it like this: “Y eso fue nuestro, por lo menos mi sueño Americano: Que mis hijas se sintieran realizadas, que hicieran algo que les gustaba, que estudiaran, que tuvieran su propia profesión, y gracias a Dios lo hemos cumplido” [“And that was our, or at least my American dream: That my daughters felt fulfilled, that they did something they liked to do, that they became educated, and that they had their own profession, and thank God, we have accomplished that”]. Maria felt that her main intention as an immigrant, the success of her daughters, had been accomplished.

Teresa and Manuel also discussed at length the meaningfulness of their small and large successes in the short five years they have been here, which connects to feeling validated in their decision to immigrate. This is how Teresa talked about it:

O sea en la medida que uno va adquiriendo logros eso también te conecta más, no? ...

Pero yo siento que se renueva cada momento esas satisfacciones. O sea bien sea porque estamos en el apartamento que nos gusta, o tenemos el carro, recién le ofrecieron un ascenso en el trabajo...A mí me dieron la llave de una de las casas [que limpia], cosas que tú dices parecieran tontas o pocas pero es el sacrificio de lo que uno ha venido haciendo. Es como trabajo en hormiguita, no? Entonces yo siento eso. Igual las calificaciones de [hijo mayor] que es niño de puras A. O la evolución de [hijo menor] que contesta “bien” que entendemos que “bien” [Manuel se ríe]. entonces ahí tú dices, valió la pena y lo volvería a hacer. O sea volvería a inmigrar.

[So, as we achieve goals that connects us more, right? ... I feel that those satisfactions are renewed with each moment. That we are in an apartment that we like, that we have a car, they recently offered him a promotion at work... I was offered the keys of one of the houses [that she cleans], things that you could say are silly or small, but it is the sacrifice that we have been doing. It's like the labor of little ants, right? So, I feel that way.

Equally, our [oldest son's] grades, he's gets all As, or the progress of [youngest child] that answers “bien” and we know he means “fine” [Manuel laughter]. So, then you say it was worth it, I would do it again. I would immigrate again.]

The small and big achievements of each member of their family symbolize to Manuel and Teresa that they are making progress towards their goals and affirms their decision to immigrate. Carlos and Carolina, who were the only couple that met after their immigration, also shared that

they're achievements made their immigration experience more positive. They discussed their ability to buy a house, learning English, becoming U.S. citizens, and successfully raising Carlos's children as important successes. Carlos also shared that finding Carolina was a definite benefit that resulted from his immigration:

Algo positivo como inmigrantes? ... El deseo que uno tenga de ser feliz siendo inmigrante lo reafirma cuando uno consigue una pareja que verdaderamente quiere. Que uno no dice "voy a llegar hasta esta meta" y la cumple. La mía fue venir a este país y ser feliz, venir a lograr. Lo logre, yo lo logre.

[Something positive as immigrants? ... That desire that you have to be happy as an immigrant is reaffirmed when you get a partner that you truly love. That one says, "I'm going to achieve that goal" and you achieve it. Mine was to come to this country and to be happy, to come and achieve. And I did it, I did it.]

Carlos sees his relationship with Carolina as one of the vehicles that allowed him to fulfill his main objective in immigrating, which was to be happy. With his statement, Carlos introduces the idea that achievements are not only external, but also include things that are internal, such as achieving happiness. This is resonant of Sergio's perspective, who noted that beyond educational degrees and other successes, the true important achievement was living in harmony with Maria. Maria also reported a deep sense of satisfaction about how she feels today and the life that she and Sergio lead. In describing her life today, Maria said:

Pero ahora ... yo esto tranquila, estoy feliz, estoy con mis hijas ... Bueno y también con mi esposo, que a él lo elijo, todos los días lo elijo de nuevo porque él es ... mi amigo, mi compañero, mi esposo, mi todo. Así que, si doy gracias a Dios que yo me siento bien y contenta.

[But now ... I am at peace, I am happy, I am with my daughters ... Well, and also with my husband, who I choose, every day I choose him again because he is ... my friend, my partner, my husband, my everything. So, I give thanks to God because I feel happy and content.]

The feeling of having “made it,” and being satisfied with the lives they have today was common among the couples, but seemed particularly salient for the older couples. Magda and Sergio, Carolina and Carlos, and Magda and Jose, all remarked on the high levels of fulfillment they felt when looking back at their lives and reflecting on all they have overcome and achieved.

Immigration Strengthened the Couple Relationship

A final benefit of immigration that emerged across all the couples was the idea that the immigration process, with all its barriers and difficulties, served to strengthen the relationship. They described experiencing relational growth was as a result of undergoing and learning to overcome immigration-related challenges. Daniela put it this way:

En nuestro caso yo particularmente siento que nos ha como fortalecido porque nos tocó bueno trabajar juntos, luchar juntos, redefinir una y otra vez las prioridades, redefinir una y otra vez los objetivos, y ahí sobre todo al principio hubo momentos de que bueno, nosotros sin el idioma, sin documentos, con un niño de 5 años ... Cosas de ese tipo, que nos tocó vivir tomando como decisiones una a la vez y muy juntos, porque “tú llevas la parte fuerte de los gastos y del trabajo, mientras yo me encargo del niño y de lo que pueda conseguir”. Esas son situaciones muy duras que no cualquiera pasa. Y yo creo que en mi opinión como que nos ha fortalecido.

[In our case, I particularly feel that it [immigration] has strengthened us because we had to work together, fight together, redefine our priorities again and again, redefine our

objectives again and again, and even more so in the beginning when we were without the language, without documentation, with a 5-year-old son ... Those types of things that we had to live through making decisions, one at a time and very united, because “you take on the brunt of our expenses and work, while I take care of our son and do whatever I can [to generate money]” ... Those are very hard situations that not everyone can overcome. And I think that, in my opinion, it has strengthened us.]

Daniela implies that their resilience was tested through the immigration process and that having to figure out how to overcome those barriers ultimately served to solidify the couple relationship. Rafael’s statement highlights this very sentiment: “Es lo positivo y lo negativo [de la inmigración] ... Y incluso lo negativo, como salimos victoriosos hasta ... logramos superar esas cosas entonces eso nos hizo también más fuertes” [“It’s the positive and the negative [of immigration]... but even the negative, because we came out victors...because we were able to overcome all those things that also made us stronger”]. In other words, the couples had to struggle with multiple stressors as a Latinx immigrants in the U.S, but this struggle facilitated a growth that ultimately benefitted their relationships.

Some couple reported depending more heavily on one another (e.g., the use of teamwork and support outlined in the previous theme) after immigration, which caused them to feel more united and closer with their partner. Maria explained this well:

Nos unió más. Porque creo que al estar solos acá, nos unió no solo como pareja sino como familia ... Entonces creo que estar pendiente de cada uno, del uno del otro, de que es lo que necesitábamos de nosotros cinco, que es lo que nos pasaba, que es lo que queríamos, que es lo que nos hacía mal, todo eso creo que nos unió mucho como familia.

[It made us more united. I think that because we were alone here, we become more united not only as a couple, but as a family ... So then I think that being attentive to each person, of one another, of what each of the five of us needed, what was happening to us, what we wanted, what made us sad, all of that, I think that it united us as a family.]

Maria described that the level of care and attention they gave each other as a family because they were alone in the U.S. served them to become close, something that she stated persists today despite her adult daughters living in different cities. This idea, of feeling closer was echoed by Ariel, who shared:

Oh definitivamente nos integramos muchos más [con la inmigración]. O sea siempre nos llevamos bien como pareja, cuando estábamos de novios y lo demás, pero definitivamente el hecho de estar juntos, de convivir, y el tener que enfrentar el día a día con lo que se viniera y el hecho de darnos cuenta de que funcionamos bien, o sea fue una afirmación final ... de lo que nosotros ya creíamos que era el caso, por lo menos para mí, el hecho de decir “no, elegimos bien”

[Oh we definitely became much more integrated [through immigration]. I mean we always got along well as a couple, when we were dating and all that, but definitely the fact of being together, of living together, of having to face each day with whatever it came, and the fact that we realized that we worked well together, that was an final affirmation ... of what we already believed was the case, or at least for me, to say “No, we chose well.”]

In this quote, Ariel clarifies that immigration served as a final confirmation of their decision to be with each other, as they realized how well they worked together in face the daily struggles that came up for them. So, the immigration process, and the difficulties it brought,

helped the couple relationships become stronger through multiple avenues. For some, it was helpful to learn new strategies to overcome challenges together, while for others the strength came from feeling more united, and for others still, the immigration experience helped reaffirm their commitment to their relationship. The fact the couples regarded immigration as ultimately beneficial for their relationship is an unexplored aspect of the research literature about this population, which tends to solely emphasize the challenges and negative outcomes of the immigrant experience. From the couples perspectives however there were many worthwhile benefits gained from taking the risk of leaving their home countries to try their luck in the U.S.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reported the data analysis results of 16 interviews with eight Latinx immigrant couples living in the U.S. The purpose of these interviews was to learn more about the relational experiences of Latinx immigrant couples after their arrival to the U.S., as well as to learn about how they might be utilizing their relationship to navigate immigration-related stressors. Overall, the experiences of the interviewed Latinx immigrant couples appeared to be marked by challenges before, during and after immigration. These challenges, which included experiences of trauma, discrimination, financial difficulties, and documentation obstacles, to name a few, had a bearing on the mental health and stress levels of the participants, while also impacting the couple relationship. However, the couples were persistent and creative in the use of strategies and tools, that ensured not only their survival, but also their growth and progress as immigrants. The couple relationship in particular, as well as the centralization of family (both extended and nuclear), provided the couple with a variety of resources to overcome challenges and succeed in their individual-level and family-level goals. Ultimately, the couples reported

enjoying a plethora of benefits as a result of their immigration, consequently viewing the difficult endeavor as worthwhile.

As seen throughout the results, there was great diversity and uniqueness in the lived experiences of each of the interviewed couples. In the time I spent with them, they generously offered their stories of strife and triumph, rejection and belonging, grief, pain, sadness, but also pride, joy, and love. While my writing could never capture the immense depth and complexities of their lives, their relationships, and what it means to be a Latinx immigrant in the U.S., my hope is that my effort at describing the most salient aspects of their experiences honors the stories they kindly shared with me. It is also my hope that results of this study can be useful, not only in increasing awareness about this population, but in the further development of culturally responsive mental health services to support them.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The aim of this study was to learn more about the lived experiences of Latinx immigrant couples living in the U.S. Utilizing a Relational Cultural Theory framework, in combination with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology, I sought to better understand how the immigration process impacted the couple relationships of Latinx immigrants. Simultaneously, I was interested in learning about the couples' perceptions of how their relationship positively influenced their immigration experience. Given the limited body of existing research on Latinx immigrant couples, and the overwhelming emphasis on deficits and stressors, the results of this study may support the development and implementation of more culturally responsive practices in clinical, advocacy, and educational efforts in the field of counseling and counselor education. In this chapter, I will explicate study findings in connection to existing literature on Latinx immigrants. In addition, I will discuss the implications of the study results for counselors and for counselor educators, as well as offer an examination of the applicability of Relational Cultural Theory as a framework for understanding and working with this population. Lastly, in this chapter I will also outline study limitations and future research.

Comparison to Existing Knowledge

While there is a small body of literature dedicated to Latinx immigrant couples, there is a substantive amount of research about Latinx immigrant individuals. Much of this research is focused on the experience of acculturation and acculturative stress (e.g., Bostean & Gillespie, 2018; Cheng, 2022; Torres, 2010; Yoon et al., 2021), as well as other immigration-related stressors, such as experiences of trauma (e.g., de Arrellano et al., 2018; Li, 2016; Monico et al., 2019; Peña-Sullivan, 2020), and discrimination (e.g., Cano, 2020; Cariello et al., 2022;

Sangalang et al., 2019). Some researchers have also focused on refugee, asylum-seeking and undocumented populations, given the unique considerations associated with these immigration conditions (e.g., increased risk for trauma, displacement from their communities, fear of deportation). In addition, to these specific facets and subpopulations of Latinx immigrants, previous investigators have sought to learn more about the immigrant paradox (Alegría et al., 2008, Cook et al., 2009), and emphasized family support as an important protective factor for Latinx immigrants (Alegría et al., 2007; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). In the following sections, I will review how topics covered in the existing literature converge and diverge from the findings of this study.

Motivations to Immigrate

The existing literature across multiple disciplines documents the variety of reasons for which people choose to immigrate (Donato & Massey, 2016; Segal et al., 2009). In general, however, motivations to immigrate seem to be categorized into “push” or “pull” factors that either prompt the immigrant to leave their country of origin or lure them to a new host country (Donato & Massey, 2016; Segal et al., 2009). Participants in this study did in fact have varied motivations for choosing to immigrate, such as educational and career goals, lack of safety in their home countries, economic crises, or for the sake of their couple relationship (i.e., to be with their partner). Most participants in this sample reported having “push” factors that led them to consider leaving their country of origin. Some of these factors included lack of safety, lack of access to vital resources (e.g., healthcare), and lack of economic opportunities. These factors were almost always the result of social, political, and economic conditions in their home countries at the time of their immigration (e.g., the Argentine great depression at the turn of the century, Venezuela’s ongoing socioeconomic and political crisis). Participants also endorsed

“pull” factors, such as the hope for better economic and educational opportunities, or immigrating “for love” (i.e., to stay with their partners), with some participants simultaneously endorsing both “push” and “pull” factors in their reasons for immigrating.

There was more grey area when attempting to divide participants’ motivation to immigrate into the dichotomous categories of forced versus voluntary immigration. While most of the participants in the study might be considered voluntary immigrants, given that only one couple came as asylum-seekers, many of them regarded the decision to immigrate as their only viable choice to secure the wellbeing of themselves and their families. In fact, several participants, reported delaying their emigration as they held on to hopes of being able to remain in their home countries. These experiences, as reported by participants, complicate our understanding of choice as a binary (i.e., you either have a choice or you don’t) when it comes to motivations to immigrate. In his chapter “Unsettling the Boundaries between Forced and Voluntary Immigration” (2021), migration studies researcher Oliver Bakewell makes an argument against the limiting categories of forced and voluntary immigration. Instead, he notes that these categories represent two extremes of a spectrum, with most immigrant experiences falling somewhere in-between. Nonetheless, the popularity of these categories as dualistic and mutually exclusive persist and present material consequences for the lives of immigrants (e.g., whether an immigrant gets to stay in a host country or not; Bakewell, 2021). The lived experiences shared by the couples in this study support Bakewell’s call to reconceptualize and unsettle the boundaries between these two categories, as participants shared blends of “push” and “pull” factors in their motivations to immigrate and often reported viewing immigration as their only viable choice. A more nuanced understanding of motivations to immigrate is needed to best

capture the complexities ingrained in the decision to leave your home and embark on the difficult journey that immigration often is.

Immigration-Related Stressors

Documented in the Latinx immigrant literature, and also present in the themes that emerged from the interviews in this study, is the existence of various immigration-related stressors. In the results of this study, stressors ranged widely based on the couple's unique story, social identities, and immigration conditions. However, some convergent themes included learning English, financial stress, feeling uprooted from their home countries, and documentation stressors. In the following sections I draw connections between the stressors often discussed in Latinx immigrant research and the lived experiences of the couples in this study.

Acculturation and Acculturative Stress

The process of acculturation, and the acculturative stress that can result from it, make up a large proportion of the current research on Latinx immigrants living in the U.S. (e.g., Bostean & Gillespie, 2018; Cheng, 2022; Torres, 2010; Yoon et al., 2021). Acculturation refers to any change that occurs when groups or individuals from different cultures meet (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149), while acculturative stress refers to any stress that results from undergoing that change (Berry et al., 1987). For Latinx immigrants, acculturation can include the process of language acquisition, the adoption or rejection of new cultural values and traditions, or changes in ethnic identification (Schwartz et al., 2010). Undergoing some of these changes can produce acculturative stress, which has been linked to increased risk for depression (Capielo Rosario & Dillon, 2020; Torres, 2010) and anxiety (Hovey & Magaña, 2010; Sirin et al., 2013).

Participants in this study did highlight some acculturative stress as part of their immigration experience. Namely, those that did not speak English upon their arrival described

the struggle of picking up a new language and the frustration of not being able to communicate. This characterization of language acquisition as a stressful process appears to match some of the existing literature. For instance, in a study conducted by Lueck and Wilson (2011) results indicated that English proficiency predicted lower levels of acculturative stress among a sample of 2,059 immigrants from various Latin American countries. Much like the experiences reported by the non-English speaking participants in this study, language acquisition can be stressful, but has the potential of facilitating their transition into their new lives in the U.S. (e.g., ability to communicate with doctors, better work opportunities). Interestingly, participant stories did not seem to support the idea that English language acquisition predicts increased family conflict, as suggested by Bostean and Gillespie's (2018) findings. This discrepancy may be due to this study's focus on intimate partner relationships, as opposed to all family relationships (e.g., parent-child relationships), where acculturation gaps may more likely lead to conflict.

Regarding acculturation, participants certainly underwent changes as a result to their exposure to a new culture (e.g., learning English, understanding and abiding by new cultural norms). A few study participants noted having difficulties getting accustomed to life in the U.S. This was the case for Carolina, who reported struggling with the change in climate, with long work hours, and with not seeing her family. Angela, who also struggled in her initial transition to the U.S., shared that she found the change difficult due to an awareness of the vulnerability of what it meant to be an immigrant and be away from her family. So, while these participants had challenges with getting used to their new lives, their difficulties were not directly the result of changes in cultural norms, values, or behaviors, but rather to concrete changes in their environment (e.g., being far from family, extreme changes in weather and topography). And although participants shared experiences of missing their country-of-origin's culture (e.g.,

missing a collectivistic cultural orientation, food, colors, music), no participant spoke about negative consequences as a direct result of adapting to a new culture. In fact, participants seemed attentive to following the U.S. norms and rules, and some even discussed the benefits being distant from some of their country-of-origin's societal norms (e.g., ability to choose a child-free life). Participants naturally underwent acculturative changes as they negotiated integrating themselves into their new society, but aside from language acquisition did not report experiences of acculturative stress. Instead, much of the stress they lived through as immigrants related to difficult social conditions, such as financial pressure, documentation status, and missing family.

These results are in line with existing critiques of acculturation research. Rudmin and colleagues (2016) have highlighted the problematic overemphasis on acculturation and acculturative stress in research about marginalized populations, such as immigrants. Focusing solely on acculturation when seeking to learn more about immigrant populations has the potential of reinforcing deficit-based narratives, while simultaneously distracting from the concrete, and unfavorable social conditions that require advocacy and change within the host nation. The stories of the couples in this study offer concrete examples for how unjust social circumstances (e.g., limited access to financial resources, tedious and slow documentation process) had a much more significant bearing on their wellbeing than their process of adaptation to their host country's culture. This suggests the need for expanding research with Latinx immigrants beyond the topic of acculturation and acculturative stress.

Experiences of Trauma

Previous researchers have documented high rates of trauma among Latinx immigrant populations, with some identifying rates ranging from 66% to 83% (Garcini et al., 2017; Vazquez et al., 2021). In general, experiences of trauma for immigrant populations are

categorized by when the trauma took place (e.g., pre-migration, in-transit, and post migration). Some researchers have discussed the increased rates of pre-migration and in-transit trauma for those who are forced to immigrate as refugees or asylum seekers, given the often-violent conditions which they may be trying to escape (Segal, et al., 2009). Others have also pointed out the increased risk of trauma for those that enter the country through dangerous journeys (e.g., by foot; Ornelas et al., 2020).

The incidence of traumatic experiences among the participants in this study is lower than previous research might suggest, with six of the sixteen participants reporting trauma in their history. This discrepancy may be due to the immigration conditions of many of the participants in this study, with only one participant entering the country by foot, and only one couple entering the country as asylum-seekers. Within this study's sample, there does seem to be support for research pointing to increased risk of traumatic experience for those who enter the country through dangerous means. This was the case for Carolina, who travelled from Colombia and entered the U.S. by crossing Rio Grande, an experience which came with much danger and hardship, and which she regards as deeply traumatic. The remainder of the participants reported experiences of trauma (e.g., hospitalizations, death of child, victims of crime) before and after their arrival to the U.S., but these were not necessarily or directly related to their experiences as immigrants.

Regardless of the time and type of traumatic experience endured by participants, many of them made a point of highlighting how their survival led to an eventual benefit or growth. For example, when discussing the death of their daughter, Daniel and Daniela spoke extensively of the lessons they had learned from this immensely difficult experience (e.g., learning about their ability to let go, to be grateful for what they have). Similarly, Maria described a renewal in her

faith as a result of her traumatic hospitalization in the last few months of her pregnancy.

Participants essentially described the experience of posttraumatic growth. Posttraumatic growth (PTG) refers to “positive psychological changes experienced as a result of the struggle with traumatic or highly challenging life circumstances” (Tedeschi et al., 2018, p. 3). These positive psychological changes have been theorized to include changes in how you relate to others (e.g., a sense of closeness with others), new possibilities (e.g., developing new interests), personal strengths (e.g., ability to handle difficult situations), spiritual change (e.g., stronger faith), and appreciation for life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). These factors are reflected in the couples’ stories of trauma survival, but also as a result of surviving the stressful experience that is immigration. These findings are in congruence with Berger and Weiss’ (2006) results, who relied on a sample of a 100 Latinx immigrant women to explore PTG in relation to the immigration experiences. These authors not only identified the presence of PTG, but also found PTG to be positively related to participation in counseling. Unfortunately, the literature on PTG and Latinx immigrant populations seems to be limited. Findings from this study point a need for continued exploration of this topic.

Pre, in-transit, and post migration trauma experiences were reported by the couples in this study, although not at the high rates that might be expected based on previous research on the Latinx immigrant community. However, study results do seem to support the idea of increased risk for in-transit traumatic experiences for undocumented immigrants who enter the country through dangerous journeys (e.g., crossing the border by foot). Additionally, findings from this study align with research on post-traumatic growth, indicating the possibility of increased fortitude and growth for the individual and the couple following the processing of a traumatic experience.

Financial Stress

There is descriptive data showing high rates of poverty among Latinx populations living in the U.S. (Guzman & Chen, 2021; Thiede et al., 2021). This data is reflected in the findings of this study, where most of the couples reported navigating and coping with financial stress at some point after their arrival to the U.S., with many reporting being particularly vulnerable in the first years after their arrival. In addition, couples reported that the difficult documentation process and the limitations it presents them with (i.e., inability to work until they have a work permit) added to their financial stress. Briefly mentioned, was also the idea of discrimination in the workplace playing a role on the economic opportunities that participants had access to. So, while the couples' lived experiences support the presence of financial need among Latinx immigrants, the existing descriptive data (e.g. poverty rates) doesn't explicate the nuances of what this need might look like and why it occurs. Knowing more about times of particular financial vulnerability, as well as about some of the causes for financial distress, can prove to be valuable information when making efforts advocate and support this population.

There is some research exploring the impact on financial stress on couple relationships (although not necessarily Latinx immigrant couples; Hardie & Lucas, 2010; Schramm et al., 2012). In a sample of young couples that included 1,625 cohabiting partners and 1,216 married partners, Hardie and Lucas (2010), for example, found that economic hardship was associated with increased conflict for both groups. That study, however, did not focus on Latinx immigrant couples, for whom the connection between marital quality and economic hardship may look different due to unique immigration-related financial considerations (e.g., inability to work).

The couples in this study did report that their financial situation had a relational impact, as they had to work more hours and more demanding shifts (e.g., opposing schedules, night

shifts), which resulted in reduced opportunities for quality time. As such, the couples' negative relationship outcomes (e.g., Sergio reporting feeling distant from his wife) were related to their strategies to cope with financial stress, a relationship which in turn may be moderated by a lack of quality time. Because the existing research on financial stress and relationship outcomes is not focused on Latinx immigrant populations, whose experiences with financial stress are uniquely impacted by things like documentation status or experiences of workplace discrimination, there is a need for additional exploration in this area.

Experiences of Discrimination

Due to the juncture of racism, xenophobia, and nativism (Chavez-Dueña et al., 2019), both policy-level and everyday discrimination are documented in the research as a significant component of the Latinx immigrant experience (Bruzelius and Baum, 2019; Sangaland et al., 2019). Among the participants in this study, everyday discrimination seemed to be more commonly reported than policy-level discrimination. Participants shared instances of workplace discrimination, micro-aggressions, and acts of violence as examples of the discrimination they have endured after their arrival to the U.S. This discrimination appeared to be linked to both their ethnic and racial identity, supporting the existence of an intersection of oppressive systems that further marginalize Latinx immigrants (Chavez-Dueña et al., 2019).

A few participants did discuss impact of policy-level discrimination as well. Carla and Rafael, for instance, noted that their experience with the documentation process was the most impactful instance of discrimination they experienced. Carla noted that the lengthy, costly, and complicated nature of this process sent the clear message that they were not wanted here. In addition, two participants (i.e., Magda and Sergio) also noted increases in everyday discrimination experiences in the last decade and attributed this to Donald Trump and his use of

rhetoric that disparaged Latinx immigrants (e.g., framing Latinx immigrants as violent, or/and as criminals). While they did not directly address any policies as discriminatory, they saw direct connections between the actions of those in power to their daily lives.

Experiences of discrimination have been linked to poor mental health outcomes in this population, including depression, anxiety, and stress (Cano, 2020; Cariello et al., 2022; Sangalang et al., 2019). However, in a partial departure from the existing research on the impact of discrimination, participants in this study reported a wide array of reactions to these experiences, ranging from feeling that discrimination didn't have an emotional impact (e.g., Jose) to feeling distress, sadness, and anger over the experiences (e.g., Carolina, Carlos, Magda). Regardless of its impact, participants seemed to deploy internal strategies to cope with the discrimination, including accepting discrimination as part of life in the U.S. and not taking it personal or working to resist stereotypes about the Latinx community by demonstrating their capability. The latter strategy provides support for what Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) coin as "transformational resistance," and more specifically "internal resistance." Using a LatCrit perspective to theorize on the modes of resistance present among Chicano and Chicana students, they introduce the idea of internal transformational resistance, which involves resisting in ways that appear conformists (e.g., following norms and rules to succeed within an education system) but that are in actuality fueled by an awareness of oppression and a desire for social justice. A similar mode of resistance appeared to be implemented by some of the participants in this study. A good example of this is Magda's desire to prove wrong her coworker's prejudiced ideas about Latinx folks by working hard and demonstrating her capacity to succeed. Just as described in Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal's work, the participants in this study seemed to engage in a

variety of strategies to cope with discrimination, some of which entailed resistance. This suggests a broader applicability of their work beyond educational settings.

Interestingly, most participants also discussed an awareness over their experiences of privilege, which included privileges based on race, class, education level, and documentation status. This acknowledgement of their privileges was often mentioned in connection to the participant's awareness of unjust and unequal conditions for those who don't share those advantaged social identities. Recognition of personal privileges and its relationship to mental health and relationship outcomes does not seem to be an explored area of inquiry in the current body of literature. However, given that it was meaningful component of the participants' stories, there may unexplored, but important questions to investigate in this area.

While discrimination was a central theme that emerged from the findings in this study, everyday discrimination was the primary focus of the couples, with few naming policy-level discrimination. This may suggest that while the couples may be affected macro-level discrimination, that impact may be somewhat less salient than everyday discrimination. ~~Invisibilized~~. In addition, the variety of responses to discrimination point to differing levels of the impact of discrimination, as well as differing strategies to cope or make sense of these experiences. These findings confirm the importance of continued research on experiences of discrimination and their impact on Latinx immigrants and their couple relationships, but also point to a need for further exploration of how immigrants cope with discrimination.

Documentation Stressors

While the majority of Latinxs living in the U.S. are documented (e.g., citizens, residents, refugees, asylum-seekers, visa holders; Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019), it is also true that a large portion of the undocumented population in the U.S. are of Latinx origin (Hugo Lopez et al.,

2021). As a result, some researchers have focused their work on learning more about the experiences of undocumented Latinx immigrants. This is of importance given the increased stressors faced by this population (e.g., limited access to healthcare, education, and employment resources), which have been linked to higher risks for negative mental health outcomes (Garcini et al., 2017; Ornelas & Perreira, 2011; Rasmussen et al., 2007). In this study, Carolina, Sergio and Maria were the only participants that had an undocumented status after their arrival to the U.S. Their experiences seem to support the existing literature on the unique stressors faced by this community, as they reported the risk of deportation, increased workplace vulnerability (e.g., getting fired, threats of violence), and for Maria and Sergio, a general sense of shame around their status. Their experiences highlight the unique needs and stressors experienced by this undocumented Latinxs and point the need of continued advocacy.

Documentation stress for documented immigrants is a theme that emerged among the remainder of the participants and something that does not seem to be commonly addressed in the current body of literature. There are some studies that have explored the impact of delayed/long pathways of permanent residency, but they are generally in other host nations (e.g., Norway, Australia; Jakobsen et al., 2017; Stevens, 2019) or with non-Latinx immigrant communities in the U.S. (e.g., Indian immigrants; Vijayakumar & Cunningham, 2019). In general, results from these studies point to feelings of worry, distress, and uncertainty in Latinx immigrant populations as it pertains to these temporal documentation statuses. In congruence with these findings, the documented participants in this study reported the process of obtaining a permanent resident status in the U.S. brought many stressors and challenges. The reported challenges were mostly in connection to their inability to work (or move jobs) due to a lack of work permits or restrictions with findings employers willing to sponsor them. This inability to work had negative mental

health consequences for a few of the participants and contributed to the financial stress the couples experienced. The findings of this study indicate the presence of documentation-related stress among undocumented and documented Latinx immigrants and points to connection between documentation challenges, financial stress, and mental health outcomes.

Latinx Immigrant Strengths

Some researchers have found the existence of improved mental and physical health outcomes among Latinx immigrant populations when compared to Latinx and non-Latinx U.S.-born populations (i.e., the immigrant paradox; Alegría et al., 2008). As would be expected, participants in this study did not speak about their wellbeing in comparison to American communities, so findings from this study cannot directly address the immigrant paradox as a phenomenon. However, given that some researchers have found family support to be a protective factor against negative mental health outcomes in Latinx immigrant populations (Alegría et al., 2007; Potochnick & Perreira, 2010), and theorized that this may explain the existence of the immigrant paradox (Cooper et al., 2020), findings from this study may be able to provide insight about how family support contributes to immigrant wellbeing.

Family as a Protective Factor

Higher levels of family support in Latinx immigrants have been found to predict improved mental health outcomes (Alegría et al., 2007), while lower levels of family cohesion have been linked to increased risks for depression (Zapata Roblyer et al., 2017). These findings are congruent with the Latinx cultural value of *familismo*. Familismo, which refers to “a strong identification with the family, great importance being assigned to the nuclear and the extended family, the presence of mutual help and obligations, and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity and solidarity among members of one same family” (Triantis et al., 1982, p. 1), can be expressed

in Latinx families by way of attitudinal and behavioral components (Sabogal et al., 1987). Attitudinal components include a sense loyalty and reciprocity with family, while behavioral components refer to the actions that express these attitudes (Sabogal et al., 1987) .

The theme “Family is important,” discussed in Chapter IV, is consistent the research suggesting the presence of a strong familial orientation as a cultural value among folks of Latinx backgrounds. Participants in this study gave great importance to both their relationships with extended family, as well as their nuclear families. Familismo, as a cultural value, was expressed by the couples through multiple avenues, including the exchange of support (both emotional and material), naming of family as their primary focus, and weighing in their family member’s perspectives when making decisions (e.g., to immigrate, to commit to their partner).

Familismo has also been found to be a protective factor for Latinx immigrants (Ayón et al., 2010; Dillon et al., 2013), however much of this research is focused on the mental health outcomes of parents and children (Ayón et al., 2010; Sotomayor-Peterson et al., 2012). The couples in this study reported many instances in which family support was instrumental for their success. Examples of this include Magda and Jose’s support from extended family during a financial crisis, and the emotional support that Angela received from her family soon after her arrival to the U.S., or as was the case for a few of the couples (e.g., Ariel and Angela, Daniel and Daniela), receiving support with childcare from extended family members. In addition, to help from their extended family, the couples also reported that the support from their partners made their success in the U.S. possible, with several participants noting being unsure of whether they would still be in the U.S. if they had immigrated along. The importance of familismo as a cultural value, then, does not seem to be limited to child and parenting outcomes, but to also be a positive component of Latinx couple relationships.

Latinx Immigrant Couples

There is a limited amount of research investigating Latinx couple relationships, and of what is available, much seems to be centered around challenges and deficits (e.g., intimate partner violence [IPV; Alvarez et al., 2020], acculturation and acculturative stress [Curandi, 2009; Negy et al., 2010]). Findings from this study cannot provide any further information on IPV among Latinx immigrant couples, given that for safety reasons couples with any active or risk of IPV were excluded from participating. However, findings from this study don't seem to provide align with existing research which points to acculturation and acculturative stress as predictors of negative relationship outcomes (Negy et al., 2010; Flores et al., 2004). Instead of presenting marital conflict as a result of acculturative stress, the couples emphasized their relationship as an asset for coping with acculturative stress. For instance, both Magda and Victoria reported that their partner's support through the process of learning English (the only acculturative stressor endorsed by participants) was useful to them as new immigrants. These findings are better aligned with Falconier and colleague's (2013) results, which showed dyadic coping as a moderator for the relationship between immigration stress (not just acculturation) and marital conflict. In their study with 107 Latinx immigrant couples, they found that supportive dyadic coping attenuated the negative impact of immigration stress on relationship satisfaction. These findings are supported by the lived experiences of the couples in this study, who noted their relationships were an important source of support to cope with immigration-related stressors. Going beyond what has been reported in the research, however, the couples in this study also reported increases in the strength of their relationship as a result of the immigration process, given that they had to identify and implement new strategies to succeed as a couple. This points to the presence of a phenomenon akin to post-traumatic growth.

Applicability of Relational Cultural Theory

I used Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) as the theoretical framework for this study. The central tenets of RCT played a role in the formulation of the research questions, methodological design and implementation of this project. As reviewed in Chapter II, RCT is a psychological theory that centralizes relationships in the contexts of larger cultural forces (e.g., oppression) as the main tool for human growth and development (Jordan, 2012). Given the significant overlap between the Latinx cultural values (e.g., familismo, personalismo), Latinx immigrant experiences (e.g., discrimination), and RCT components (e.g., growth fostering relationships, controlling images), this theory provided me with a culturally responsive lens through which to conceptualize this study. In the following sections, I will review the applicability of RCT's theoretical components as it pertains to the experiences of the Latinx immigrant couples who participated in this study.

Growth Fostering Relationships

RCT theorists assert that relationships, and in particular growth fostering relationships, are the primary avenue through which people can attain wellbeing (Stiver et al., 2013). Growth fostering relationships are the result of three main relational qualities: mutual empowerment, relational authenticity, and mutual empathy (Jordan 2012). Findings from the present study seem to confirm the existence and importance of these components in growth fostering relationships, as they are present in the couples' descriptions of their relationships and their partners.

Mutual empowerment, which refers to a sense of agency that results from the awareness of your capacity to impact your partner (Hartling, 2013), perhaps can be best understood as a sharing of power within relationships: each partner allows themselves to be openly influenced by the other. In their practice of mutual decision-making, for instance, the couples displayed mutual

empowerment. They felt invested in exercising “power with” and not “power over” their partners and therefore preferred making decisions together. Mutual empowerment was also demonstrated in the couples’ approach to teamwork, as they divided the labor and tasks necessary for their wellbeing with the intent of supporting one another.

Mutual empathy, which allows folks to “know” the experience of another (Jordan, 2012), was also very much present in how the couples navigated their relationships. Maria, for example, spoke about the attentiveness she felt for Sergio and for their daughters as she was attuned to and caring about their feelings and emotional needs. Similarly, Sergio, expressed the presence of empathy when talking about the importance of authentically listening; he reported that when you take time to listen to your partner, you build the capacity to better value them and understand what they are feeling (i.e., capacity for empathy). Other couples, like Rafael and Carla, spoke about the value of empathic communication when they shared the reciprocal *confianza* they feel to talk to each other about their feelings and know that they will be understood. Empathy, then was at the core of the couples’ relationship dynamics and appeared to be particularly significant in times of strife.

Lastly, relational authenticity, which involves transparency in relationships, was also present in several of the statements made by the couples. Maria, for example, shared that with Sergio she can always be herself. This was a sentiment that was also shared by Angela, who noted that she never felt judged by Ariel, and instead had the reassurance that he accepts her as she is. The ability to be authentic with their partners was the result of an assurance of acceptance and nonjudgment, which requires the mutual empathy the couples reported above.

The qualities of a growth-fostering relationship were clearly reflected in how the participants viewed and experienced their relationships. These qualities were sustained, and

perhaps became even more important, through the hardships associated with their immigration process. The commonality between the concept of growth-fostering relationships and the experiences of the couples in this study suggest the potential usefulness of RCT to adequately capture and understand some aspects of Latinx immigrant couple relationships.

The Five Good Things

Based on RCT tenets, growth-fostering relationships result in The Five Good Things: (1) A sense of zest, (2) an increased sense of self-worth, (3) clarity, (4) productivity, and (5) and increased desire for more connection (Lenz, 2016). When discussing the benefits of loving and being loved, the couples used words that were resonant of The Five Good Things. For example, Carla mentioned that being loved gave her a sense of safety, confidence, and courage. These words indicate increases in self-worth, zest, and productivity founded on the relational safety and the courage it produces. Similarly, Manuel reported that his love for wife and children provide with him the fuel necessary to go out and work hard each day, also signaling increases in energy and productivity as a result of these growth-fostering relationships. Increases in clarity about themselves and their relationships were also mentioned by the couples. Manuel, for instance, talked about being able to locate himself through his relationships with his family. The couples did not speak about a desire for more connection but did regard their connections to one another as constant. When asked about a time when they felt particularly connected to each other after their arrival to the U.S., nearly all the couples reported that they were always connected. So, connection seemed like a given and always-present quality in their relationships, rather than something they intentionally sought out or worked for. Connection, then, does seem to be the natural byproduct of growth-fostering relationships. Findings from this study provide support for The Five Good Things as resulting benefits from engaging growth-fostering relationships.

Relational Resilience and Antifragility

RCT theorists challenge the concept of resilience as an individual trait possessed only by some, and instead promote the idea that resilience can be strengthened in everyone through engagement in growth-fostering relationships (Hartling, 2010). In her chapter “Strengthening Resilience in a Risky World: It’s all About Relationships” Hartling (2010, p. 54) offers this RCT based definition for resilience: “the ability to connect, reconnect, and resist disconnection in response to hardships, adversities, trauma, and alienating social/cultural practices.” The reports of the couples in this study suggest that relationships can in fact be an important source to strengthen resilience, as the couples described using their relationship as a resource to withstand the stressors and crises that immigration brought them. For example, couples described the importance of giving and receiving emotional support, of giving and receiving encouragement, and the inclinations towards unity (as opposed to disconnection) during times of stress. Although some noted an awareness of their individual resilience (e.g., Daniela becoming aware of her own strength), they consistently tied their ability to be strong as a benefit of being in their relationship. The concept of relational resilience, then, was present in the interviewed couples’ lived experiences.

However, missing from the concept of resilience, whether conceptualized as an individual or inter-personal trait, is the idea of growth from hardship. An interesting finding from this study was that the couples believed their relationship was strengthened as a result of enduring the immigration process and overcoming the challenges it entailed, something which is not fully captured by the concept of relational resilience. Resilience generally refers to a person or a system’s capacity to “bounce back” from challenges/crises, implying a return to homeostasis (Ben-Shahar, 2021). As a result, the concept of resilience neglects to name the possibility of

growth or benefit from the survival of these situations. To address this gap in the idea of resilience, other researchers have proposed the concept of antifragility. Antifragility refers to a person or a systems' capacity to not only overcome hardship, but to grow better or stronger as a result of enduring that hardship (Ben-Shahar, 2021). In psychological research, antifragile systems emerge through post-traumatic growth, which is reflected in the couples' experiences after trauma (as discussed above), but also in their reports increased strength and unity in their relationship as a result of immigration-related crisis.

RCT adjusts the idea of resilience to account for the important role that relationships play in fostering it. From an RCT lens, the qualities of growth-fostering relationships are necessary for the development and maintenance of resilience, a reconceptualization that seems to be supported that the reported experiences of the couples in this study. RCT, however, does not explicitly address the possibility of relational growth as a result of surviving hardship while in a growth-fostering relationship. The concept of antifragility as a relational quality that produces post-traumatic growth, may therefore be additive to the many RCT concepts that account for the benefits of growth-fostering relationships.

Strategies for Disconnection

It is likely that because this study only sampled couples whose relationships prevailed despite undergoing the significant stressor of immigration, and because the second research question was the designed to look for the good, findings from this study do not provide additional information about RCT tenets addressing disconnection (e.g., strategies for disconnection, the central relational paradox). Disconnection is theorized to be the result of relational experiences (e.g., with caregivers, previous partners) lacking in the growth-fostering qualities and that result unhelpful relationship images (e.g., I am not lovable). One participant,

Carla, clarified during the member check meeting that she grew up with parental relationships that taught her love was not unconditional, and that instead it needed to be earned. She noted that that this created patterns of insecure attachment, which her relationship with Rafael has helped her to heal from. While Carla is describing the previous existence of an unhelpful relational image, she focused on how her relationship with Rafael was corrective, rather than strategies she may have deployed due to fear of connection. It is certainly possible that the partners in this study struggle with strategies for disconnection, but these experiences were not emphasized or recurrent enough to emerge as a theme. Additional research would be needed to better understand how the RCT concepts of strategies for disconnection and the central relational paradox may manifest itself in Latinx immigrant couple relationships.

Experiences of Marginalization

One of my major motivations in selecting RCT as the framework for this study is RCT theorists' attentiveness to the role of culture and systems of oppression. Based on the existing literature, I expected discrimination and prejudice to be a part of the couples' experiences in the U.S. This expectation was confirmed as couples discussed contending and resisting stereotypes and responding to micro and macro aggressions. The couples had varied responses to these experiences, with some reporting they had no impact on them at all, and others reporting sadness and distress because of them.

RCT theorists connect oppression (and all the ways it emerges in culture) to relationships by using Patricia Holl Collin's (2009) concept of "controlling images." Controlling images are essentially stereotypes about marginalized communities designed to keep them in the margins. An examples of this in the results of this study include the stereotype of Latinxs as stupid, which in turn created workplace discrimination, and therefore added new challenges to

the income and vocation advancement of some of the participants (e.g., Magda, Carlos, Carolina). RCT theorists posit that these controlling images have the power of impacting an individual's relational images, ultimately negatively influencing their interpersonal relationships and therefore their growth (Miller, 2013). Based on their reported experiences, controlling images had an impact in how work supervisors and colleagues interacted with study participants, resulting in prejudice and workplace discrimination. However, participants in this study did not connect their experiences of discrimination to their own relational images or how they interacted with their partners. Consequently, findings from this study cannot provide further illumination on how marginalization can impact Latinx immigrants' view of themselves and the resulting relational consequences of reacting to or internalizing controlling images.

The results of this study lend themselves to support some key components of RCT as a framework for understanding Latinx immigrant couples. The concepts of growth-fostering relationships, The Five Good things, and the existence of controlling images were all reflected in participant's stories. Conversely, there were other key RCT concepts that this findings from this study cannot elucidate, given the focus of research questions (e.g., the impact of controlling images on relational images, strategies for disconnection, central relational paradox), creating a need for further research. Nonetheless, study results can contribute to the small but growing literature on the applicability of this theory with non-white populations. RCT literature has been critiqued for lacking in the exploration of the theory's applicability with communities of color, given that much of the research has been focused the use of RCT with white women (Lenz, 2016). This study can contribute to efforts in addressing that critique and filling the knowledge gap on the usability of RCT for understanding the experiences of people of color, given its sample of Latinx immigrant couples.

Implications for Counselors and Counselor Educators

Clinical Practice

There are nearly 45 million immigrants in the U.S. and close to 50% of are of Latinx origin (Budiman et al., 2020). In addition, Latinx communities have been growing across all 50 states (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019), with many states experiencing drastic increases in Latinx immigrant populations, with special growth in the southeastern states (see *The New Latino South*; Kochhar et al., 2005). Due the large number of Latinx immigrants living throughout the U.S., it is likely most counselors will be called to work with this population at some point in their career and therefore imperative that they are prepared to do so.

Working with immigrants requires for counselors to cultivate knowledge of the unique needs and challenges faced by this Latinx immigrants, paired with skills that allow them to be effective in their work. It is perhaps for this reason that various researchers have theorized and proposed frameworks on how to engage in multicultural competencies that account for and address the immigrant experience (Chi-Ying Chung et al., 2008; Chi-Yi Chung et al., 2011; Villalba, 2009). Villalba (2009) for example proposed that counselors be aware of language acquisition, trauma, acculturation, and mental health education needs among immigrants and refugees from all parts of the world. He also places special emphasis on counselors examining and challenging their biases about immigrant populations and being active in their pursuit of understanding immigrants' worldviews. Skills such as cultural humility and broaching then, are of great necessity. In their article on social justice leadership and advocacy for working with immigrant populations, Chi-Yi Chung and colleagues (2011) also add the importance of recognizing oppressive systems rooted in racism and xenophobia. The findings from this study suggest that special attention to these stressors in the clinical and advocacy work of counselors is

merited, as many of the challenges identified by these authors emerged as themes for the interviewed couples. Additional challenges mentioned by participants in this study that also warrant counselor awareness include documentation stress, grief and loss for country-of-origin (e.g., family, culture, careers that were left behind), financial stress, and the impact of these stressors on couple relationships.

Findings from this study, however, also provide additional insight on how counselors may best support the Latinx immigrant population in particular, by not only cultivating an awareness of the challenges and stressors they incur, but by also recognizing the strengths and cultural capital present. The couples in this study demonstrated impressive levels of resilience as they described a wide range of creative strategies for success (e.g., working hard, utilizing their support systems, relying on spirituality/religion) that should not be ignored. Focusing on challenges alone risks engaging a deficit-based perspective that perpetuates notions of inferiority and reduces the Latinx immigrant experience to one of victimhood. In addition, counselors who don't account for the strengths present in this population will likely fail to leverage these strengths as tools for enhancing treatment outcomes. Results from this study suggest that counselors' work may prove to be more effective if they assess for these strengths (e.g., health of the immigrant's support system, use of spirituality/religion and gratitude, desire to help others) and tailor interventions that are attentive to them. For example, if a counselor successfully assesses a recent immigrant's religious or spiritual beliefs and discovers they are of great importance to that client, that counselor and client may collaborate on goals that support the client's pursuit and/or maintenance of their religious/spiritual practice (e.g., finding a place of worship, carving out time for prayer/meditation, keeping a gratitude journal). Work that accounts for strengths not only have the potential to enhance treatment outcomes, but also enhance rapport

building, as the counselor's orientation expands to seeing the whole person and not only their problems and difficulties.

Findings from this study also provide special insight as to the importance of familial, and particularly couple relationships, for the wellbeing of Latinx immigrants. The couples identified their relationship and its qualities (e.g., mutual support, being loved, open communication) as meaningful assets for them, which were of immense importance in securing their success as immigrants. The results of this study suggest that a systemic approach to working with Latinx immigrants is warranted, as it's both more culturally relevant and strength based. As a result, clinicians may want to consider assessing for the state of intimate partner relationships (e.g., dyadic coping, relationship satisfaction) and creating interventions that support relational health among Latinx immigrants (e.g., psychoeducation on communication skills). Counselors may also be able to leverage intimate partner relationships to help clients reach counseling goals (e.g., engaging a client's partner with providing support for achieving change). A systemic approach also points to the important role that couples and family counselors play in supporting Latinx immigrant populations by using their specialized training and knowledge on supporting positive systemic growth.

The clinical implications of this study's result support previous calls for counselors to pay special attention to the unique challenges and needs faced by the immigrant population. They also highlight the importance of multicultural competencies to improve service provision (e.g., examining personal biases, expanding knowledge base on relevant issues, openness to differing worldviews). The implications of this study's findings are also additive to previous researcher suggestions for effective clinical work with this population, in that they point to the necessity for a strength-based and systemic approach when working with Latinx immigrants.

Advocacy

In his 1967 speech at the American Psychological Association's annual convention, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. problematized the idea of helping others achieve "well-adjusted lives" without acknowledging and addressing social injustice:

You are saying that we must all seek the well-adjusted life. But on the other hand, I am sure that we all recognize that there are some things in our society, some things in our world, to which we should never be adjusted. We must never adjust ourselves to racial discrimination and racial segregation. We must never adjust ourselves to religious bigotry. We must never adjust ourselves to economic conditions that take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. We must never adjust ourselves to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating effects of physical violence, [King's Challenge to the Nation's Social Scientists," 1999, pp, 9-10]

I am reminded of his words as I consider the implications of this study's findings. The results from this study highlight the continued need for advocacy with and on behalf of Latinx immigrants living in the U.S. Many of the stressors communicated by the couples (e.g., financial distress, inability to communicate in English, experiences of discrimination, documentation stress) are not of a nature that can be "resolved" in counseling sessions. While counselors may be able to validate the difficulty of these experiences and help immigrants cope with the feelings that arise in connection to them, the responsibility of counselors and counselor educators does not end there. As outlined by the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), the role of counselors entails advocacy at all levels (i.e., individual, group, institutional and societal) to address conditions that inhibit client growth and wellness.

The couples' lived experiences as immigrants in the U.S. put into view the wide need to engage in advocacy in collaboration (or representation) of clients at micro and macro levels (Toporek et al., 2010). Examples of advocacy practices can include: (1) efforts to increase accessibility to mental health services by addressing language and economic barriers (e.g., free or no-cost counseling services, mental health services provided fully in Spanish), (2) being well-informed on community resources that can support Latinx immigrant populations (e.g., financial needs, documentation process, housing, medical resources, English classes) and connecting clients to those services, (3) opposing state and federal legislation that promote anti-immigrant sentiments and that exacerbate an already lengthy and complicated documentation process, (4) facilitating support groups for recently arrived Latinx immigrants, (5) hosting relationship psychoeducation workshops to leverage relational strengths. Opportunities to engage in advocacy that is responsive to the needs of Latinx immigrant populations are abundant. And because of the uniqueness of each client story, these efforts are most effective if tailored to support the specific needs reported by the clients and/or the immigrant community the counselor is serving. Participants in this study shared the deep vulnerability they found themselves in as immigrants in the U.S. Receiving help from others (church members, friends, counselors, professors), who were willing to support them through the immense change that immigration entails, was an important part of their success and illuminates the importance of advocacy with and for this population.

Counselor Education

Despite the large Latinx immigrant population in the U.S., and the unique needs and experiences present in this community, counselor training rarely includes preparation for how to effectively engage in clinical and advocacy work with clients of this background (Villalba,

2009). The myriad of stressors and challenges identified by the couples in this study provides further justification for previous calls urging counselors to have increased awareness on working with immigrants (Chi-Ying Chung et al., 2008; Chi-Yi Chung et al., 2011; Villalba, 2009).

Counselor educators have an important role in helping counselors-in-training (CIT) be adequately prepared to work with diverse populations as they enter the workforce. Consequently, counselor educators are uniquely positioned to prepare CITs to be effective practitioners when working with the large Latinx immigrant population living in the U.S.

The clinical and advocacy implications outlined above provide examples of foci counselor educators may bring into their curricula and training of CITs. Counselor educators may consider teaching about immigrant populations, including Latinx immigrant populations, as a diverse community with unique challenges (e.g., language acquisition, grief and loss, trauma, discrimination) that require awareness and attentiveness from counselors. They may also consider how to teach CIT's to apply the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2016) when working with immigrant populations. Based on the findings of this study, it seems that teaching CIT's to use a strength-based perspective that considers cultural values, such as familismo, as assets can be a helpful way to stimulate the use cultural responsive practices among future counselors.

Lastly, findings from this study suggest the importance of training students on using systemic approaches and theories (e.g., RCT) when working with Latinx immigrants. Given that study results support previous findings on family as a significant protective factor for Latinx immigrants, it would be of benefit for counselors to be trained on how support the health of family systems, including the couple relationship, while also considering the impact of culture. RCT, as a theory, is both relationally oriented and attentive systems of oppression, and therefore

a helpful framework to help counselors-in-training learn how to effectively work with the Latinx population. Counselor educators may consider how to incorporate RCT in their curriculums across courses, including counseling theories, multicultural counseling, as well as couples and family courses.

Limitations and Future Research

In this study, I sought to learn more about the relational experiences of Latinx immigrant couples living in the U.S. by interviewing couples using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodological approach. While varied and meaningful information about the couples' lived experiences emerged from the data, this study, like any other, contains several limitations that are of importance to note. These limitations include the heterogeneity of the sample, the inability to capture the experiences of immigrants whose relationship did not succeed post-immigration, and the strong possibility of losing some of the couple's conveyed meaning through the translation of their quotes into English.

Although IPA researchers believe in the idiographic nature of phenomena (i.e., each story is expected to be unique), they also recommend that research is conducted with a homogenous sample to best ensure that findings emerged from folks who have experienced the specific phenomena of interest under similar social conditions (Smith et al., 2009). This study drew on a sample of Latinx immigrant couples who all immigrated to the U.S. as adults, however, there remained great variability in their social identities and lived experiences prior to and after their immigration. The study sample included participants from Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, Mexico, and Puerto Rico, as well as participants who had differing racial identities, social class, education levels, documentation statuses, and immigration conditions (e.g., voluntary vs. asylum seeking). In addition, couples immigrated in different decades (e.g., 70s, 90s, 00s, 10s) and to

different points of entries (e.g., Colorado, Texas, Florida). Given such diversity in the social identities and experiences of the participants in this study, there were unique components to each of the couples' stories that I was not able to fully capture in the selected themes. Examples of this include Teresa and Manuel's experiences as parents of two children with special needs, Zele and Victoria's strategies for navigating Zele's ADHD symptoms, or Angela's struggles with Ariel's desire to join the Navy and her eventual decision to be supportive of him. In addition, the uniqueness of each partner and couple also seemed to change their immigration-related experience (e.g., motivations to immigrate, accessibility to resources). The heterogeneity of this sample points to the importance of viewing the Latinx community as an extremely diverse sample that is certainly not a monolith.

On the other hand, a second study limitation is related to information that could not be accessed due to the homogeneity of the sample. Given that all the couples sampled in this study were ones to who successfully navigated the immigration process and were remained together, the study results cannot provide insight as to how the immigration process can create irreparable ruptures in couple relationships, or how relationships that not growth-fostering can add stress to the immigration process. In other words, study results can provide insight as to what worked well in Latinx immigrant couple relationships, but not truly provide insight as to what doesn't work well for couples navigating this difficult change.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that there is possible loss of meaning for those who are not able to review study findings in Spanish. All study interviews were conducted and analyzed in Spanish, with results only being translated into English for the purposes of dissemination. The participants' use of idioms, country-specific expressions, and even their use of humor is not fully captured in the translated quotes. To mitigate this, and to preserve the couples' words as best I

could, I chose to include their original quotes in Spanish, followed by the Spanish translation. My hope is that those that can read Spanish have access to the participants' account of their own stories in their native language. For those that can't understand Spanish, I highlight the translation as a limitation so that it is considered as they review the findings.

Conclusion

Despite the mentioned limitations, this study contributes to filling a gap in counselor research by offering new insight on the experiences of Latinx immigrant couples living in the U.S. In addition, this study points to the need for additional research to better understand the challenges and strengths present in this diverse, and growing population. Future research may focus on investigating some of the under-explored immigration-related stressors mentioned by participants in this study. Examples include documentation stress, financial stress, grief and loss of home-country and the impact these have on mental health, as well as couple relationships. Given the many strengths that participants displayed in their efforts to cope with and survive these stressors (e.g., spirituality/religiosity, use of support systems, use of gratitude and aspirational capital), the counseling profession may also benefit from research that illuminates our understanding of what these strengths are and how they work to support Latinx immigrant wellbeing. In particular, future researchers may consider further investigating how specific qualities of intimate partner relationships (e.g., mutual support, mutual empathy, dyadic coping) can lessen the impact immigration-related stress. Lastly, this study contains promising results about the applicability of RCT with Latinx immigrant communities. However, additional research on the effectiveness of RCT in clinical practice is still necessary.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Recruitment Video Script in English

Hi! My name is Nicole Silverio and I am a Counseling and Counselor Education doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. For my dissertation, I am conducting a study to learn more about the experiences of Hispanic or Latino/a immigrant couples living in the U.S. As a Latina immigrant myself, my hope is that the findings from this study help counselors better understand how they can support our community.

For that reason, I need your help. If you and your partner are both Hispanic or Latino/a immigrants who came to the United States as adults and who have been in your relationship for over 3 years, you may be eligible to participate.

You can each earn up to \$60 each in Amazon or Walmart gift cards for completing two 60-to-75-minute interviews and one 15-to-30-minute meeting about your immigration and relationship experiences.

All meetings will take place online and can be arranged around you and your partner's schedule. If you are interested in enrolling, please follow the QR code displayed on the video or click on this link. I look forward to speaking with you!

Recruitment Video Script in Spanish

¡Hola! Mi nombre es Nicole Silverio y estoy haciendo mi doctorado en Consejería y Educación de Consejeros en la Universidad de Carolina del Norte en Greensboro. Como parte de mi tesis, estoy completando un estudio para aprender más sobre las experiencias de las parejas de inmigrantes Hispánicas o Latinas viviendo en los Estados Unidos. Como una Latina inmigrante, mi esperanza es que los resultados nos ayuden a comprender mejor las experiencias a las que nos enfrentamos al emigrar y aplicarlo para ofrecer un mejor apoyo.

Esta es la razón, por la que necesito su ayuda. Si usted y su pareja son ambos Hispánicos/Latinos inmigrantes que llegaron a los Estados Unidos como adultos y han estado en esta relación por 3 años o más, podrían ser elegibles para participar.

Serán compensados con \$60 en tarjetas de regalo de Amazon o de Walmart por completar dos entrevistas de 60 a 75 minutos cada una y una reunión final de 15 a 30 minutos sobre su proceso de inmigración y sus experiencias en su relación.

Todas las reuniones se realizarán virtualmente y podrán ser agendadas basado en su disponibilidad como pareja. Si está interesado en participar, por favor siga el código de QR en la pantalla o haga clic en este enlace. ¡Espero verlo pronto!

Recruitment Email for Organizational Distribution in English

Hello,

I hope this email finds you well! I am writing to share with you an opportunity to participate in a research study exploring the experiences of Hispanic or Latino/a immigrant couples. The researcher's name is Nicole Silverio. She is a Counseling and Counselor Education doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro completing this study as her dissertation. Your participation can help inform counselors on how to best support Latino(a) immigrant couples living in the U.S.

You may be eligible to participate in the study if you and your partner are both Hispanic or Latino(a) immigrants, who entered the U.S. after the age of 18 *and* if you and your partner have been in your relationship for three years or more. **You can earn up to \$60 each in your choice of Amazon or Walmart gift cards for completing the following study activities:**

- Two 60-to-75-minute audio recorded interviews
- One 15-to-30-minute audio recorded final meeting

All the meetings will be online using Zoom and can be scheduled around you and your partner's availability.

Please see the attached flyer and video for more information. If you are interested in enrolling, please click [here](#) or follow this QR code:



Thank you so much!

Recruitment Email for Organizational Distribution in Spanish

Hola,

¡Espero que al recibir este correo se encuentre bien! Estoy escribiéndole para compartir información sobre una oportunidad de participar en un estudio que explora las experiencias de las parejas inmigrantes Hispánicas o Latinas. El nombre de la investigadora es Nicole Silverio. Ella está haciendo un doctorado en Consejería y Educación de Consejeros en la Universidad de Carolina del Norte en Greensboro y está completando este estudio como parte de su tesis. Su participación podría ayudarnos a informar a los consejeros como ser de mejor soporte para las parejas inmigrantes Hispánicas o Latinas viviendo en los Estados Unidos.

Ustedes podrían ser elegible para participar en el estudio si usted y su pareja son ambos inmigrantes Hispánicos o Latinos quienes entraron a los Estados Unidos después de los 18 años y han estado en su relación de pareja por tres años o más. **Ustedes podrían ser compensados hasta \$60 cada uno en tarjetas de regalos de Amazon o Walmart por completar las siguientes actividades para estudio:**

- Dos entrevistas, audio grabadas, de 60 a 75 minutos cada una
- Una reunión final, audio grabada, de 15 a 30 minutos

Todas las reuniones tomarán lugar virtualmente utilizando Zoom y pueden ser agendadas basado en la disponibilidad de usted y su pareja.

Anexado encontrara un volante y un video con más información. Si está interesado en inscribirse en el estudio, por favor haga clic [aquí](#) o siga este código de QR:



¡Muchas gracias!

Recruitment Flyer in English

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

Seeking Hispanic or Latino/a Immigrant Couples

**PARTICIPATE IN A
RESEARCH STUDY!**



CLICK [HERE](#) OR
FOLLOW THIS QR
CODE TO LEARN MORE



ABOUT THE STUDY

If you and your partner are Latino/a immigrants who arrived to the U.S. after the age of 18 and have been in your relationship for 3 years or more, you are invited to participate in a study investigating your experiences as a couple

EARN UP TO \$60 EACH

in Walmart or Amazon gift cards by completing:

- Two 60-75-minute interviews
- One 15-30-minute final meeting

NICOLE SILVERIO, MA, NCC. LMHC, LMFT

Doctoral Student

✉ njsilver@uncg.edu

Last revised 9/4/22

Recruitment Flyer in Spanish

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

Se Buscan Parejas Hispanas or Latinas de Immigrantes

**PARTICIPE EN UN
ESTUDIO!**



HAGA CLIC [AQUÍ](#) O
SIGA ESTE CÓDIGO DE
QR PARA APRENDER
MÁS



SOBRE EL ESTUDIO

Si usted y su pareja son inmigrantes Latinos que llegaron a los Estados Unidos después de los 18 años de edad, y han estado en su relación por 3 años o más, están invitados a participar en un estudio que investiga sus experiencias como pareja.

GANEN HASTA \$60 CADA UNO

en tarjetas de regalo de Walmart o Amazon al completar:

- Dos entrevistas de 60 a 75 minutos
- Una reunión final de 15 a 30 minutos

NICOLE SILVERIO, MA, NCC. LMHC, LMFT

Doctoral Student

✉ njsilver@uncg.edu

Last revised 9/4/22

APPENDIX B: SCREENING TOOLS

Qualtrics Survey Printout in English



English

සමූහානුමැණි

Welcome!

Para español haga clic en el menu a mano derecha.

සමූහානුමැණි ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත. ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත. ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත.

ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත. ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත. ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත.

ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත.

- ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත.
- ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත.
- ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත.

ඔබගේ සමූහානුමැණි පිළිබඳව විස්තර සැපයීමට මෙහිදී ඔබට අවස්ථාවක් ඇත.

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NJSilver@uncg.edu



Informed Consent

IRB Information Sheet

Project Title: Investigating the relational experiences of Latinx/a/o immigrant couples

Principal Investigator: Nicole Silverio

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kelly Wester

What is this all about?

I am asking you to participate in this research study because I am interested in learning more about your experiences as a Hispanic/Latino(a) immigrant couple. This research project will take about 2.25 to 3 hours and will involve you attending a total of 3 meetings, including two 60-to-75 minute audio-recorded interviews, and a one final 15-to-30 audio-recorded meeting. Your participation in this research project is voluntary.

How will this negatively affect me?

There are minimal risks involved in participating in this study. Some people might experience discomfort while responding to the interview questions, but this discomfort is not expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in everyday life.

What do I get out of this research project?

Although there are no direct benefits to you, society might benefit from learning more about the experiences of Hispanic/Latino(a) immigrant couples and their relationships strengths by using this information to improve advocacy efforts and better educate

counselors on how to support Hispanic/Latino(a) immigrant couples.

Will I get paid for participating?

You will each be paid a total of \$60 dollars in e-gift cards for your completion of all study activities. You will receive the first \$20 of this amount upon completion of the first interview, \$20 upon the completion of the second interview, and the remaining \$20 after completion of the final member check meeting. You will be able to choose between Amazon or Walmart gift cards.

What about my confidentiality?

We will do everything possible to make sure that your information is kept confidential. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. We will use pseudonyms for all data analysis procedures and store all collected information in a password protected and HIPAA compatible cloud storage platform (i.e., Box).

Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described in this section.

Your de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent.

What if I do not want to be in this research study?

You do not have to be part of this project. This project is voluntary and it is up to you to decide to participate in this research project. If you agree to participate, at any time in this project you may stop participating without penalty. E-gift cards are prorated through the completion of the program, so the full \$60-value incentive is only available to those who complete all study activities.

What if I have questions?

You can ask Nicole Silverio (Njsilver@uncg.edu) or Dr. Kelly Wester (Klwester@uncg.edu)

anything about the study. If you have concerns about how you have been treated in this study call the Office of Research Integrity Director at 1-855-251-2351.

By proceeding, you are agreeing to participate in this study.

Confirmation of Eligibility

Please confirm you are eligible to participate in this study by answering the questions below.

Are you and your partner both Latin@/Hispanic immigrants?

- No
 Yes

Did you and your partner both immigrate to the United States as adults (i.e., after the age of 18)?

- No
 Yes

Have you and your partner been in your relationship for 3 or more years?

- No
 Yes

Participant Not Eligible

Thank you for your interest in participating. At this time, it doesn't seem like you and your partner are a good fit for the study. If you have questions about this decision, please feel free to email me, Nicole Silverio, at NJSilver@uncg.edu

Below, I have included some additional resources that may be helpful for you or someone you know:

Immigration Resources

National Immigrant Justice Center

<https://immigrantjustice.org/>

Catholic Charities USA

<https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/>

Unidos US

<https://www.unidosus.org/>

United We Dream

<https://unitedwedream.org/>

Intimate Partner Violence Resource

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233

<https://www.thehotline.org/>

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<https://ncadv.org/>

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

<https://ww.nrcdv.org/>

HITS

Please read each of the following statements and use the frequency scale on the right to mark how often each occurs for you.

How often does your partner...

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Fairly often	Frequently
Physically hurt you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Insult you or talk down to you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Threaten you with harm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Scream or curse at you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Demographic Information

What is your first and last name?

What is your partner's first and last name?

What is your race?

How old are you?

What is your gender identity? (e.g., man, woman, non-binary, etc.)

What is your sexual orientation?

What is your country of origin?

How many years have you lived in the United States?

Which city and state do you currently reside in?

How many years have you and your partner been in your relationship?

Contact Information

Congratulations!

It looks like you qualify to participate in this study. Please leave your contact information below so that I may reach out to you about scheduling our first meeting.

What is your phone number?

What is your email address?

What is your preferred contact method?

- Email
- Text Message
- Phone Call
- WhatsApp

Do you give your permission to receive appointment reminders through your preferred contact method?

- Yes
- No

Eligible and Complete

Thank you!

Thank you again for your interest in this study! If your partner has not completed this survey, please encourage them to do so using the QR code or link below. ***I will not be able to schedule our first meeting until both you and your partner have completed this survey.***

Once both you and your partner have completed this survey, I will be in contact soon to schedule our first meeting.

Also, please feel free to share this link with any couple that might also be interested in participating!

https://uncg.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6y8WEVle0c7gyxM



Included below are some additional resources that may be helpful for you or someone you know.

Immigration Resources

National Immigrant Justice Center

<https://immigrantjustice.org/>

Catholic Charities USA

<https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/>

Unidos US

<https://www.unidosus.org/>

United We Dream

<https://unitedwedream.org/>

Intimate Partner Violence Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233

<https://www.thehotline.org/>

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<https://ncadv.org/>

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

<https://www.nrcdv.org/>

Powered by Qualtrics



Informed Consent

IRB Documento de Información

Título del Proyecto: Investigación sobre las experiencias relacionales de parejas de inmigrantes Latinx/a/o

Investigadora Principal: Nicole Silverio

Asesora de la Facultad: Dra. Kelly Wester

¿De qué se trata el estudio?

Estoy solicitando que participe en este estudio porque estoy interesada en aprender más sobre sus experiencias como pareja de inmigrantes Latinos. Este estudio de investigación durara entre 2 a 3 horas que estarán distribuidas en 3 reuniones, incluyendo dos entrevistas audiograbadas de 60 a 75 minutos cada una y una reunión final, también audiograbada, de 15 a 30 minutos. Su participación en este estudio es voluntaria.

¿Me afectará negativamente participar en este estudio?

Hay riesgos mínimos relacionados con participar en este estudio. Algunas personas pueden sentir angustia o incomodidad al responder a las preguntas de las entrevistas, pero se anticipa que este nivel de angustia no sobrepasa lo que surge en el diario vivir.

¿Cómo me beneficio de participar en este estudio?

Aunque no hay un beneficio directo a usted, la sociedad se puede beneficiar al aprender más sobre las experiencias de las parejas de inmigrantes Latinos y sobre

sus destrezas. Esta información puede ser usada para educar a los consejeros de como apoyar a las parejas de inmigrantes Latinos.

¿Seré compensado por participar?

Cada uno será compensado con \$60 en tarjetas de regalos electrónicas por completar todas las actividades del estudio. Usted recibirá \$20 al completar la primera entrevista, y \$20 al completar la segunda entrevista, y los últimos \$20 al completar la última reunión. Usted podrá elegir entre tarjetas de regalo de Amazon o de Walmart.

¿Qué tal mi confidencialidad?

Haremos todo lo posible para asegurar que su información se mantenga confidencial. Toda la información obtenida a través del estudio es estrictamente confidencial y no será divulgada a menos que sea requerido por la ley. Utilizaremos nombres falsos para el análisis de la data y toda la información obtenida estará guardada en un sistema de almacenamiento privado en la nube (llamado Box), el cual es compatible con HIPAA y el cual estará protegido con contraseña.

La confidencialidad absoluta de información provista a través del internet no puede ser garantizada debido a las limitaciones de seguridad en el internet. Por favor asegure cerrar su ventanilla cuando acabemos para que nadie pueda ver lo que estamos haciendo.

Debido a que su voz puede ser reconocida por cualquier persona que escuche la grabación, la confidencialidad de las cosas que diga en la grabación no puede ser garantizada, aunque trataremos de limitar el acceso a la grabación como indicado previamente.

Su información desidentificada será guardada indefinidamente y podría ser usada en nuevas investigaciones sin tener que obtener su consentimiento nuevamente.

¿Qué tal si no quiere ser parte de este estudio?

No tiene que participar en este estudio. Este proyecto es voluntario y usted decide si quiere participar. Aun si dio su consentimiento para participar, puede parar su participación en cualquier momento sin ninguna penalidad. Las tarjetas de regalo son prorrateadas al completar el programa, así que los \$60 en tarjetas de regalo solo

están disponible para aquellos que completen todas las actividades asociadas con el estudio.

¿Qué tal si tengo preguntas?

Le puede preguntar a Nicole Silverio (Njsilver@uncg.edu) o a la Dra. Kelly Wester (Klwester@uncg.edu) cualquier cosa sobre el estudio. Si tiene alguna preocupación de cómo ha sido tratado(a) en este estudio llame al director de la Oficina de Integridad en Investigaciones marcando 1-855-251-2351.

Al proceder, esta dando su consentimiento para participar en este estudio.

Confirmation of Eligibility

Por favor conteste las siguientes preguntas para saber si es elegible para este estudio.

¿Son usted y su pareja inmigrantes Hispanos o Latinos?

- No
 Sí

¿Inmigraron usted y su pareja a los Estados Unidos siendo adultos (después de los 18 años de edad)?

- No
 Sí

¿Han estado su pareja y usted en su relación por tres años o más?

- No
 Sí

Participant Not Eligible

Gracias por su interés en participar. Lamentablemente en este momento su pareja y usted no cumplen los requisitos establecidos para el estudio. Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre esta decisión, por favor siéntase con la libertad de escribirme a NJSilver@uncg.edu

https://uncg.yul1.qualtrics.com/Q/EditSection/Blocks/Ajax/GetSurveyPrintPreview?ContextSurveyID=SV_6y8WEVle0c7gyxM&ContextLibraryID=UR_eKAYEq... 4/10

Debajo he incluido algunos recursos adicionales que podrían ser de ayuda para usted o alguien que conoce.

Recursos de Inmigración

National Immigrant Justice Center

<https://immigrantjustice.org/>

Catholic Charities USA

<https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/>

Unidos US

<https://www.unidosus.org/>

United We Dream

<https://unitedwedream.org/>

Recursos de Violencia Domestica

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233

<https://www.thehotline.org/>

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<https://ncadv.org/>

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

<https://ww.nrcdv.org/>

HITS

Por favor indique la opción que mejor representa la frecuencia que usted y su pareja actúan de la manera representada durante el último mes:

Que tan a menudo su pareja ...

	Nunca	Rara vez	A veces	Bastante a menudo	Frecuentemente
¿Le lastima físicamente?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
¿Le insulta o le habla en una forma que le hace sentir inferior?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
¿Le amenaza de hacerle daño?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
¿Le grita o le maldice?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Demographic Information

¿Cuál es su primer nombre y su apellido?

¿Cuál es el primer nombre y apellido de su pareja?

¿Cuál es su raza (seleccione todas las que apliquen)?

¿Qué edad tiene?

¿Qué es su identidad de genero?

¿Qué es su orientación sexual?

¿Cuál es su país de origen?

¿Cuántos años a vivido en los Estados Unidos?

¿En que ciudad y estado vive usted actualmente?

¿Cuántos años tienen usted y su pareja en su relación?

Contact Information

!Felicitaciones!

Parece que califica para participar en el estudio. Por favor deje su información de contacto para llamarle y agendar nuestra primera cita.

¿Cuál es su numero de teléfono?

¿Cuál es su correo electrónico?

¿Cómo prefiere que le contacte?

- Correo eletronico
- Mensaje de Texto
- Llamadas telefonicas
- WhatsApp

¿Da usted su permiso para recibir recordatorios de nuestras citas usando el modo de comunicación que usted indico como preferencia?

- Si
- No

Eligible and Complete

Gracias!

!Gracias nuevamente por su interés en el estudio! Si su pareja no ha completado esta encuesta, por favor motive a que lo haga usando en código de QR o el enlace incluido debajo. ***No me sera posible agendar nuestra primera cita antes de que usted y pareja ambos completen esta encuesta.***

Cuando usted y su pareja ambos hayan completado esta encuesta yo me comunicare para acordar nuestra primera cita.

Tambien, por favor sientase con la libertad de compatir este enlace con cualquier pareja que pueda estar interesada en participar!

https://uncg.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6y8WEVle0c7gyxM



Debajo están incluidos algunos recursos que pueden ser de ayuda para usted o alguien que conozca.

Recursos de Inmigración

National Immigrant Justice Center

<https://immigrantjustice.org/>

Catholic Charities USA

<https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/>

Unidos US

<https://www.unidosus.org/>

United We Dream

<https://unitedwedream.org/>

Recursos de Violencia Domestica

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233

<https://www.thehotline.org/>

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<https://ncadv.org/>

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

<https://www.nrcdv.org/>

Con tecnología de Qualtrics

HITS Questionnaire in English

Please read each of the following statements and use the frequency scale on the right to mark how often each occurs for you.

How often does your partner ...	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Fairly often	Frequently
Physically hurt you?					
Insult you or talk down to you?					
Threaten you with harm?					
Scream or curse at you?					

Sherin, K.M., Sinacore, J.M., Li, X.Q., Zitter, R.E., Shakil, A. (1998). HITS: A short domestic violence screening tool for use in a family practice setting. *Family Medicine*, 30(7), 508-512.

HITS Questionnaire in Spanish

Por favor indique la opción que mejor representa la frecuencia que usted y su pareja actúan de la manera representada durante el último mes:

Que tan a menudo su pareja ...	Nunca	Rara vez	A veces	Bastante a	Frecuentemente
¿Le lastima físicamente?					
¿Le insulta o le habla en una forma que le hace sentir inferior?					
¿Le amenaza de hacerle daño?					
¿Le grita o le maldice?					

Chen, P.H., Rovi, S., Vega, M., Jacobs, A., Johnson, M.S. (2005). Screening for domestic violence in a predominantly Hispanic clinical setting. *Family Practice*, 22, 617-623.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview 1 Guide in English

Introduction:

Thank you so much for your interest in participating in this study and for meeting with me today. My name is Nicole Silverio and I am Counseling and Counselor Education doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am conducting this study as part of my dissertation, which explores the relationship experiences of Hispanic/Latino(a) immigrant couples.

Because today is our first meeting, I will be spending a few minutes explaining the study and what it entails. I also want to answer any questions you may have and confirm that you would like to participate. After that, if you decide to participate, we will begin with the interview. We will be meeting for 60 to 75 minutes, and I'll ask you some questions about your relationship and your experiences as immigrants.

Are you ready to begin?

Informed Consent:

Read through IRB Information Sheet. I am wondering if you have any questions about the study or your participation. Would you like to enroll in the study?

If the couple would like to participate: Great! Thank you so much for your willingness to participate. We will begin the interview portion of our meeting now, which I will need to record.

Do I have your permission to begin recording?

If the couple would not like to participate: I completely understand. Thank you so much for your willingness to meet with me today. If any questions or thoughts about the study come up for you, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Interview:

Thank you for your permission to record and agreeing to participate in the study. As we begin the interview, I want to share that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I am only interested in learning about your experiences, and I would like to hear from both of you for each question. You can be completely honest; you can choose to not answer specific questions, and you can choose to end the interview whenever you'd like.

All the information you share will be confidential and I will not be asking for any identifying information during the recording. To protect your identity, I will ask you to choose pseudonyms, which I will utilize for the data analysis process and reporting the results of the study.

The following questions will be utilized to conduct the semi-structured interview:

Question	Follow-Up Prompts
I will use a pseudonym (fake name) in the study. Would you like to choose a name or would you like me to choose one for you?	
Tell me the story of how you met.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Walk me through that time.• What drew you to one another?• Tell me about the moment you decided to work towards a long-time relationship with another (e.g., when you knew you were serious about the other person)
What prompted you to immigrate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who was there with you?

- When you reflect on that time, what feelings do you remember?
 - What was most challenging for you to leave behind?
 - What were you most looking forward to?
- When you think back to your first few months in the United States, how did the reality of being here compare to your expectations?
- Tell me more about that
 - How did that feel?
 - How did that change your view of the United States?
- How does being an immigrant impact your life now?
- Give me an example of a more recent experience that reminds you of this
 - Tell me what feelings came up for you in that situation.
- From your perspective, how has the fact that you are both immigrants impacted your relationship?
- Walk me through an example of that?
 - What feelings did that bring up for you at the time?
- I'm curious about challenges or difficulties have come up for your relationship given that you are both immigrants.
- What was that like for each of you?
 - What emotions do you recall from being in that situation?
- How has being immigrants benefited your relationship?
- Walk me through that experience in detail?
 - What feelings came up for you then?

Are there other parts of your
immigration experience as a
couple that you'd like to tell
me about today?

Closing Remarks:

That is all the questions I have for you today. Thank you so much for your time and openness in this process. The information you provided was so helpful! I will be emailing each of you your first \$20 gift cards to the emails you provided me earlier, does that work for you? Do you prefer a Walmart or an Amazon gift card?

We have our next interview scheduled for [DATE & TIME]. Just like this time, we will spend 60 to 75 minutes on some questions. I will reach out with a reminder prior to our meeting. Please feel free to contact me if any questions or concerns come up prior to our next meeting.

Thank you again and goodbye!

Interview 1 Guide in Spanish

Introducción:

Muchas gracias por su interés en participar en este estudio y por reunirse conmigo el día de hoy. Mi nombre es Nicole Silverio y soy una estudiante haciendo mi doctorado en Consejería y Educación de Consejeros en la Universidad de Carolina del Norte en Greensboro. Como parte de mi tesis, estoy completando este estudio, el cual explora las experiencias de parejas inmigrantes Hispanas/Latinas.

Como hoy es nuestra primera reunión, utilizare unos minutos para explicarle el estudio y lo que involucra. También quiero contestar cualquier pregunta que ustedes puedan tener y confirmar que les gustaría participar. Después de eso, si deciden participar, empezaremos con la entrevista. Hoy nos reuniremos entre una hora a una hora y quince minutos and les hare algunas preguntas sobre su relación y sus experiencias como inmigrantes.

¿Están listos para empezar?

Consentimiento Informado:

Repasar el Documenta de Información del IRB. ¿Tienen alguna pregunta sobre el estudio o sobre su participación? ¿Les gustaría proceder con su participación?

Si a la pareja le gustaría participar: ¡Excelente! Muchas gracias por su participación. Ahora empezaremos la entrevista, la cual tengo que grabar. ¿Tengo sus permisos para empezar a grabar esta reunión?

Si la pareja decide no participar: Entiendo completamente. Muchas gracias por reunirse conmigo hoy. Si les surge cualquier pregunta o comentario sobre el estudio después del día de hoy, siéntanse con la libertad de contactarme.

Entrevista:

Gracias por su permiso para grabar esta reunión y por su consentimiento para participar en el estudio. Antes de comenzar, les quiero compartir que no hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas durante la entrevista. Simplemente, estoy interesada en aprender sobre sus experiencias, y me gustaría los dos ofrezcan su perspectiva en cada una de las preguntas. Pueden ser totalmente honestos; también pueden decidir no contestar ciertas preguntas y pueden decidir terminar la entrevista cuando lo deseen.

Toda la información que compartan es confidencial y yo no les pediré ninguna información que los pueda revelar su identidad durante la entrevista. Para proteger su identidad, les pediré que escojan nombres falsos. Estos nombres serán usados cuando yo este analizando la data y cuando este reportando los resultados del estudio.

Las próximas preguntas serán utilizadas durante la entrevista:

Preguntas	Seguimiento
Por favor escojan un nombre falso cada uno, el cual utilizaré para representarlos en los resultados del estudio.	
Cuéntenme la historia de cómo se conocieron.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describanme esa experiencia a fondo• ¿Que los atrajo el uno al otro?• Cuéntenme sobre el momento en que decidieron estar con su pareja en una relación comprometida (ej., una relación más seria)

¿Qué les motivó a emigrar?

- ¿Quién estaba con usted(es)?
- ¿Cuándo reflexiona sobre esa época de su vida, qué sentimientos recuerda?
- ¿Qué fue lo más difícil de dejar atrás en su país de origen?
- ¿Qué era lo que más ansiaba con su mudanza a los EE.UU?

¿Cuándo recuerdan sus primeros meses en los Estados Unidos, cómo se comparó la realidad de la vida aquí con sus expectativas?

- Cuéntenme más sobre eso
- ¿Cómo se sintió?
- ¿Cómo cambió su perspectiva sobre los Estados Unidos, si es que cambió de alguna manera?

¿Hoy en día, cómo impacta sus vidas ser inmigrante?

- Denme un ejemplo de una experiencia reciente.
 - ¿Qué emociones surgieron durante esta situación?

¿Desde sus perspectivas, cómo impacta a su relación el hecho de que ustedes sean inmigrantes?

- Descríbanme esa experiencia a fondo
 - ¿Qué sentimientos les causó esa experiencia?

¿Tengo curiosidad sobre que retos o dificultades han enfrentado en su relación como inmigrantes

- ¿Cómo fue esa experiencia para cada uno de ustedes?
- ¿Qué sentimientos les causó estar en esa situación?

¿Qué ha sido algo positivo o motivador para ustedes como una pareja de inmigrantes?

- ¿Me pueden describir esa experiencia a fondo?
- ¿Cómo se sintieron en ese momento?

¿Hay alguna otra parte de su experiencia de inmigrantes como pareja la cual les gustaría compartir conmigo el día de hoy?

Conclusión

Esa son todas las preguntas que tengo para ustedes hoy. Muchas gracias por su tiempo y por su honestidad en este proceso. ¡La información que me proporcionaron va a ser de mucha ayuda! Les estaré enviando sus primeras tarjetas de regalo a los correos electrónicos que me proveyeron antes. ¿Estaría bien? ¿Prefieren una tarjeta de regalo de Amazon o de Walmart?

Nuestra próxima entrevista esta agenda para [FECHA & HORA). Igual que el día de hoy, pasaremos de una hora and una hora y quince minutos en una serie de preguntas. Yo me comunicare antes de la reunión para darles un recordatorio. Por favor siéntanse con la libertad de contactarme si les surge cualquier pregunta o preocupación antes de nuestra próxima reunión. ¡Gracias de nuevo y adiós!

Interview 2 Guide in English

Greetings:

Thank you so much for meeting with me again. I am happy to see you both! Today is our second interview, so like last time, we will be meeting for 60-to-75 minutes, and I'll be asking you to answer some questions about relationship and your experiences as immigrants. Just like before, I will be recording our time together. All the information you share will be confidential and I will not be asking for any identifying information during the recording.

Before we begin with the interview, I want to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I am only interested in learning about your experiences and am interested in hearing from both of you throughout the interview. You can be completely honest; you can choose to not answer specific questions, and you can choose to end the interview whenever you'd like.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Interview:

The following questions will be utilized to conduct the semi-structured interview:

Question	Follow-Up Prompts
Tell me about some things you do well as a couple	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share with me an example of this<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What feelings are connected to that experience?
What do you value most about your relationship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is an example of this?• What makes this important for you?

What are important or critical times in the history of your relationship?

- Walk me through that experience.
- What feelings, thoughts, and reactions do you remember having at that time?

Tell about a time in which your partner supported you through a challenge?

- What did your partner's support look like?
- How did you feel receiving that support?
- How, if at all, did this impact your relationship?

Last time we met, we talked about many of the experiences you've had as an immigrant in the United States. How has being in your relationship impacted some of these experiences?

Tell me about an immigration-related challenge that you have been able to overcome as a couple?

- What made that difficult for you?
- When you recall that difficult time, what feelings do you remember having?
- What did you take away from that experience?

What is a time in your immigration process from when you first arrived to today during which you felt very connected as a couple?

- Walk me through that experience.
- What feelings do you remember having towards your partner during that time?

Keeping in mind that I am really interested in knowing more about how your identity as immigrants impact your relationship as a couple, are there additional thoughts, experiences, feelings, or stories that you'd like to share with me today?

Closing Remarks:

That is all the questions I have for you today. Thank you so much for your time and openness in this process. The information you provided was so helpful! I will be emailing each of you second \$20 gift cards to the emails you provided me earlier, does that work for you? Do you prefer a Walmart or an Amazon gift card?

We have our final interview scheduled for [DATE & TIME]. That meeting will be dedicated to making sure I have correctly understood what you have shared with me in the last two interviews. We will spend 20 to 30 minutes reviewing the themes from our time together and adding anything that might be missing. I will reach out with a reminder prior to our meeting. Please feel free to contact me if any questions or concerns come up prior to our next meeting. Thank you again and goodbye!

Interview 2 Guide in Spanish

Saludos:

Gracias por reunirse conmigo nuevamente. ¡Estoy contenta de verlos a los dos! Hoy es nuestra segunda entrevista, y así que, como la última reunión, estaremos juntos de una hora a una hora y quince minutos. Les estaré preguntando sobre su relación y sus experiencias como inmigrantes. También como la última vez, estaré grabando nuestra reunión. Toda la información que compartan será confidencial y no les preguntare nada que pueda revelar su identidad.

Antes de empezar la entrevista, les quería recordar que no hay respuestas corrector o incorrectas para estas preguntas. Solo estoy interesada en aprender sobre sus experiencias y me gustaría escuchar la perspectiva de los dos a través de la entrevista. Ustedes pueden ser totalmente honestos; pueden escoger no contestar ciertas preguntas, y pueden terminar la entrevista cuando le deseen.

¿Tienen alguna pregunta antes de que empecemos?

Entrevista:

Las próximas preguntas serán utilizadas durante la entrevista:

Preguntas	Seguimiento
Cuéntenme sobre algunas cosas que ustedes hacen bien como pareja.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compártenme un ejemplo de esto.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ ¿Qué emociones están conectadas a esa experiencia?
¿Qué más valoran sobre su relación?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ¿Qué sería un ejemplo de esto?• ¿Qué hace esto de importancia para ustedes?
¿Cuál es un tiempo/época importante o crítico en la historia de su relación?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Descríbanme esa experiencia a fondo.• ¿Qué sentimientos, pensamientos, y reacciones recuerdan durante ese tiempo?

¿Cuéntenme sobre una ocasión en la cual su pareja le apoyó durante un reto?

- ¿De qué manera se manifestó el apoyo de su pareja?
- ¿Que se sintió recibir ese apoyo?
- Como, si es que, de alguna manera, ¿cambió esta experiencia su relación?

La última vez que estuvimos juntos, conversamos sobre las experiencias que han tenido como inmigrantes en los Estados Unidos. ¿Cómo han sido estas experiencias impactadas por su relación o por el hecho de que tenga una pareja?

¿Cuéntenme sobre un reto relacionado a su proceso de inmigración que han podido sobrellevar como pareja?

- ¿Que hizo este reto algo difícil?
- ¿Cuándo recuerdan este momento difícil en sus vidas, que emociones recuerdan sentir?
- ¿Que aprendieron o se llevaron de esta experiencia?
- Cuéntenme sobre esa experiencia a fondo.
- ¿Qué sentimientos hacia su pareja recuerda durante ese tiempo?

Cuéntenme sobre un tiempo o etapa en su proceso de inmigración desde cuando llegaron hasta el día de hoy, en que se sintieron muy conectados como pareja.

¿Teniendo pendiente que estoy interesada en aprender más sobre cómo sus identidades como inmigrantes han impactado su relación de pareja, tienen algún pensamiento, sentimiento, experiencia, o historia adicional que

les gustaría compartir conmigo
hoy?

Closing Remarks:

Esa son todas las preguntas que tengo para ustedes hoy. Muchas gracias por su tiempo y por su honestidad en este proceso. ¡La información que me proporcionaron va a ser de mucha ayuda! Les estaré enviando sus segundas tarjetas de regalo a los correos electrónicos que me proveyeron antes. ¿Estaría bien? ¿Prefieren una tarjeta de regalo de Amazon o de Walmart?

Nuestra última reunión esta agendada para el día [FECHA & HORA]. Esa reunión será dedicada para asegurar que yo entendí correctamente lo que ustedes me han compartido en estas entrevistas. Pasaremos de quince minutos a medio hora juntos repasando los temas que hemos hablado y agregando cualquier cosa que yo no haya captado. Yo les enviare un recordatorio antes de nuestra siguiente reunión. Por favor siéntanse con la Libertad de contactarme si les surge cualquier pregunta o preocupación antes de nuestra próxima reunión. ¡Gracias de nuevo y adiós!

APPENDIX D: PILOT STUDY INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview Guide – Meeting 1 of Pilot Study in English

Introduction:

Hello and thank you so much for meeting with me today. I am asking to meet with you because I need your help to evaluate the procedures of my research study. I am a Counseling and Counselor Education doctoral student at UNCG and am I am conducting a study about the experiences of Latin@ immigrant couples as part of my dissertation. Currently, I'm going over the study procedures to ensure that the recruitment and data collection protocols are effective in gathering relevant information and in ensuring the couples complete their study participation.

Please know that there are no wrong or right answers, and your answers will not hurt my feelings. I am interested in your honest opinions about the study recruitment and the procedures in this meeting. Today, I'll start by asking you questions about what it was like to enroll in the study using the flyer and the Qualtrics survey page. After that, I will review the first set of interview questions. At the end I will ask you questions about your experience with the interview. Are you ready to begin?

Evaluation of Recruitment Procedures:

Great! Let's start with your experience with recruitment materials:

1. How effective was the flyer in catching your attention?
2. Did the flyer contain all the information you needed to make a decision about your participation?
 - a. Is there anything I should add?
3. When you arrived at the survey page, was there anything confusing?
4. How easy or difficult was the Qualtrics survey to navigate?

5. How easy or difficult was the scheduling process for today's meeting?
 - a. Is there a way I can improve it?

Thank you so much for answering those questions. Now, I will proceed with the interview as I would normally do with future participants.

Interview 1:

Follow interview 1 guide (see Appendix C).

Evaluation of Interview 1:

1. Were there any questions that you found confusing?
 - a. If so, do you have suggestions as how to clarify them?
2. Was there anything I didn't ask about that you think would be important to ask?
 - a. If so, what?
3. How did the interview length feel?

Conclusion:

Thank you for your support and for giving me this time. The information you provided was very useful. I will be sending you \$20 each in e-gift cards to the emails you previously provided. Does that work? If yes, do you prefer an Amazon or a Walmart gift card? The remainder of the gift cars will be emailed to you after our second meeting.

Let's schedule our next meeting. *Select time and date for pilot study interview.* Please reach out if you have any questions or concerns. I will be sending you reminders 24 hours prior to our scheduled time. See you then!

Interview Guide – Meeting 1 of Pilot Study in Spanish

Introducción:

Hola y muchas gracias por reunirse conmigo hoy. Les pido este tiempo porque necesito su ayuda para evaluar los protocolos de mi estudio de investigación. Yo soy una estudiante de doctorado en Consejería y Educación de Consejeros en UNCG y como parte de mi tesis estoy completando un estudio sobre las experiencias de parejas inmigrantes Latinas. En esta fase, estoy repasando todos los procedimientos del estudio para asegurar que el reclutamiento y la colección de data sean efectivas en obtener la información que necesito. También quiero asegurar que los procedimientos sean adecuados para motivar a las parejas a completar su participación en el estudio.

Por favor tengan presente que no hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas y que sus respuestas no herirán mis sentimientos. Estoy interesada en sus opiniones honesta sobre el reclutamiento del estudio y los procedimientos de la primera entrevista. Empezaremos con unas preguntas sobre su experiencia de inscripción al estudio utilizando el volante y la pagina de la encuesta en Qualtrics. Después, procederé con repasar el primer set de preguntas. Al final, les preguntare sobre sus experiencias con estas preguntas. ¿Están listo para iniciar?

Evaluación del Protocolo de Reclutamiento:

¡Excelente! Empecemos con sus experiencias con los materiales de reclutamiento:

1. ¿Qué tan efectivo fue el volante en llamar su atención?
2. ¿Tenía el volante toda la información necesaria para ustedes decidir si querían participar en el estudio?
 - a. ¿Hay alguna cosa que debo agregar?
3. Cuando llegaron a la página de web con la encuesta, ¿hubo algo confuso?

4. ¿Qué tan difícil fue navegar la página de web con la encuesta?
5. ¿Qué tan fácil o difícil fue el procedimiento de agendar nuestra cita para el día de hoy?
 - a. ¿Hay alguna manera en que pueda mejorar este procedimiento?

Muchas gracias por responder a estas preguntas. Ahora procederé con el protocolo de la primera entrevista como si ustedes fueran participantes del estudio.

Entrevista 1:

Siga el guion de la Entrevista 1 (Apéndice C)

Evaluación de la Entrevista 1:

1. ¿Hubo alguna pregunta que fue confusa?
 - a. En caso de que sí, ¿Qué sugerencias tienen de como la puedo clarificarla?
2. ¿Hubo algo que yo no pregunte que sientan es importante?
 - a. En caso de que así sea, ¿Cuál sería?
3. ¿Qué les pareció el tiempo que tomo la entrevista?

Conclusión:

¡Gracias por su apoyo y dedicarme este tiempo! La información que proveyeron es de mucha ayuda. Les enviare \$20 a cada uno en tarjetas de regalos a los correos electrónicos que me dieron anteriormente. ¿Estaría bien? En caso de que si, ¿prefieren tarjetas de regalo de Walmart o de Amazon? El resto de las tarjetas de regalo serán enviadas después de nuestra próxima reunión.

Agendemos nuestra próxima reunión. *Seleccionen un día y una hora para la segunda entrevista del estudio piloto.* Si tienen alguna pregunta o preocupación, por favor no duden en

contactarme. Les estaré enviando un recordatorio 24 horas antes de nuestra próxima reunión.

¡Nos veremos pronto!

Interview Guide – Meeting 2 of Pilot Study in English

Greetings:

Hello and thank you so much for meeting with me this final time! The goal of this meeting is to gather your thoughts and opinions about the interview protocol for the second interview of my study on the experiences of Hispanic/Latino(a) immigrant couples. I will conduct the interview as if you participants in my study and afterwards, ask you some questions about your experience with the interview. There are no wrong or write answers and your answers will not hurt my feelings. I am interested in your honest opinions about the interview process and how it may be improved.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview 2:

Follow procedure for interview 2 (see Appendix C)

Evaluation of Interview 2:

1. Were there any questions that you found confusing?
 - a. If so, do you have suggestions as how to clarify them?
2. Was there anything I didn't ask about that you think would be important to ask?
 - a. If so, what?
3. How did the interview length feel?
4. Is the incentive amount fair for your time in the study?
5. Is the incentive amount enough to motivate couples to complete all study activities?

Conclusion:

Thank you so much for your time today. Your responses were very helpful! To thank you for your time I will be emailing you your final \$40 gift cards to the email addresses you previously provided, does that work? If yes, do you prefer Amazon or Walmart gift cards?

If you think of any additional feedback that you believe could improve the experience for participants in my study, please feel free to let me know. Thank you again!

Interview Guide – Meeting 2 of Pilot Study in Spanish

Saludos:

¡Hola y gracias por reunirse conmigo una última vez! La meta de esta reunión es obtener sus opiniones sobre el protocolo de la segunda entrevista en mi estudio que explora las experiencias de parejas de inmigrantes Latinos. Haremos la entrevista como si ustedes fueran participantes en el estudio y después le hare unas preguntas sobre su experiencia con la entrevista. Recuerden que no hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas y que no herirán mis sentimientos con sus respuestas. Estoy interesada en sus opiniones honestas sobre el proceso de la entrevista y en como este puede ser mejorado.

¿Tienen alguna pregunta antes de empezar?

Entrevista 2

Siga el guion de la Entrevista 2 (Apéndice C)

Evaluación de la Entrevista 1

1. ¿Hubo alguna pregunta que fue confusa?
 - a. En caso de que sí, ¿Qué sugerencias tienen de como la puedo clarificar?
2. ¿Hubo algo que yo no pregunte que sientan es importante?
 - a. En caso de que así sea, ¿Cuál sería?
3. ¿Qué les pareció el tiempo que tomo la entrevista?
4. ¿Es la compensación justa por el tiempo invertido en el estudio?
5. ¿Es la cantidad de la compensación suficientemente motivadora para completar todas las actividades para el estudio?

Conclusión:

¡Gracias nuevamente por su apoyo! La información que proveyeron es de mucha ayuda. Les enviare \$40 a cada uno en tarjetas de regalos a los correos electrónicos que me proveyeron anteriormente. ¿Estaría bien? En caso de que si, ¿prefieren tarjetas de regalo de Walmart o de Amazon?

Si tienen alguna otra sugerencia para mejorar el estudio, por favor me dejan saber.

¡Muchas gracias!