Migrating Latinas and the Grief Process

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MIGRATING LATINAS AND THE
GRIEF PROCESS

by

Daiana A. González

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GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

MIGRATING LATINAS AND THE GRIEF PROCESS

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This qualitative study examines the migratory experience of immigrant Latina married women. It looks at their experience from both an individual and a systemic perspective. It compares their experience to that of grief due to bereavement using Parkes’ theory of the grief process. This research also presents findings as to the effects of migration on the marital system.

Analysis of interview data provided by 12 Latin American women who resided in the United States ranging from 2 years to 10 years, allowed a comparison between the experience of these women and the grief process theory. The findings of the study indicate that although there are some slight differences between grieving a deceased person and grieving the loss of a country, the similarities predominate. The data gathered was divided into the categories of initial mixed-emotions, searching, anger, disorganization and despair, recovery. Furthermore, the impact of immigration on the
marital dyad was analyzed. The interviewees reported an increase in marital argument
during the first stages of immigration with a tendency to decrease as time lapses.
Overall, the interviewees identified their marital relationship as being stronger than prior
to coming to the United States.
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Introduction

The Hispanic population in the United States is increasing rapidly. It has increased 50% between 1990 and 2000 and, by 2002, more than one in eight people in the United States was of Hispanic origin. The Hispanic population in Utah is also increasing. Hispanics in Utah comprised 4.9 percent of the population in 1990, a number which increased to 9 percent by 2000 (US Census Bureau, 2000). As the percentage of Hispanics in the United States and Utah increases, the need for research in the mental health field pertaining to that population also becomes more necessary.

A significant percentage of Hispanics residing in the United States was born in foreign countries, with two in five (40%) Hispanics being born abroad (US Census Bureau, 2002). Among these, 52.1 percent entered the country between 1990 and 2002, 25.6 entered the country in the 1980s, and the remaining 22.3 percent entered before 1980.

Migrating to a new country requires substantial physical and psychological adjustment. Ryff and Singer (1996) suggested that self-acceptance; positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth are characteristics of psychological adjustment. As immigrants migrate to a new environment, they also have to adjust physically to being in a new land that may be different from their own.

As immigrants adjust to their new country, they undergo an acculturation process. As acculturation takes place, cultural minorities begin to take part in the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and practices of the host culture (Buddington, 2002; Landrine & Klonoff, 1994). Berry (1980) described four strategies for becoming acculturated:
integration, assimilation, separation/segregation, and marginalization. When integration occurs, the migrant is able to arrive at a compromise between the expectations and norms of the host country and those of her native country. Assimilation refers to the abandonment of one’s own cultural identity and adopting that of the host country. The opposite of assimilation is separation /segregation. In such an instance, the immigrant maintains her cultural heritage with no interest in adopting any of the aspects of the dominant culture. The fourth type of acculturation strategy is marginalization. In marginalization, one gives up one’s own cultural identity and does not show interest in positive relations with others. Strategies of assimilation, separation/segregation, and marginalization may all lead to acculturative stress, while integration is associated with less stress.

Acculturative stress is a factor affecting Hispanic immigrants. Smart and Smart (1995) emphasize that a significant factor in Hispanic acculturative stress is the loss of a support network. They stated, “Loss of social support and family ties is particularly acute for Hispanics because Hispanic cultures emphasize the sense of the collective over the individual, thus stressing affiliation and cooperation over competition and confrontation” (p. 392). Migrating families often move into an unknown and sometimes hostile environment, leaving their loved ones behind, while knowing that a return to their native countries will be difficult, if not impossible (Guarnaccia, DeLaCancela, & Carrillo, 1989).

An additional factor affecting the experience of immigration is the value placed on what was left behind in the previous country. In accordance with a social exchange approach (Ben-Sira, 1997), the decision to emigrate is based on the evaluation of the
perceived value the individual places on the costs and benefits of migrating. Immigrants migrate with subjective expectations about conditions in the new country. These expectations stem from information gathered from more than one source. Ben-Sira stated that “the understanding of, and the meaning attributed to, even the most reliable information is a product of interpretations based on the culturally infused frame of reference of the prospective immigrant” (p. 10). Thus, after having migrated to the new country, the immigrant might be confronted with a differing reality of what was expected.

In addition, according to the social exchange model, the values placed on the costs and benefits are based on abundance and scarcity. Ben-Sira (1997) further states that following immigration, the benefits might be devalued due to their abundance, and the things left behind will be valued due to their scarcity. This, in turn, causes the change to be viewed as a loss. Therefore loss, as it pertains to what was left behind, is a factor that cannot be ignored when trying to understand Hispanic immigrants.

Thus, when Hispanics come to the United States, they experience multiple losses. Parkes (1996) defined grief as a reaction to loss. Grief is a consequence of losses perceived as significant. Therefore, loss and grief are both components of the psychological experience of Hispanic immigrants. This study qualitatively examined, from the perspective of the wives, Hispanic immigrant married couples’ experience as they go through the experience of migrating to the United States. The scope of the study was limited to Hispanic couples that migrate voluntarily. The term “voluntary migration” refers to the choice to migrate in search of a more attractive future with more economic opportunities (Ben-Sira, 1997). This excludes refugees who leave their home country as a result of threat to their lives and liberty. Due to the amount of research supporting
Parkes’ model of the grief process with other populations (Bartrop, Hancock, Craig & Porrit, 1992; Cleiren, 1993; Levy, Derby & Martinkowski, 1993; Parkes, 1970, 1996; Parkes & Weiss, 1983; Prigerson, et al., 1996; Zisook & Shuchter, 1993), it was used as the theoretical framework for the present study.

Literature Review

Loss

Migration results in multiple types of losses, which are influenced by a number of factors. Rando (1993) suggests that there are primary and secondary losses. A primary loss is the loss of a loved one. Secondary losses constitute everything that the lost loved person contributed to the bereaved survivor. In this study, the primary loss will be the loss of a mother country, and secondary losses will include additional losses that come as a consequence of the primary losses.

Secondary losses can be divided into two different categories, which are physical and symbolic (Casado & Leung, 2001). A physical loss is the loss of tangible objects or people. A symbolic loss is an abstract loss of something intangible. Physical losses for Hispanic immigrants include the loss of family, friends, and significant others. In addition to physical losses, Hispanic immigrants experience multiple symbolic losses. For example, immigrant subjects in Aroian’s (1990) study used descriptions such as, “your whole life is gone”, when referring to the immigration experience. Symbolic losses may include the loss of a culture, roles, understood social customs, a cultural heritage, social support, and familiar social hierarchy. Furthermore, another type of symbolic loss that immigrants might experience is a loss of a sense of control (Smart & Smart, 1995). All of these losses accompany the primary loss, that of a country.
Another type of symbolic loss is the loss of one’s own identity. Mirsky (1991) framed the loss of the mother tongue and the acquisition of a second language as a separation-individuation process. She stated, “One loses one’s homeland, family, friends, culture and language which occupied not only one’s everyday life, but more importantly, one’s self-identity and the internal representations of one’s objects” (p. 618). There are other authors who have correlated the immigrant experience with a sense of identity loss. For example, Ward and Styles (2003) found that a reinvention of the self occurs with immigrants. Results from their study of 154 immigrants suggested that migration has either positive or negative consequences on the individual’s identity. The participants in the study that were in the positive category reported feeling emotionally stronger and more confident. Those participants whose responses were placed in the negative categories had not developed a sense of belonging to the new country. Thus, it can be seen that when migration takes place, the self undergoes changes that lead into either positive or negative changes on one’s identity.

The intensity of grief experienced after a loss is relative to the magnitude of the perceived loss. Some losses may be perceived as minor and others as major (Harvey, 2002). The magnitude of losing an insignificant possession is different than that of losing a loved one. Thus, the magnitude of perceived loss is relative to the perceived importance of what is being lost. Both Levinger (1992) and Parkes (1988) stated that the perception of the loss is dependent upon the relationship between the deceased and the person left behind. Parkes also stated that grief is aggravated if the lost person is someone who one would turn to in times of need. Levinger pointed to different aspects of the perception of a loss. He suggests that perceived loss is dependent upon factors,
such as the closeness of the relationship to the lost person and whether the death was unexpected. An immigrant’s perception of the loss of a country and what it constitutes, then, would have a significant impact on the grieving experience.

Perception is further affected by the costs and benefits of the loss. When change is perceived as a gain, acceptance may not be hard. However, when the loss is what Parkes (1996) defined as a ‘mixed-blessing’, people will resist change. Immigrants migrate with the hope of finding a positive and more beneficial lifestyle. Even though they see benefits to migrating, such as higher income, there are also disadvantages and losses. Shapiro (1995) stated:

Many children in Latino families grow up exposed to systematic risks such as poverty, community violence, deficient urban schools, limited access to health and mental health care, and racism. They are also likely to face a great deal of conflict in their attempts to stay loyal to Latino family, community, and culture of origin while growing up in a culture and receiving education in schools which celebrate the limitations of a monolingual English society and diminish the value of bilingual and bicultural competence. (p. 162)

Additionally, Lijtmaer (2001) stated that migration involves feelings of inadequacy, sorrow, and disappointment. Due to the nature of the losses that accompany migration, such losses can be considered ‘mixed-blessings’. Hispanics might perceive the losses that result from migration as substantial, and therefore, resist change.

Other variables that affect the impact of a loss have been identified. These include the nature of the loss; the relationship and attachment to the loss; the personality of the bereaved; and the circumstances surrounding the loss (Doka, 1998). For example, a circumstance surrounding the impact of the loss is whether the loss was expected or not. It has been found that sudden and unexpected death may lead to more intense grief.
(Parkes, 1996). Additional variables that influence the impact of a loss are social factors including age, gender, developmental level, social class, cultural and religious beliefs and practices, family, and external and internal support (Doka, 1998). For example, it has been found that widowers are more likely to suffer from health impairments than widows (Parkes, 1996; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). Furthermore, the developmental stage that a person is at will also affect the impact of the response to the loss. A child may not understand the concept of death the same way that an adult would (Doka, 1998). Additionally, the beliefs about the loss can influence the individual’s reaction to the loss. Wright et al. (1996) outline the difference between constraining beliefs and facilitative beliefs. Constraining beliefs intensify the problem while facilitative beliefs lead to more solutions. Thus, it can be concluded that when looking at the impact of grief, more than one factor needs to be taken into account.

In summary, Hispanic immigrants experience substantial losses, with the impact of the different loss depending on the perception of the loss. Different variables affecting the perception of a loss have been identified. Furthermore, the perception of the loss is affected by the perceived costs and benefits attached to the loss. Consequently, the impact of the losses that come as a consequence to migration varies depending on how the individual perceives such losses.

**Grief Process**

In his book *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life*, Parkes (1996) proposes a theory on grief where he describes grief as being a process, not a state. In addition, Parkes does not describe grief as a prolonged period of depression, but rather as acute and episodic pangs that are severe episodes of pain and anxiety. At first, following
bereavement, these pangs occur frequently, but as time passes they become less frequent and are mainly triggered by events that bring memories of the loss.

Parkes described numbness as the first phase of grief. Numbness leads to a lack of overt emotion; nevertheless, many people develop certain physical symptoms at this stage. Disbelief is also part of this phase and occurs when the person denies that a loss has occurred. The function of disbelief is to enable the bereaved person to avoid pain-provoking thoughts or to take away the pain from the thoughts.

Searching (pinning), a restless desire of the bereaved person to find the lost person, is the second phase of grief. It can become manifest in more than one manner. As the person searches for the dead person, she is involved in selecting places in which to look for her. The person perceives certain objects or places as fitting the picture of the loss object and is selective in deciding which items and locations fit the picture. Parkes described searching as having seven different components, which are: (a) alarm, tension, and a state of arousal; (b) restless movement; (c) preoccupations with thoughts of the lost person; (d) development of a perceptual set for that person; (e) loss of interest in personal appearance and other matters that normally occupy attention; (f) direction of attention towards those parts of the environment in which the lost person is most likely to be; and (g) calling for the lost person. Other aspects of the searching phase are preoccupation with thoughts of the loss person and with events leading to the loss of the person, happy memories replacing painful recollections, and repeating habits that were performed with and by the lost person.

As pinning takes place, the bereaved person will sometimes find ways to mitigate the pain. The most common form of mitigation is feeling like the deceased person is
there, even though she may not be present. Furthermore, the person left behind might have dreams in which the dead person appears. Through these means of mitigating, the person that is still alive symbolically finds the dead person. However, there are other ways of mitigating pain that include avoiding thoughts of the loss and building a new image of the dead person. When avoiding the thoughts of the lost one, the person still alive may also avoid people and situations that will act as reminders. Mitigation helps relief the pain of grief and of traumatic memories.

Parkes (1996) emphasizes the feelings of anger and guilt. Guilt is expressed in the form of self-reproach, and anger is often associated with guilt. The target and expression of anger varies amongst people. At times, the person left behind seeks someone to blame, such as someone else or the person, herself. Furthermore, the person might show resistance to those trying to help her. Parkes found that anger is apparent in the pining phase of grief and disappears in the next phase.

As pining diminishes, a period of disorganization and despair follows, during which time there is uncertainty, aimlessness, and apathy. The bereaved person recognizes that some of the acts and thoughts performed in the pining phase were inappropriate. The phase of disorganization and despair is not a clear-cut phase, and it can reoccur multiple times. The leading emotion during this phase is depression. In many cases, the roles of the survivor change since she has to fill the gap left by the dead person. As this takes place, one starts to identify more with the dead person by performing the activities and roles that the dead person used to perform. During the disorganization and despair phase, the person left behind concentrates more in the past rather than in the future.
Recovering, the final element of the grief process, constitutes gaining a new identity. In the case of a widow, recovery is achieved as the widow goes from living a ‘widow’ identity into living a ‘woman’ identity. The bereaved person progressively regains interest in the world. Furthermore, she gradually stops looking at the past and starts looking at the future. Recovery involves her starting to gain a new identity independent of the dead person.

_Grief Upon the Family_

Although Parkes’ (1970, 1983) research has mainly been at the individual level, there are those who have looked at grief from a systemic perspective. Looking at grief at a systemic level helps one identify the impact of grief in a given system, rather than at an individual level.

A family’s strictness of rules concerning the expectations for grief will affect their reaction to a loss. Nadeau (2001) explicated how the sense of loss in a family comes in the context of roles as they relate to family position and rules that govern family interaction, including how the family should grieve. If the rules are flexible, family members will have less difficulty grieving. Furthermore, flexible rules are more likely to change if they are inadequate. Consequently, rigid rules can bring disruption to a system. Shapiro (1994) stated that “grief is a crisis of both attachment and identity, disrupting family stability, in the interrelated domains of emotions, interactions, social roles, and meanings” (p.17). Grief can bring discord and conflict in a family (Bowlby-West, 1982, Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991). Rigid rules make the system’s grief process harder. Consequently, grief can bring instability to the homogeneity of a system.
Nevertheless, the trauma of a loss can also strengthen a family system (Fish, 1986). Often times, bereaved parents are denied social support (Rando, 1986), and, therefore, become each other’s main source of support (Kamm & Vandenberg, 2001). Thus, depending on the circumstances, experiencing a primary loss might either bring discord or strength to the marital relationship.

Research on Immigrants and Grief

There has been little research studying the grief process as it relates to Latino immigrants. While some research has been conducted on immigration and grief, the amount relating to Latinos and migratory grief is limited. Literature in the area has mainly been based either on clinical experience or on the study of one culture and then generalized to all immigrants. For example, in 1974 Garza-Guerrero published an article relating to immigrants in which he discussed cultural shock and mourning. Fisher (1989) identified perceived loss of the homeland as being similar to that of the grief process resulting from the loss of a loved one. Furthermore, Arredondo-Dowd (1981) made a connection, mainly based on her clinical experience, between an immigrant’s grief and Bowlby’s (1961) phases of grief. Espin (1987) suggested, based on her clinical experience, that the impact of immigration on women is different than on men. She narrowed her analysis of psychological impact of migration to Latinas. Espin cited Arredondo-Dowd’s (1981) stages of acculturation and adaptation when describing the process that immigrants go through as one of adaptation.

Some qualitative research has been conducted to explore the topic of migratory grief in various cultures. Schneller (1981) interviewed 13 Soviet-Jewish immigrants and identified different phases and symptoms of mourning. She was able to identify three
different phases that the thirteen Soviet-Jewish immigrants experienced. The first phase identified was the protest phase, including the components of anxiety, physical stress, anger, preoccupation with the lost country, and idealization. The second phase was disorganization and depression. Most of the immigrants reported varying degrees of depression related to their immigration experience. The final phase in the process, as described by Schneller, was the detachment phase. She discovered that the women found a barrier to integrating and adjusting to the new culture. Men, on the other hand, indicated a more complete resolution of mourning than women. This finding concurs with Espin’s (1987) assertion that the psychological impact of migrating women is different than that of migrating men. According to Schneller’s study, 12 out of 13 subjects had not completed the grief process. Her sample had resided in the United States for a minimum of one year and a maximum of three years. Based on this information, Schneller concluded that mourning the loss of a country is a longer process than mourning the loss of a love-object. Nevertheless, the duration of the loss of a love-object does not have a fixed time and varies from individual to individual.

Other qualitative research exploring migratory grief has been conducted. Aroian (1990) interviewed 25 Polish immigrants and identified common themes in the interviewees’ responses. The themes were loss and disruption, occupation, language, subordination, feeling at home, and grief resolution and return visits. Emmenegger-Hindin (1993) found a universal theme of grieving based on a sample of 12 women from three different countries (Ecuador, Russia, and Japan). Her research results indicated that grieving is a normal part of the acculturation process. Ward and Styles (2003) did a study in which they surveyed 154 participants and interviewed 40 of them. A big aim of
their study was to determine whether the loss that immigrants face can result in the threatening of a person’s identity. They found that women who fostered a new identity were able to reinvent themselves. On the other hand, those who did not experienced distress. They indicated that what was of significance in their study was that interviewees experienced growth in the self in that they indicated being more confident and having more emotional strength and independence. Nevertheless, not all of them reported a sense of belonging to the new country.

All of the qualitative studies mentioned thus far showed that immigrants experience different aspects of migratory grief. The studies that looked at grief in phases found that there are phases of migratory grief. Furthermore, a difference was found in gender and the intensity of grief. However, even though these studies supported the notion that immigrants experience grief, none of the studies were specifically targeted to the Hispanic population.

The quantitative research performed in the realm of migratory grief has identified the existence of distress and depression. Prudent (1988) conducted a study which involved 100 Haitian men and women in which she found a correlation between Haitian’s symptoms of psychological distress and their level of grieving. These symptoms diminished with the passage of time. Brener (1991) did a study with Mexican immigrant subjects and found a relationship between low acculturation, high depression, and high perceived losses. Lakatos (1992) identified migratory grief as being one of the predictors of psychological symptomatology in Hispanic immigrants. Casado and Leung (2001) researched migratory grief in Chinese elderly immigrants. They found in their sample of 150 Chinese immigrants that those who had higher degrees of migratory grief, lower
English proficiency, were younger, and visited their home country were more likely to feel depressed.

Rationale for the Present Study

Research relating to Hispanic immigrants and the grief process is sparse. As the percentage of immigrants in the United States increases, so will the need for research on the psychological impact of migration. Immigration and the grief process have been studied to some extent; however, the amount of research targeted specifically at Hispanic immigrants and the grief process is minimal.

As the Hispanic population increases, the demand for research related to that specific population also increases. Hispanics are currently the largest minority group in the United States. In addition, many migrate with their spouses. Thus, the dynamics of the marital system as it pertains to migratory grief cannot be ignored. Unfortunately, no migratory research that looks at the migratory experience from a systems perspective has been conducted within the Hispanic population. The present study looked at the effects of relocating to a new country on the individual and the marital dyad.

Like many of the studies previously mentioned (Aroian, 1990; Brener, 1991; Casado & Leung, 2001; Emmenger-Hindin, 1993; Lakatos, 1992; Prudent, 1988; Schneller, 1981; Ward & Styles, 2003), this study looked at migratory grief. However, it only looked at the Hispanic population. Although Brener and Lakatos’ studies looked at the Hispanic population, the scope of this study was different from their quantitative studies. The present qualitative study examined the grief process of Hispanic immigrants through the lens of Parkes’ (1996) theory. Thus, it contributes to the existing knowledge on migratory grief, in general, and to the Hispanic experience, in particular.
Methods

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were used to examine the grief process of Hispanic immigrant couples. Since the observations needed cannot be easily reduced to numbers, qualitative research was most appropriate in studying the grief process in Hispanic immigrants. Additionally, when conducting an interview, the interviewer is exposed to verbal and non-verbal cues that otherwise would not be evident (Babbie, 2003). Furthermore, Seidman (1998) stated that because the stories of those we interview are of worth, people we interview are hard to code with numbers, and finding pseudonyms for subjects is a sensitive task. Most importantly, through semi-structured interviews, the researchers were able to acquire a deeper and fuller understanding of the experience of Hispanics who migrate into the United States.

Sample

Due to the difficulty in identifying and selecting participants randomly, this study used a convenience sample of subjects located through different contacts. Participants were recruited from different areas where there is a large concentration of Hispanic immigrants in Utah including the Centro Hispano and local churches. The purposive sample constituted a snowball sample (Newfield, 1996). Data was collected on the members of the targeted population that were found in the locations specified, and those individuals were then asked to voluntarily provide information needed to locate other members of that population whom they might know.

The researchers sampled 12 female Hispanic immigrants who migrated with their spouses from various Latin American countries. The nationalities represented in the
sample were Peru, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Colombia. The ages of the participants ranged from twenty eight to forty three, with almost half of the participants being in their thirties. In order to be eligible to participate, participants had to have been married prior to coming to the United States. Originally they had to have resided in the United States for a minimum of two years and a maximum of seven years. This time period was considered sufficient for different aspects of the mourning process to develop. It has been found that immigration stress peaks at twenty-seven months and then starts decreasing (Wang & Darryl, 2004). The degradation process can last up to five years, totaling to about seven years of stress (Wang & Darryl). As the interviewees were sampled, it was found that those who had been longer in the United States were able to provide additional information. Thus, the required time period for them to have been in the United States was extended to a minimum of two years and a maximum of ten years. It was not expanded past ten years since too long of a time span might cause problems with the accuracy of information. Therefore, the range of required years in the United States was made to cover the sufficient amount of years that would lend a vivid description of the migratory experience.

Several measures were taken to protect participants from harm. Participation in the study was voluntary. Prior to being interviewed, participants read and signed an informed consent form. Furthermore, interviewees had the option of agreeing to a processual consent (Ramos, 1989). This involves the interviewer giving participants constant opportunities to stop the interviewer or not answer a particular difficult question. Participants’ identities were kept strictly confidential.

Interview Procedures
Initial contact with the participants was made over the phone to set up an appointment. Interviews were conducted in their homes and at the Brigham Young University Comprehensive Clinic. Gorden (1980) stated that when conducting an interview, the place should maximize the participant and interviewer’s physical comfort. Participants were given the opportunity to determine whether they wanted the interviews to be conducted in their homes or at the clinic. Privacy was assured and distractions were minimized. All measures were taken to make the interview procedure a comfortable one for the interviewees.

Each participant was interviewed separately by one interviewer and the interviews were audio-taped. Since the interviewer is the main research tool in a qualitative interview (Payne, 1999), careful consideration was given as to who the interviewers should be. There were three interviewers, all of whom were Hispanic females, and the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Based on the implication that Hispanic immigrants will feel more comfortable talking to someone of their same ethnicity about sensitive issues, such as status in the country and likes and dislikes towards the host country, Hispanic interviewers were used. All three interviewers had an in-depth understanding of Parkes’ grief process and of the nature of the study. Furthermore, they were trained in interviewing skills. They were trained on strategies that lead to establishing rapport with the participants being interviewed (Payne, 1999). They were further trained on the types of non-verbal behaviors that make the interviewee feel more comfortable. Amongst these are the use of eye contact and maintaining an open and relaxed body posture (Egan, 1994). Furthermore, interviewers were taught to identify when it is appropriate to ask adequate probing questions. Due to the sensitive nature of
the interview, the need to demonstrate respect towards the interviewees was highly
emphasized during the training process.

*Instruments*

*Questionnaire.* The protocol of the semi-structured interview was designed by the
researcher (See Appendix A). Questions were based on the grief process identified by
Parkes (1996). In order to avoid biases in the questions, three separate researchers
participated in adapting the questions for the interview. The questions were composed of
open-ended and closed-ended questions (Bowling, 1997). Open-ended questions invited
the interviewees to share their story and elicit expansive responses. Closed-ended
questions were used to check factual details.

The questionnaire consisted of three main sections. The first section was
designed to gather general information regarding the participants’ experience when
coming to the United States. The second was composed of more specific questions
related to the participants’ experience in the United States as it relates to Parkes’ theory
of the grief process. This section contained questions specifically related to loss and
grief. The interviews culminated with the last set of questions aimed at understanding the
dynamics of the couple’s marital relationship as they migrated into the United States.
Questions at the beginning of the interview were general and evolved into being more
specific as the interview progressed. All of the questions were asked consecutively
without any intermissions. Interviews lasted approximately ninety minutes.

*Analysis of Data*

Data analysis and data collection were done simultaneously (Newfield, Sells,
Smith, Newfield & Newfield, 1996). The interviews were audio tape-recorded and then
transcribed in full. Data management was the first step towards data analysis (Brewer, 2000). Data management is a means of organizing data into manageable units. The analysts created index codes (index categories) based on Parkes’ grief process. These index codes were used to organize the data. At this stage of data analysis no meaning was fixed to the data. Note was taken as to the location of every extract within each code. By so doing, the researcher knew where every reference pertaining to a specific index code could be found within the data. Although data management is not an analysis, it assisted in organizing the data in order to facilitate data analysis.

The coders then moved into qualitative description and pattern-searching (Brewer, 2000). This involved describing and explaining what was observed. As part of the process, coders picked out events that were considered focal for the participants. They further found descriptions of the behaviors that each code represents. Following the qualitative description of the codes, coders searched for patterns within the data. From these patterns, the analysts were able to further classify the data. In so doing, they attached meaning to the data.

The final step in the data analysis was to search for what Becker (1998) defined as deviant cases. Deviant cases were exceptions to the rule that did not fit in the classification system. These cases challenge the conclusions that the researchers wanted to make. By confronting these negative cases, the correspondence of the reality the design attempts to represent was improved (Brewer, 2000).

Results

The data gathered was coded and placed into categories. Initially Parkes’ grief framework was used to establish the categories. Two additional categories were
uncovered throughout the process. The new categories are initial mixed emotions and
migration effects of the marital relationship. The initial categories were numbness,
searching, anger and guilt, disorganization and despair, recovery. Two categories were
further divided into subcategories. Searching has three subcategories, which are
preoccupation with thoughts of their native country, direction of attention towards parts
of the environment that remind them of their country, and calling those they left behind.
The disorganization and despair phase was divided into three subcategories. These are
feelings of sadness, role changes, and language. Appendix B contains a chart that
illustrates Parkes’ model and the model uncovered in this study.

Numbness

None of the women interviewed related experiences similar to those of the
numbness phase described by Parkes (1996). They did not report a feeling of numbness
or blunting. Additionally, they did not describe outright disbelief that the loss occurred.
As part of disbelief, Parkes illustrates the widows as trying to convince themselves that
the loss had not happened. He further specified that this type of outright disbelief is rare.
Disbelief as described by Parkes was not a theme that emerged in the interviews.

Instead, the women interviewed described their initial emotional reaction to
having left their native country and arriving to a new country as one of having mixed
feelings. Only two women described their initial reaction as entirely positive, and two
women described it as being entirely negative. The remaining women reported having
had both positive and negative reactions. They described being amazed by the novelty of
the host country. They used words such as surprise and amazement to describe their
reaction to the United States. However, they also reported having experienced negative
emotions, such as sadness and frustration. When asked how she first felt when arriving, a thirty-five year-old woman who had been in the United States for three and a half years stated,

The truth is that when I first arrived, I felt the novelty of having arrived here. The environment, another type of life, the United States seemed so beautiful.

However, she later stated:

I would cry because I missed my customs. I wanted to go back after the first week, but I would tell myself, ‘no, an airplane ticket is too expensive’.

Another interviewee gave a response that further illustrates the theme of initial mixed feelings. After having described how surprised she was at the spaciousness of the United States, she stated that she felt lonely during her first week in the United States.

When referring to her family in Chile she said,

I felt abandoned. Like if everyone in the world had died. That was the sensation that I was left with. An emptiness. It is very different to be in one’s own country, and if it is far away you can take a bus or a taxi or drive and be there; than to know that one will not be able to reach them (family) when one wants to be with them.

Thus, most of the women described their initial reaction as one of having mixed feelings. They were surprised by the novelty of being in a new country as well as sad for having left behind components of their native country.

Two women described their initial reaction as being entirely positive. One of the interviewees also mentioned noticing the novelty of the new country. However, she did not have negative feelings blended with the feelings of novelty like the other interviewees. She described being amazed by the size of the streets in the United States.
She further mentioned being impressed by the openness of women to state their opinion.

She then proceeded to say:

> Everything was fine at first because we were just getting to know the place and we were together. Afterwards we were able to experience different things, but at first all of the experiences were very positive.

Two women described their initial reaction as being entirely negative. One of them has been in the United States for four years. She still has negative feelings towards the United States and wishes to return to her country. The other one has been in the United States for seven years. She stated feeling more patriotism at this time towards the United States than towards her native country. They both had initial negative reactions to being in the United States. Nevertheless, one’s attitude switched to a positive one while the other’s attitude remained negative.

**Searching**

Three components of searching were evident in the data gathered. These were preoccupation with thoughts of their native country, direction of attention towards parts of the environment that remind them of their country, and calling those they left behind.

*Preoccupation with thoughts of their native country.* All the respondents coincided in saying that during their first period in the United States, they mainly thought about the past. They were preoccupied with thoughts of the family and culture left behind. As time progressed, thoughts started to turn towards the present and future. However, thoughts about the past and their native country are still present to a lesser extent. Only one of the respondents, who had been in the United States for four years, seemed to still be constantly concentrating on what she left behind. Another respondent originally from Chile specified that she mainly thought about the past for the first two
years of her time in the United States. The factor that made her start thinking about the future in the United States was having a baby. When talking about the future, all but one talked with optimism.

Attention to parts of the environment that remind them of their country. This category has been divided into three subcategories: activities, traditions, and return visits. They all fit under the main category in that they involve a behavior that will guide them to momentarily find elements of their culture that they have to some extent left behind. Commonalities in all three subcategories were found amongst the interviewees’ responses.

All but three of the respondents reported going to places and activities that reminded them of their native country. These activities can either be in their homes or outside their homes. One of the respondents has actively been involved in planning cultural activities. Others reported trying to celebrate special dates in the manner that they did in their countries. Special dates included birthdays, Christmas, Reyes Magos, and 10 de Mayo. Other forms of being involved in behaviors that direct them to their cultural roots included listening to music and watching videos of their country.

Additionally, a Chilean interviewee who has resided in the United States for four and a half years related that she not only directed her attention to places that reminded her of her country, but that she also tried to imagine that she was in her country:

I’d imagine that I was in the street and I would try to imagine the things that were in my country. I would try to imagine the trees and the people that lived close to me.
She also talked about how she and her family would go to particular places that reminded them of their country. When recounting the first time that she passed by a particular place that reminded her of her country, she related the following:

Right behind the train trail, there is a small river. It is very similar to a place in our city where we used to go and we had to cross the train trail. Therefore, the first time I saw it, I was under the impression that if I crossed it I would be in Chile.

Half of the interviewees reported trying to maintain their cultural traditions. Food was an essential part of this. They tried to make the same food that they ate in their countries. As one of the interviewees stated, “The days when I cook, we always eat Peruvian food”. She then proceeded to say, “There has always been traditional Peruvian food here (her home); when we invite our friends we try to make Peruvian food so that they can taste it”. Most of the women interviewed stated that cooking and eating food from their country reminds them of their country.

Only two of the interviewees had had the opportunity to have a return visit to their native country. Nevertheless, there was a big proportion of the interviewees who either planned on returning or at times had the desire to return. One woman said that she missed her family so much that she frequently had thoughts of returning to her native country of Peru. One of the motivating factors that made her think about returning to her country of origin was the family left behind. “I think about them (family) a lot. I miss them. It has been hard for me to be here. Our goal is to return, but it is still hard to be here, because one misses one’s family”. Other women also described having had, at some point or another, the desire to return. One interviewee stated that her family plans every year to go visit their country, but that they had never been able to do so. Another woman who had been in the United States for four and a half years recounted having at
some point the desire to return to her country of origin. She would tell her husband that she missed her native country, that it would have been better for them not to have come to the United States, and that she was planning on leaving. Both the thought and action of returning to their native countries illustrates a search for what they left behind.

*Calling those they left behind.* All of the respondents reported frequent calls to family members left behind, regardless of the amount of time that they had been in the United States. The number of times that they call varied from two to three times a week, to every other week. The frequency of the calls did not diminish over time. Calling is a way of maintaining contact with those left behind.

*Anger and Guilt*

Anger was mainly shown in terms of discontent and blaming. Similar to the anger characteristic of those mourning the loss of a loved one, the expression of anger varied from person to person. It was directed both outwardly toward external factors and inwardly towards their own selves. For all of the respondents, most of the anger occurred in the early stages of being in the country. As time progressed, most of the women demonstrated more love towards the host country and less bitterness, discontent, and blaming. Nevertheless, there was one interviewee who, after having been in the United States for four years, still showed excessive anger.

The most frequent form of anger described by more than half of the women interviewed was feeling discontent towards the people in the United States. In many cases, these women experienced racism directed towards them. For example, an Argentine respondent expressed, “I don’t like some people who are racist and have a weird idea of Hispanics”. However, most of the women recognized that only a few U.S.
citizens expressed racism; the majority of Americans were good people. The same interviewee later said in her interview: “Most of the people that I have met in Utah are good people”. One particular interviewee stated having felt upset towards the foreigners residing in the United States. She further specified that there is racism amongst the Hispanic population itself. This form of anger was expressed through discontent with others.

Anger was also demonstrated in the form of blaming. Interviewees reported blaming their own selves for their problems as a consequence of migrating to a new country; at other times they blamed their husband. One individual reported solely blaming her husband. She directly stated that at times she blamed her husband and then said:

I say to him, “why did you want to come here if we were fine in our country?” I say that many times, but then my anger dissipates. Sometimes one speaks out of anger.

They all reported having found themselves in a state of blaming when they are enduring hardships. A pattern as to when blaming is most prevalent on a time line was not evident. Most of the respondents stated that they still sporadically found themselves engaged in blaming, and the blaming is usually triggered by current stressful situations.

Other forms of anger included resentful feelings towards the host country and towards their native country. These forms of anger were not as prevalent as those described above. Two women reported feeling upset at the host country. One of them reported that her feelings towards the United States were of anger for being such a good country. She stated when referring to the United States, “Why did it have to be such a
good country? Why did we have to move so far away from our family?” She then proceeded to describe her initial feelings towards the United States as anger and said:

   In one’s country one cannot achieve much. Maybe it is because there are more people here and they have a different mentality here. But why did we have to, in a sort of way, detach ourselves from our country and leave in search of a better future for us and for our children?

   In a sense, she was not only upset at the United States, but she was also blaming it for her loss.

   The final form of anger was resentment towards the native country. Two women reported having strong negative emotions connected to their native countries. One of them said the following when asked if she ever found herself blaming herself or others for the problems arising as a result of immigration:

   Yes, I blame Mexico’s government. If they would have good job opportunities with good salaries, if they would not increase the price of food because they increase the price of food but not the salaries, if I could make good money there in my country, of course I would not be here.

This statement shows resentment towards the native country. Furthermore, it blames the native country for problems that arose as a result of immigration.

*Disorganization and Despair*

   The interview data gathered illustrated three main components of disorganization and despair, one of which involved feelings of sadness, another involved role changes, and the last one is language. Sadness came as a consequence of leaving valuable people and traditions behind. Role changes were a consequence of being in a new country, in different living situations, and a different culture. Feelings of sadness and
disorganization caused by changes in the environment were described by all of the respondents.

Sadness. Parkes (1996) defined depression as the characteristic emotion of this phase. Although depression was not directly measured in this study, moments of sadness were described by all of the interviewees. Hence, we chose to base this category on descriptions of times when the respondents reported feeling sad. Measuring the severity of depression (clinical vs. situational) was not within the scope of this study. However, most of the responses pointed towards situational depression, since it mainly occurred during stressful times.

All of the interviewees stated that the first year was the time during which feelings of sadness were most prevalent. It coincides with being the most stressful time, with finances being the main stress-provoking factor. As time passed, feelings of sadness diminished. This indicates that their experience is not characterized as a prolonged period of depression. A participant who had been in the United States for nine years stated:

One suffers a lot when one first arrives. But like I was telling you, after a while one gets used to it. We went through a lot of hardships when we first arrived. The difference between the time when we first arrived and now is notorious. At least we now have more in terms of finances. When I first arrived I would always say, “I was happier in Mexico”. But now I feel fine here.

It was evident that following the initial period of sadness, it periodically re-emerged as acute and episodic pangs. The interviewees reported feeling nostalgic during special events, such as birthdays and Christmas. A few women reported feeling sad when their babies were born. They wished that they could share that experience with family members not present in this country. Other women stated feeling sad when sad events,
such as the death of family members, happened in their native countries. One Mexican woman who had been in the United States for ten years and had recently obtained her residency mentioned, “If you would have talked to me one year ago I would have told you that I was not happy”. She attributed that to being unable to leave the country. She described how her grandparents passed away and she was not able to go to Mexico to attend the funeral. Many of the women did not feel good as a consequence of their inability to be with their loved ones during such hard times.

This theme also included the extent to which they missed their native country as a factor that affected their mood. The participants mainly missed their families and their customs; they did not necessarily miss the country itself. As one of the women stated, “Look, if we talk about missing Peru, I never missed it. Missing my family is a whole different story”. She then proceeded to say:

When it comes to my family, I even miss them now. I would like to see them, but I came with the mentality that I would not see them for many years, so I came prepared for it. But I stopped crying after talking to them on the phone after one year of being here. This means that I would cry and cry after hanging up the phone, and I stopped doing that after the first year.

Another interviewee stated when talking about her experience in the United States:

I felt bored and I would cry because I missed my customs. I wanted to go back after the first week of being here, but I would tell myself that a plane ticket was too expensive.

*Change in roles.* An important component of disorganization and despair is the change in roles and how it affects those experiencing such changes. Only one of the interviewees reported not having had a change in roles. She specified that she worked in her native country, just like she does now. She also took care of her children in her
country, which has not changed in the United States. On the other hand, many of the women said that they worked in their native and host countries, but that they still experienced a change in roles when coming to the United States. One Peruvian woman reported that she does not currently work. She described being able to stay in the home with her children as a positive change. A few interviewees stated that their work status went down in the United States. One expressed discontent with not being able to find a job similar to the one she had in her native country. She was the main provider in her native country and now her husband is the main provider. Although their role as members of the work force has not changed drastically, many reported having noticed a change in their roles. Some reported working more hours and others reported working less.

Almost all of the women mentioned that there have been changes in their role as women. One of them explained that she feels more equal to her husband now. She noticed that her husband also changed his attitude towards women. Another respondent talked about how she feels that she has more of an opportunity to develop as a woman in this country. She also mentioned that she is able to do community work here that she would have never been able to do in her country of origin. In addition, an interviewee who was in the process of acquiring an advanced education degree along with her husband reported becoming more independent in the United States. She reported:

I used to be more dependent. I didn’t know that. I always thought that I was an independent woman and that I made my own decisions. When I came here, I realized that I did a lot, a lot, I would say 70% of what my husband would tell me to do. Since I had stopped working for many years, I depended a lot on him. I would ask everything. “Are we going to do this? Can we do it? Should we do it? Should we not do it? I already did it”. It reached that point. The thing is that when you do it in the medium in which we lived, it
looked normal. The man in our countries is the one who says the last word. When I was here, I realized that I couldn’t do that because he was busy. I realized that I was the one who needed to start making decisions. My husband would tell me, “You can’t count on me, you need to decide yourself”.

She then proceeded to explain that making such a transition was hard for her. She described feeling as though she was blind, deaf, and mute. As reported by her, it took her about one year to adapt to such a change. All who described a change in their role as women in society reported being satisfied with the change.

Language. Language was included as a subcategory of disorganization and despair. Not only were the interviewees exposed to a new culture and new roles, but they also found a language barrier. This language barrier led to more disorganization and despair. One of the women who had been in the United States for four years stated:

It is like if one is in one place and it is hard because you do not know what they are saying, if they are insulting you, or if they like what you said. So I feel a little bit uncomfortable because I feel isolated from everything. One does not know what is going on and that bothers me. I try to learn it, but there are times that I learn something but when I am going to speak I forget. I forget everything I learned. I try to say one word and nobody understands me. I then think to myself that my English is horrible. I definitely think that that stops one from trying. I think that one of the biggest barriers is language.

All of the interviewees reported language as being an essential component of their migratory experience. They stated feeling lost and not being able to communicate with others.

Recovery

Although all of the women interviewed demonstrated different elements of recovery described by Parkes, only one of them illustrated full recovery. They have gradually started looking at the future more than at the past. Furthermore, they all
seemed to be gaining a new identity in the sense that they are integrating their old identity with the creation of a new identity. A woman from Ecuador remarkably described this process:

You leave your whole life behind. Everything that you were before, everything that you did before, you leave it all behind, because it is not enough here to say, “I was this.” That does not count. What counts is what you are doing right now and what you have achieved here. I used to feel like if I had left my whole past behind. It is like starting again here, trying to build everything from point zero. I then realized that everything that you were before is the base for everything that you will be in the future, for what you achieve in the future. But during the period of adaptation, during the first few months, one has little identity.

Parkes (1996) described recovery as gaining a new identity independent of the dead person. However, all of the interviewees’ countries still seemed to be very present in their lives. Searching was a predominant characteristic of their responses. They still seemed to be making sense of the new culture and how it blends with their old culture.

There was only one participant who clearly fit Parkes’ description of recovery. Her thoughts were mainly on the future. Although she did not rid herself of her own identity, she mingled her old experiences with her new experiences to create a new identity. She reported feeling completely satisfied with the host country and the life that she is living now. She described her country with love, but at the same time with no desire to return. She was able to integrate both cultures and create a new identity without discarding her old identity. Nevertheless, she was the exception.

*Migrating Effects on the Marital Relationship*

In addition to describing their individual experiences related to the immigration process, the women also talked about the changes in their relationship with their husbands following immigration. Many of them reported changes in roles in the marital
These changes in roles were based on the division of labor both in the home and in the workforce. Nevertheless, all of the interviewees but one described flexibility in rules pertaining to role change. As described by them, both members in the marital dyad adapted well to the changes in roles. Furthermore, they described such role changes as being positive.

They all stated that their relationship with their spouse is now stronger. Additionally; all but one specified that the communication with their spouse had improved, and they pointed out the fact that the increase in communication is what strengthened their relationship. They described immigration as a factor that brought them closer together since they only had each other in the new country. A statement made by a Colombian immigrant illustrates how her relationship with her husband was strengthened as positive communication with him increased. It also explains how not having a big support network drew the couple closer to each other:

Everyone is doing their own thing. What I mean by this is that there are a lot of people, but it feels like if we are so alone. Then we realize that we can’ t depend on other people. We have to be very close as a couple to see how we are going to solve our situation. What is more convenient for us and all of that. If we don’ t both talk then there is no other way here.

Another interviewee who had been in the United States for three years said the following when referring to her marital relationship:

Our relationship is stronger because we only have each other. When I was in my own country, I would go to my mom’s house or my aunt’s house. In other words one can run to a friend. One feels more support in that sense. On the other hand here, when we have problems we have to solve them ourselves and without the help of any other people.
It can be deducted from the interviews that migrating to a new country strengthens the marital relationship in the long run.

However, half of the respondents described a phase in which the arguments between them and their spouses increased. This phase occurred during the first stage of immigration. Nevertheless, they all stated that in the long run, their relationship with their husbands was strengthened. For example, one of the interviewees said, “Look, we have had downs (in the relationship), extreme downs, but now we are doing very well”. Another interviewee recounted how she divorced her husband after three years of being in the United States. She remarried him several months later. She further stated that her relationship with her husband at this point (7 years in the country) is stronger than it had ever been. Another respondent, who had been in the country for 4 years, stated that her relationship is currently stronger than it had ever been in the past. Nevertheless, she stated that her relationship with her husband could use some help and that they still argue frequently. The interviewees described a trend in which there is initially an increase in arguments, but looking at it in the long spectrum, their marital relationships were strengthened.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that, although there are some differences in the emotional reaction of those reporting the loss of a person by death and those migrating to a new country, the similarities seem to be more prevalent. While the grief of the bereaved can be traced to a specific person, the grief of Latina immigrants points towards the family and customs left behind. This study elaborated on a working concept of grief as experienced by married Latina immigrants.
There is general agreement regarding several aspects of grief as experienced by those who lose a loved one by death and those who migrate to a new country. Those interviewed described many components of searching similar to those identified by Parkes (1996). They all reported concentrating their thoughts in the past when they first arrived. As time progressed, their thoughts started to gradually move towards the present and future. This gradual process of thoughts is also present in bereaved individuals. As the grief process occurs and they move towards recovery, they start directing their thoughts towards the future.

Additional similarities between the migrating experience and the grief process were found in the area of searching. Latina immigrants tend to, at some point or another, focus their attention on parts of the environment that remind them of their native country. This is mainly observable in their desire to attend cultural activities, maintain their traditions, and return to the native country. Similar to the widow who maintains the habits of activities that she performed with her husband, these women try to maintain the traditions of their country. Furthermore, the frequency of phone calls made to those in their native country did not decrease over time. Unlike Latina immigrants, a bereaved person cannot have that type of direct contact with the deceased person. However, the bereaved person still searches and is in need of that contact. She achieves this by literally calling for the lost person, having remarkably clear memories of the dead person, experiencing illusions of having seen or heard the dead person; and even having dreams which involve the dead person. The searching behavior described by Parkes (1996) was noticeable in all the women interviewed for this study.
The interviewees also demonstrated having experienced anger and guilt similar to that described by Parkes. Anger was a common theme among all of the respondents. It was mainly present in the form of discontent and blaming. Anger was expressed towards the native country, the host country, their spouses, and their own selves. Interestingly, anger was mainly prevalent during the first period of their migratory experience. This coincides with Parkes’ research in that anger tends to occur during the first stages of grief. As time progresses, the feelings of anger begin to mitigate.

Experiences of disorganization and despair were also related by those being interviewed. The most salient descriptions of disorganization and despair involved feelings of sadness, role changes, and language, all of which had an impact in the experience of the immigrants interviewed.

In addition, all of the respondents reported feeling sad at some point or another. They described the first year as the hardest one, during which time sadness predominated. This indicates that depression is not a prevalent characteristic present in the whole migratory grief process. Nevertheless, they did experience occasional pangs of sadness after the first year. These pangs of sadness were usually precipitated by events that made them think of their native country. These events were either dramatic in nature or happy. When describing happy events, they described mixed feelings in which they were happy for what had happened and at the same time sad for not being able to share those experiences with far away family members. Sadness was a part of the migratory experienced described by all of the interviewees.

Much to our surprise, they did not miss the country itself, but what the country represents. The two main common denominators that they all stated missing were their
old customs and family. They miss the food and the traditions. They also miss the presence of their extended family. This supports the literature on Latinos and their social support network. Smart and Smart (1995) described the loss of social support as being one of the most significant aspects of acculturative stress for Latinos. Once they come to the United States, they lose that social support network that is so essential to them. Many of them reported feeling lonely and missing having a physical interaction with their family. That may explain in part, why contact with family in their country of origin did not decrease over time.

All of the interviewees but one stated that their role in the family and in society changed as a result of coming to the United States. This probably involved a period of adjustment. The role conflicts mainly involved gender differences between the expectations of them as women in the country left behind as opposed to those in the new country. This change in role was positive for them and contributed to their growth as individuals. In addition, most of them reported being able to make things work so that they can spend more time with their children, which increased their feelings of contentment. Many of them also stated feeling more equal to their husbands than they did in their native country. As the women talked about the change in roles experienced by them, they also showed optimism and expressed feelings of contentment. This indicates that although there have been changes in roles, those changes have had a positive psychological impact on them.

Language was mentioned by all the respondents as an important part of their experience. Hence, it cannot be ignored. Furthermore, language has been a prevalent theme in the immigration literature. Padilla and Perez (2003) hypothesized that having to
cope with language is one of the factors that makes acculturation more difficult. Mirsky (1991) suggested that the loss of a mother tongue is accompanied by an internal loss. She argues that most immigrants struggle with learning the new language because of emotional and psychological factors that are tied to it. Casado and Leung (2001) found English proficiency to be an important factor of depression for their sample of immigrants. The results of the present study are consistent with the literature.

There were two main reasons why language was included as part of the organization and despair phase. First, the participants described a general sense of feeling lost for not knowing the language. This particular characteristic would fall under disorganization. Second, research previously done has found a correlation between not knowing the language of the host country and depression (Casado & Leung, 2001). Parkes identified depression as the characteristic feeling of disorganization and despair. Thus, language is an important component of the disorganization and despair phase.

Although there are many similarities between the experience of a bereaved person and a Latina immigrant, there are also differences. The main difference was found in the numbness phase. Numbness, as defined by Parkes (1996), was not described by any of the interviewees. However, the majority of them described similar emotional experiences when first arriving to the United States. Due to the difference in nature of the initial phase of migratory grief and the numbness described by Parkes, new terminology was adopted for it.

We decided to call the initial phase of migratory grief ‘initial mixed-emotions’. Most of the respondents described having mixed feelings when first arriving to the United States. While they were impressed by the novelty of the new country, they also...
felt sadness for what they left behind. These two very opposing feelings were present in most of the respondents during their first week in the United States.

There are differences between the experience of someone who has lost a loved one through death and someone who experienced a loss as a consequence of relocating. These differences could account for the difference in the initial emotional reaction. All of the immigrants interviewed came to the United States on their own volition; they all reported having voluntarily made the decision to migrate. According to the social exchange approach described by Ben-Sira (1997), the decision to migrate is made after the evaluation of the perceived costs and benefits of migrating. Taking this into account, they decided to migrate because the perceived gains outnumbered the perceived losses. On the contrary, when one loses a loved one through death, it is not through one’s own volition.

Although migrant women experience losses as a result of migration, they also experience palpable gains. The fact that those interviewed migrated on their own will and had initial mixed feelings might be a factor affecting the differences in the initial emotional experience of those surpassing migratory grief as opposed to those experiencing bereavement grief.

Differences were also found in the duration of time leading to recovery. The results of this study suggest that recovery from migratory grief is a longer process than recovery from bereavement grief. The data gathered does not concur with Ward and Styles (2003) findings that reinvention of the self can happen for some immediately after migration. On the contrary, the creation of a new identity is a process that takes time. The interview data of the present study concurs with Schneller’s (1981) study, who found
that 12 out of the 13 participants had not completed the grief process. In the current study, only 1 out of the 12 participants had reached full recovery. Based on this information, Schneller’s theory that mourning the loss of a country is a longer process than mourning the loss of a dead person is sustained. This might be due in part to the length of the acculturation process, which some scholars believe can be present up to the third generation (Phinney & Flores, 2002). Although the duration of bereavement grief can vary, it is usually not passed on to the coming generations; thus grieving the loss of a country might be a much longer process. The dynamics of acculturation and grief are intergenerational, affecting up to three generations. It appears that achieving recovery is a long process.

In addition to an examination of their experiences regarding grief and migration, this study also examined their perceptions of the effects of the migratory experience on the marital dyad. Most of the participants described similar trends in their relationship following migration. They described an initial period in which conflict increases. The time range for this varies from a few months to four years. However, they stated that as time lapses conflict declines and the relationship becomes stronger. Most of the participants in the study credited this increase in relationship quality to a lack of the social support that they had left behind in their country. Not having such a support network led them to turn more to each other for support. Furthermore, the large majority of them stated that positive communication with their spouse had increased, hence bringing them closer to each other. These results are similar to the bereaved literature that states that bereaved parents lack social support and thus turn to each other for
support (Kamm & Vandenberg, 2001). Overall, it was found that immigration strengthens the marital relationship over time.

The literature has also looked at roles in the family to analyze grief. The flexibility of rules as it pertains to roles was identified as an essential factor of the grief experience in a family (Nadeau, 2001). Many of the women interviewed stated that there had been a change in roles in the marital system. However most of them expressed that there has been a flexibility of rules pertaining to role change. They stated that not only themselves, but also their husbands adapted very well to the new roles. Only one woman stated having noticed that her husband struggled to adapt to her new role as a woman and as a wife in the United States. Interestingly, she was the participant who had been in the United States the longest and the one that showed higher levels of distress pertaining to her migratory experience. In the majority of cases, the interviewees reported a flexibility of rules when adapting to the new roles in the host country. Such flexibility is likely to be a factor contributing to the strength of the relationship.

The results of this study indicate that, although there are some differences between grieving a deceased person and migratory grief, the similarities outnumber the differences. Furthermore, these results confirm that grief is a strong component of the migratory experience. It was also evident that the phases of migratory grief are not linear. Although there were some similarities as to the time limit within which different phases occurred, the interviewees’ accounts described how they at times fluctuated back and forth from one phase to another. The research questions at hand were answered and many similarities between the grief process described Parkes and the experience of married Latina immigrants were found.
Limitations and direction for future research

There are two major limitations that must be taken into account when examining the findings of this study. First, due to the nature of the qualitative study, the sample size was small. Consequently, the small number of participants might make the sample not representative of the general population of Latina immigrants. However, participants were selected in a fashion that would increase the generalizability of the findings. The sample was gathered from four different cities, and it was representative of more than one nation and not just one specific nationality. These factors helped reduce problems with generalizability. Nevertheless, the results should be looked at with caution prior to generalizing them to the entire female immigrant Latino population.

The second major limitation is that participants were only females, hence marital relationship questions were only asked to the female population. Interviewing male participants in regards to the effects of migration on their marital relationship might render different results. This limitation must be taken into consideration when looking at the marital experience of those who migrated to a new country.

Using Parkes’ theory as the main model for creating categories was a constraint of the study as well as one of the strengths. It was a strength in that it gave the researchers a well grounded model as a comparison point to the experience of immigrants. Therefore, the researchers were able to find similarities and differences between Parkes’ model of grief and an immigrant’s experience. Using Parkes’ model was constraining in that it limited the researchers from finding other categories. Thus using Parkes’ model was both a strength and a weakness of the study.
The findings of this study have specific implications for future research, in particular, migratory grief at the individual and systemic level pertaining to Latino male immigrants. No research to date has been done targeting that specific population. Doing so would contribute to the general knowledge of migratory grief. It would also give researchers and those interested in the field the opportunity to compare the experience of Latina immigrants to that of Latino immigrants. Additionally, it would give marriage therapists a wider understanding of how migration affects the marriage dynamics. Doing similar research to the one presented here, but with male participants would add to the existing knowledge on migratory grief.

In addition, the findings of this study lack information as to the time frame of specific phases. Although it was found that the phases do not necessarily follow a linear pattern, research can be done to find the approximate duration of each phase (if there is one). Having such information would help create a more comprehensive model of migratory grief.

Clinical implications

The results of this study have important implications for those working with Latino immigrants in clinical practice. It will particularly help marriage therapists working with Latino immigrant couples. The findings of this study are relevant in that they not only look at migratory grief as it pertains to the individual, but also as it pertains to the marital couple. Marriage and family therapists can benefit from having this knowledge when working with immigrants. Understanding the trend that a marital relationship follows as a result of immigration can give the therapist better insight into the challenges and opportunities facing immigrant couples.
Having knowledge of migratory grief will also help the clinician provide better service to the immigrant Latino population. It gives the clinician a better understanding of the emotional experience undergone by these clients. This understanding will help in the treatment and assessment of Latino immigrant clients. Furthermore, it can also help increase the clinician’s sensitivity to her immigrant clients. Being aware of the process of migratory grief gives the clinical practitioner cultural sensitivity to different aspects of the clients’ culture. In so doing, the therapeutic relationship will be enhanced.

Santiago-Rivera and Altarriba, J. (2002) suggested that a thorough assessment of Latinos should include factors such as language proficiency, level of acculturation, and cultural expressions. Santiago-Rivera (1995) suggested that the levels of acculturation, language proficiency and preference, cultural norms, values and beliefs affect the assessment of psychological factors. They proposed that these factors should be assessed prior to designing a treatment plan. Doing a comprehensive assessment that includes migratory grief will in turn lead to a more thorough treatment plan targeting factors that would otherwise be neglected.

Issues related to migratory grief might arise during the assessment and treatment portions of therapy. Hoffman & Bolton (1985) stated that one of the most salient acculturative related issues presented in therapy is the failure to mourn the loss of the native country. Appendix C contains sample questions that serve as a resource for marriage and family therapists when doing an assessment of immigrant clients. The therapist should take into account the impact of the migratory experience on both the individual Latina and the marital system. This will in turn help create a comprehensive treatment plan.
References


Santiago-Rivera, A.L. & Altarriba, J. (2002). The role of language in therapy with the


Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE

To begin, we have a few general questions about you:

1. How old are you?
2. How many years have you been married for?
3. What is your country of origin?
4. How many years have you been in the United States for?
5. What were some of your reasons for coming to the United States?
6. Do you have any relatives in this area?
7. What relatives are still in your country?

The main questions are numbered and in bold. Possible supporting questions are in italics.

Section 1
General Questions:
1. Tell me about your experience coming to the United States
   • What are the factors that affected your decision to come to the United States?
   • What preparations did you make prior to coming to the United States?
   • What things did you leave behind?
   • What things have you gained by coming to the United States?
   • What do you miss the most from your country?

Section 2
Numbness:
1. Explain how you first felt about your experience of coming to the United States.
   • How did you feel the first week that you were here?
   • How did you feel the second week that you were here?

Searching:
1. Do you do things that remind you of your country?
   • Have you ever found yourselves going to places that remind you of your native country? Please describe.
   • Have you ever found yourself thinking a lot about your native country? Please describe
   • How often do you talk to the people in your country?

Disorganization and Despair:
1. Since migrating, do you concentrate more on the past, the present, or the future?
   • During your first year in the United States, did you concentrate more on the past, the present, or the future?
   • After having been in the United States for about two years, did you concentrate more on the past, the present, or the future?

2. Have the roles of yourself and your husband changed or remained the same since coming to the US? Please explain.

Anger and Guilt:
1. What have been your feelings towards the United States and its culture?
   • Has there been a time when you have felt satisfied with the host country?
   • Has there been a time when you have felt upset with the host country?
   • Has there been a time when you have felt upset towards the natives of this country?

2. Have you ever found yourself blaming your own self or others for problems arising as a result of migrating to the United States?

Recovery:
1. How are you feeling at this stage about your experience in the United States?
   • Are you happy about coming or do you regret coming to the US?
   • What do you think your future holds for you now in the United States?
   • How do you feel towards the host culture at this stage?

Section 3

1. Is your marital relationship stronger, the same, or weaker after having migrated?
   • Why?
   • What is the biggest difference between now and then?

2. In what ways, if in any, has migrating to the United States affected your relationship with your husband?

3. How have you helped each other with the adjustment of coming to the US?

4. If you knew then what you know now, would you have come to the United State?
5. If you could advise a married couple coming to the United States, what would you tell them?
   - What would you tell the wife?
## COMPARISON OF MODELS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bereavement Grief</th>
<th>Migratory Grief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Numbness</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Initial Mixed Emotions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Searching</strong></td>
<td><strong>2. Searching</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Preoccupation with thoughts of the lost person</td>
<td>a. Preoccupation with thoughts of the lost country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Direction of attention towards those parts of the environment in which the lost person is likely to be</td>
<td>b. Direction of attention towards parts of the environment that remind them of their country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Calling the lost person</td>
<td>c. Calling those they left behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Anger and Guilt</strong></td>
<td><strong>3. Anger and Guilt</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Disorganization and Despair</strong></td>
<td><strong>4. Disorganization and Despair</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Depression</td>
<td>a. Sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Change in Roles</td>
<td>b. Change in Roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Language</td>
<td>c. Language</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5. Recovery</strong></td>
<td><strong>5. Recovery</strong></td>
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Appendix C

SAMPLE OF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your experience coming to the United States

2. How did you feel when you first arrived in this country? How did you feel after the first year? How do you feel now?

3. Have you ever or do you still have a persisting wish for the country you left behind and what it constitutes?

4. Did you go to places and events that remind you of your country? Do you still go? Do you go more now than before?

5. Was there a period or is there still a period in which you find yourself thinking a lot about your country and what it constitutes?

6. Are your thoughts mainly in the past (meaning your native country), present, or the future?

7. How often do you talk to the people that stayed in your native country?

8. How often would you say you have memories of your native country? How does that compare to when you first arrived to the United States and through out your stay in this country?

9. What do you think of when you think of your native country?

10. Have there been times when you have been upset with your native country?

11. What do you think of when you think of the host country?

12. What are your feelings towards the United States and its culture?

13. Have there been times when you have been upset at the host country?

14. Have there been times when you wish you would have never come?

15. Have the roles of yourself and your husband changed or remained the same since coming to the US? Please explain.
16. Have you ever found yourself blaming your own self or others for problems arising as a result of migrating to the United States?

17. Who do you usually turn to when you have problems?

18. Is your marital relationship stronger, the same, or weaker after having migrated?

19. In what ways, if in any, has migrating to the United States affected your relationship with your spouse?

20. How are you feeling at this stage about your experience in the United States?