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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A BUFFER OF ACCULTURATIVE STRESS: A STUDY OF MARITAL DISTRESS AMONG UNDOCUMENTED, MEXICAN IMMIGRANT MEN, by DOUGLAS COSTA DE ANDRADE RIBEIRO, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A BUFFER OF ACCULTURATIVE STRESS: A STUDY OF MARITAL DISTRESS AMONG UNDOCUMENTED, MEXICAN IMMIGRANT MEN

by

Douglas Costa de Andrade Ribeiro

Immigration trends in the United States have changed drastically in the last 20 years. Starting in the 1990's the majority of immigrants have originated from Latin American, with most emigrating from Mexico. Men, some of whom are undocumented, have driven this new wave of immigrants. These new Mexican immigrants have bypassed traditional receiving sites across the U.S. Mexican border and settled in non-traditional sites in the southern U.S. (Kiang, Grzywacz, Marin, Arcury, and Quandt, 2010). They face increased difficulties adjusting to life in the U.S. due to separation from family and spouses, lack of established social support networks in the U.S., and marginalization. Difficulties adapting to a new culture combined with lack of social support have been associated with significant mental health problems in this population (Hiott, Grzywacz, Arcury, & Quandt, 2006). This study explored the relationship between acculturative stress and marital satisfaction, as well as the protective (buffering) role of social support in a sample of 125 undocumented, married, Mexican American men. The following instruments were used in this study: (a) The Social, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental Scale (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987), (b) the Social Support Questionnaire (Acuna & Bruner, 1999; Sarason, Levine, Bashan, & Sarason, 1983), and (c) the Global Distress Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (Negy & Snyder, 1997). Results indicated that high levels of acculturative stress and low levels of social support were significantly associated with higher levels of marital distress.

However, results did not support the hypothesis that social support acted as a buffer (moderator) against the effects of high acculturative stress on marital distress. These findings suggest that interventions with undocumented Mexican immigrant men should focus on assessing and treating acculturative stressors as well as aiding/advocating for the development and strengthening of social support networks.

SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A BUFFER OF ACCULTURATIVE STRESS: A STUDY OF MARITAL DISTRESS AMONG UNDOCUMENTED, MEXICAN IMMIGRANT MEN

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Douglas Costa de Andrade Ribeiro

A Dissertation

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ABBREVIATIONS

MSI-R	Marital Satisfaction Inventory – Revised
GDS	Global Satisfaction Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory
SAFE	Social, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental Scale
SSQ	Social Support Questionnaire

CHAPTER 1

PSYCHOSOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED MEXICAN IMMIGRANT MEN

Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States. According to the 2010 U.S. Census data, Latinos comprise about 16% of the U.S. population with 50.5 million (Humes, Jones, Ramirez, 2011). Latinos are currently the largest minority group in the United States, followed by African Americans who comprise 13% of the total population (Humes et al., 2011). From 2000 to 2010, the Latino population accounted for more than half of the total U.S. population, growing 43% in ten years (Humes et al., 2011). By the year 2050, the Latino population is projected to reach 132.8 million, nearly one third of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Latino's cultural adjustment to U.S. culture has been associated with significant psychosocial and health problems (Arbona, Olvera, Rodriguez, Hagan, Linares, & Wiesner, 2010; Steidel & Contreras, 2003). Undocumented Latino immigrants, who are estimated to be 19% of the Latino population in the U.S., are more likely than documented immigrants and citizens to experience psychosocial and health problems due to their societal marginalization and lack of access to health providers (Finch & Vega, 2003; Hiott, Grzywacz, Arcury, & Quandt, 2006; Ortega, Fang, Perez, Rizzo, Carter-Pokras, Wallace, Gelberg, 2007; Pérez & Fortuna, 2005; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, 2008). In a comparison between undocumented Mexican men and women's use of health services, men were 3 times less likely to seek health services then women (Nandi, Galea, Lopez, Nandi, Strongarone, & Ompad, 2008). A similar imbalance in seeking psychological services was observed by Negy, Hammos, Reig-

Ferrer, and Carper (2010).

This is a concern to mental health professors since Latino immigrant couples are uniquely exposed to psychosocial stressors that are not experienced by the general population (Padilla & Borrero, 2006). Among the factors that make the immigration experience difficult is the loss of "support networks" and sequential immigration patterns (e.g., husband immigrating alone first, and joined by the family at later date) that separate the family for undetermined periods of time (Kochhar, Suro, & Tafoya, 2005; Lahaie, Hayes, Piper, & Haymann, 2009). Finch and Vega (2003) demonstrated that Latinos who are able to reestablish social support networks in the U.S. are able to decrease the predicted impact of stress on their psychological and physical health.

Research on the impact of undocumented status on Latino immigrants' psychological adjustment has been limited (Arbona et al., 2010; Sullivan & Rehm, 2005). Researchers have pointed to difficulties in developing trust and gaining access to participants as reasons for not assessing legal status on their studies (e.g., Cavazos-Rehg, Zayas, & Spitznagel, 2007; Finch, Kolody, & Vega, 2000; Finch & Vega, 2003). Research is needed on the factors contributing to the psychological and social adjustment of undocumented immigrants, especially its impact on couples' adjustment (Umana-Taylor & Alvaro, 2006; Flores, Tschann, Marin, & Pantoja, 2004). The combination of social marginalization, oppression, poor health, and several psychological stressors experienced by this growing yet understudied population make the study of immigrant Mexican men imperative to the provision of culturally sensitive and ethical mental health services.

Historical Overview of Migration to the United States

The term "nation of immigrants" has been used to describe the diversity and uniqueness of the United States of America (Kennedy, 1958). Although this term is not completely accurate, since many of those arriving on the shores of the United States of America were not voluntary immigrants but slaves, the term attempts to speak to the common migration experience of those residing in the United States (Weisberger, 1994). This migratory tradition began with Native American's great migration through the Bering Strait, which was followed by European colonization thousands of years later. By the 18th century, the European population was primarily British but with an increasing number of Germans. During the mid-19th century, immigration rates grew significantly with more than 1.5 million Germans and 3 million Irish arriving. Immigration experienced a significant decline during the years of the American Civil War but regained its force soon after, and by the early 20th century, a new wave comprising Russians, Poles, and Italians, amongst other European groups, were arriving in large numbers (Weisberger, 1994). However, European immigration began to decline, and by the 1990s, it was surpassed by the growing number of individuals originating from Latin American countries (Grieco, 2010).

Another expression of the migratory and subsequent Americanization of the United States is the Latin expression *E Pluribus Unum*, meaning *out of many, one*, which is present on coins, postage stamps, publications, flags, military uniforms, public monuments, public buildings, passports and other United States Government property (U.S. Department of State, 1996). The initial draft of the Great Seal of the United States was commissioned by the 1776's Continental Congress to Franklin, Adams, and

Jefferson in order to express the union of colonies and its peoples. The initial design was not used, but the basic premise that out of many nations and peoples, one new nation and united people was created, remains to this day.

The assertion of this union and the ways in which it is actually experienced by immigrant groups has been a topic of study by historical and social scientists. The United States as a *melting pot* has become part of the United States psyche and alludes to the social movement that expects or encourages immigrants to assimilate linearly to the predominant culture of the United States (Kivisto, 2004). Sociological researchers have for years examined and measured immigrants' ability to move upwardly socioeconomically, residential choices, linguistic patters, and intermarriage as indicators of assimilation (Walters & Jimenez, 2005). These measures have given little consideration to how immigrants retain their culture of origin, but focus on how they compare and measure up to average Americans in the United States. Also, these measures fail to account for ways in which immigrants do impact or change the culture of the places they settle. Walters and Jimenez (2005) point to the unique geographical patterns of immigration in the last two decades to smaller communities as a negation of traditional assimilation theory since those small communities are being changed by the presence of immigrants.

Trends in Latin American Immigration

Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, the number of immigrants from Latin America started to increase. Initially, many left voluntarily or were driven from their countries due to geopolitical and ideological conflicts. However, over time economic motivators became a significant driving force behind those immigrating to the United States from

Latin America (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). Grieco (2010) demonstrated that in 1960 only about 9.4% of immigrants arriving in the United States were from Latin America, with the majority (74%) of immigrants arriving from Europe. During the 70s and 80s the Latin American immigrant population increased to 19.4% and 33.1%, respectively. In the 90s the Latin American immigrant population became the largest immigrant population with 44.3%, and by 2007 about 53.6% of the immigrant population was from Latin America, with only 13.1% originating from Europe (Grieco, 2010).

It is estimated that there are 38.1 million foreign born individuals in the United States, of which 48% are of Latin American origin (Grieco, 2010). This new wave of immigrants has not been limited to states such as California, Texas, and other states bordering Mexico, which have a strong Mexican-American heritage. In the last 20 years, a larger number of foreign-born individuals have immigrated to other states as well. Southern states, in particular, have experienced a fast growth of Latino immigrants in the United States with North Carolina, Arkansas, and Georgia experiencing an increase of 394%, 337%, and 300%, respectively (Kochhar et al., 2005).

About 28% of the foreign-born immigrant population participating in this migratory wave is not authorized to be in the United States and are undocumented (Passel, Cohon, D'Vera, 2011). The undocumented immigrant population in the United States grew gradually in the last few decades, peaking in 2007 at 12 million individuals. However, the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States fell to 11.6 million in 2008. This downward trend continued in 2009, as the estimated undocumented population reached 11.1 million. In 2010, an insignificant growth in the undocumented was observed with estimates placing the undocumented population at 11.2 million (Passel

et al., 2011). Demographers attribute this trend to the slowdown of the economy, arguing that it had a direct impact on the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States (Passel et al., 2011).

The more recent increase in the immigrant population has sparked several sociopolitical debates, with a particular focus on undocumented immigrants. Several states, including Arizona, Alabama, South Carolina, and Georgia have enacted tough laws to discourage the presence of undocumented Latino immigrants (Diamond, 2011; Miller, 2010). Legal scholars have pointed out that Latinos in the south experience unique socio-political pressures in an area with a history "seeped in a Black-White divide or, alternatively, characterized by remarkable racial homogeneity" (Pruitt, 2009).

Immigration to the Southern United States

The long history of immigration to the South can be traced to the 1820s when a wave of French, Irish, and German immigrants arrived in the port of New Orleans. Texas and Maryland also received a large number of immigrants in the pre-Civil War period. The state of Texas experienced significant growth up to the early 20th century as a result of the Mexican revolution in 1910 (Bankston, 2007).

The late 20th century brought a new wave of immigrants to the South. Bankston (2007) argued that to understand this new wave best, one has to separate the states in which immigrants were developing roots into three categories. First, he referred to the "access states," comprising Texas and Florida. These are states where immigrants first enter into the South. Consequently, they have the largest immigrant populations. Second, there are the "opportunity states," comprising Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, and Virginia. These states have experienced rapid economic growth, providing immigrants

with readily available job opportunities. Third, the “limited migration” states, comprising Arkansas and Tennessee, are currently experiencing fast growth but are still lagging behind in immigrant population numbers (Bankston, 2007).

Psychosocial Experiences of Mexican Immigrant Men

In light of the new wave of immigration to the United States since the 1990s, social scientists have attempted to understand and describe the impact of such population shifts at the group and individual levels. Berry (2008) argued that “when groups of different cultural backgrounds and their individual members engage each other, a process of acculturation begins, leading to cultural and psychological changes in both parties” (p. 330). Individuals acculturating to a predominant culture gradually incorporate the predominant culture’s beliefs, language, behaviors, attitudes, and values (Gonzales, Fabrett, & Knight, 2009).

However, this process is not unidirectional. In reality there are several layers in which this process occurs. Gonzales et al. (2009) argued that there is a process of enculturation by which “individuals also adapt to the cultural beliefs, values, behaviors, and language of their heritage cultures and develop an understanding and sense of belonging to their ethnic groups” (p. 115). Drawing from the current research on Latino immigrants’ adjustment process, Gonzales et al. (2009) postulated the use of the term “cultural adaptation” to better encapsulate the duality of the acculturation/enculturation process (p. 115).

As a result of this multidirectional or multidimensional outlook on cultural adaptation, researchers have begun to explore the concept of biculturalism. Flores et al. (2004) argue that bicultural individuals may function competently in more than one

culture. However, their ability to function may range between low to high cultural identification to those cultures. Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, and Buki (2003) argued that:

> This process does not occur in a vacuum but rather within the social demands and constraints of the new context. Immigrants and children of immigrants may struggle to retain their cultural identity, language, and values while attempting to function competently in a new culture, learn a new language, and develop a new and integrated sense of who they are (p. 120).

Acculturative Stressors

In the process of cultural adaptation, individuals experience a number of psychological stressors (Kiang, Grzywacz, Marin, Arcury, and Quandt, 2010). Researchers have pointed out that some of these stressors emanate from language acquisition, loss of support networks, and family conflicts (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Padilla & Borrero, 2006). The term "acculturative stress" has been coined to describe the experience of these stressors (Berry, 2006; Padilla & Borrego, 2006; Zea et al., 2003). Acculturative stress has been associated with increased family conflict, psychological distress, and cultural conflicts (Cuellar, Arnold, & González, 1995; Flores et al., 2004). Acculturative stressors have been associated with loss of personal identity and social support (Smart & Smart, 1995). Latinos also experience a few unique acculturative stressors: (a) discrimination on basis of skin color, (b) changes in social and family ties, (c) illegal immigration status, (d) geographic proximity, (e) traumatic history of armed conflicts, (f) reliance on physical labor, and (g) language loyalty (Arbona et al., 2010; Padilla & Borrero, 2006, Smart & Smart, 1995).

At low levels, acculturative stressors may contribute to immigrant's ability to adjust to their new environment; however, significant psychological dysfunction can occur when acculturative stressors are experienced at high levels (Umana-Taylor &

Alvaro, 2009). At high levels, acculturative stressors have been associated with: (a) psychological distress, (b) depression symptoms, (c) suicidal ideation, (d) poor health, (e) alcohol and drug use, (f) family conflicts, (e) marital distress, and (e) poor health (Arbona et. al., 2010; Finch and Vega, 2003; Hovey, 2000; Negy et al. 2010). It is important to point out that undocumented individuals have unique stressors not experienced by documented immigrants and refugees. Unique to the undocumented immigrants experience is the constant fear of deportation to their country of origin, separation during immigration, lack of access to government-sponsored services, and perceived negative political and popular attitudes (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Nandi et al., 2008; Ramos-Sanchez, 2009).

Hovey (2000) found that low-income levels and family dysfunction were predictive of acculturative stress among Mexican immigrants. Additionally, Mexican immigrants who possessed non-positive outlook for the future and had the majority of family members living in Mexico experienced significantly higher levels of acculturative stress (Hovey, 2000). Although there are many similarities between how Mexican men and women experience acculturative stressors, Mexican born men may experience higher levels of depression and anxiety due to perceived stress emanating from social marginalization (Hiott et al., 2006).

Social Support

Humans utilize community networks or social support networks to overcome challenges to survival (Tardy, 1985; Sarason, Levine, Bashan, & Sarason, 1983). Social support refers to a group or community's ability to provide its members with psychological (emotional), informational, and material (instrumental) resources for the

betterment of individual's faced with a particular stress (Cohen, 2004; House & Kahn, 1985). In line with the above-mentioned hypothesis, social support has consistently been linked to better physical and mental health outcomes (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Finch & Vega, 2003; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003; Uchino, 2006).

Many researchers have argued that social support plays a protective role in buffering the negative effects of stress on mental and physical health (reviewed by Cohen, 2004; Cohen & Willis, 1985; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Uchino, Cacioppo, Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). The stress-buffering model of social support asserts that "social connections benefit health by providing psychological and material resources needed to cope with stress" (Cohen, 2004, p. 677). Social support plays a particularly important role in the physical and psychosocial functioning of Latinos in the U.S. (Campos, Schetter, Abdou, Hobel, Sandman, 2008; Crockett, Iturbide, Stone, McGinley, Raffaelli, Carlo, 2007; Dunn & O'Brien, 2009; Finch & Vega, 2003; Hovey, 2000; Negy et. al., 2010).

Immigration is associated with a significant loss of social support networks (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Padilla & Borrero, 2006; Smart & Smart, 1995). Although some areas of the country have developed strong Latino communities and business enclaves, current migration trends include new immigrants establishing roots in nontraditional areas (Kiang, et al., 2010; Kochhar et al., 2005; Portes & Jensen, 1989). The lack of established Latino community networks may hinder post-immigration health at these nontraditional areas, exposing immigrants to stressors without the crucial protective factors of social support.

Mexican Men and the Family

An understanding of how men are socialized and through culture acquire and develop their values, customs, and expectations has been considered an integral part of multicultural competency in mental health only within the past few years (Liu, 2005). Health providers' understanding of male gender role socialization and related constructs of power, privilege and societal expectations of men as they develop into adulthood is essential to facilitating their physical and psychological health (Courtenay, 2000). Moreover, researchers and health providers must take into consideration men's social class, racial and ethnic differences as impacts masculinity constructs (Levant, 1996).

Literature on Mexican men has often been limited to a negative characterization that pointed to violence, aggressiveness, and hypersexual behavior (Anders, 1993; Beaver, Gold, & Prisco, 1992). The negative conceptualization of the *macho* or *machista* Mexican male has over the years become an integral part of popular culture, and further perpetuated by some social scientists (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Terence, 2008). Conversely, Arciniega et al. (2008) introduced a bi-dimensional conceptualization of Mexican masculinity that ranges from *traditional machismo* (as briefly described above) to *caballerismo* or chivalry, which is associated with "nurturance, protection of the family and its honor, dignity, wisdom, hard work, responsibility, spirituality, and emotional connectedness" (p. 20).

Cultural adaptation or acculturation also plays a significant role in how men and women experience their marital relationship (Flores et. al., 2004; Negy & Snyder, 1997). Mexican men differ significantly from their spouses regarding their experience of marital conflict and subsequent satisfaction. Researchers (e.g., Contreras, Hendrick, & Hendrick,

1996; Flores et al., 2004) have observed a U-shaped pattern in Mexican men's satisfaction with marriage. Mexican men appear to initiate the marital relationship with high levels of satisfaction. As time passes, men experience a fast decline in satisfaction when compared to their spouses. However, men tend to experience an improvement in their marital satisfaction as time progresses. Mexican women, on the other hand, experience a steady decrease in marital satisfaction. Acculturation levels and gender differences impact the way Mexican couples perceive their conflicts and marital satisfaction (Flores et al., 2004; Contreras et al., 1996). Gender roles and acculturative processes, including acculturative stress, impact and transform the marriages of Mexican Americans and must be accounted for by those providing services or researching this population.

Mexican Families and Migration

A few studies have explored the impact of men's migration trends on the family. The term "transnational families" was coined to identify families who are divided between their country of origin and employment (Lahaie et al., 2009, p. 300). The separation between Mexican fathers living in the United States and their families living in Mexico has been associated with several negative outcomes. Lahaie et al. (2009) explored the impact on the family when a parent migrates to the United States. She found that children of an absent parent performed significantly worse academically, behaviorally, and emotionally.

Transnational families tend to be unsustainable over time, but there appears to be a movement toward family reunification. Kochhar et al., (2005) argue that:

> As men who have migrated in search of economic opportunity settle down, women join the migration in greater numbers. Wives who had

> stayed behind join their husbands, new marriages are formed, and eventually children are born. Inevitably, the impact of the migration on the receiving community changes as the years pass. Recent case studies conducted in Atlanta showed that when married men migrated to the United States, their wives tended to join them within three years (p. 16).

Padilla and Borrego (2006) argue that couples are also faced with unique challenges due to this separation. Many Mexican couples experience a period of separation in which the husband emigrates first then sponsors the immigration of their wives and their children (Suârez-Orozco, Todorova, Luie, 2002). In their review of the literature, Suârez-Orozco et al. (2003) found studies pointing to marital and other difficulties at the time of family reunification. Their review pointed out that the spouses who stayed in their country of origin were at higher risk of experiencing symptoms of depression than those whose spouses did not emigrate to the U.S.

It is estimated that about 52% of Latino marriages end in divorce within the first 20 years of marriage (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001). When compared to other ethnic and racial groups in the United States, Latinos fall between Whites (48%) and Blacks (63%). However, Umana-Taylor and Alvaro (2006) argue that among Mexican-Americans, marital separation and not divorce is the preferred method of relationship dissolution. She argued that instead of choosing divorce, Mexican-Americans in particular rely on informal ways of terminating their marital unions.

Marital Satisfaction

The theoretical conceptualization of marital functioning can be dated back to the first half of the 20th century. Terman (1938) published one of the first studies that explored possible constructs associated with the marital satisfaction of 1000 married and 100 divorced couples and found that “dominance in the husband correlates slightly

positively with his own happiness but not with his wife's!" (p. 191). Terman's (1938) study was followed by several attempts to develop a global scale of marital satisfaction with improved validity and reliability. Snyder (1979) used a content oriented approach to propose eight dimensions of marital interaction: (a) affective communication, (b) problem solving communication, (c) quality and quality of time together, (d) disagreement about finances, (e) sexual dissatisfaction, (f) history of marital disruption, (g) dissatisfaction with children, and (h) conflict over childrearing.

Diaz-Loving (2004) argued for the consideration of constructs validated to the use with individuals and couples of Mexican origin. Such constructs include perceived love, affection, tenderness, dependency, aggression, sexual behavior, relational emotions, and relational maintenance. These constructs take into consideration some perspectives of marriage relevant traditional Mexican culture.

Traditional Mexican culture emphasizes the role of marriage as first and foremost that of conception and rising of children. The marital relationship and subsequent satisfaction is perceived to be the result of "good fortune" and cannot be achieved by "marital improvement or enrichment" (Falicov, 1998, p. 188). In traditional Mexican marriages, the interaction between husbands and wives tend to be one with "ideal of masculinity for the husband and the covert influence and centrality of the dutiful and self-sacrificing wife" (Negy & Snyder, 1997). Cultural values such as personalismo (characterized by interdependence and warmth), simpatia (relational agreement and harmony), and respeto (respect towards others) play a significant role in terms of the marital relationship and Mexican perceptions of relationship satisfaction (Flores et. al., 2004; Cuellar et al., 1995).

Marital distress has been demonstrated to be a significant life stressor and hindrance to overall life satisfaction among Latinos (Negy et. al., 2010; Padilla and Borrero, 2006). The combination of rigid traditional marriage ideals and the combination of loss of support networks and increased stressors caused by immigration have been hypothesized to place Mexican immigrants at significant risk for relationship dissolution (Oropesa & Landale, 2004; Padilla and Borrego, 2006).

Mexican Masculinity

Masculinity and gender role socialization have been shown to significantly impact men's health (Mahalik, Burns, & Syzdek, 2007; Courtenay, 2000). Men are less likely to seek treatment for physical and mental health needs than women (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). This gender discrepancy holds true when men struggle with depressive symptoms, drug and alcohol dependency, and stress (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Coutenay, 2000).

Broughton (2008) argued that Mexican men are under significant social, political and economic pressure to migrate north. As a consequence of this migration, low-income men from rural areas of southern Mexico are forced to negotiate their "hegemonic masculinities" and subscribe to a new understanding of being male as they migrate. This discrepancy creates a unique set of gender role conflicts and acculturative stressors for Mexican immigrant men that are not experienced by non-Latino U.S. residents (Cabassa, 2007; Fragoso & Kashubeck, 2000). Mexican immigrants are particularly exposed to these stressors since they are socialized to see themselves as the authority figures of the family and are "expected to be strong, dominant, and the provider for the family" (Fragoso & Kashubeck, 2000, p. 87). After immigration however, men are unable to sustain traditional gender roles once the norm. Immigrant Mexican men are then faced

with the need to change gender role expectations and acculturate to their new culture (Broughton, 2008).

Future Research

The goal of this study is to add to the body of knowledge regarding Latin American men and their adaptation to American culture. This study explores the relationship between acculturative stress, marital satisfaction, and support networks. Specifically, this study investigates whether social support acts as a protective factor against the negative effects of acculturative stress on marital satisfaction. It is predicted that elevated levels of acculturative stress are associated with low levels of marital satisfaction. Moreover, high levels of social support are expected to reduce or protect against the detrimental effects of acculturative stress on marital satisfaction.

Negy et al. (2010) explored the relationship between acculturative stress and marital distress amongst Latin American women. He found a significant positive correlation between acculturative stress and marital distress. In addition, social support partly medicated this relationship. However, these findings are limited due to the fact ethnic differences of participants were not considered, participation was limited to women, and the role of social support as a moderating variable was not explored.

The present study is unique in that it attempts to explore the experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant men; a group that is currently underrepresented in the literature. This investigation will build on the available research that demonstrates that men experience the stressors associated with immigration differently than women. Ultimately, this research will be used to inform interventions aimed at providing ethical and culturally sensitive services to this population.

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CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A BUFFER OF ACCULTURATIVE STRESS: A STUDY OF MARITAL DISTRESS AMONG UNDOCUMENTED, MEXICAN IMMIGRANT MEN

Immigration trends in the United States have changed significantly over the last two decades, with an increase in immigration from individuals from Latin America. Since the 1990s, the majority of immigrants arriving in the United States have been born in Latin America, with 64% originating in Mexico, making Latinos the largest minority group in the country (Grieco, 2010). Currently, there are an estimated 50.5 million Latinos in the United States, 6.5 million of whom are undocumented Mexican immigrants (Humes, Jones, Ramirez, 2011; Passel & Cohn, 2011). Men make up the majority of new Latino immigrants. They come as laborers for economic reasons and provide financial support for their families back in their countries of origin (Fuligni & Perreira, 2009; Kochhar, Suro, & Tafoya, 2005).

Although documented and undocumented immigrants experience similar challenges associated with immigration, those unauthorized to be in the United States have reported unique challenges to their adjustment (Arbona, Olvera, Rodriguez, Linares, & Wiesner, 2010). Undocumented immigrants, particularly, are more likely to experience challenges related to family separation, language acquisition, fear of deportation, lack of access to government-sponsored services, negative political and popular attitudes, and traditional values associated with “extended family structure and gender role organization” (Arbona et al. 2010, p. 368; Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Ramos-Sanchez, 2009).

Cultural Adaptation, Stress, and Marital Satisfaction

Transactional stress theory postulates that stress-inducing experiences, such as cultural adaptation to a new country, tend to increase the stress experienced in other areas of life (Pillow, Zautra, & Sandler, 1996). Social scientists have used the term acculturative stress to define the unique and stressful adaptation process experienced by immigrants exposed to a new culture (Berry, 2006; Padilla & Borrego, 2006; Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, & Buki, 2003). Acculturative stress has been conceptualized as a psychological struggle to negotiate the incongruence between one's original and host culture (Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994). It is hypothesized that overtime, acculturative stressors may decrease as immigrants negotiate cultural incongruence and assimilate to the host country (Miranda & Matheny, 2000). Although this decrease in acculturative stress may be true for some immigrants, Umana-Taylor and Alvaro (2006) argued that some may not experience a decrease due to discrimination and marginalization.

Acculturative stress has been demonstrated to have a negative impact on psychological functioning (Williams & Berry, 1991). Acculturative stressors, which are the negative consequences resulting from cultural adjustment, have been associated with increased psychosomatic, depressive and anxiety symptomology, perceived marginalization and alienation, identity confusion, and poor health (Finch & Vega, 2003; Umana-Taylor & Alfaro, 2009; Williams & Berry, 1991). This adaptation process also has been found to be associated with changes in family dynamics, mental health, and cultural constructs, and is a source of stress to many immigrants (Cuellar, Arnold, & Gonzales, 1995; Flores, Tschann, Marin, & Pantoja, 2004).

Latino couples experience many of the same psychosocial stressors that non-immigrant couples' experience (e.g., relational conflicts, financial disagreements, child rearing disagreements); however, immigrants are also exposed to acculturative stressors (Padilla & Borrego, 2006). Padilla and Borrego (2006) argue that these stressors negatively impact Latino couples' emotions and hinder their ability to cope due to a lack of "cultural and social support."

An extensive literature search revealed only one study (Negy, Hammons, Reig-Ferrer, & Carper, 2010) that explored the relationship between acculturative stress and marital distress. Negy et al.'s (2010) study of 95 Latinas found a significantly positive relationship between levels of acculturative stress and marital distress. Increased acculturative stress was associated with increased number of years married, high ethnic identity, family of origin conflict, and negative general stressors. These authors also found a significant negative relationship between acculturative stress and number of years residing in the U.S., dominant society immersion, social support, and family of origin cohesion.

Stress, Social Support, and the Buffering Hypothesis

Tardy (1985) argued that many of our community activities and networks serve essential aspects of our lives. This social environment has been hypothesized to aid humans in the pursuit to survive and thrive (Sarason, Levine, Bashan, & Sarason, 1983). Research on the value and impact of social support has increased significantly in recent years. Social support correlates with academic success, physical health, and mental health (Ahumada, Castillo, Munos, & Moruno, 2005; Finch & Vega, 2003; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003; Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991). Lack of social support is

associated with negative outcomes in the lives of adults, adolescents, and children (Sarason et al., 1983).

Social support plays a role in protecting individuals from the negative effects of stressful experiences (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, Seeman, 2000; Cohen & Willis, 2004; Finch & Vega, 2003; Rodriguez et al., 2003; Uchino, 2006). The buffering model postulates that individuals under stress will benefit from the perceived availability of psychological, social, and material support (Cohen, 2004; House & Kahn, 1985). Building on this literature, a growing number of researchers have explored and found significant protective benefits of social support for Latinos and Mexican Americans (Campos, Schetter, Abdou, Hobel, Sandman, 2008; Crockett, Iturbide, Stone, McGinley, Raffaelli, Carlo, 2007; Dunn & O'Brien, 2009; Finch & Vega, 2003; Hovey, 2000; Negy et. al., 2010)

Social support has been found to be particularly important to Mexican Americans. Finch and Vega (2003) argued that Mexican American's living in California have access to social support networks which may provide improved health outcomes. Established social support networks among Mexican Americans living in California were found to be a buffer against factors previously demonstrated to be associated with poor health, such as immigration, acculturative stress, and discrimination (Finch & Vega, 2003; Kiang, et al., 2010; Kochhar et al., 2005).

However, current immigration trends have taken immigrants to nontraditional immigrant receiving sites (Bankston, 2007). Kiang, Grzywacz, Marin, Arcury, and Quandt, (2010) argue that nontraditional receiving sites lack the social infrastructure and resources to provide the necessary support to immigrants. Thus, Mexican and other

Latino immigrant couples experience a significant decrease in the availability of social support after immigrating to the United States, especially when moving to nontraditional receiving areas (Kiang et al., 2010; Padilla & Borrego, 2006). Immigrants are then faced with the additional challenge of seeking economic advancement in the United States in areas with limited cultural business enclaves and limited health informational networks (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2006; Portes & Jensen, 1989). Immigrants struggle to balance multiple jobs and time with family, with limited or no social support.

Marital Distress and Immigration

Traditionally, Mexican couples adopt an interdependent way of relating to others, in combination with a deep sense of respect toward others (Flores et al., 2004). *Familismo*, *personalismo*, and *respeto*, are fundamental aspects of Mexican American family's relationship style (Bean, Curtis, & Marcum, 1997; Contreras, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1996; Flores et al., 2004). *Familismo*, in particular, has been identified as one of the foundational concepts of Latino culture. This concept is based on an understanding of family that goes beyond the nuclear family and includes the extended family (e.g., grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins) as a source of support (Contreras et al., 1996).

Migration impacts family dynamics and marital functioning (Falicov, 2005; Flores et al., 2004; Negy & Snyder, 1997). Immigrants' traditional views are constantly challenged by the new culture. Separation from family members due to sequential immigration is correlated with "family friction and negative psychological outcomes" (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). When reunited, individuals and family members are faced with individual differences in levels of acculturation that drastically

impact the function and satisfaction of Mexican couples and families (Contreras et al., 1996; Flores et al., 2004; Negy & Snyder, 1997; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

The majority of studies concerning immigrant adjustment have explored the role of acculturation in the marital and family relationships of immigrants and their descendents (Flores et al, 2004; Negy & Snyder, 2000, 1997; Rodriguez et al., 2007; Vega, Kolody, and Valle, 1988). Flores et al. (2004) found that as individuals acculturated they utilized a direct style of conflict expression. Conversely, those who were "less acculturated" relied on a more indirect style of conflict expression. Their findings highlight that significant changes to traditional ways of marital conflict expression occur when immigrants are exposed to a new culture. However, there is only one study to date that has explored the interaction between marital distress and acculturative stress in the literature. Negy et al. (2010) explored the role of acculturation and acculturative stress on marital relationships and found that increased marital distress was associated with increased age, years of marriage, social support, family of origin cohesion, family of origin conflict, acculturative stress, and negative general stressors. However, these researchers did not explore gender and ethnic differences, thus limiting the study's generalization (Lee & Ferraro, 2009).

Mexican Masculinity

Culture plays a significant role in how men perceive their roles in the family and society (Levant, 1996). Mexican immigrant men experience gender role conflicts pre-immigration and this increases during the acculturative process (Broughton, 2008; Ojeda, Rosales, Good, 2008). Acculturation to the dominant culture requires changes in gender roles and consequently changes in expectations of self and others (Broughton, 2008).

Broughton (2008) argued that Mexican men experience significant social, political and economic pressure to migrate north. As a consequence of this migration, low-income men from rural areas of southern Mexico are forced to negotiate their "hegemonic masculinities" and subscribe to a new understanding of being male.

Migration creates a unique set of gender role conflicts and acculturative stressors for Mexican immigrant men as they are traditionally socialized to perceive themselves as the authority figures of the family "expected to be strong, dominant, and the provider(s) for the family" (Cabassa, 2007; Fragoso & Kashubeck, 2000, p. 87). After immigration however, men are unable to sustain traditional gender roles once the norm (Broughton, 2008). Coping with changing gender role expectations and acculturative stress creates unique challenges for immigrant Mexican men who may have limited social support.

Undocumented Mexican men experience unique challenges after emigrating. Constant fear of deportation, loss of status, and below average wage have been documented as some of the challenges faced by these immigrants (Ribeiro & Ancis, 2012b). Fears of deportation in particular, directly threaten their ability to fulfill the traditional role of being the provider for the family. Losses of status at work and at home are also unique stressor experienced by undocumented immigrants (Ramos-Sanchez, 2009; Ribeiro & Ancis, 2012a).

Purpose of Study

It is imperative that psychologists and other mental health providers better understand the marital adjustment of Mexican immigrant men in the United States. There remains limited research on the relationship between acculturative stress and marital distress overall, and for this population in particular. No published study to date has

examined the relationship between acculturative stress and marital distress of Latino men, specially undocumented Mexican men in the United States. There have been barriers to such research. For example, several authors point to difficulties associated with developing trust and gaining a substantial number of participants as the primary reasons for not asking immigrants about their legal status (e.g., Cavazos-Rehg, Zayas, & Spitznagel, 2007; Finch et al., 2000; Finch & Vega, 2003).

It is the intent of this study to help close the gap of knowledge in this area of research. The present study focuses on the role of social support as a protective factor against the negative effects of acculturative stress on marital satisfaction (Cohen & Willis, 1985). This study hopes to answer the following research questions: Is acculturative stress associated with marital distress among undocumented Mexican immigrant men? Does social support buffer or moderate the relationship between acculturative stress and marital distress among undocumented Mexican immigrant men? It is hypothesized that elevated levels of acculturative stress are associated with high levels of marital dissatisfaction among undocumented Mexican immigrant men (Padilla & Borrego, 2006; Flores et al., 2004). Further, high levels of social support are hypothesized to reduce or protect against the detrimental effects of acculturative stress on marital satisfaction.

Method

Participants

The analytic sample consisted of 125 undocumented Mexican men ranging from 20 to 70 years of age (M = 35, SD = 8.86). Participation was limited to individuals who were married (n = 93, 74.4%), cohabitating (n = 25, 20%), separated (n = 5, 4%), as well

as in other types of romantic relationships (*n* = 1, .8%). One participant left the question of relationship status unanswered but he was included in the analysis since he completed the marital distress scale (*n* = 1, .8%). The length of participants' marital relationship ranged from 6 months to 50 years (*M* = 11.66, *SD* = 8.57). Out of the participants that reported having children (*n* = 105), the average offspring number was 2.31 (*SD* = 1.36).

The majority of participants (*n* = 68, 54.4%) immigrated as a family to the United States. About 42.4% (*n* = 53) reported immigrating alone, and 3.4% (*n* = 4) did not answer this question. Of those who immigrated alone, about 45 reported being reunited with their families after a period ranging from less than one year to a maximum of 17 years. On average, these participants were reunited with their families after 3.12 years (*SD* = 4.31). The year of immigration ranged from 1966 to 2009 (*MD* = 1999, *SD* = 8.01). The reasons for which participants immigrated included economic (*n* = 89, 71.2%), familial (*n* = 20, 16%), educational (*n* = 4, 3.2%), and political (*n* = 1, .8%). The remaining participants (*n* = 8, 6.4%) reported a combination of these factors. Two participants (1.6%) marked other (i.e., visit) as for the reason for immigrating and one left this question unanswered.

Spanish was the only language spoken in the homes of 94 (75.2%) participants, while English was spoken exclusively in the homes of only 2 (1.6%) participants. The remaining participants (*n* = 27) reported both Spanish and English being spoken in their homes. All participants completed the survey materials in Spanish. The level of education achieved ranged from preschool (*n* = 1, .8) to completed undergraduate studies (*n* = 10, 8%). High School was the most common educational level achieved (*n* = 51, 40.8%, *SD* = 1.46), followed by completed elementary school (*n* = 34, 27.2%) and incomplete Junior

High School (*n* = 20, 16%). Participants' engagement in the workforce was at 93.6% (*n* = 117), with 5.6% (*n* = 7) reporting unemployment at the moment of completing the survey. Their income ranged from $100 to $1500 per week (*M* = 437.49, *SD* = 175.6).

Household and community composition demonstrate a variety of arrangements for those participating in this study. The household of about 54.4% (*n* = 68) of the participants was composed exclusively of nuclear families (i.e., spouse and children); while 41.6% (*n* = 52) shared their household with friends (*n* = 20), siblings (*n* = 12), parents (*n* = 6), and or a combination of these factors (*n* = 5). Most participants (*n* = 75, 73.5%) reported having extended family members living in close proximity to their home, regardless of their household arrangement. The remaining participants denied having any family members living in close proximity.

Procedures

Participants were recruited at community, governmental, and religious organizations in a large urban area in the southeastern United States. The lead researcher contacted these organizations through phone calls initially, and then visited each site in person. A detailed explanation of the study was given to each organization, and, after approval, the lead researcher recruited participants personally.

Recruitment occurred at each organization's site. The lead researcher attended scheduled organizational activities (i.e., ESOL Class, Health fair, etc.) as well as set up a recruiting table at a waiting area of one organization. Potential participants were given a short presentation informing them of the requirements of the study. They were then given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. Individuals interested in participating signed an informed consent form and were given a packet with survey questionnaires.

Measures

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire and three other widely used standardized measures. These measures have been demonstrated to be valid and reliable in both English and Spanish versions. Only data from respondents who answered 75% or more of the questions for each measure were used (Crockett et. al., 2007).

Demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire was developed for this study and included questions regarding age, gender, ethnicity, race, marital status, number of children, country of origin, immigration status, length of residency in the United States, reasons for immigrating, housing, education, and income.

Acculturative stress. The Social, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental (SAFE) scale (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987) is comprised of 24 items measuring acculturative stress in four areas: social, attitudinal, familial, and environmental. Examinees rate responses ranging from not stressful (1) to extremely stressful (5); "not experienced" responses are given the score of 0. Responses were averaged with higher scores indicating higher acculturative stress. Previous studies have revealed a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .90 (Hovey, 2000) to .98 (Fuertes & Westbrook, 1996). Construct validity has been established with Mexican immigrants (Hovey, 2000). The alpha coefficient for the Spanish version of the SAFE scale used in the current study was .91.

Social support. The Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) consists of 27 items exploring specific sources of support. Then, each examinee is asked to rate how satisfied they are with the support being received on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied). Responses were averaged, with high scores indicating increased social support. The SSQ has been found to be internally consistent, with a

Cronbach alpha of .97 English and .94 Spanish (Acuña & Bruner, 1999; Sarason et al., 1983). The alpha coefficient for the Spanish version of the SSQ scale used in the current study was .97.

Marital distress. The Global Distress Scale (GDS) of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (MSI-R; Negy & Snyder, 1997) was used to measure perceived relationship distress. A "True" and "False" format is used to probe respondents' appraisals of the overall quality of their marital relationship. Responses were averaged, with higher scores indicating greater marital distress. In a sample of Mexican and Mexican American couples, the GDS was found to have an internal consistency of .92 and .90 respectively (Negy, Snyder, Diaz-Loving, 2004). The alpha coefficient for the current study was .91.

The SAFE, SSQ, and GDS were developed in English and translated into Spanish using a double-translation procedure, in which materials are translated to Spanish then translated back to English and compared to the original scale. Professional translators supervised by bilingual doctoral level social scientists translated the SAFE and SSQ (Hovey, 2000; Acuna & Bruner, 1999). A team of bilingual psychologists experienced in relationship function and test translation performed the translation of the GDS (Negy et al., 2004).

Results

Data Analysis

Negy et al. (2010) demonstrated that marital distress was significantly correlated with social support ($r = -.28$, $p < .05$) and acculturative stress ($r = .32$, $p < .01$) for Latina immigrants. A priori power analysis indicated that to achieve a power of .80 ($p = .05$) and

an anticipated effect size of $f^2 = 0.114082$ (Aguinis, 2004; Aikin and West, 1991; Soper, 2011), a minimum sample size of 99 was needed. Table 1 demonstrates the estimates used to achieve the above mentioned sample size.

The current sample of 125 participants exceeded the priori sample requirement. Using the current sample, marital distress was significantly correlated with both social support (r = -.397, p = .001) and acculturative stress (r = .238, p < .008). Table 2 demonstrates the observed statistical power for this study's sample. The observed power for the relationship between marital distress and both social support and acculturative stress was .998. The observed power for the moderation effect of social support was .16.

In order to answer the first research question, bivariate correlations were used to explore the relationship between acculturative stress, social support, marital distress, and other demographic variables among undocumented Mexican immigrant men (Table 3). Higher levels of marital distress were associated with higher levels of acculturative stress (r = .238, p = .008) and with sharing the household with others, excluding spouse and children (r = .269, p = .003). Conversely, lower levels of marital distress were associated with both higher social support (r = -.397, p = .001). In this sample, individuals who reported higher levels of social support had fewer children.

Table 1

Power analysis based on the relationship of predictor variables and Marital Distress

Variable	r.	R^2	f^2	Power	α
SAFE	.32	.1024	.114082	.8	.05
SSQ	−.28	.0784	.085069	.8	.05

Table 2.
Observed statistical power

	Variable entered	*r.*	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	Power	ΔPower	α
Step 1	SAFE, SSQ	.431	.186	−	13.897	.998	−	.05
Step 2	SAFExSSQ	.446	.199	.013	2.011	−	0.16	.05

To explore the second research question, a moderated multiple regression was used to evaluate: (1) The amount of variance accounted for by the predictor *X* (acculturative stress) and moderator *Z* (social support) variables in the outcome variable *Y* (marital distress), and (2) to evaluate the specific contributions of the predictor and moderator variables to the outcome variable (Aguinis, 2004; Aiken and West, 1991). The following regression equation was employed to measure the hypothesized buffering or moderating effect of social support on the relationship between acculturative stress and marital distress:

$$Y = a + b_1X + b_2Z + b_3X \cdot Z + e$$

"where *a* is the least-squares estimate of the intercept, b_1 is the least-squares estimate of the population regression coefficient for *X*, b_2 is the least-squares estimate of the population regression coefficient for *Z*, b_3 is the sample-based least-squares estimate of the population regression coefficient for the product term, and *e* is a residual term" (Aquinis, 2004, pp. 11-12).

A moderated regression was used in order to test the second research question. In step one, 18.6% of the marital distress variance (R^2 = .186, p = .001) was explained by acculturative stress and availability of social support. In step two, the product of acculturative stress and social support accounted for 1.3% of the change in variance (ΔR^2 = .013, p = .159). Step two indicates that the interaction between acculturative stress and marital distress was not moderated by social support.

Table 3.
Bivariate Correlations.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	–								
2. Year of Immigration	-.338**	–							
3. Time Coupled	.755*	-.300**	–						
4. Number of Children	.238	-.051	.420**	–					
5. Extended Family	-.232	.070	-.082	-.064	–				
6. Shares Household	-.146	.226	-.31	-.209	.098	–			
7. GDS	.005	-.027	-.015	.027	-.215	.269**	–		
8. SSQ	.023	-.195	.006	-.240*	.021	-.124	-.397**	–	
9. SAFE	.022	.096	-.062	-.035	-.080	.160	.238*	-.186	–

Note. * p < .05. ** p <.01 after applying Holm's adjustment; Share Household: Participants that share their house/apartment with others beside spouse and children.

Discussion

The relationship between acculturative stress, social support, and marital distress among undocumented Mexican immigrant men was examined in this study. The hypothesis that acculturative stressors and marital distress are associated was supported. Acculturative stress was significantly associated with increased marital distress. The results of this study lend credence to the hypothesis that stress-inducing experiences are likely to reach unrelated aspects of individual's lives (Pillow, Zautra, and Sandler, 1996).

Although previous studies have demonstrated that acculturative stressors tend to decrease over time (Negy et al., 2010; Miranda & Matheny, 2000), no significant association was found between year of immigration and acculturative stressors in this study's sample. Acculturative stressors among undocumented immigrants participating in this study may be perpetuated by discrimination and marginalization regardless of time residing in the United States (Arbona et al., 2010; Berry, 2006; Ramos-Sanchez, 2009; Ribeiro & Ancis, 2012a; Umana-Taylor & Alvaro, 2006). Discrimination and marginalization may have been a significant factor since the data for this study was collected between 2010 and 2011, a period in which several states enacted or passed laws limiting the rights of undocumented immigrants.

Low social support was found to be the highly correlated with marital distress for this study's sample. This finding bolsters the hypothesis that individuals who have strong social support networks tend to have better physical and mental health outcomes (Finch & Vega, 2003). It also supports previous findings that the marital relationships of undocumented Mexican couples benefit from social support networks (Ribeiro & Ancis, 2012b). It appears that those who are able to develop these networks after immigration may fair better in their marital relationships over time than those who do not.

The results did not statistically support the hypothesis that social support moderates the relationship between acculturative stress and marital distress. There appears to be several factors that hindered the rendering of significant results. First, low power for the additional change emanating from the production between Acculturative Stress and Social Support (SAFE x SSQ) was observed. McClelland and Judd (1993) argue that the reductions in model error caused by adding the moderator product are "disconcertingly low" even when reliable measures are used. They go on to recommend that interactions with as little 1% variance should be considered.

The second factor that may have influenced the results might be theoretical in nature. Cohen and Wills' (1985), in a landmark study, postulate that there are two models for approaching the interaction between social support and stress. The first assumes that social support buffers or protects the individual from the negative impact of stress. The second postulates that social support has an overall beneficial effect on those experiencing stress and those who are not, thus creating a "main-effect" with no interaction between social support and stress (p. 310). In addition, mediation should also

be considered as a model to explain how the relationship between acculturative stress and marital distress is influenced by social support.

Implications

The findings have significant implications for mental health professionals serving undocumented Mexican immigrant men. The impact of acculturative stress and availability of social support should be considered by mental health practitioners when providing couples or individual therapy to clients. Mental health professionals may find it therapeutic to aid clients in developing or strengthening their use of social support networks.

Pinto (2006) highlighted that mental health professionals may develop interventions focused on restructuring clients' social support and the roles of formal/informal networks in order to achieve desired outcomes. In light of this study's results, it is recommended that mental health practitioners help their clients to increase their social networks and guide them to higher utilization of preventive services available in the community. Pinto (2006) recommended that mental health professionals (1) thoroughly assess client's social networks, (2) aid clients in developing social connections, (3) encourage clients to expand their friendship networks, (4) actively engage in providing referrals, (5) develop and build up current support system, and (6) encourage psychotherapy and psycho-educational group participation. The results of this study highlight that this strategy might be essential for mental health providers who work with undocumented individuals and couples reporting high levels of acculturative stress and low social support.

The results of this study indicate that clinicians should pay particular attention to issues of acculturative stress, social support, and immigration status as they assess and treat this population. Mental health providers must rely on culturally sensitive treatment models that consider the impact of immigration on client's perceived masculinity (Chao, 2012). Although there are no treatment models specifically designed to work with undocumented Mexican men, Liu's (2005) framework may be adapted to serve this population. Liu (2005) adapted Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis (1992) multicultural competencies domains and sub-domains in order to highlight the importance of incorporating issues of gender and masculinity into competent multicultural practice. However, Liu (2005) does not explicitly address issues specific to undocumented immigrant men, such as acculturation, acculturation stress, marginalization due to legal status, fear discovery, and the impact of deportation on their families (Ramos-Sanchez, 2009; Ribeiro & Ancis, 2012b).

It is important that mental health providers account for the unique experiences and stressors undocumented immigrants face. The Multi-Level Model of Psychotherapy (MLM), Counseling, Social Justice, and Human Rights for Immigrants (Bemak, Chung, & Pedersen, 2003) was developed for the treatment of immigrants and refugees (Chung, Bemak, & Ortiz, 2008). Chung et al. (2008) suggested that mental health professionals incorporate the following five levels when working with undocumented/undocumented immigrants and refugees: (1) "mental health education," (2), "individual, group, and family counseling interventions," (3) "cultural empowerment," (4), "integration of traditional and Western healing practices," and (5) "addressing social justice and human rights issues" (pp. 315-316).

Chung et al. (2008) argued that in order to best serve immigrants and refugees' needs, counselors and other mental health providers must act as advocates and therefore challenge unfair "policies, rules, regulations, and systems that adversely effect the mental health of immigrants" (p. 314). The need to advocate is particularly necessary when working with undocumented immigrants due to their limited rights and societal marginalization. Undocumented Mexican immigrant men might particularly benefit from mental health providers that advocate for their access to community and governmental sources of support and prevention.

The American Counseling Association Advocacy Competencies supports and encourages counselor's efforts to advocate for their clients and families at the individual, community, systemic, and sociopolitical levels (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002). Roysircar (2009) highlighed that counselors have a window of opportunity to effect change and advocate for their clients in the areas of "peace, justice, equity, access, racial equality, internationalism, and disaster recovery" (p. 293). The results of this study suggest that undocumented immigrants may benefit from working with counselors' who are willing to act as advocates for fair and equal access to community and governmental support networks. It is imperative the mental health providers leave their comfort zones and advocate for "social justice, fairness, and equality when working with immigrants and refugees" (Chung et al., 2008, p. 315).

Clinically, mental health providers working with undocumented Mexican immigrant men and couples should account for their marginalization and perceived discrimination. The results of this study indicate that these men experience significant levels of acculturative stress that directly impact how they function in their marital

relationship. This study points to the importance of effectively assessing the unique impact that undocumented status may play in marriage and close romantic relationship.

Limitations

Measures used in this study assess perceived acculturative stress and social support experienced by participants. Results indicate that perceptions of social support and acculturative stress have a significant impact on participants' marital relationships. Nonetheless, including behavioral measures or observations of these constructs may improve the current study's validity.

Inferences regarding the relationship between social support, acculturative stress, and marital distress should be made with caution. Deductions concerning social support's role in the relationship between acculturative stress and social support are qualitative based on a visual review of scatter plots. Although researchers have indicated the appropriateness of such review of results, the lack of statistical significance of social support as a moderator limits the generalization of this study's results (Finch & Vega, 2003; McClelland and Judd, 1993).

One of the most pronounced limitations of this study is the lack of data from participants' partners. As previously discussed, there appears to be significant gender differences in the way marital distress is impacted by acculturative stress and social support. Furthermore, marital distress scores of each partner may be viewed as interdependent (Cook & Kenny, 2005). Future research that recruits both partners is necessary to explore how gender differences and partner interdependence impact marital distress, acculturative stress, and social support.

Further Research

This study highlights the importance of acculturative stress and social support on the marital relationships of undocumented Mexican immigrant men. Acculturative stress appears to be an "independent source of stress and seems to be associated with marital distress irrespective of the availability of support from one's social network" (Negy et. al., 2010, p. 15). Clearly, more research is necessary to determine the role of social support in the lives of undocumented immigrants. Since no study has demonstrated a buffering effect, researchers should conceptualize both buffering and main-effect interactions as they develop their studies.

Further research is necessary in order to determine how men and women experience acculturative stressors differently as well as how these stressors impact their marital relationship. In a study conducted by Negy et al. (2010), the correlation between social support and marital distress appeared stronger for men when compared to women. Conversely, the correlation between acculturative stress and marital distress appeared stronger for women relative to men. In light of these differences, it is recommended that researchers account for possible gender differences when designing future studies. Moreover, it is imperative that researchers account for differences in ethnicity and immigration status when exploring the marital experiences of Latino immigrants in the United States.

Conclusion

Despite limitations, the present study provides the first documented link between acculturative stress and marital distress among Latino immigrant men. It also provides data highlighting the impact of an undocumented status on the long-term life experience

of participants, who, in spite of living in the United States for several years, do not experience a decrease of acculturative stress like documented immigrants tend to experience. These findings suggest that interventions with undocumented Mexican immigrant men should focus on assessing and treating acculturative stressors as well as aiding/advocating for the development and strengthening of social support networks.

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