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## THE CHALLENGES OF ACCULTURATING IN THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY: IMMIGRANTS OF LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

Melissa Saldana-Alvarez

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THE CHALLENGES OF ACCULTURATING IN THE LOS ANGELES  
COUNTY: IMMIGRANTS OF LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Melissa Saldana-Alvarez

June 2020

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## ABSTRACT

This study intends to identify the barriers that may impede new immigrants from successfully acculturating in the United States. The researcher collected qualitative data through audio-recorded face-to-face-interviews with the participants. Participants were recruited through a local agency that provides a number of services to immigrant in the community. Data collected was transcribed and analyzed for the development of categories of individual, family, group, organizational, and community involvement in the lives of new immigrants who attempt to acculturate in this country. The research findings reveal the need for mental health, medical, and educational services, and workshops about rights and laws in the U.S. among the U.S. immigrant population. The following themes were discussed: participant adverse experiences in home country and in U.S., participant strength of social and family ties, financial stressors, participant marital status, participant ability to cope, feelings of optimism, and potential for mental health illnesses. The findings can inform social workers about how to implement interventions and policy advocacy to address the specific needs of the immigrant population in both a micro and macro sense. The research findings were provided to California State University, San Bernardino and to the study site where participants were recruited.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ASSESSMENT

#### Introduction

Chapter one includes this study's research focus, which entails understanding the difficulties that immigrants experience in acculturating in the United States. The chapter also identifies the paradigm of the study and an explanation for the use of this perspective. Additionally, it includes a literature review to provide a brief overview on the themes of the research focus and its relation to the study. Lastly, a discussion of the contribution of this study to the body of knowledge of social work practice and the theoretical orientation are presented.

#### Research Focus

The research focus of this study was centered in identifying the difficulties that new immigrants experience while attempting to establish themselves in the United States and what our communities can do to assist this population during the acculturation process. The purpose was to produce a study to examine the acculturation process within the new immigrant population. This study produced findings to enhance the knowledge about specific issues experienced by this population and the possible resources that would improve their chances of successfully acculturating in the United States. To understand the experiences of this population, in-depth interviews were conducted.

## Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

The post-positivism approach was utilized to begin the assessment of this research project. The post-positivism approach was the best fit in providing the information needed because this approach aided in developing the focus further as the research study progressed. Post-positivism emphasizes that the researcher gain entry into the natural setting of the participants to gather qualitative data. Since there is no research question, an understanding of the research focus occurred through interviews. In order to narrow the focus, an understanding of the personal experiences of the participants needed to occur (Morris, 2014). The data gathered through the interviews with the participants was analyzed with current literature to ensure that the focus of the study is appropriate. This paradigm allowed for the development of relationships with the participants, which was conducive to learning about the struggles that immigrants experience in acculturating in the United States.

## Literature Review

There are several areas that must be discussed regarding issues that young immigrants encounter while acculturating in the United States. These issues are found in the areas of access to resources, family relationships, and psychological well-being that may be affected by a number of stressors.

### Access to Resources

The Office of Refugee Resettlement, or ORR which falls under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, lists a number of available resources

to assist immigrants with their mental health needs, for example, if they happen to be classified as refugees. The resources include various informational videos and links aimed at increasing knowledge. Unfortunately, it is difficult for undocumented immigrants in particular to access the mental health services they so desperately need. Undocumented immigrants are denied access to health care in the U.S., which brings up concerns across the country. Discriminating against immigrants by denying them access to health care is evidence of an inefficient health care system (Parmet, 2017).

Community input is crucial in the development and implementation of effective programs and strategies to alleviate mental health symptom among the immigrant population in the U.S. “Few examples exist where researchers adopt and evaluate interventions and strategies developed in community settings, taking into account community needs and their own indigenous approaches” (Polo, 2012, p. 210). There generally is a bias where programs and interventions are implemented within communities and members are passengers rather than drivers in their own treatments (Polo, 2012).

### Family Relationships

For many immigrants, family ties become weakened when they leave their home countries. Research suggests that, “...for foreign-born youth who perceived a high degree of distance between themselves and their parent with respect to values, there is a greater willingness on the part of youth to remain distant by not spending as much time with family and by not seeking advice from

their family members (Nair et al., 2018). In other words, youth who may be trying to acculturate to the values of a foreign country may distance themselves from their own culture, causing family rifts.

Research has shown that weakened family ties in home countries lead to higher rates of permanent migration and higher likelihood of assimilating, such as by learning the dominant language (Stark, 2013). In other words, if immigrants feel that their family ties are stronger in their home countries, they are less likely to consider their migration permanent and will feel less motivated to attempt to acculturate in the United States.

### Psychological Well-being

There are expected to be variances within the pool of participants. Some participants may have been detained upon entering the United States, while others were not. This occurrence can have negative effects on the mental well-being of immigrants that may last. Detained immigrants suffer higher rates of anxiety, depression, and PTSD than those that were not detained and social isolation is found to be high in immigrants who were released after being detained (Von Werthern, 2018).

According to one researcher, immigrants who suffer from depression and anxiety, tend to also suffer from stress caused by immigration, discrimination, fear of deportation, and differences between cultures (Arbona, 2010). The unique stresses experienced by this population tend to lead to negative outcomes in terms of their psychological well-being.

Among the issues that the new immigrant population experiences upon entering this country, one important area is that of psychological well-being. The new culture that immigrants transition to in order to fit in may cause issues within their families and family ties with family in their home countries may make them less likely to assimilate in the United States. More importantly, newly arrived immigrants' psychological well-being may suffer as a result of the stress they are under, as well as trauma or stressors that they experienced in their home countries. Additionally, there is a lack of accessibility to healthcare and other beneficial resources to immigrants that would improve their chances of acculturation in the U.S. These are some of the issues found in conducting the research study.

#### Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical force in this study was the theory of ethnic/racial identity. This theory allowed for the analysis of what the experiences are for new immigrants in acculturating in the U.S. in this day and age. Ethnic/racial identities have been connected to "...socioemotional, academic, and behavioral well-being among young people" (Wang, 2017). Ethnic/racial identity is crucial in the well-being of individuals. It was important to explore this topic within the study participants, as there was a wealth of information to be gathered about how conflicts within ethnic/racial identity affect the acculturation process of immigrants.

## Contribution of Study to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

Post-positivism has the potential to provide strong data from which to draw conclusions. The data is of importance to micro and macro social work practice for several reasons. In micro practice, the data obtained can give insight into the type of issues that people in this population are experiencing. The issues may include those in the areas of mental health, economic stability, and acculturation likelihood, to name a few. In learning that, interventions and/or treatment plans can be developed to be able to address those issues in practice.

In a macro sense, having this knowledge can aid in motivating social workers to strive to alleviate those issues at large. For example, knowing that there are specific issues that a population experiences as a whole can even stimulate policy changes to take place within workplaces, communities, and schools. Social changes can be made to increase preventative measures that assist this population has more resources to rely on when in need.

## Summary

This chapter elaborated on the research focus, as well as the paradigm being adopted for the study. A literature review was provided that explains important topics that were explored in interviews and fall within the focus of the study. Lastly, the contribution of the study to macro and micro social work practice was presented.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ENGAGEMENT

#### Introduction

This chapter addresses the engagement steps of the study. Areas covered include what the study site was and where the study took place. It also explains whom the various gatekeepers were and how the gatekeepers engaged in order to gain entry into the study site. Next, this chapter addresses self-preparation that occurred before entering the study site. There are several ethical issues that were kept in mind before working with participants and they included diversity, ethical, and political issues. Lastly, this chapter explains the role technology played in the study.

#### Research Site

For this research study, the study site consisted of a local community organization that comes into contact with and provides services to immigrants that live in the Southern California region. The local community organization provides immigrants with the opportunity to acquire safe work for a fair wage, labor rights education, health and safety training, vocational training, and immigration document preparation to name a few services. More specifically, the organization that was contacted provides services to the immigrant population in a number of cities across the Inland Empire. The gatekeeper included the executive director of the community organization. The executive director of the



organization was contacted to gain approval and entry into the research site. With approval, the study took place within one of the community organization sites, local cafes, and one participant's home.

### Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

To engage the gatekeeper at the research site, he was approached with the purpose and focus of the research study. The gatekeeper was initially contacted via email. The purpose of the initial contact was for the researcher to introduce herself and to briefly explain the purpose and benefits of the research study. It was explained to the community organization executive director that the immigrant community stands to benefit from the research findings. An initial meeting was requested between the researcher and the gatekeeper. Upon agreeing to meet, the researcher explained the entire research study process to the gatekeeper in person to ensure that any questions or concerns were addressed.

Once permission was granted to conduct the study within the aforementioned sites, the researcher emailed the executive director a permission letter. The researcher proceeded by providing the gatekeeper with a flyer presenting contact information for those who were interested in participating. The flyer was be posted within the organization site in a highly visible area.

The gatekeeper additionally suggested that the researcher attend a biweekly meeting that included some of the members of the organization to provide the researcher with an opportunity to introduce herself and explain the

purpose of her study to the members in person. The researcher attended several meetings with the organization members and actively participated for several weeks before introducing the purpose and benefits of her research study to the potential participants. Communication continued with the gatekeeper throughout the duration of the study.

### Self-Preparation

Upon beginning the study, the researcher developed an understanding about factors that lead to successful acculturation and those that impede acculturation for immigrants. This knowledge was gained through a review of an existing body of literature.

Before entering the study site, preparation took place ahead of time by researching potential factors, such as cultural factors, that may change the way the research study is guided. It was expected that people of various cultures would be interviewed and there would have needed to be a level of familiarity with them in order to prevent crossing boundaries or norms. In preparation for the interviews with participants, knowledge was acquired about the participants' cultures. The researcher learned about the participants' home country's official language, common slang words and gestures as to avoid misinterpretation, and the dominant religion. The researcher maintained unconditional positive regard for participants and was sensitive to participants' vulnerability in discussing their personal difficulties. In addition, the researcher practiced cultural humility as to remain respectful towards the participants.

The researcher remained self-aware about her own perspectives and matters of countertransference while conducting the study. In order to facilitate this, she created a journal in which she wrote all of her thoughts after conducting each interview to allow her the space to self-reflect. The purpose of self-reflection was for the researcher to maintain an objective perspective when listening to the participants' lived experiences.

To prepare for engagement with the gatekeeper, the researcher created a consent form, interview questions, a flyer, and a permission letter to present to him. This was used to explain the process of the study to the gatekeeper. The researcher remained open to addressing questions and concerns that the gatekeeper had.

### Diversity Issues

During the study, was expected that the researcher would interview a variety of people. The researcher encountered people with different values, belief systems, and people of different ages and genders. There was the possibility that participants would have held or expressed racist, homophobic, or sexist viewpoints, for example, and the researcher was prepared for handling such instances. The participants may have also share child-rearing practices or home remedies specific to their cultures that do not align with those of the researcher's. The researcher remained committed to allowing the participants to teach the researcher about their experiences regardless of their differences. Additionally,

the researcher incorporated a willingness to accept other points of views and values to truly understand the participants' experiences and remain objective.

### Ethical Issues

To prevent issues from arising, approval by the Human Subjects Review Board, the community organization, and the participants were obtained. Next, before beginning the study, the study's focus and purpose were explained to all of the participants. They were asked to sign a consent form and they were provided with the approximate length of time needed to participate before beginning the interviews.

The possibility of ethical issues arising existed. One issue that had the possibility of arising was that of the use of minors as participants. To prevent this issue from arising, all participants in this study were adults over the age of eighteen. A second issue that had the possibility of arising was the fear of deportation that participants' may experience if they disclose their legal status. This fear may have also prevented willingness to participate on behalf of the participants. To combat this, the participants were not asked to disclose their legal status.

The identities and responses of participants remained confidential and were only used for the purposes of the study. The participants were assured of this prior to engaging in the interviews. The participants' identities and responses remained safely stored in a file cabinet until they were no longer of any use, at which point they were discarded.

## Political Issues

Potentially, political issues may have emerged throughout the study. For example, the community organization could have possibly viewed this study and disclosing the identities and legal status of immigrants that seek assistance from them as a threat to the well-being of the people they serve. Allowing the researcher to gain access to the participants may have caused the immigrants to feel compromised, putting the organizations in a bad light. The gatekeeper may have denied the researcher access to the participants in an effort to protect this vulnerable population and to avoid fear that it could have brought to the immigrant community. Guaranteeing confidentiality of the participants and anonymity of the organizations through an agreement was utilized to combat this hesitation. Additionally, the researcher made the gatekeeper aware of the potential benefits that the research findings can provide for the immigrant community.

## The Role of Technology in Engagement

Technology played a significant role in this study. Initially, email was used to make initial contact with the gatekeeper. Phone calls were later made to the gatekeeper to set up an initial meeting. Later, phone calls were made to contact the research participants about meeting times and locations, as well as text messaging. Email was continuously used to keep the gatekeeper updated throughout the study. During the study, an audio recorder was utilized to conduct

the face-to-face interviews and a computer was later used to create a narrative with the data collected.

### Summary

This chapter addressed the stages of engagement for this research study. The gatekeeper and participants were engaged and a thorough explanation of the study's focus and purpose was provided for them. Research was gathered in self-preparation efforts to allow the researcher to obtain the necessary knowledge to work with the specific population. Potential diversity, ethical, and political issues were also discussed within this chapter, conveying the importance of cultural humility and confidentiality. Finally, an explanation of the role of technology was provided, including the use of a telephone, computer, email, text, and an audio recorder.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### Introduction

This chapter covers the core areas of focus needed in the implementation of the research study. Chapter three addresses who will be included in the research study and the selection of the study participants. Additionally, data gathering methods, the phases of data collection, and the recording of data will be explained. This includes information about the data analysis, communication of findings, termination and follow-up, and lastly the plan for dissemination.

#### Study Participants

The study participants were made up of people who receive services from a community organization located in the Inland Empire region. The participants seek services from these organizations in hopes of easing difficulties and breaking through barriers while adjusting to lives in the United States. The organization gatekeeper put the researcher in touch with about 12 potential participants, of which 7 individuals participated. Due to the small participant pool, the participants consisted of young men and women who migrated to this country within the last thirty years, rather than the last ten years, which was the original plan. Participants included Hispanic men and women over the age of eighteen of diverse backgrounds. All of the participants were Hispanic and Spanish-speaking

due to the large population of immigrants from Latin American countries in the region.

### Selection of Participants

Purposive sampling provides the researcher with the most comprehensive data about the focus of the study (Morris, 2014). Specifically, homogenous sampling targets a sub-group for an in-depth study (Morris, 2014). Selection of participants occurred through homogenous sampling of people who specifically are over eighteen, receive services from the community organization, and had immigrated to the United States within the last thirty years.

The participants were recruited by engaging the executive director of a community organization located in the Inland Empire. The process and purpose of the study was explained to the gatekeeper by the researcher. Once approval was granted by the gatekeeper, flyers providing a brief explanation of the study were posted at the organization site. The flyers provided information about the study and the researcher's contact information for those who were interested in participating. Additionally, the researcher attended several organizational meetings where she personally explained the purpose and benefits of the research study to the potential participants.

Participants were selected from the pool of community organization members, located in the Inland Empire. After flyers were posted within the organization site providing potential participants with the researcher's contact information and attending several organizational meetings, those who contacted



the researcher wishing to participate were asked their age and how long they have been living in the United States to verify that they were over eighteen years of age and that they had been living in the United States for thirty years or fewer.

The contact information of people who were interested in participating was provided to the researcher by the potential participants themselves during the initial contact. People who were interested in participating were contacted by the researcher at a later time and were walked through the process, purpose of the study, and consent form. Lastly, times and dates for the interviews were scheduled for the participants.

### Data Gathering

Qualitative data gathering consisted of individual, face-to-face interviews. This type of qualitative data collection provided enough detail to allow the researcher to walk in the participants' shoes. The interviews were conducted on the organization site, local cafes, and a participant's home. The researcher used an audio recorder to record the individual interviews with participants, as well as a journal where she will make note of important details.

During initial meetings, the focus was placed on building rapport and gathering surface-level data, such as names, country of origin, and age. Crucial to the interviews, a list of questions was prepared for the interviews. This included inclusion, verification, substitution frame questions, as well as contrast questions. The variety in questions was of help in obtaining different details from the participants. Responses were analyzed to create new questions to draw

conclusions from. Probing questions were used to uncover core issues and struggles that the participants were and continue experiencing while attempting to establish themselves in the U.S.

The participants were questioned about their support systems, family ties in their home countries, acquisition of the dominant language, and their day-to-day experiences at that point in time to name a few topics. This led to new information about the struggles they are experiencing or have experienced in acculturating.

#### Phases of Data Collection

There are several phases of data collection in order to ensure that it is a thorough process. After making initial contact with the participants, interviews were scheduled. To begin the interviews with the participants, there needed to be an engagement process, in which the researcher needed to build rapport with the interviewees. This took place in the beginning stage of the interviews with throwaway questions to make the participants feel comfortable, such as by asking them what they enjoy about living in the United States, where they work, and what a typical day looked like for them. The interview questions then shifted to focus on the topic and the focus was generally maintained throughout the interviews.

A list of interview questions was developed prior to the interviews to allow for a smooth process and to maintain the focus of the interview. The interviewees were provided a copy of the questions before the interviews for review. Although

the researcher used a list of questions, there was an understanding that questions may change and follow-up questions may be asked as the interviews progressed. These questions served to explore specific opinions and attitudes about the lived experiences of the participants. Responses served to develop an understanding of the difficulties encountered by immigrants after immigrating to the United States.

After conducting the interviews, the researcher paraphrased the responses back to the interviewees to allow them to clarify if needed. This was also done to ensure that the researcher had accurately captured the participants' attitudes and beliefs. The researcher thanked the participants for their time, she notified them that she would be contacting them if she had questions at a later time, and she would address any questions or concerns about the study. The participants were also encouraged to contact the researcher via email or by phone if they did have any further comments, questions, or concerns.

### Data Recording

An audio recorder was used to record the interviews with the participants. The participants were made aware of the use of an audio recorder ahead of time and were asked to sign a consent form agreeing to its use. Recording by hand was also conducted during the interviews in a journal. A journal was used for this purpose to keep track of the interview processes, to record important revelations, and to remain focused on the information that needed to be gathered.

Journal entries were made for each participant under an alias to ensure confidentiality. The participants' true identities were kept safe on a separate document. Data collected through the use of the audio recorder was transcribed into written form. Written notes and audio recordings were used to create a narrative. All data, documents, and records were kept safe in a locked filed cabinet and they were all discarded once they were no longer needed for purposes of the study. The researcher did not contact the participants for additional information.

#### Data Analysis Procedures

To begin, open coding was the first stage of the data analysis process. Interviews and observations were conducted to collect data. The significant amount of information was first broken down into relevant concepts. The information provided was grouped together to form pieces of information that appeared to be connected.

Piecing together the data lead to the creation of dimensions and links to other concepts. Theoretical and guiding questions needed to be asked during the interviews in order to do so. There were certain statements or observations that stood out and that needed to be microanalyzed. For example, a situation the researcher could have encountered is if one participant expresses that she is a Medi-Cal recipient and later in the interview she states that she borrowed money from a friend to buy herself groceries for the week. These pieces of information could be grouped together, and it can be concluded that she receives assistance

due to having a low-income. Another example is if a participant expresses frequently feeling sadness about having left her family behind in her home country. This participant also discloses that she suffers panic attacks regularly. The researcher can connect the two ideas under the category of mental health issues.

The next stage was axial coding and it entailed making connecting statements between different categories or themes. These categories and themes were expected to emerge from the data that was collected during the interviews and observations. For example, a few possible categories that may have emerged during the data collection process include immigrants who are living in poverty and immigrants who are living comfortably, with the dimension range of hopelessness to optimistic. There are several connections that could be made within this hypothetical example.

The following stage was selective coding. This stage entailed the development of a theoretical statement. The categories were refined and the connections made in the previous stage were selected and included in a theoretical statement. First, a core category was identified from the list of categories. For this project in particular, the category of living in poverty could have been used. Next, a diagram could have been used to draw the connections between categories in order to develop theories. The journal and hand-written notes were referred back to during the development of a theoretical statement. Computer programs were not used in speeding up the qualitative data analysis

process. During this stage, irrelevant categories and connections were discarded.

The following stage is called the conditional matrix and it included the inclusion of the theoretical statement in the context of current knowledge about the experiences of new immigrants. A literature review including information about modern day acculturation was used in this stage. The current wealth of knowledge included the categories of individual, family, group, organizational, and community involvement in the lives of new immigrants who attempted to acculturate in this country. An exploration took place to identify whether the theoretical statement fits in the micro or macro levels of the human experience and human interaction. Research findings were linked to the human experience. The theoretical statement affected individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities and there are different variations within each level as well. For example, if there was an attempt to link the research findings with individuals, they would have applied differently to an eighteen-year-old than to a thirty year-old. Variations like this one could be found within each of the levels.

The analysis of all the data gathered took place. The experiences of the research participants were compared to those of immigrants from many decades ago. This information was shared with the participants and was added to the body of knowledge about acculturation.

## Summary

This chapter covered the focus of implementation of this research study. It addressed who will be included in the research study and the selection of the study participants. This chapter included information regarding the data gathering methods, the phases of data collection, and recording of data was explained. Lastly, it explained the processes of data analysis, communication of findings, termination and follow-up, and the plan for dissemination.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVALUATION

#### Introduction

This chapter will explain the data and the findings from that data. Additionally, this chapter will cover the potential impact of the findings on micro and macro level social work practice.

#### Data Analysis

The demographic data of the research participants is shown in Table 1. There were seven participants in total, of which 100% were of Mexican origin. The participants were between the ages of 19 and 56. One participant was 19, one was 20, one was 35, one was 51, one was 53, and two were 56 years of age. All participants identified their genders: 6 females and 1 male. Of the seven participants, three are single, three are married, and one is single and divorced.

In terms of how long they have been living in the United States, the participants reported having immigrated to the U.S. between 3 and 29 years ago. Two participants had immigrated to the U.S. 3 years ago, one 10 years ago, one 19 years ago, one 20 years ago, one 26 years ago, and one 29 years ago.

As far as educational attainments, the participants' educational backgrounds range from completion of middle school to attainment of a bachelor's degree. Two participants reported having completed middle school,



two completed the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, one completed the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and two obtained a bachelor's degree.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	Age	Country of Origin	Years In U.S.	Highest Level Of Education	Marital Status
Participants					
Jenny	56	Mexico	29	middle school	married
Carla	56	Mexico	10	college degree	divorced
Cristina	51	Mexico	26	middle school	married
Becky	53	Mexico	20	college degree	married
Alex	19	Mexico	3	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	single
Elissa	35	Mexico	19	12 <sup>th</sup> grade	w/partner
Lydia	20	Mexico	3	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	single

Of the seven participants, two reported having immigrated to the United States for fear of falling victims to criminal activity (violence, kidnappings, etc.). Two other participants reported having immigrated to fulfill their dreams of studying and obtaining college degrees in the U.S. Three of the participants reported having immigrated to the U.S. to escape poverty and lack of opportunities for economic advancement.

All seven participants reported initially needing to work in U.S. in order to survive and support family. Two of the seven participants also reported having to support families in their home countries upon arrival. Five of the participants expressed continued need to work to survive, while two did not express the same need. Upon initial arrival to the U.S., all seven participants reported having lived with either a sibling, friend, or in-laws for a variety of time: between a few months to 2 years.

None of the seven participants reported having experienced trauma or having fallen victims to crime while in their home countries or while journeying to the United States. One participant expressed having been sexually assaulted in the U.S. In addition, five of the seven participants experienced difficulties such as financial hardships, divorce, verbal and emotional abuse by employers and ICE officers, fear of deportation, discrimination in the family, difficulty finding employment, wrongful termination by employers, having to care for ill family members, and sadness about leaving behind family members while in the U.S.

In terms of social and family ties, six participants reported having constant communication with family members in their home countries, although one participant has strained relationships with family in her home country. One participant no longer has living family members in her home country with which she holds strong bonds. All seven participants report that they seek out social/emotional support from friends they have made at work, school, church

and family members living in the U.S. and those living in their home countries as well.

The participants overall reported that the services that would aid the U.S. immigrant population in establishing themselves in the country include, educational resources to assist them in learning English, and workshops to inform them about their rights, the laws and norms of the U.S., financial planning, medical services, and mental health services.

### Data Interpretation

Through the different stages of data analysis, relevant themes that emerged were connected. The emerging themes that were connected included, participant adverse experiences in home country and in U.S., participant strength of social and family ties, financial stressors, and participant marital status, to create new concepts such as: participant ability to cope, feelings of optimism, and potential for mental health illnesses.

#### Leisure and Optimism

Through the interviewing process, it was uncovered that there was a correlation between the amount of time the participants spent working or participating in leisurely activities and the likelihood of them experiencing discontentment or optimism. Of all the participants only two did not express a need to work to survive in the U.S., although one seeks employment and the other is currently employed. The two participants were also the only two participants to express their interest in leisurely activities such as baking, art,

reading, and learning about different cultures, as well as having more time to spend with children in their afterschool activities. One participant expressed feeling that he has very little time for any leisurely activities due to his need to work excessively in order to survive.

This data led to the conclusion that spending a significant amount of time working, leaves participants with little time for leisurely activities, which led to an overall feeling of discontentment and potential mental health illness. Additionally, feeling that they must work in order to survive is a stressor that may increase the likelihood of mental health illness. On the other hand, participants who do not have financial stressors and are able spend time engaging in leisurely activities experience more optimism.

Table 2. Direct Quotes about Leisure and Optimism

Participants	Direct Quotes about Leisure and Optimism
Alex	“Well things change a lot. I work every day. It’s all about working in the U.S. for me. That leaves me very little time to do things that I enjoy. I would love to travel and explore the U.S. and enjoy more time with my family because I have no time for that now.” (November, 2019)
Becky	“I love staying busy. I have always been surrounded by art. Growing up I was a ballet dancer and listened to classical music. I have studied and am familiar with the American Indian culture and African American culture, for example. I adapt very well and I love learning.” (November, 2019)

### Marital Status and Mental Illness

It was identified that the only three participants who did not have the support of a significant other, experienced symptoms of mental illness. The participants who were single, either reported symptoms of mental illness or expressed the need for new immigrants to receive information about where or how to obtain mental health services. During the interview process, the first single participant, Lydia, stated that she strongly believes that immigrants would benefit from information on how to obtain mental health services. The second participant, Carla, reported that she also believes immigrants would benefit from mental health services and that she was actively receiving mental health services to help her cope with her divorce. The third participant, Alex, expressed feelings of sadness and loneliness since immigrating to the U.S. Alex also does not receive mental health services, nor did he suggest it as a way to better assist immigrants in the U.S.

Table 3. Direct Quotes about Marital Status and Mental Health

Participants	Direct Quotes about Marital Status and Mental Health
Lydia	<p>“I felt so guilty for leaving knowing that my grandpa was ill. ...all my peers in Mexico were already graduating and I was having to start over completely here in the U.S. It was depressing. Just making immigrants feel like they are not alone and that everything will be ok because the struggles of many immigrants is too much to bear. Psychological and emotional help is necessary for them to know that they are going to be ok and that people are there to support them if they would like to share what is on their minds to make them feel better” (November, 2019)</p>
Carla	<p>“...there should be more information provided to the immigrant population about mental health services available to them. I now believe in it because I am receiving mental health services, but this was not always the case. I think that I am now beginning to process everything and I am receiving mental health services now. It is really helping me.” (November, 2019)</p>
Alex	<p>“I was leaving behind my parents and siblings. I felt sad because I didn’t know and I still don’t know if I will ever see them again. So many things will change over the years and I will miss out on all of it. I was sacrificing a lot by coming over here to have a better life...there were times where I would feel lonely. I realized that it is part of the sacrifice...” (November, 2019)</p>

Coping Skills and Adverse Experiences

Upon analysis, it was recognized that all of the seven participants reported being able to make friends easily in various places including school, work, church. They also sought support from family members living in U.S and in their home countries. There were five participants who experienced hardships while in the U.S. and one, in particular, fell victim to crime. None of them, however, were victimized in their home countries. It was concluded that the participants have all

learned positive coping skills, such as seeking social and emotional support, to cope and help them overcome times of adversity.

Table 4. Direct Quotes about Coping Skills and Adverse Experiences

Participants	Direct Quotes about Coping Skills and Adverse Experiences
Elissa	“Sometimes they would hold my pay for three weeks. At times I didn’t even have food to eat...It was a scary time though because the landlord’s husband tried opening my room at night frequently and he attempted to do things to me. This happened to me in several different places I lived in...” (November, 2019)
Jenny	“Well I am Christian, so when I need emotional support I go to my church for support. I have also been fortunate enough to have established very trusting relationships with some of my bosses as well.” (December, 2019)
Cristina	“I even made a friend once who did not speak English or Spanish. I have made two dear friends in particular who I consider to be like family to me. My friends show me different perspectives of life. Sometimes people think that they are going through the absolute worst thing in life, but it is not until you hear someone going through something worse that you realize that you can get through it.” (November, 2019)

#### Implication of Findings for Micro and Macro Practice

The findings can provide social workers with a clear understanding of the unique struggles of the immigrant population in the U.S. and which specific interventions on the micro and macro level can be implemented to help immigrants succeed in the U.S.

On a micro level, knowing the particular symptoms and struggles that immigrants face can lead social workers working in the mental health field to

implement treatment plans that include interventions specifically geared to address the symptoms presented. The research findings can also encourage all social workers working directly with immigrants in the U.S. to work in an empathic manner and to thoroughly understand the meaning of cultural humility in practice.

The research findings highlight the need for change in macro social work. In a macro sense, the findings describe a need for mental health services, medical services, educational resources to assist immigrants in learning English, and workshops to inform them about their rights, financial planning, and the laws and norms of the U.S. It is important for social workers working in policy advocacy, for example, to know exactly what it is that the population needs and how they stand to benefit from the changes and there are clear needs not being met. By utilizing the research findings to stimulate policy change within the communities, workplaces, and schools of the Los Angeles County, there will be preventative programs, information, and services that can be offered geared to address their specific needs.

### Summary

This chapter covered the findings of the research study. The study participants' ages ranged from 19-56 and they all immigrated from Mexico. The data was presented through the transcribed audio recordings. Through the analysis of the data collected from participants, common themes emerged and different categories were developed. The data was interpreted to demonstrate



the correlation between themes. Lastly, the implications of the research findings for micro and macro social work practice were discussed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

#### Introduction

This chapter will explain the termination plans with the study site and study participants. A description of plans to communicate and disseminate the study findings will be provided.

#### Termination of Study

Termination with the study site and the study participants began as soon as the interviews were completed. The termination process included answering participant questions about the study, informing them about the current stage of the research study, and providing the approximate time that the findings will be available. Appreciation was also expressed to the participants for their contribution to this research project.

The research findings including what was learned from the interviews and observations, what the struggles are for the population, what the different participants had in common in terms of their responses, and the resources that may be useful to immigrants will be explained to the study participants through this report.

### Communication of Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

Communication continued with the gatekeeper after the interviews were completed with the participants. This completed research report will be shared with the gatekeeper, as well as with the research participants.

### Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

Relationships with the study site and the study participants will not be ongoing to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

### Dissemination Plan

Findings will be shared in written form, through this comprehensive report to California State University San Bernardino's Social Work Department. The research findings will also be communicated to the study participants and study site through this report.

### Summary

This study explored the various hardships that immigrants experience in acculturating in the U.S., how they are impacted by them, and what our communities can do to assist this population. This chapter covered the plans for the termination of the study and the communication of the findings with the study site and study participants. The relationship with the study participants was addressed as well as the dissemination plan.

APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO**  
**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**  
***Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee***

Researcher(s): Melissa Saldana-Alvarez

Proposal Title: Acculturation in Modern-Day America

# SW1966

Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

-----  
Proposal is:

X      Approved

     To be resubmitted with revisions listed below

     To be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

Faculty signature missing

Missing informed consent  Debriefing statement

Revisions needed in informed consent  Debriefing

Data collection instruments revision

Agency approval letter missing

CITI missing

Revisions in design needed (specified below)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair Signature

6/10/2019  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Distribution: White-Coordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS



California State University, San Bernardino  
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee  
APPROVED 6/10/2019 VOID AFTER 6/9/2020  
IRB# SW1966 CHAIR [Signature]

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Social Work

**INFORMED CONSENT**

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine barriers that impede immigrants from successfully acculturating in the United States. The study is being conducted by Melissa Saldana-Alvarez, a MSW student under the supervision of Dr. Armando Barragan, assistant professor in the School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-Committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to identify barriers and sources of support encountered by the immigrant population in the U.S. in order to develop strategies that lead to successful acculturation.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked of a few questions on their reasons for immigrating, difficulties in acculturating, feelings about immigrating, and types of assistance that would make acculturation easier.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** Your responses will remain anonymous and

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data will be reported anonymously.

**DURATION:** It will take 30 to 40 minutes to answer the question.

**RISKS:** There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Armando Barragan at 909-537-3501 or Armando.Barragan@csusb.edu.

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu>) at California State University, San Bernardino after June 2020.

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This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

\_\_\_\_\_

Place an X mark here

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

I agree to be tape recorded: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

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California State University, San Bernardino  
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee  
APPROVED 6/1/20 VOID AFTER 6/9/20  
IRB# SW1966 CHAIR *Garrett*

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School of Social Work

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

El estudio en el que se le pide que participe está diseñado para examinar las barreras que impiden que los inmigrantes aculturen con éxito en los Estados Unidos. El estudio está siendo realizado por Melissa Saldana-Alvarez, una estudiante de MSW bajo la supervisión del Dr. Armando Barragan, profesor asistente en la Escuela de Trabajo Social. El estudio ha sido aprobado por el Subcomité de Trabajo Social de la Junta de Revisión Institucional, California State University, San Bernardino.

**PROPÓSITO:** El propósito del estudio es identificar las barreras y las fuentes de apoyo encontradas por la población inmigrante en los EE. UU. para desarrollar estrategias que conduzcan a una aculturación exitosa.

**DESCRIPCIÓN:** Se le preguntará sobre sus razones para inmigrar y sus sentimientos sobre su inmigración, dificultades al aculturarse, y tipos de asistencia que facilitarían su aculturación.

**PARTICIPACIÓN:** Su participación es totalmente voluntaria. Puede negarse a participar o interrumpir su participación en cualquier momento sin consecuencias.

**CONFIDENCIALIDAD O ANONIMIA:** Sus respuestas se mantendrán anónimas y los datos serán reportados de forma anónima.

**DURACIÓN:** Tomará aproximadamente 60 minutos para responder las preguntas.

**RIESGOS:** No hay riesgos previsible a largo plazo e inmediatos para los participantes que participan en el estudio. Puede experimentar algunas molestias al ser entrevistado(a) debido a la naturaleza de las preguntas y se les notificará que no están obligados a responder ninguna pregunta a la que no se sientan cómodos respondiendo.

**BENEFICIOS:** Los hallazgos del estudio pueden llevar a nuestras comunidades a desarrollar formas en las que puedan brindar servicios a inmigrantes que propicien una aculturación exitosa.

**CONTACTO:** Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre este estudio, no dude en comunicarse con el Dr. Armando Barragan al 909-537-3501 o en Armando.Barragan@csusb.edu.

**RESULTADOS:** Los resultados del estudio se pueden obtener en la biblioteca de Pfau ScholarWorks (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu>) en la Universidad Estatal de California, San Bernardino después de Junio de 2020.

Estoy de acuerdo en ser grabado: \_\_\_\_\_ Si \_\_\_\_\_ No

Esto es para certificar que leí lo anterior y tengo 18 años o más.

Coloque una marca X aquí

Fecha

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APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interview Questions

Age:

Nationality:

Mexican \_\_\_\_\_  
Honduran \_\_\_\_\_  
Guatemalan \_\_\_\_\_  
Salvadoran \_\_\_\_\_  
Costa Rican \_\_\_\_\_  
Nicaraguan \_\_\_\_\_  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest level of education:

Marital Status:

Married \_\_\_\_\_  
Divorced \_\_\_\_\_  
Separated \_\_\_\_\_  
Single \_\_\_\_\_  
Widowed \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been living in the United States?

What do you like the most about living in the United States?

Do you work? If so, where do you work?

What were your reasons for immigrating?

What were your feelings about immigrating to the U.S.?

What were your day-to-day experiences in your home country and how has that changed?

Did you know anybody in the United States before immigrating?

Where did you go when you first arrived in the United States?

Were you detained upon entering the United States? If so, what was that experience like?

What have been your biggest struggles in acculturating in the United States?

Did you receive any type of assistance from anyone when you arrived? If so, what kind and from who?

What has been the easiest part of acculturating in the United States?

Have you learned to speak English? If so, how long did it take you to learn it?

Do you work at an establishment that requires you to speak English?

Do you have strong family ties in your home country and if so with who?

Do you see your stay in the United States as permanent?

Have you created new bonds/ties with people since immigrating to the United States?

What are your current support systems now? Who do you go to for support?

What services do you need or do you think immigrants need to assist with resettlement in the United States?

Developed by: Melissa Saldana-Alvarez

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