

***INTERPERSONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH IN
MEXICAN MIGRANT COUPLES:
A BICULTURAL STUDY***

Final Narrative Report

JULY 2007

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Title of project: Interpersonal And Mental Health In Mexican Migrant Couples:
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Interpersonal and Mental Health in Mexican Migrant Couples: A Bicultural Study

Statement of the problem

Through a cultural perspective and a psycho-social approach of interpersonal relationships, in this case, the couple's relationship, we suggest an interactive vision of the variables: identity, gender roles, intimacy, styles of communication and confrontment, for the better understanding of the Mexican migrant couple phenomenon, we consider that an inadequate integration of the variables could be a risk factor for the couple's relationship functionality; whereas an adequate integration would lead us to maintain healthy relationships which are favorable for mental and interpersonal wellbeing, and a better social and acculturative adaptation.

Because of the complexity of the couple's relationship in the migratory context and in function of the interaction of the variables: identity, gender roles, intimacy, styles of communication and confrontment, mentioned above, we state the following research question: Is there an "interpersonal reality" that is favorable for mental and interpersonal health; and promoting a better social and acculturation adaptation in Mexican migrant couples in the United States?

General Objective

To know the interpersonal reality by the interaction: identity, gender roles, intimacy, styles of communication and confrontment, for Mexican migrant couples, in order to promote mental and interpersonal health and a better social adaptation of them in Mexican and American cultures.

Specific Objectives:

1. To know gender identity attributes at a personal and at a couple's relationship level in the Mexican migrant population in the United States.
2. To know if there are any changes in the traditional gender roles that the original culture transmits them along with the gender roles assumed by the acculturation process in Mexican migrant couples in the United States.
3. Understand the construction of intimacy of Mexican migrant couples.
4. To know the influence that the styles of communication have in the construction of intimacy in the Mexican migrant couples in the United States.

5. Distinguish which are the styles of confrontation that the Mexican migrant couples in the United States utilize in acculturation. To create a model of migration and acculturation from the interaction of identity, gender roles, intimacy, styles of communication and confrontation) by Mexican migrant couples in the United States.
6. To design intervention strategies promoting mental and interpersonal health for a better adaptation of the Mexican migrant couples in the United States,

Process

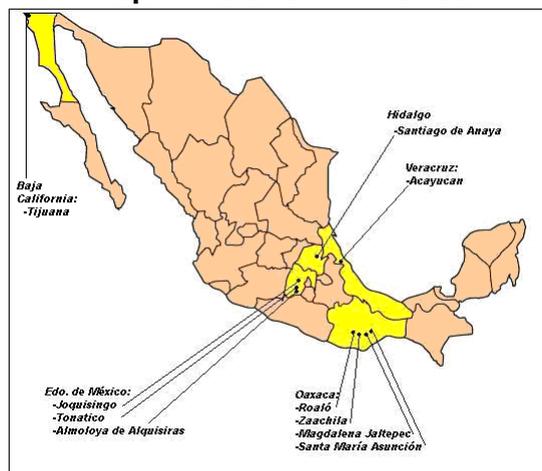
The fieldwork has been done in USA and in México.. En los Estados Unidos the fieldwork was done in the State of California where the following locations were research sites: Fontana, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Palm Desert, Bloomington, Riverside, Thermal, Coachella Valley, Mecca, Indio, Palm Springs and in Duros.

Map 1. Fieldwork in the state of California, USA.



The fieldwork in Mexico took place in the States of: Oaxaca, Estado de Mexico, Veracruz, Hidalgo and Baja California.

Map 2. Fieldwork in Mexico

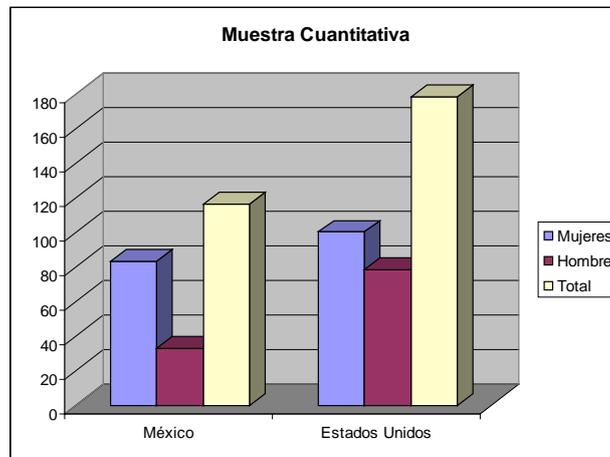


Individuals who participated in this study were met through various ways. On one hand, we established contact with some of the leaders of predominantly migrant areas in the State of California and in Mexico, and through them we were able to interview numerous couples in various communities.

For instance, the quantitative sample obtained so far, consists of 178 Mexican migrants living in the United States, coming from 32 different states within Mexico, 100 women (56.17%) and 78 men (43.82%). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 60 years old, with a mean age of 35.59 years old and a standard deviation of .49. The range of married years was from 1 to 38 years with a mean of 12.9 and a standard deviation of 9.12. 52% of the subjects had met their partner in Mexico and the 48% in United States. The selection of the sample was accidental and non-probabilistic.

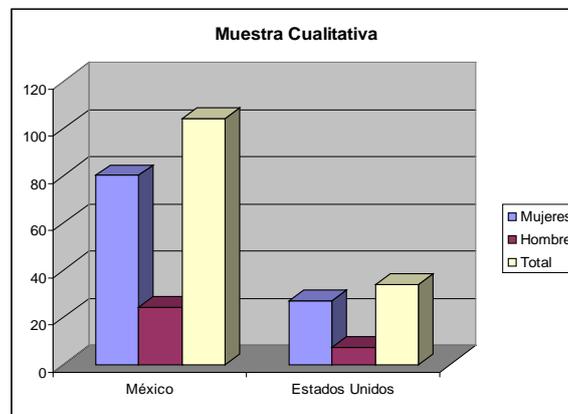
The quantitative sample within Mexico, consisted of 116 Mexicans with their wife or husband in the United States, of which 83 were women (71.6%) and 33 were men (28.4%). The age of the participants ranged from 14 to 67 years old, with a mean age of 37.87 years old and a standard deviation of 13.18. The range of married years was from 1 to 40 years with a mean of 14.26 and a standard deviation of 9.7. The selection of the sample was accidental and non-probabilistic.

Gráfica 1. Muestra Cuantitativa en Estados Unidos y México



On the other hand, the qualitative sample achieved has been of 34 (27 women and 7 men) Mexican migrants living in the United States who were in a relationship (Table 1), and in Mexico 104 individuals (80 women and 24 men) participated in either in-depth interviews or in focus groups (for specific information please go to Table 2 in the Appendix).

Gráfica 1. Muestra Cualitativa en Estados Unidos y México



The ethical aspect of the research was handled by means of consent forms given for each questionnaire, in-depth interview and focus group. A rigorous effort was undertaken to ensure that the participants who collaborated in our study did so in a free and voluntarily manner, informing them of the objectives of the research and the confidentiality policies of the information provided.

Fieldwork Highlights

Accessing the migrant communities within Mexico and the United States, was not an easy task, as when the fieldwork began a historical, political and social movement and events impacted the Mexican migrants in the United States as well as their families in Mexico, which consequently made our target population become very suspicious and wary in participating in our research and be recorded. As a result of this situation, our first approximation to the migrant communities became more time-consuming than what had previously been projected.

In the United States, the approximation process to the migrant population was successfully carried out in great part due to the support of Susan Francis and the community Promotoras (family health specialists) of the Child Well Care Clinic, located in Palm Desert CA. In addition, the cooperation of Violeta Suazo, Mexican community leader and representative of the Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior in Bloomington and San Bernardino (IME, Mexicans Abroad Institute) was a significant component in this study. It must also be mentioned that Consul Carlos Giraldo Cabrales, of the Consulate of Mexico in San Bernardino, CA, was instrumental in supporting our efforts in the quantitative phase of the research in the USA, as he permitted investigators in this research study to access to the Mexican Consulate and the ability to interview participants.

On the other hand, in Mexico we were able to access the Mexican migrant communities because of the cooperation of the “Company of Jesus” religious leaders, such as the “Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes” (Jesuit Service to Migrants), the Comision Diocesana del Migrante (Migrant’s Diocesan Commission), the Centro de Orientacion del Migrante en Oaxaca, A.C. (COMI, Migrant Orientation Center in Oaxaca). The support of the organization Ixquixóchitl Arbol de Muchas Flores, A.C. in Zaachila, Oaxaca was also an important aspect of this study. We must also mention the significant cooperation of María Fernanda García Villalobos, coordinator of the Enlace Internacional y Mexiquense en el Exterior del Gobierno del Edo. de Mexico (International and Mexican Alliance Abroad of the Edo. Mexico’s Government).

In Tijuana, thanks to the help and support of Luiz Kendzierski, priest in charge of “Casa de Migrantes” (Immigrants House for Men) and of Mary Galvan administrator of “Casa Madre Assunta” (Immigrants House for Women and Children), we were able to interview immigrants being recently deported who were staying at these immigrants’ asylums.

We found that most of the communities we visited in Mexico were noticeably comprised of children, young teenagers or older people. Young adults and middle-aged people were hardly seen. Consequently, we had to redefine our study’s criteria of inclusion. Coincidentally enough, in the United States we did

find migrant couples who had the characteristics we initially established in the criteria for inclusion in our sample. It is also important to mention that it was not possible to interview “couples” in each instance. In some cases we interviewed women and men separately who were in a relationship, and in other cases we were able to interview both members of the relationship at the same time.

While on our fieldwork in Tijuana, Mexico, we mainly interviewed recently deported immigrants. This population was found under significantly different circumstances, contrasting drastically with the population previously interviewed in Mexico and in the United States. For instance, most of the interviewees were deported without previous notice, and were taken to the border in Tijuana (after spending a minimum of three days in prison, due to lack of work permits or also because of domestic violence charges), these individuals once expelled from the US and being in Tijuana had no place to live, or to stay, we found them staying at a temporary asylum for immigrants called “Casa de Migrantes”. Also, most of the interviewees had no social networks, family members or friends near Tijuana to help them. Individuals interviewed in Tijuana, were found to be under high levels of stress, depression, hopelessness, and in a more vulnerable state (emotionally, physically and financially) compared to the population interviewed within Mexico and in the US. The psychological impacts upon deportation were tremendous, and even sparked in our research several questions for future study.

Final Observations

There can be no doubt that the phenomenon of migration is of great importance for those researchers who set out to explain political, social, economic, legal and cultural issues, among others, from an other than macro viewpoint. It is also important to offer a more concrete vision that takes into account what people say and do regarding the experience examined here: how people live, adapt and impart meaning to their lives as immigrants, either legal or illegal. The use of narrative-style interviews and of autobiographical documents is the ideal way to gain access to internal or subjective aspects of people in such a situation, being an appropriate means of studying life experiences, arising from social interaction, that are interpreted at the individual level and accumulated bit by bit in the course of the said interaction. The interpretation of such experiences will, perforce, be mediated by the subjects' self-image and via communication with other persons interacting with them, above all "significant others".

It should be stressed that the subjective factors involved in immigration have been little studied, either in migrants in general or in Mexican migrants in particular. These subjective elements pertain to such sociological, anthropological and psychological dimensions as ideas, feelings, values and beliefs. Qualitative research enables us to bring to the surface aspects of self-depiction that are not detected by quantitative methods. However, as is corroborated by this research, the said findings confirm many of the data that are obtained via qualitative means, with a certain degree of reliability and statistical significance.

Migration constitutes an alteration in the course taken by the individual's and the couple's life, and this is even more the case when moving house means changing countries, which can imply learning a new language and adapting to a new environment with different laws and customs, to mention just some of the aspects that can be affected by such a move.

With regard to identity and gender roles, we have found patterns that corroborate the existing literature. Nonetheless we have also seen new ways of interrelating in Mexican migrant couples, who, for instance, relate with each other not only in a traditional or innovatory manner, but also in a transitional one. We have analyzed how men and women assume their roles as participants both in and outside the home. In this regard, men have tended to give greater expression to their feelings within the relationship and assumed gender roles, as part of everyday household life, that are deemed to be feminine from the cultural point of view. For their part, women have also modified their traditional patterns of behavior, viewing themselves in new ways and, by dint of circumstance, beginning to play a double role that combines housework with work outside the home, in the search for gender equality in all the areas that call for it.

Migration also triggers a set of factors -such as financial problems, health-related issues, unfavorable living conditions (for example 4 families living in one household), inability to go out freely, loneliness or separation from relatives- that greatly affects the couple's relationship. Such things generate both tensions and cohesion in the partners' interaction with each other. Children, mutual support and shared feelings create an intimate bond in migrant couples.

Since it sets in motion a process of re-adaptation, the migratory process leads to changed power structures and roles, both in couples and patterns of interaction within the family. With regard the subjective processes of married and family life, this leads both to a broad spectrum of expressiveness of conditions of vulnerability and a wide range of confrontational strategies, in which issues pertaining to identity, relationships with partners and shared everyday experience are intermixed within the context of the host country.

It was in the recently deported couples whom we interviewed at the border (Tijuana) that we found the greatest emotional, physical and financial vulnerability, and this population contrasted dramatically with that interviewed inside Mexico and the United States. The unexpected nature of deportation, which leaves those subjected to it without any home, job or social network, led to the highest levels of stress, depression, anxiety and desperation. The psychological impacts of deportation were tremendous and even led us to formulate several questions for future study in the course of our research.

Furthermore, it is crucial that an exhaustive analysis be carried out of the effects on the living conditions of the communities in both Mexico and the United States brought about by the migratory flow between the said two countries that stems from globalization, family and cultural ties, and leads to a system for exchanging currency, goods, information and human beings. These social links allow Mexicans living in the United States to maintain a living network of relationships and representations that enables the communities from which the said migrants come to subsist and develop, although those involved are also subjected to conditions of risk and vulnerability, the understanding of which might enable us to develop new programs to protect them from psycho-social risk.

Additional Funding:

Recipient: Celia Mancillas Bazán

Amount: \$11,657.00

Granting Institution: Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City.

Project Name: Intimacy and Gender Identity in Mexican Migrant Couples.
(Intimidad e Identidad de Género en Parejas Migrantes Mexicanas)

Project Period: January through December 2006

Proposals prepared for additional future funding:

Title: *The Psychological and Social Impact on Mexican Immigrants after Deportation*

Edgar Butler and Celia Mancillas Bazán, University of California, Riverside, and Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City.

Results directly related to this research undertaken by the principal and collaborating investigators as a direct result from the grant:

Conference presentations related to the project:

Presenter: Butler, E., Mancillas, C., Domínguez, A., Ojeda, A., Polanco, G. y Polo, A.

Title of paper: *“Interpersonal and Mental Health in Mexican Migrant Couples: A Bicultural Study”.*

Name, date and location of conference: 48th Annual Conference, Western Social Science Association, Phoenix, Arizona, USA, April 21st 2006.

Presenter: Ojeda, A.

Title of paper: *“Intimacy and Marital Communication in Immigrant Mexican Couples”.*

Name, date and location of conference: The 2006 International Association for Relationship Research Conference, Rethymno, Crete, Grecia del 6 al 10 de Julio del 2006.

Presenter: Ojeda, A.

Title of paper: *“Intimacy and Marital Communication in Immigrant Mexican Couples. A Bicultural Study”*

Name, date and location of conference: 18th International Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology. Isla de Spetses, Grecia del 11 al 15 de Julio del 2006.

Presenter: Mancillas, C.

Title of paper: *“Intimidad e identidad de género en parejas mexicanas migrantes”.*

Name, date and location of conference: Encuentro Internacional de Especialistas. Prospectiva Migratoria México-Estados Unidos. Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales –UNAM, Red Escenarios y Estrategias para América Latina, Nodo Futuro México, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México, D.F., 30 de agosto de 2006.

Presenter: Ojeda, A.

Title of paper: *“Estilos de Comunicación y Afrontamiento en Migrantes Mexicanos”*.

Name, date and location of conference: XIV Congreso Mexicano de Psicología. El psicólogo rumbo a la certificación: Investigación, formación y práctica. Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco 27, 28, 29 de septiembre del 2006.

Presenter: Mancillas, C., Butler, E., Ojeda, A., Roth, E.

Title of paper: *“Intimacy and Gender in Mexican Migrant Couples: A Bicultural Perspective”*.

Name, date and location of conference: 49th Conference, Western Social Science Association, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, April 11-14, 2007.

Presenter: Mancillas, C. y Butler, E.

Title of paper: “Interpersonal and mental health in mexican immigrant couples. A bicultural study”

Name, date and location of conference: 49th Conference, Western Social Science Association, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, April 11-14, 2007.

Presenter: Mancillas, C.

Title of paper: “Intimidad y estrategias de afrontamiento en parejas migrantes mexicanas. Un estudio bicultural”

Name, date and location of conference: X Foro Internacional del Enfoque Centrado en la Persona celebrado en Palma de Mallorca, España, del 7 al 12 de mayo de 2007.

Presenter: Ojeda, A. y Polo, A.

Title of paper: *“El afrontamiento en migrantes México-Estados Unidos como agente de cambio: De factores de riesgo a factores de protección”*.

Name, date and location of conference: VI Congreso Iberoamericano de Evaluación Psicológica, 29 y 30 de Junio de 2007, Ciudad de México.

Presenter: Ojeda, A.

Title of paper: *“Comunicación Marital Y Estilos de Afrontamiento en Migrantes Mexicanos: Un Estudio Mixto”*

Name, date and location of conference: XXXI Congreso Interamericano de Psicología, 1- 5 julio 2007, Ciudad de México.

Presenter: Ojeda, A.

Title of paper: *“Comunicación y Afrontamiento con Migrantes: Implicaciones en su relación de Pareja”*.

Name, date and location of conference: IV Congreso regional latino Americano de Psicología Transcultural, 6-9 julio, 2007, Ciudad de México.

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