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Immigrant Mothers in Abusive Relationships: Decisions and Actions

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

IMMIGRANT MOTHERS IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS: DECISIONS AND ACTIONS

By

Michelle Castro Fernandez

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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IMMIGRANT MOTHERS IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS: DECISIONS AND ACTIONS

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Intimate partner violence is an important public health concern affecting millions of mothers and their children each year. Research suggests that Latina women, particularly immigrants, are at risk for victimization, face multiple barriers for help-seeking, and tend to remain in abusive relationships longer than their non-immigrant counterparts. Theoretical models used to explain Latinas’ decisions to stay or leave an abusive relationship fail to capture many nuances and complexities of their experiences. This study relies on grounded theory methodology to construct a model to better understand Latina immigrant mothers’ decision to stay or leave their abusing partners.

Interviews with eight Latina immigrant mothers who were victims of intimate partner violence revealed a dynamic set of historical, psychological, and sociocultural forces that influence their decisions. Childhood experiences, family values, and self-perceptions contributed to inconsistent messages that made leaving an abusive relationship difficult. Connections (and disconnections) were identified as pronounced forces that provoked movement towards or away from making a decision. Uncertainty and dissonance is a key factor that was found to halt the process from flowing and impedes a woman from being able to make a decision and action.

Implications for research and clinical practice are discussed.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction

For this dissertation I have listened to and interpreted the stories of immigrant Latina\(^1\) mothers who are victims of intimate partner violence (IPV). My goal was to understand the choices women make to stay or leave abusive partners. This chapter provides the context from which this research emerged. I include reflections to describe what led me to this study and then present an overview of intimate partner violence as a public health concern. This is followed by a discussion of why learning about the experiences of Latina immigrant mothers is a valuable endeavor.

Reflections

Early during my graduate studies, I was encouraged to be intentional in my work. I have been intentional with this dissertation and have made careful attempts to reflect on the decisions I have made throughout the entirety of the process.

Topic and sample

This study is an outgrowth of the professional and personal transformations I experienced over the course of my graduate studies. I entered graduate school with an aspiration for purpose, curiosity about familial relationships, and fondness for children. Professionally these took shape in seeking opportunities with children and families who were confronting difficult life circumstances and examining how family relationships soothe and exacerbate painful emotional experiences. In my personal journey, it was manifested as expanding my identity to include spouse and mother.

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\(^1\) While the terms Hispanic and Latino are often used interchangeably, neither term quite represents this ethnic group accurately. I have chosen to use the term Latino to refer to individuals who identify as such and whose ancestry is linked to Spanish-speaking countries in Central America, the Caribbean and South America. For a thoughtful discussion on the term Latino see Suarez-Orozco and Paez (2009).
My earliest clinical and research training experiences involved a broad strokes approach to learning about children and families. Across contexts, working with underserved immigrant Latino populations was most salient for me. As a child of Cuban and Colombian immigrants, I felt connected to the narratives of hope and the transnational pursuit for happiness. Intellectually, I was drawn to their remarkable sense of sacrifice and resilience. Exposure to these families led me to critically think about the ways in which institutions, including the psychology profession, support and hinder the wellbeing of Latinos. This interest led me to co-authoring a chapter addressing cultural considerations for intervention programs with men who batter (Aldarondo & Castro-Fernandez, 2008), as well as another chapter examining the risk and protective factors for IPV perpetration (Aldarondo & Castro-Fernandez, 2009). Working on these two chapters supported my interest in the complexities of IPV and provided lessons on the multidimensional nature to safeguarding victims and changing perpetrators’ behaviors through intervention and prevention. It also bolstered my commitment to working with Latino families affected by IPV.

In my third year of doctoral training I was involved in a qualitative community-based participatory research project that aimed at identifying factors of IPV prevention programs targeting Latinas (Gonzalez-Guarda, Cummings, Becerra, Fernandez, & Mesa, 2013). Exposure to this type of research promoted my interest in methods that invited collaboration with the community and placed emphasis on nuances captured in dialogue. As a psychologist-in-training I was taught to privilege words and language. Language, I believe, “produces meaning [and] creates social reality” (Lincoln & Denzin, 1998).
During the process of familiarizing myself with the literature and hearing the concerns from Latina participants about IPV, I learned that Latina immigrant mothers experience conflicting pressures, as indicated by

… the difficulty of protecting and caring for their children amid increased pressure to maintain the family unit, while at the same time losing their extended family support network. The powerful dynamics of IPV and immigration, including inequality and multiple sources of vulnerability compound these difficulties. Although multiple barriers can keep mothers from leaving an abusive relationship, equally compelling as reasons to stay are “double binds”…They were bound to the abuser and to their children, to their roles of wife and mother, to their idea of family and their reality of their family, and their native country and the U.S. (Kelly, 2009, p. 294).

My review of the IPV literature on Latina immigrant women suggested that their experiences are complicated by personal (e.g., shame, fragmented social support), institutional (e.g., language demands, financial requirements, cultural insensitivity, marginalization), ideological (e.g., values of marriage, family, fate) and legal factors (e.g., threats of deportation) (Das Dasgupta, 2005, Moreno, 2007; Raj & Silverman, 2002). However, the research literature did not offer good explanations for how Latina victims, specifically those who are mothers, make decisions about ending or remaining in their relationships.

Readings on Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 1997) helped me think about victims as relational beings and consider how feeling connected or disconnected might relate to their decisions to stay or leave the relationship. Jean Baker Miller and her colleagues at the Wellesley Stone Center developed this model to understand women’s growth and psychological development (Miller, 1976). Their self-in-relation model postulates that “the yearning for and movement toward connection are…central organizing factors in people’s lives and the experience of chronic disconnection or
isolation is seen as the primary source of suffering” (Jordan, 2004, p.11). I value meaningful connections with others. The most dominant aspects of my identity reflect my relationships. My roles of mother, wife, daughter, and psychologist-in-training, exist only because of my relationships with my daughters, spouse, parents, and patients. These aspects of my self are threaded by my Latino cultural background and inform much of what I believe to be a “good” mother, wife, daughter, professional, and woman. From an early age, the women and men in my family taught me about the importance of family, self-sacrifice, strength, purity, faith, and respect. At times the messages were contradictory which thwarted the path into womanhood. As an American born into a family of Latino immigrants, living with dissonance has required reflections and negotiations about the messages I would like to pass on to my daughters.

I think that trauma, like culture, can also act as a thread through people’s lives. In my experiences as a therapist, I hear how traumatic experiences define a person. People use terms and phrases like “survivor” or “I was a victim” that link their identity with traumatic events. The Relational Cultural Theory conceptualizes trauma as a deterrent for connection and growth; it obstructs movement in a relationship (Jordan, 2004). A response to trauma is characterized by “a paradox of connections and disconnections” where an individual experiences the internal struggle of simultaneously wanting and fearing connection, leading to immobilization and isolation (Jordan et al., 2004). I wondered if Latina immigrant mothers experienced a similar dissonance while in an abusive relationship and if it was manifested in their frequent decision to stay.
**Methodology**

I used grounded theory to learn about the decisions of Latina immigrant mothers. Arriving at the conclusion that Charmaz’s (2008) grounded theory was the best fit for this research first required clarifying my beliefs about reality and knowledge. My earliest memory of actively engaging in conversations about “truths” was while attending a Catholic high school. Here, we were given lessons on universal and absolute truths (e.g., good versus evil, right versus wrong). Questions about exceptions to these rules were met with fixed responses and citations from the bible. Perhaps it was the adolescent hallmark of defiance, but I had difficulty accepting these notions as the only truths and found myself searching for others. I experienced a shift in my conceptualization of truths after reading *Man Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl (1946) and being exposed to Frederick Nietzsche’s perspectivism. Although I did not connect with Frankl’s religious undertones and Nietzsche’s nihilistic beliefs and misogynistic messages, their mutual understanding that individual perspectives are valid and represent various truths were compatible with my worldview.

The psychology program I attended as an undergraduate student promoted the view of psychology as a “hard” science. The program’s alignment with positivism was evident throughout my coursework and my involvement in a research lab, where I was told to dismiss commentaries written on the margins of a questionnaire because they could not be quantified into the existing data set. This experience inspired me to engage in research that treated participants’ voices differently.

In graduate school I sought opportunities to learn more about qualitative inquiry and read about grounded theory. I came to appreciate Charmaz’s interpretation (and
reconstruction) of grounded theory\(^2\) and its philosophical underpinnings of constructivism. Constructivists assume:

(1) reality is multiple, processual, constructed—but constructed under particular conditions; (2) the research process emerges from interactions; (3) it takes into account the researcher’s positionality, as well as other research participants; (4) the researcher and the researched construct data—data are products of the research process, not simply observed objects of it. Researchers are part of the research situation… and research always reflects value positions (Charmaz, 2008, p. 402).

The constructivist’s approach to grounded theory aims for an interpretive understanding while attending to the context (temporal, social, and situational conditions) (Charmaz, 2008). I found this approach to be compatible with my epistemological stance of subjectivism.

**Writing**

My writing process includes my voice, as indicated throughout the text in my use of first person and the inclusion of personal reflections, questions, and observations. I believe that the interaction between the participants and myself fostered a space where we were able to construct a shared experience and create meaning. I relied on the use of memos, while responding to various aspects of the research process. The memos were varied. Some were brief written comments while listening to the participants and others were typed narratives after having completed a session. Journaling facilitated my processing and digesting of the data. It also served as a working space for me to create, revise, and connect themes for the analysis. In keeping with Lincoln and Denzin (1994) I

\(^2\) Charmaz deviates from the Glaser & Strauss’ grounded theory, which positions itself with objectivity. Instead, she embraces subjectivity at all levels of the research process.
have come to see that “writing is a process of discovery… [where] the researcher’s self-knowledge and knowledge of the topic develops through experimentation with point of view, tone, texture, sequencing, metaphor and so on.”

**Overview of the Problem**

In 1985, the United States Surgeon General cast a spotlight on IPV and called for collaborative efforts to better understand and reduce the incidents of this public health problem (Dahlberg & Mercy, 2009). Over the last three decades, Reponses to the call resulted in social service programs, research agendas, and laws. Despite these efforts, national data indicate that IPV continues to occur at high rates. Approximately one quarter of women in the United States have been raped, assaulted, and/or stalked by their partners over the course of their lifetime and 7.0 million women are victimized each year (Black et al., 2011; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Moreover, nearly fifty percent of women have experienced some form of psychological abuse by their intimate partner (i.e., insults, humiliation threats, control, coercion) (Black et al., 2011). The extent of the abuse varies, with approximately 14% of women suffering severe forms of abuse like being punched, kicked, and having a weapon used against them (Black et al., 2011). Victims who sustain the abuse are most often young; 20 to 24 years of age (Catalano, 2006). Assessment of racial and ethnic group differences offers mixed findings on whether minority women are more susceptible to abuse (Field & Caetano, 2005; Klevens, 2006). This study focuses on women as victims but it is important to note that men are also victims of intimate partner violence. While prevalence rates differ significantly, with females far more likely to be victims (Black et al., 2011), there are similarities in the experiences and consequences of the abuse (Douglas & Hines, 2011). It is important to also note that intimate partner violence occurs in both heterosexual and same-sex couples (Messinger, 2011). However, abuse in same-sex couples continues to be an emerging phenomenon in the research literature and therefore, most of the studies reviewed in this chapter are based on heterosexual couples.
2007; West, 2004) with the most conservative estimates suggesting minority women are just as likely to experience IPV as their white majority counterparts (Field & Caetano, 2005).

Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in the United States and make up over 60% of the population in Miami-Dade County (MDC) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Since 2009, criminal offenses related to IPV increased by over 15% in Florida (Department of Children and Families, 2011). Data from MDC indicate that over the course of sixteen months (January 2009 to May 2010) there were 43 fatalities due to IPV, of which 26% were Latinas. In recent years, MDC ranked highest of all counties in Florida in the number of IPV related deaths (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2012) and documented offenses including murder, forcible rape, forcible sodomy, aggravated assault, aggravated stalking, simple assault, threat/intimidation and stalking (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2012).

Studies with samples from other parts of the United States also suggest that Latinas are at risk for victimization (Field & Caetano, 2005). Latinas report a higher level of trauma related to the abuse (Edelson, Hokoda, Ramos-Lira, 2007) and are far less likely to access interventions (Ingram, 2007). They experience high rates of marital rape (Perilla, 1999) and tend to stay in the abusive relationships longer, especially if they are immigrants (Klevens, 2007). Reasons for staying in an abusive relationship are not well established but some speculate that culture may be an important factor (Burke, Ooman-Early, & Rager, 2009; Klevens, 2007, Vidales, 2010). Few studies have intentionally
examined Latinas’ decision-making (Lacey, 2010; Lacey, Saunders, & Zhang, 2011) and possible cultural factors related to staying or leaving abusive relationships (Vidales, 2010).

**Research Questions**

In this study I explore the experiences of Latina immigrant mothers who are victims of IPV. Specifically, I explore the decisions to stay or leave their abusive partners and have sought to answer the following questions:

*Question 1:* How do Latina immigrant mothers who are victims of IPV decide to stay or leave their abusive partners?

*Question 2:* What factors influence the process to leave or remain in an abusive relationship?

*Question 3:* What strategies are used to stay or leave the abusive relationship?

**Rationale**

This study seeks to elucidate the nuances that are part of Latina immigrant mothers’ lives while in an abusive relationship. The study was designed to construct a theory grounded in the experiences of Latina immigrant mothers and to understand how they decide to leave or stay abusive intimate relationships. My hope is that the findings of this study would not only help others appreciate the challenges Latina women face while making this decision but would also be useful to those who want to promote their safety, healing, and wellbeing.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the empirical and theoretical literature related to my research questions. The review of the empirical literature focused on peer-reviewed journal articles and books addressing (1) decisions made by victims of intimate partner violence, (2) experiences of Latina victims of IPV, and (3) experiences of mothers who are victims of IPV. The review of the theoretical literature focused on theories and conceptual frameworks as explanations for women’s decisions to stay or leave their abusive partners.

Review of the Empirical Literature

Predictors for staying and leaving

Decision-making among victims of intimate partner violence has received considerable attention from the fields of psychology, nursing, sociology, and law. While there is some disagreement regarding whether leaving a violent relationship truly prevents subsequent abuse (Bell et al., 2007; Fleury et al., 2000), the prevailing assumption is that women are safest when they are apart from their abusive partner (Rhatigan, et al., 2005). However, this assumption does not capture how separation from a partner is frequently only a temporary remedy since many victims leave the abusive partner several times before ending the relationship (Anderson, 2003; Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2007). Some suggest that up to 74% of women may return to their abusive partner (Griffing et al., 2002; Strube, 1988). Reasons for returning may be related to harassment (Baker, 1997), manipulation (Anderson et al., 2003) and emotional commitment (Baker, 1997; Griffing et al., 2002).
While reviewing the literature, it was apparent that predictors for staying and leaving clustered across various domains. Figure 1 illustrates the most common predictors for decisions in the IPV research. Predictors are situated in one of four categories: individual factors, abusive relationship factors, social factors, and cultural factors. Empirical examinations of victims’ history (e.g., childhood abuse, previous abusive relationships) and characteristics (e.g., age, socioeconomic class, personality traits, psychological health) have received the most attention (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Rhatigan et al., 2006; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998). Characteristics related to the abusive relationship are the second most common area discussed in the literature and includes objective (e.g., duration of relationship, frequency of abuse) and subjective factors (e.g., level of commitment to the relationship, beliefs about the relationship) (Rhatigan et al., 2005, Truman-Schram et al., 2000). More recently, an interest in the role of social and cultural factors has been added to the literature. Studies including minority samples have yielded important findings regarding the cultural influences on their experiences and their decision-making (Klevens, 2007; Lacey, 2010). However, few studies have examined the experiences of Latina victims despite knowing they are far less likely to access resources and remain in abusive relationships. Although these studies offer some insight into the cultural factors associated with Latina victims’ decision-making, none seek to understand the intertwining of Latino immigrant culture and motherhood as it relates to deciding to stay or leave an abusive partner. Researchers looking at this issue agree that “violent relationship termination is likely a multi-determined decision process” (Rhatigan et al., 2006, p.331).
Figure 1. Summary of literature review on predictors for decision-making
Individual factors. Researchers have paid considerable attention to victims’ history and exposure to violence as predictors for leaving an abusive relationship (Anderson and Saunders, 2003). History of childhood victimization, whether witnessing violence or being a victim of child abuse, yields mixed findings for its strength in predicting the decision to leave an abusive relationship (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Rhatigan et al., 2006; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998). While some studies support the hypothesis that women who have experienced violence during childhood may be more inclined to leave an abusive relationship (Anderson and Saunders, 2003), other studies have failed to do so (Kim & Grey, 2008; Rhatigan et al., 2006; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998).

Financial independence frequently appears as a predictor for leaving abusive relationships (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Anderson et al., 2003; Bornstein, 2006). When a victim’s basic needs, such as shelter and financial security, are threatened by leaving an abusive relationship, staying may feel like the only option (Anderson et al., 2003; Moreno, 2007). Since educational attainment and income are tied to financial independence, it is not surprising that women who are employed and have higher levels of education, are more likely to leave an abusive relationship (Kim & Grey, 2008; Rhattigan et al., 2005). However, Lacey’s study (2010) contradicts the link between increased income and increased likelihood of leaving an abusive relationship. His analysis of socioeconomic and ethnic group differences revealed that higher income increased the likelihood that Latina victims of IPV would stay in abusive relationships. Findings from study also revealed 60% of Latina victims from the sample stayed in the relationship after their partners were violent towards them.
Researchers have examined how specific attributions and beliefs influence victims’ decisions to stay or leave abusive relationships. Women who assume the blame for the abuse and perceive the abusive partner positively are more inclined to stay (Truman-Schram et al., 2000). However, when shifts are made from self-blaming to blaming the abusive partner, victims are more likely to leave (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998). Sherman and Rodriguez (2006) found attributions about the abuse to not be significantly correlated to leaving an abusive relationship. Other individual attributes, such as high levels of self-efficacy (Rhattigan et al., 2005) and internal locus of control (Bryne & Arias, 2004) are linked to leaving the abusive relationship. Thus, victims who believe their actions could result in a more desirable outcome are more likely to leave abusive relationships. However, according to Lerner and Kennedy (2000) feelings of self-efficacy seem to come with a price for women with higher scores in self-efficacy measures are significantly more likely to endorse symptoms of depression and relationship trauma than other women. Empirical support on the opposite phenomenon, learned helplessness, the belief that one has no control on whether to stay or leave, has yielded mixed results for its predictability for staying or leaving an abusive relationship (Bryne & Arias, 2004; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998).

Although there is no disputing the psychological and emotional impact of being a victim of IPV, it is difficult to discern whether the psychological and emotional factors linked to decision-making existed prior to the relationship or are consequences of the abuse. Self-esteem is one of the most documented psychological concepts discussed in the stay-leave literature with findings supporting high levels of self-esteem related to deciding to leave an abusive relationship (Kim & Grey, 2006; Rhattigan et al., 2005). In
addition, victims who report feeling closely attached to their partners and who are emotionally preoccupied with the abusive partner are more likely to stay in the abusive relationship (Sherman & Rodriguez, 2006; Rhattigan et al., 2005). Similarly, victims who endorsed more feelings of love and sympathy towards the abuser are more likely to stay (Belknap, 1999).

The abusive relationship. There is general support for Gelles’ “common sense hypothesis,” (1972), which posits that increased severity and frequency of abuse leads to greater likelihood of leaving the relationship. Pape and Arias (2000) found that the perception of increased violence severity and frequency, regardless of its objective occurrences, leads women to leave the violent relationship. However, several studies have found neither abuse severity nor frequency as significant predictors for the decision to leave an abusive relationship (Bryne & Arias, 2004; McDonough, 2010; Sherman & Rodriguez, 2006). The nature of the abuse is another factor frequently cited in the literature. Various studies support experiences of psychological or emotional abuse as predictive of the decision to leave (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Lacey, 2010; Lacey et al., 2011; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998). High levels of reported “investment” in the relationship (defined as being married or having children with the partner) is related to staying in abusive relationships (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Rhattigan et al., 2005; Truman-Schram et al., 2000), except among Latina victims whose “investment” is not significantly predictive of their decision to stay or leave an abusive relationship (Lacey, 2010). Previous separation from the abusive partner (Anderson and Saunders, 2003) and living with the perpetrator (Kim & Grey, 2008) are both predictive of leaving an abusive
relationship, presumably because of the risk for increased frequency of the abuse.

Research findings related to the length of the relationship are not conclusive (Rhattigan et al., 2005).

**Social support.** Researchers evaluating the impact of social factors have found perceived support from friends (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Randell, Bledsoe, Shroff, & Pierce, 2012) and social service agencies (Rhattigan et al., 2005; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998) as predictive for women’s decisions to leave an abusive relationship. As might be expected, women who report minimal support and isolation tend to stay with their abusive partner (Anderson et al., 2003; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998). Among ethnic minority victims, more adults living in the home has been found to increase the likelihood for staying in the abusive relationship (Lacey et al, 2011). Lacey and colleagues argue that the presence of other adults in the home has a “buffering effect”, allowing women to feel supported and protected while living with an abusive partner. Although perceived social support serves as predictor in the decision-making process, the wishes of others within the women’s social support systems, specifically the desire for the victim to leave the abusive relationship, appears to be irrelevant to the decision to leave (Bryne & Arias, 2004). However, there is one major exception. When faced with the decision to stay or leave women who are mothers heavily consider both the desires of their children and the overall impact the abuse may have on the children (Rhodes, 2010).

Qualitative studies seeking to understand decision-making among mothers who are victims of IPV describe what they believe to be the best option for their children (Chang et al., 2009; Kelly, 2009; Moe, 2009; Rhodes, Cerulli, Dichter, Kothari, & Barg, 2010; Zink, Elder, & Jacobson, 2003). For many, the “turning point” (Rhodes et al.,
in leaving a relationship is triggered by a victims’ awareness that their child is being threatened in some way (e.g., physically, psychologically) (Chang et al., 2009; Rhodes et al., 2010). Having children may be the most salient factor when it comes to deciding to leave a violent relationship (Baker, 1997). Equally compelling, however, are the women’s desires to provide their children with an intact family (Kelly, 2010; Rhodes et al., 2010; Zink et al., 2003) and avoid possible loss of custody (Kelly, 2009; Rhodes et al., 2010). Thus, women who are mothers face what Kelly (2009) refers to as a “double-bind” when deciding what is best for their family. Moe’s (2009) interviews with mothers illustrate the emotional (e.g., fear, guilt, reluctance), practical (e.g., housing, custody, divorce), and economic (e.g., financial stability, employment) complexities involved in making a decision and then act on it.

**The sociocultural context.** The research literature on socio-cultural factors relating to decisions to leave or stay in abusive relationships is scant, with some attention given to gender roles as predictor. In one study, nonconformity to traditional gender roles was found to be predictive of leaving abusive relationship (Rhattigan et al., 2005). Among Latina women, cultural values informing traditional gender roles (Perilla, 1999) and beliefs about fate or “fatalismo” (Moreno, 2007) are related to decisions to stay. Moreover, the IPV experience for Latinas is unlike those of white American women due to acculturation stressors (Kleven, 2007), barriers to accessing resources (Kleven, 2007), and threats of deportation for those who lack legal documentation (Moreno, 2007).

**Culture, immigration, and acculturation**

Estimates suggest that Latina and non-Latina women are equally at risk for victimization (Bonomi, Anderson, Cannon, Slesnik, & Rodriguez, 2009; Tjaden and
Thoennes, 2000). However, some scholars argue that women of color, including Latinas, are underrepresented in the research literature and true prevalence rates cannot be accurately captured by what are considered to be culturally-biased measures that are used to estimate incidents and prevalence of IPV (Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004). Latina women are more likely to stay with their abuser (Hass, Dutton, & Orloff, 2000) and are thought to suffer more severe consequences than non-Latina victims (Hazen, Connelly, Soriano, & Landsverk, 2008; Klevens, 2007). Given the rapid growth of the Latino population in the United States (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011) and their high risk of victimization it is important to understand the experiences of Latina victims of IPV.

Research on Latina victims explores the role of acculturation (Klevens, 2007) and yields contradictory evidence for whether acculturation level is predictive of victimization. Both high levels and low levels of acculturation lead to an increased likelihood for victimization (Torres et al., 2000; Caetano, Schafer, Clark, Cunradi, Raspberry, 2000). Victims who identify as being “highly acculturated” (e.g., prefer English) are thought to be at an increased risk because of the potential losses of protective factors (Torres et al., 2000). “Moderately acculturated” Latinas (measured by use of English, ease of social relationships with non-Latinos) also appear to be at high risk for victimization. However, Caetano and colleagues’ (2000) found higher and lower levels of acculturation not to be significantly related to likelihood of abuse. In one study, acculturation was perceived as a protective factor and found to facilitate access to services (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2010). The contradictory findings on the impact of acculturation are likely influenced by methodological limitations (e.g., differences in the measurement of acculturation).
The process of acculturation is activated when an individual leaves their country of origin and is immersed in the host culture. For many Latinos in the United States, immigration is an inevitable part of their lives. While there is debate over whether immigrants are at greater risk for victimization (Hass, Dutton, & Orloff, 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Wright & Benson, 2010), immigrants’ experiences of IPV are complicated by unique barriers for escaping the violence (Adams & Campbell, 2005; Aherns, Rios-Mandel, Isas, & Lopez, 2010; Belknap & VandeVusse, 2010; Das Dasgupta, 2005; Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2011; Klevens, 2007; Zarza & Adler, 2008). Immigrant victims are challenged to overcome many personal (e.g., shame, fragmented social support), institutional (e.g., language demands, financial requirements, cultural insensitivity, marginalization), and ideological barriers (e.g., values of marriage, family, fate) (Amanor-Boadu et al., 2012; Das Dasgupta, 2005). Furthermore, researchers have noted that perpetrators of IPV control immigrant victims without legal documentation through threats of deportation (Moreno, 2007; Raj & Silverman, 2002). According to Adams and Campbell (2012, p. 25) victims without legal documentation are particularly vulnerable and are restricted from access to help by the very policies that simultaneously make them more likely to experience IPV. This chain of events can quickly spiral into family disintegration and negative health outcomes as curtailed access to public benefits and social services for the undocumented leads to further impoverished families without safety nets.

The combined effect of these obstacles makes it easy to understand why the research literature consistently notes that Latina immigrants are less likely to seek help (Ingram, 2007; Klevens, 2007; West, Kaufman Kantor, & Jasinski, 1998).
Traditional gender roles that are entrenched in cultural scripts of machismo and marianismo have also been an area of interest in the IPV field (Galanti, 2003; Moreno, 2007; Perilla, 1999; Perilla et al., 1994; Rivera, 1994). In Perilla’s (1999) discussion of IPV among Latino immigrants, she describes the duality of machismo. Machista ideals, she notes consist of “…opposite views of masculinity: The first stresses external characteristics such as physical strength, aggressiveness, sexual prowess, heavy drinking, and power. The second emphasizes internal attributes such as honor, responsibility, respect, and courage” (p.116). These competing beliefs of machismo may make it difficult for Latina women to decipher between appropriate and abusive behavior and thus increase their vulnerability to victimization. Interestingly, while gender roles within the Latino culture are often perceived as clearly defined and practiced from an early age (Adames & Campbell, 2005; Moreno, 2007), the ideals consistent with machismo are contradictory (Perilla, 1999). Moreno’s (2007) study of Latina victims with HIV, found support for “…early training in marianismo, which emphasized remaining docile, ignorant about sex, and eager to please men at all costs, as well as enduring infidelity for the sake of the family and children…” as a dominant theme (p. 349). Marianismo emphasizes a woman’s responsibility for her family’s wellbeing while maintaining a passive and self-sacrificing disposition (Perilla, 1999). Other studies have found that adherence to the ideologies of machismo and marianismo often impedes a victim’s ability to recognize intimate partner violence (Aherns et al., 2010; Belknap & VandeVusse, 2010). Moreover, the abuse may be justified for women who deviate from the values of marianismo (Aherns et al., 2010; Belknap & VandeVusse, 2010). American values of independence and individualism challenge Latina women’s ability to uphold the
traditional gender role expectation (Perilla, 1999). Latina women living in the U.S. are therefore challenged by contradictory expectations of being both submissive and assertive (Phinney & Flores, 2002).

The dynamic of interdependence and loyalty among each family member is another defining value within the Latino culture. Latina women involved in violent relationships face the internal conflict of protecting their families from dissolution and public shame while trying to protect themselves from the abuse (Perilla, 1999; Perilla et al., 1994). However, interdependence and loyalty also allow for extended family to be available for social support. The presence of extended family may benefit victims in profound ways since the abuse experience is often fraught with isolation (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2010; Wright & Benson, 2010).

Another cultural factor that is in the literature is “fatalism”, which refers to a belief in predetermination or role of an external force as responsible for their life events (Moreno, 2007). “Fatalism” is thought to offer a justification for abusive behavior and to contribute to feelings of powerlessness (Moreno, 2007).

The growing body of evidence on Latino cultural factors sheds light on how Latina victims’ experiences of IPV are uniquely complex. Awareness of this issue has lead researchers and clinicians to call for the development of culturally tailored interventions and prevention strategies (Loue & Faust, 1998; Ramos & Carlson, 2004; Weidel, Provencio-Vasquez, Watson, and Gonzalez-Guarda, 2008).

*Risks for mothers and mothers-to-be*

With over half of all female victims living with children under the age of 12 (Catalano, 2012), there has been some attention given by the research community to the
experiences of mothers and their children. Pregnant women in the general population appear to be no more likely to be victimized than non-pregnant women (Bailey, 2010). However, pregnant women from ethnic minority groups who are young and from lower socioeconomic status have consistently been found to be at a higher risk for abuse (Ely and Flaherty, 2000). Consequences of IPV for pregnant women stand apart from those who are not pregnant, with higher rates of medical conditions and mental health problems appearing most frequently in the literature (Bailey, 2010). Bailey’s (2010) review highlights the importance of identifying risks and consequences faced by pregnant victims, however, his review does not include studies with non-English speaking women, thus overlooking the experiences of an important part of the Latino community.

Whether maternal parenting deteriorates as a result of IPV is unclear. Some researchers suggest that IPV is related to increased conflict and decreased parental warmth (presumed indicators of a healthy parent-child relationship) (Holden & Ritchie, 1991), as well as increased parenting stress (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2000). Casanueva and colleagues (2008) found that IPV does not appear to stifle the quality of maternal parenting, with victims and non-abused women obtaining comparable scores on parenting measures. In terms of how mothers perceive their family role of in the context of IPV, motherhood was regarded as their only “salvation” (Irwin et al., 2002).

Consequences faced by the children

Children of IPV victims experience many negative consequences (Bailey, 2010; Clements, Oxtoby, & Ogle, 2008; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003). Children of pregnant women victims of IPV are more likely to face complications at birth such as low birth weight and preterm delivery, as well as important developmental difficulties
including cognitive deficits, delays in speech and motor functioning, behavioral problems, academic challenges, and neurological damage (Bailey, 2010). The possible negative impact for children who witness the violence is also significant. Results from a meta-analysis of over 100 studies estimate that over 60% of children exposed to IPV have significantly more psychosocial difficulties than children who are never exposed to IPV (Kritzmann et al., 2003). In Clements and colleagues’ (2008) review the most common behavioral and psychosocial difficulties were oppositional defiance, aggression, conduct disorders, depression, low self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, and poor interpersonal skills.

**Review of Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks**

Various theories have been applied and tested for their relevance to the decisions made by victims of IPV. Other theories have emerged from data. Table 1 provides an overview of the contributions and limitations of the most prevailing theories in the literature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Contributions</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transtheoretical Model of Change</td>
<td>Victims engage in a series of steps before deciding to leave</td>
<td>Assumption that victims are capable of making rational decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange Theory</td>
<td>Victims weigh perceived rewards and costs prior to decision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Battered Syndrome</td>
<td>Learned helplessness explains reasons for staying</td>
<td>Does not account for the women who confront abusing partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist theories</td>
<td>Acknowledge power differentials as reasons for staying</td>
<td>Deficit-focused and overlooks potential strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrier Model</td>
<td>Internal cultural and social constructs impeded leaving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging theories</td>
<td>Cultural values, internal friction, and access to resources as factors</td>
<td>Does not include mothers’ perspectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual, psychological theories

Prochaska and DiClemente’s Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM) (1984) is the most frequently used theory to understand victims’ process of change and decision-making. Although TTM was initially conceived to explain basic behavioral change, it is often used to examine a broad range of maladaptive behaviors (e.g., smoking, disease management, diet). The central tenants of TTM describe change as a series of discrete stages where individuals are initially unaware of the need for a change (precontemplation), consider making a change while feeling ambivalent (contemplation), mobilize the necessary factors to make the decision to change (preparation), fulfill behavior change (action), and finally continue their commitment to maintain the behavior change (maintenance) (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1984). Although the stage model appears linear, it is not intended to be and the process often includes relapse or movement towards earlier stages (Brown, 1997).

Brown (1997, p. 23) was one of the first to suggest that TTM may be a useful way to understand the “complex process that battered women go through in freeing themselves from violence” by systematically evaluating the stages of change and strategies executed by victims. Brown’s qualitative study examined the suitability of TTM and found that women generally do engage in a series of stages when attempting to end the abusive relationship. He identified a combination of cognitive (e.g., consciousness raising, self-reevaluation, environmental-reevaluation) and behavioral strategies (e.g., disclosing the abuse, leaving the abusive partner). Self-efficacy and “decisional-balance” also emerged as important factors for movement in between stages. Over time various quantitative (Banyard, Eckstein, Moynihan, 2010; Burkitt & Larkin,
2008; Andersen, 2003; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013) and qualitative (Catalo, Jack, Ciliska, & MacMillian, 2012; Cluss et al., 2006; Burke, Gielen, McDonnel, O’Campo, & Maman, 2001) investigations have provided additional support for the suitability of TTM as a framework for understanding how victims of IPV make decisions.

While it may be challenging to critique the theoretical giant that is TTM, some scholars have made their attempts. Criticisms are based on the notion that the stage model oversimplifies the human experience (Bandura, 1997 cited in Fletcher, 2014). Adams and White (2004) suggest that TTM was designed to identify change of a single behavior and does not change of simultaneously occurring behaviors. Further, they postulate that the identification of a stage relies on the ability to be introspective and self-assess. Similarly, others have critiqued the model for being “largely based on rational processes that do not allow explicitly for the impact of emotions or religious beliefs on behavior” (Munro et al., 2007).

Exchange theory (Nye, 1978; Gelles, 1983) is based on the “premise that individuals seek rewards and avoid costs to maximize the value of their outcomes, these transactions are often influenced by a cost/reward ratio”. Further, power in social relationships plays an important role since the individual with more power is thought to be the one who will receive the most benefit (Lacey, 2010). Exchange theory frames victims’ decisions as a process of weighing perceived costs and benefits (Lacey, 2010; McDonough, 2010). Problem-solving models, which involve a similar evaluative process is another framework used for understanding victims’ decisions (Burman, 2003; Belknap, 1999; Maddoux, Symes, McFarlane, Koci, Gilroy, et al., 2014). Criticisms of the
exchange theory and problem-solving theories rest on the contested assumption that people are rationale when deciding how to respond to their relationships (Lamanna, 2014).

Learned helplessness is often cited as the primary coping mechanism and associated factor for decision-making. Learned helplessness is characterized by low self-esteem and passivity (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012) and acts as a barrier for victims to leave an abusive relationship. The theory of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1972) inspired the concept of the battered woman’s syndrome (Walker, 1977; 1989; 2009). Battered woman’s syndrome is a pattern of psychological symptoms observed in victims of IPV (Walker, 2009). It has been frequently been used as a legal strategy to explain victims’ behaviors that may be difficult for others to understand (e.g., killing the abusive partner, staying with the abusive partner) (Dutton, 2009). Despite its continued use in the legal system, the theory has been criticized for pathologizing victims (Dutton, 2009) and some argue that it contradicts the realities of victims who take action against their abusive partners (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012).

Although the aforementioned theories contribute to the IPV decision-making literature, I believe they naively assume that victims rely exclusively on individually driven cognitive, psychological, or behavioral processes when making decisions about abusive relationships. This assumption is problematic because it excludes external factors (e.g., people outside of the relationship, social norms, etc.). Feminist domestic violence scholars have echoed this same criticism and have built their theories on the premise that IPV and related decisions are situated within a broader, social context as discussed in the section that follows (Dobash & Dobash, 1997).
Another concern I have with these individual theories, specifically those that ascribe to stage and cost-analysis frameworks, is the assumption that all individuals are capable of engaging in a sophisticated, rational cognitive process. The stage model and exchange theory involve a series of cognitive tasks that require insight, problem identification, awareness of available resources, development of an action plan, and access to means for execution of the plan. Cognitive limitations (due to injury, intellectual delays, emotional distress, intoxication) may impede an individual from successfully navigating through these tasks. Thus, it seems reasonable to argue then that many victims of IPV may not be able to make purely rational decisions for themselves and their families.

**Sociocultural and contextual models**

Feminist analysis and theoretical frameworks have played a key role in the battered women’s movement and are prominent in the IPV literature. Traditional feminist theories situate the problem of IPV in social norms that perpetuate gender inequities of power (Dobash & Dobash, 1977). Contemporary feminist models emphasize how gender, as well as ethnicity and legal status exacerbate women’s vulnerabilities for victimization and oppression (Adams & Campbell, 2012; Anderson, 2003; Creshnaw, 1993). The cumulative effect of these vulnerabilities creates barriers in the decision to leave an abusive relationship (Adams & Campbell, 2012).

Grigsby and Hartman’s barrier model, suggests that women are at the center of four nested external constructs and postulates a model

“…based on a foundation that asserts that even these more internal barriers have their roots in an external cultural and social context. Each of these layers essentially creates barriers for victims to leave a violent relationship.” (p.497).
The use of sociocultural and contextual models offers a broader and richer understanding of victims’ experiences of IPV. The contemporary feminist models appear to be well regarded by the field for their inclusivity and attention to the multidimensional nature of the human experience (Zinn & Dill, 1992). In fact, it was difficult to locate published criticism of the comprehensive feminist models as they relate to IPV. This came as a surprise to me because in my review of these models, it was quite apparent that the models seemed incomplete. The emphasis was on the barriers faced when making a decision and the solution was on removing the barriers. However, in a society where dismantling sexism, racism, and classism are a perpetual work in progress, I am left wondering what are the strengths might help victims overcome the barriers.

**Emerging theories**

Few researchers have applied grounded theory methodology to explore the decisions victims make in their abusive relationships. These grounded theories offer valuable insight to internal friction, cultural pressures, and awareness of resources available as salient factors involved in the decision to stay or leave.

In one study, victims’ descriptions of powerlessness (e.g., feeling they had no choice, believing their children would be taken from them) and connectedness (e.g., relating to the anecdotes of others, believing the person is trustworthy) were found to be important in the decision to disclose being victims of IPV (Busch & Wolfer, 2002).

Moreno (2007) found “fatalism” to be an important cultural factor influencing the decision to stay in an abusive relationship. As a participant in that study stated, “When I was being abused, I thought that was life; because my mother did it to me, my uncle and aunts did it to me, so what made me think that my husband wasn’t going to do it to me?
That was a way of life” (Moreno, 2007, p.345). Ascribing to traditional gender roles of machismo and marianismo were also associated with the decision to stay (Moreno, 2007). In their study on Latina women’s experiences of IPV, Burke and colleagues (2009) discovered four stages in the abuse process: the pursuit, the abuse begins, the abuse continues or escalates, and the end of the abuse or escape to a new life. Major themes were related to the women’s awareness of and access to resources. These grounded theory studies contribute to the literature by adding voices of victims and emphasizing various sociocultural factors that influence their decisions. However, they are few and do not address to the experiences of mothers.
Chapter 3

Methods

This study relies on qualitative research methodology to understand the experiences and decision making of Latina mothers victims of IPV. This form of research inquiry includes “a plethora of viewpoints, sometimes diametrically opposed, to one another.” (Creswell, 2012, p.1). However, in a general sense qualitative research inquiry can be defined as

…the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under the study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem and its contribution to the literature or call for change (Creswell, 2012, p.44).

Grounded theory lies among the myriad of viewpoints that identify as qualitative research inquiry. In their seminal publication, The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, Glaser and Strauss (1967) introduced grounded theory as “theory from data” and delineated a systematic analytical method of constant comparison. An explanatory theory then emerges from the comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Since its introduction, generations of grounded theorists have proposed their own variations of the original theory. Variations can be seen in the foundation, direction, and significance of the routes that lead to theory. I used Charmaz’s (2006) grounded theory for this research, which is founded on the philosophical underpinnings of constructivism and passes through a flexible set of guidelines for data gathering and analysis. According to Charmaz, theory construction relies on the subjective

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4 Glaser denounces some of the variations and remains loyal to his initial conceptualization of grounded theory. New generations of grounded theory are just as passionate about expressing their commitment to their versions of grounded theory (Glaser, 2002; Bryant, 2003)
interpretations of the researcher and participant, as well as the context from which those interpretations are made (e.g., time, place, culture). I selected Charmaz’s grounded theory as the method for this research because of its compatibility with my own philosophical stance of constructivism and its suitability for generating a participant-centered understanding of decisions made by victims of IPV.

Participants

Eight women participated in this research study. They were from 24 to 50 years of age and were born in South America, Central America, or the Caribbean. One of the participants was born in Puerto Rico. Duration of living in the United States spanned from 1 to 35 years with less than half of them having acquired citizenship or legal residency by the time of the interview. Their education level ranged from second grade to a master’s degree. Access to medical and financial resources was similar across the sample with most having government-sponsored or no insurance, and a monthly income of less than $1000. Participants had one to three children. One of the participants was seven months pregnant with her fourth daughter. The children were across the developmental span from infancy (youngest was 10 months) to adulthood (oldest was 30). Most of the children lived with their mothers. Two mothers migrated to the United States without their children and their children were living with family in their country of origin at the time of the interview. All participants had left their abusive partners and were no longer living with them, and three were still legally married to the abusive partner. The participants all had children during the abusive relationship. All but one

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5 While the commonwealth of Puerto Rico has been a U.S. territory since 1898 and residents of the island were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917, in terms of cultural and political life the island of Puerto Rico functions as its own country. For the purposes of this study the participant from Puerto Rico was regarded as an immigrant.
had children living in the home during abusive episodes. They were all receiving therapeutic interventions (e.g., group therapy, psychotropic medication, psychotherapy) at the time of the study.

**Recruitment**

Participants were recruited from a social service agency that offers legal aid, financial assistance, housing placement, psychotherapy, and educational workshops to victims of IPV. Women receiving services at the site were eligible for the study if they were (1) over 18 year of age, (2) identified as an immigrant Latina, (3) had children, and (4) had experienced IPV in their lifetime. Recruitment efforts included a flyer available in the waiting room of the site and announcements distributed at a weekly victims’ support group. Participants were offered a $25 gift coupon to Target Stores and a chance to enter a raffle for two round-trip travel vouchers courtesy of Southwest Airlines. Women who expressed an interest in participating provided their contact information and were called to schedule the interview session.

Seventeen women expressed their interest in participating. Many were unable to enroll in the study were because of various challenges including being unable to contact (phone disconnected or never returned call, N=4), work and childcare responsibilities (N=2), transportation (N=2), and conflicts in scheduling (N=1). From the five with whom there was contact, multiple sessions were scheduled but ultimately they were unable to attend due to the reasons stated above.

As prescribed by grounded theory, the recruitment, data collection, and analysis for this study occurred simultaneously. These efforts led to theoretical saturation, which refers to the point at which the data became redundant and no longer added new
information to the analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Analysis of the first six participants, revealed patterns in the terminology related to factors influencing their decisions. For example, “aguantar” or to tolerate was used 99 times. Reduancy was also evident in narratives about generational patterns of violence, family/cultural expectations, and role of social support. There was discordance in themes related to immigration, which appeared related to differences in the age at which the women left their countries. Specifically, women who arrived to the United States at a young age found their immigrant status less relevant than those who arrived as adults. Theoretical sampling, which involves the intentional inclusion of participants who could elaborate, refine, or test a category (Coyne, 1997), was applied in my recruitment of women who could speak about the impact of immigration on their decisions.

The decision to stop recruitment at eight participants was indicated by the lack of new data emerging from the narratives. This decision was further supported by a meta-analysis of qualitative studies on Latina victims of IPV, which found 40% of the reviewed studies to have samples of 10 or less, with a minimum of seven participants (Donnelly, 2015). This study’s sample falls within this range. It is possible that the homogeneity of the group (e.g., no longer in the abusive relationship, participation in support groups, identification with the Latino culture, role as mother) may have led to saturation more quickly than had the sample been diverse in terms of relationship status and access to resources.
Data Collection and Procedures

Potential participants indicated their interest by their verbal commitment and provision of a contact number. Potential participants were then called over the telephone to be screened for eligibility and scheduled for the interview session.

Interviews were held at private conference room at the social service agency where they were recruited. Prior to beginning the interview, participants were oriented to each section of the consent forms (i.e., informed consent and consent to be audio-recorded) and then offered an opportunity to read it prior to signing the document. At this time questions were answered to ensure that they understood the study and felt comfortable. Participants were told that while the study was being completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the counseling psychology doctoral program at the University of Miami, the interview was not meant to assess or treat any mental health concerns. Upon signing the consent form, participants were given the study’s background information questionnaire. All written materials were prepared in English and translated into Spanish by a certified professional translator. Seven participants chose to complete the Spanish version of the questionnaire.

Personal interviews are among of the most frequently used tools for qualitative data collection with victims of IPV. Semi-structured interviews are “useful for collecting information about historical events, opinions, interpretations, and meaning” (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005, p.130). For this study, I created a semi-structured interview guide of broad open-ended questions designed to address the research questions. Questions were meant to elicit narratives of their experiences in abusive relationships, the social context of the

6 The University of Miami’s Institutional Review Board approved all procedures and documents used in this study.
relationship (e.g., social support, employment, stressors), and how key aspects of their personal identities (e.g., mother, immigrant, Latina) informed their experiences and choices. Interviews were digitally audio-recorded using a personal computer and a handheld recorder. The interviews ranged in length from 50 to 90 minutes. A professional transcription company (VerbaLink) transcribed the audio-recorded sessions in the language(s) spoken throughout the interview. I shared my impressions with participants and asked for feedback to ensure understanding of their narratives. This practice, termed member-checking, is an important quality indicators in the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006).

**Analysis**

Data from background questionnaires, interview transcripts, as well as my observations, reflections, reactions, and conceptualizations were included in the analysis. The constant comparative method, an iterative process of comparing the data to emerging themes (Creswell, 2012) was used for the analysis. The first analytic step was coding the data, which here “means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each pieces of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p.43). The codes capture behaviors and events found through a line-by-line examination of the text. I used “in vivo” codes in order to keep the data grounded in the text (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The goal of this first step in analysis was to be open to all theoretical possibilities, with the recognition that the codes would be constructed through my lenses (Charmaz, 2006). The second analytical step was axial coding where codes were conceptually linked to create categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Categories add coherence to the open codes (Charmaz, 2006). This was followed by selective coding,
which is when core categories were created to capture the relationship between categories. This process was repeated and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, that is, no new information could be added to the categories. The final step in the analysis was constructing a theoretical understanding of how Latina immigrant mothers come to stay or leave their abusive partners.

The coding was done in Spanish as an effort to keep the codes and categories grounded to the interviews. I am a native Spanish-speaker (of Colombian and Cuban descent) familiar with the vernacular and idioms of the Spanish language. During my graduate studies, I received training in executing therapeutic interventions in Spanish with Latino populations and obtained the bilingual-bicultural certificate from my master’s program. Moreover, I have been a practicing therapist for over eight years with the majority of my client population preferring to speak Spanish.

**Goodness and Quality**

Guba and Lincoln (1986; 1994) propose two sets of criteria for goodness and quality for qualitative research. *Trustworthiness* parallels the conventional positivist paradigm (1985) where *authenticity* is based on naturalism (1986; 1994). Trustworthiness is achieved by fulfilling measures of credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through my long-standing relationship with the agency where I recruited participants (2+ years), observations of the support groups, and frequent conversations with service providers (e.g., group facilitator, assistant director of the agency) that helped me understand the culture and aims of the institution (prolonged engagement and persistent observation). Moreover, credibility measures were met by my contact with study participants at various times (member checks). After
listening to the interviews and completing the first two steps of the analysis (open codes and categories), I called participants to share my interpretations of their narratives. I offered a brief summary of the characteristics of the abusive relationship, their childhood experiences, and factors influencing their decision to leave the abusive partner. I then asked if there was anything they wished to clarify or correct. This was an opportunity to obtain clarification and collaborate in assigning meaning to the data. During one follow up conversation, one of the women shared the extent of how her employer influenced her to leave the abusive relationship. She stated more details about how her employer offered to call the authorities herself and accompany her to file a restraining order. She described this person’s encouragement and support as pivotal to her leaving after years of being in an abusive relationship. While the theme of how connection is a powerful influential force remained the same, member checking added depth to the data. During the theory development stage of the analysis, I consulted with a colleague, a Latina female psychologist, to review samples of the transcriptions and provide feedback on the analysis (peer debriefing). Transferability was achieved through the use of thick descriptions. Confirmability was met through the use of memos, which serve as an audit trail of how I reached any conclusive statements in my research.

Guba and Lincoln describe fairness as most important among the authenticity criteria (1986). Fairness is “a balanced view that presents all constructions and values that undergird them” (Guba & Lincoln, 1986, p. 20). It is achieved through (1) assessing and presenting conflicting belief systems and (2) engaging in negotiations about recommendations with stakeholders. This was met in the content analysis, where
conflicting beliefs were represented in the codes and categories and through member-checking.

My Role as Researcher

I view myself as a co-researcher in this study, working in collaboration with a group of women who know what it is like to be a Latina immigrant mother and victim of IPV. As a co-researcher I sought to do my best to develop a genuine connection with the participants and thus create the conditions for fruitful collaboration. Our connection was fostered by my reliance on my skill set as a therapist (e.g., rapport building, empathy, reflecting) and the participants’ willingness to be honest and vulnerable. I believe that this form of relating to the participants enriched the data with our respective areas of expertise, interpretations, values, beliefs, and ideas. In addition, I accepted the responsibility of using my privileges (education, affiliation with the university, opportunity for publishing) to disseminate the findings of this study and ensure that others would have the opportunity to benefit from learning of their experiences.
Chapter 4

Results

The participants’ narratives and related data in this study were used to construct a grounded theory about the decisions and actions of Latina immigrant mothers who have been victims of intimate partner violence. What follows in this section are interpretations of the rich accounts from Latina immigrant mothers. Their stories illustrated how early childhood experiences shape women’s values and beliefs about their roles as Latina women, partners, and mothers. Their immigration narratives revealed how these values and narratives often felt contested while living among a culture they perceived as very different from their own. As they spoke about their younger selves and about their identity as immigrants, the women often stated feeling internal conflict, confusion, and uncertainty. Their relationship with their abusive partner initially provided stability and perceived safety and becoming a mother clarified their identity and established firm priorities (the wellbeing of their child). Descriptions of the abusive episodes were vivid and often probed intense emotions during the interview. Women shared about feeling alone, afraid, and confused. Social connection emerged as remedy for overcoming the paralysis and ultimately deciding to leave.

A Grounded Theory Model

This theoretical framework represents a rich understanding of the decisions made and actions taken by Latina immigrant mothers while in abusive relationships. Diagram 2 builds on the metaphor of the mechanics of a watch to organize and illustrate my conceptualization. The decisions and actions of Latina immigrant mothers in this study were tied to a complex system informed by their family values and upbringing, self-
perception, and social connections and disconnections. As children, exposure to Latino
cultural values (familism, faith) and family contexts (exposure to violence) influenced
ideas about womanhood and family violence. Identification with traditional gender roles
yielded beliefs that women should tend to the needs of others. Witnessing violence
between their parents implicitly communicated tolerance. Childhood experiences, family
values, and self-perceptions often led to inconsistent messages that made leaving an
abusive relationship difficult. How women were connected (and disconnected) to
significant others was an important trigger that either provoked them to move forward or
halted the process of taking action. For these women, the urging from significant others
played a key role in “pushing” them out of the relationship. Conversely, the absence of
input from significant others reinforced isolation and tolerance of the abuse. These
women’s lives are fraught with ambiguity and inconsistencies, often making it
challenging to know what are the best choices they can make for themselves and their
children. As children witnessing violence and as women being subjected to the abuse
from their partner, their experience of everyday life and relationships is filled with
uncertainty and dissonance. This uncertainty was captured in their internal dialogue and
inconsistent actions. Such ambiguity shapes the flow of their lives and impacts their
ability to make important decisions in their lives.
Figure 2. Grounded theoretical model for decisions and actions among Latina immigrant mothers who are victims of IPV
The Abusive Relationship is Unpredictable

The abusive relationship is the lever that sets the gears in motion. It is the catalyst and context that changes a woman’s life. When the women spoke about their relationships they became overwhelmed with emotion. They offered tearful descriptions of the incidents of abuse and many acknowledged that were still healing from the residual trauma.

Initial impressions of their partner were favorable and despite some experiencing reluctance in pursuing the relationship, the man’s insistence, along with being pleased with how he behaved with the family was lures into committing.

*Me casé con el hombre ideal, ya tú sabes, el hombre perfecto, lindo, amoroso, más bello.*
I married the ideal man, the perfect man, handsome, loving, the most gorgeous [man].

*Créamelos que no me impactó para nada, pero tanta insistencia, él era bien especial conmigo – Bueno, los detalles, ... cómo se comportó con mis papás, cuando miró a mis hijos, todo eso.*
Believe me, he didn’t impress me, but he insisted, he was very special with me—his attention—how he behaved with my parents and my children.

For others, the added practical aspect of support and stability into their lives was important. Gestures of care and concern were highly regarded and contributed to the illusion of an ideal partner.

*No me importó su edad, sino su detalle de llevarme, de traerme, al mercado. Con mis hijas era muy chévere, con mis nietos súper especial. Y ya cuando decidimos casarnos, que él dijo que quería casarse conmigo, que me quería ayudar mucho.*
His age did not matter to me. His thoughtfulness in taking and bringing me back from the supermarket. With my daughters he was very cool, with my grandchildren he was very special. And then when we decided we should marry, he told me wanted to marry me and that he wanted very much to help me.

The onset of warning signs varied for the women and most reported missing the early symptoms of an abusive relationship. Their reflections offered clarity to what they
now can identify as control and manipulation. Their partners restricted outings, dominated arguments, and managed the finances of the home. These behaviors would lead to intimidation and increased dependency.

Estuvimos cinco años, pero fueron cinco años muy difíciles y manipulándome mentalmente, ¿me entiendes? – En aquellos tiempos yo no me daba cuenta de eso, como era ingenua. Pensaba que todo lo que él lo hacía lo hacía por amor y fue así. Y bueno, los cinco años estuvimos, siempre eran discusiones porque él era – él es una persona muy controladora, es de carácter fuerte y entonces recibí más daño emocional; mentalmente.

We were together for five years, five difficult years; and he mentally manipulated me, you understand me?—in those days, I didn’t realize, because I was innocent. I thought that everything he did, he did with love and that’s how it was. And well, five years we were together, always arguing because he was—he is a controlling person, with a strong personality, and so I became more emotional damaged.

he tries to control me so much I mean he doesn’t want me to work, he wants me to stay home, he doesn’t compromise. I mean he’s allowed to do things and then, I don’t or I can’t do those things or I’m not free to speak up.

El tipo lo que él quería es seguirme maltratando, ofendiendo porque como yo no trabajo él me decía, “Tú no sabes vivir sola, tú tienes que estar aquí.” Como diciendo, “aguanta.”

What the guy wanted to do was to continue mistreating me, offending me because I don’t work. He would say, “you don’t know how to live alone, you have to live here.” As if saying, “put up with it.”

Consistent with what has already been well established in the research literature, the use of alcohol and drugs emerged as a recurrent factor for escalating conflict and abusive behaviors. Descriptions of alcohol use seemed to suggest alcoholism given the frequency and amount consumed. The women provided descriptions of their partners’ impaired state (e.g., incoherence, unconsciousness) after prolonged periods of drinking. The realization that the scope of the drinking was extreme often coincided with an extreme consequence, such as having their 12-year-old daughter drive the car because he was unable. The woman’s responses to the drinking were mostly to remain quiet but for
one it involved suggesting intervention through Alcoholics Anonymous with the hope that she could salvage her relationship. He refused.

Jealousy was frequently cited as a trigger for the abusive episodes, perhaps because sharing their wife’s attention might mean having less control and elicit insecurities. The jealousy was a response to her spending time, caring for, or acknowledging another person whether it was her friends, their newborn child, or a family member.

The abuse was enduring. It happened over the course of months and years. The abuse always involved verbal, psychological, and emotional maltreatment. Abusive partners would humiliate the women by calling them profanities, publically shaming them by revealing their undocumented status, and manipulating circumstances that ultimately led women to unemployment and eviction. Men would stalk them through incessant phone calls and unannounced appearances at their homes.
He slept in his car. He slept watching me in the apartment, where I slept in a room, to see what I was doing and if a man would come to the apartment. He would knock on the door but I would not open because I didn’t want to continue the relationship anymore.

The physical violence left bruises, lacerations, and broken bones and teeth. For some, it resulted in loss of consciousness. All of them were afraid they might be killed.

Sometimes weapons were used (e.g., knives and other household objects) and for one participant, her husband’s male friends were invited to engage in the assault. Many of the women did not seek medical attention even though it may have been warranted. When they did, they did so under the guise that another event, like a car accident or bad fall, caused the injuries. Only one disclosed the abuse to her gynecologist. She had been repeatedly sexually abused and was concerned about rectal damage.

Reflection on the observed shift in behavior coincided with confusion and attempts to make sense of the reasons they were subjected to such abuse. Blame was distributed to themselves, the abusive partner, and God.

Porque era como una excusa para mí, para seguir con él, cómo se dice, con el maltratador. Es una excusa que tenemos nosotras las mujeres de decir, para no dejar a esa persona, yo decía, “No, no quiero separarme.” Por lo mismo que pensaba que era que no me maltrataba.

Because it was like an excuse for me to stay with him, with the abuser. It’s an excuse that we women say, to not leave the other person, I would say, “no, no I don’t want to separate.” For the reason that I thought he was not abusing me.

la bebida, porque él toma diario, él toma todos los días. Entonces tú sabes que la gente que toma llega un momento que ya pierden conocimiento, ni saben ni lo que hablan.

The alcohol, because he drank daily, he drank every day. And so, you know, that when people drink they reach a moment where they lose their consciousness, and they don’t know what they are saying.

Llegó un momento en que sí me siento como muy triste, digo que ¿por qué me tocó todo esto a mí? Pero oro mucho a Dios y le digo que – Ya, que me perdone, si fue que cometí errores. O, si fue que – Quizás lo que yo viví, pues me tocó
There came a time where I felt sad, I would say to myself, “why did all of this happen to me?” Because I pray a lot to God and I say—I ask for forgiveness, if I committed errors. Or, if it was—perhaps I lived what I lived, because I was destined to live it, and perhaps it is what I have to drag in my life. I don’t know, I don’t really know what happened. What has happened with my life?

Children were often present for the abusive episodes. Young children, too young to speak, manifested the trauma through separation anxiety and shaking. Those that were preschool years would recounted the events to others, as if trying to make sense of what had occurred. Mothers of older children reported their children experiencing panic attacks, aggressive behaviors, and suicidality. Concerns about the emotional impact lead to establishing psychiatric and psychological treatment.

The course of an abusive relationship changes the trajectory of a woman’s life. It impacts her physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing and also affects her children. While assimilating and contending with the transformations introduced by an unpredictable, abusive relationship, a series of overlapping and complex forces are activated and ultimately determine the direction she will take.

**Family Values and Upbringing Create a Foundation**

This gear is situated in the first layer to illustrate its temporal significance of having existed prior to other gears. Family norms related to the use of violence, gender roles, and motherhood primed girls and young women to certain rules and expectations. Conversations about early life experiences revealed that violence should to be tolerated, women were primary caretakers, and mothers were to prioritize their children. The research literature has linked these messages to Latino cultural factors; however, these women did not identify their culture as the primary source informing these beliefs.
Instead, they stated that such lessons were learned “from the crib” and not necessarily from Latino cultural messages. When I explored this further, the women articulated some aspects of being a mother as uniquely Latina but otherwise perceived these messages as simply family norms.

Generational patterns of violence were part of every participant’s lived experiences. As children, they witnessed mothers and grandmothers be maltreated by their partners. The way women in their families responded to the violence often served as a reference point for how they should respond to their abusive partners. They recalled memories capturing the emotional impact it had on them as children.

*Mi papá maltrató mucho a mi mamá. Y eso se repite. No sé por qué, pero la maltrató mucho. Yo lo viví, sufrí mucho. De niña sufrí mucho, el maltrato que él le hizo a mi madre. Y a mí me tocaron entonces yo pensé que yo tenía que aguantar eso. Que si mi mamá lo vivió y lo aguantó y era su esposo de muchos años, pues que yo también tenía que soportar.*

My father abused my mother a lot. These situations repeat themselves. I don’t know why, but he abused her a lot. I lived it, I suffered a lot. As a child I suffered a lot, from the his abuse of my mother. And since this happened to her and I saw it, I thought that I had to tolerate it. If my mother lived it, and tolerated it and it of her husband of many years, well than I would also have to tolerate it.

Now as adults, these women, along their sisters and daughters, are subjected to violence in their own intimate relationships. The recognition that these are patterns, and the perception of misfortunate, appears to elicit a sense of hopelessness and uncertainty of how to intervene with the women in their lives.

*Después mi hermana, o sea, mis tres hermanas hemos pasado experiencias feas. Mi hermana mayor, la que está aquí, está pasando lo mismo mío y ahí está con el hombre.*

Afterwards my sister, well my three sisters have lived ugly experiences. My older sister, the one who is here, is going through the same thing and there she is with the man.

[Mi hija] también vive sola con los dos niños. Está – o sea, dándole con los dos niños ya. Siendo fuerte, viendo quizás el mismo patrón mío de lo que me tocó.
Entonces lo está viviendo. Que se equivocó. De pronto consiguió el hombre que no lo debía buscar.

[My daughter] also lives alone with her two children. She is, going at it with both children. Being strong, living perhaps the same pattern of mine. She is living it. She made a mistake. Suddenly, she found a man that she shouldn’t have found.

Messages about women’s potential and pathways to adulthood seemed to be related to the family’s level of educational attainment and socioeconomic status. In families where parents were educated and employed, studying and establishing a career were emphasized to the girls in the family. Once they were educated and earning income, the expectation was for her to financially support her parents; a responsibility from which other men (e.g., brothers) in the family were exempt. In families with fewer educational and financial resources, girls were either removed from school or not expected to finish so that they may instead assume caretaking and household responsibilities. All the participants voiced having to be responsible in some capacity (e.g., financially, emotionally, caretaking) for their parents and siblings.

Había comprado un chanchito que no te deja sacar el dinero. Todos los días guardaba 20 dólares. Tres días antes de irme, quebré el chanco, no me lo creía tenía 4,000 dólares, que con eso me fui para Honduras. A arreglar las cosas que me hacían falta, dejar a mis hijos. Les dejé como unos reyes. Igual a mi papá – les llevé a mis hermanos. Dice mi papi que …yo soy su cosecha.

I had bought a piggy bank that doesn’t allow you to take out the money. I would put in $20 every day. Three days before I left, I broke the piggy bank, and I couldn’t believe that I had $4000, which I took to Honduras to resolve the things that were needed, give to my children. I left them like kings. Same with my father—I gave to my siblings. My father says that I am his harvest—I bought a piggy bank that doesn’t allow you to take out the money. I would put in $20 every day. Three days before I left, I broke the piggy bank, and I couldn’t believe that I had $4000, which I took to Honduras to resolve the things that were needed, give to my children. I left them like kings. Same with my father—I gave to my siblings. My father says that I am his crop.

Sí, y así era yo con mi mamá. Yo fui una buena hija con mi mamá, las amigas de mi mamá, yo estaba casada, y ya tenía a mi hijo y yo a mi mamá la cuidé hasta que se murió. Mi mamá murió de fibrosis pulmonar, que se te cierran los
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*pulmones y tiene que vivir con el oxígeno, eso es duro. Y con mi hijo chiquito ahí la iba cargando en el coche y comprarle el oxígeno a mi mamá. Y eso me quedo en mi corazón, que hasta que se murió le serví.*

Yes, and that’s how I was with my mother. I was a good daughter to my mother, my mother’s friends. I was married and I had my son and I cared for my mother until she died. My mother died of a pulmonary fibrosis, when your lungs collapse and you need to live with the oxygen, it is very hard. And I, with my young child, putting him in the stroller and going to buy the oxygen for my mother. That has stayed in my heart, that until she died I served her.

Perception of their parents was generally favorable and suggested a sense of loyalty, as daughters, to their families. This was true even when there was recognition that they were treated harshly.

*Yo amo mucho a mis padres...no sé por qué los hombres sí me han tocado. Mi papá es un hombre ejemplar, un hombre humilde, ¿qué te puedo decir? Es el mejor padre, aunque conmigo se portó como no tuvo que haberlo hecho, porque fue muy duro conmigo, con los castigos y todo. Incluso me hincó una vez embarazada. Ya iba parir. Eso me dolió tanto porque me hincó, que mi hermano me pegó una patada aquí y casi me saca a la niña.*

I love my parents very much…I don’t know why I have been with these kinds of men. My father was an example of a man, a humble man, how do I say? The best father, although with me, he behaved in ways he should not have, because he was very tough with me, with punishments and all. He placed me on my knees one time while I was pregnant. I was about to give birth. It hurt me so much when I was on my knees and my brother kicked right here [points to stomach] and my daughter almost came out.

Lessons of motherhood came from the examples set by their mothers and other women in their families. Woman either emulated what they had observed or avoided repeating what they considered to be a poor model of a mother (e.g., choosing men over the children). The prevailing belief, regardless of what they had observed, was that a mother’s duty was to take care of and protect her children.

*Si usted se fija, hasta los animales cómo cuidan a sus hijos... hasta las gallinas, si usted les agarra un pollito, cómo sigue la gallina. Si usted les toca a un hijo...lo mismo tiene que hacer uno. Uno por sus hijos tiene que sacar también. Así mismo, tiene que darles todo. Si uno los trajo a este mundo, uno sabe a lo que vienen.*
If you notice, even the animals care for their children…even the hens, if you grab a chick, how the hen will follow. If you touch a child… it’s the same that [a mother] should do. Just like that, give them everything.

Some found that identifying as Latina immigrants offered distinct ideas about motherhood and family. Specifically, the importance of family cohesion was reiterated by several of the mothers.

Yes, women look very much after their children. Not like [in the United States]. Here, they give them too much freedom; we don’t. We are more conservative. Here it is is very different.

Aquí las madres son más alejados de sus hijos.
Here, mothers are more distant from their children

Allá, el mal de uno es el mal de todos… aquí no. Aquí cada quien mira por lo suyo. Entonces yo no digo nada, pero mi opinión es que familia es familia; tienen que estar juntos a apoyarse el uno al otro.
Over there [my country], one’s misfortunate is everyone’s…here, no. Here, everyone is only concerned with what is theirs. And so, I don’t say anything, but my opinion is that family is family; they need to stay together and support one another.

Taking care of children included being able to financially provide for them. Several women found that taking on this financial responsibility resulted in their assuming the roles of both mother and father.

Yo la pensaba… que de pronto mi vida podría haber sido de otra manera. Porque, pues, he trabajado tanto, he luchado si sola por mis hijas. He sido mamá y papá de ellas. Tanto allá como acá. Entonces pensé que de pronto iba recibir de pronto yo otra manera o sea, otra vida, otra – mi vida iba ser otra, diferente. De tener un compañero a mi lado. Un hogar formado, pero no, las cosas no se dieron así.
And I thought… suddenly my life could have been different. Because, well, I have worked so much, I have fought on my own for my daughters. I have been a mother and a father to them. So then, I thought I would live another life—that my life would be different. To have a partner by my side. A home, but no, things did not turn out that way.
Faith was also another family value that was emphasized. In contexts defined by unpredictability and chaos, they found stability, comfort, and support in their faith. For many, having faith and cultivating a relationship with god was something that was taught from an early age. Faith is value that had been transmitted through the generations and one that the wish to model and instill in their children.

Yo me acuerdo. Yo me aferraba a Dios. Cuando yo veía a mi mamá llorar, de los golpes que le daba a mi papá, yo decía, “Diosito que yo no me pase lo mismo. Que yo le consiga un hombre bueno.”
I remember. I would cling to God. When I would see my mother cry, because my father was hitting her, I would say, “God, that I don’t want to go through the same thing. I would pray that I would find a good man.”

Yo creo que Dios mira mi corazón y Él mismo me da la valentía, la fuerza.
I believe that God looks into my heart and He gives me the courage, the strength.

Cuando lo veo que está así un poco sofocadito le digo, “Papi, vamos a rezar.” Y se calma.
When I see him a bit upset, I tell him, “Honey, let’s pray” and he calms down.

One woman noted that children are “like sponges. They absorb everything.”

When many of these women were children, they absorbed scenes of violence between their mothers and fathers. They watched women respond to the violence with tolerance. They were taught that as women they will have to serve others (their parents, siblings, men) and that as mothers they will be responsible for fulfilling their children’s needs, even if it meant taking on the nontraditional role of financial provider.

Family values and experiences set the initial tone for young girls of what they may dream for themselves. Limits, expectations, and norms were communicated through modeling and explicit teachings. For these women, where Latino cultural values reflect traditional gender roles, lessons on tending to the needs of others was emphasized.
Receiving love and support was guaranteed through their religious and spiritual relationships with God.

**How She Perceives Herself**

The following gear captures how women view themselves. It lies above the family upbringing gear because I believe it to be partially influenced by the messages they received as children. Specifically, I refer to the messages regarding self-worth, purpose, and roles. Questions intended to elicit reflections about how they identify with certain roles (e.g., mother, spouse, etc.) initially brought out a range of self-evaluative commentaries. Critical self-perceptions coincided with when they were in the abusive relationship and positive self-perceptions emerged from the narratives of having left the relationship.

Self-criticisms were insulting and unforgiving, “I was an idiot”, “and so I continued for being stupid”, “I saw it from the beginning, but I played dumb” These insults were underscored by shame and self-blame,

“I am embarrassed to talk about my situation, because now, I think back… I say, "Okay, “what was I thinking?” I tell myself, “What is wrong with me?”

They identified character flaws as blinders that “allowed” the abuse. Terms that mean to allow or permit (e.g., “dejar”, “permitir”) were used frequently and supported self-blame or responsibility over the incidences of abuse.

*Soy muy buena, yo soy demasiada buena gente, y eso es malo. Yo misma lo he dicho ahora. No es que lo trate de no, pero no es bueno ser muy bueno, más con los hombres.*

I am very good, I am too good a person and that is bad. I am saying it now. It is not good to be good, especially with men.

*porque lo malo de nosotros, por lo menos yo permití, “Ay, pobrecito, lo perdono.” Y eso fue creando costumbre, él se fue acostumbrando, acostumbrando a seguir abusando.*
Because the bad thing about us, is that I allowed it, “Oh, poor thing, I forgive him.” And that creates a habit, he got used to it, got accustomed to it, and continued to be abusive.

They labeled themselves as young and naïve, suggesting a perceived inability to respond to the abusive relationship adequately. They also identified perceived emotional weaknesses stemming from non-violent traumas (family deaths, family separations, poverty, pre-existing psychiatric disorders, and consequences of substance use), which shaped beliefs about their limited capabilities. These vulnerabilities were exacerbated by described tendencies to be “blind” and “mute.”

Entonces yo como joven me dejé llevar y estaba ciega y las manipulaciones de él eran de una manera que uno piensa, se confunde, una manera de confundir a uno.
So then, since I was young I let myself be fooled and I was blind and his manipulation worked in such a way that, I think, confused me.

He would just act like everything was okay… I have to let it go and things would just build up.

When I met with these women they were all out of their abusive relationships. Being outside of the relationship offered a different vantage point and all of these women, despite their initial self-critical claims, were now able to view themselves as pillars of strength and courage. Their renewed sense of self, founded on beliefs that women should “love themselves and think of themselves” facilitated the discovery of themselves as worthy and capable. They were all future oriented and had established goals for their personal fulfillment including returning to school, finding employment opportunities that they enjoy, being healthy, and discovering hobbies. They were all hopeful for their futures and many expressed having already achieved the intangible peace and safety. This peace yielded an emotional space for prayer, forgiveness, and
even empathy for their former partners, a testimony that they had moved forward from the trauma.

_Orar por el enemigo, por el abusador se me hizo difícil, pero ya es tan fácil ahora._

To pray for the enemy, for the abuser was difficult, but now it is so easy.

_he perdonado este muchacho y perdoné el papá de mis hijos. Ya estoy tranquila. Ya vivo tranquila, he sufrido, pero tranquila._

I have forgiven this man, I have forgiven the father of my children. I am at peace. I live a peaceful life, I’ve suffered, but I am at peace.

_pobrecito, tengo lástima. Para mí él es digno de lástima, una persona - yo lo catalogo a él como un esquizofrénico y un bipolar, un loco porque no es normal. Una persona normal no va a hacer locuras._

Poor man, I feel pity for him. For me, he is the worthy of pity—I label him as schizophrenic and bipolar, a crazy person because that isn’t normal. A normal person does not behave so crazy.

The discovery of themselves as capable and worthy women emerged as a new aspect of their identity that they had not known prior to leaving their abusive partner.

Their role as mother was more familiar to them and one that was regarded as the most important. As one of the women stated, “I am more mother than I am woman,” suggesting that her identity as a mother superseded her identity as a woman. The responsibilities of a mother meant providing for and protecting the children. Providing and protecting invariably led to making sacrifices for the sake of the children. One woman shared, “I did so many kinds of things for my children because sometimes there was no milk for my daughter” but the children’s needs were not always as clear.

Remaining in the abusive relationship was sometimes motivated by their belief that their children needed a home with a father and even after having separated from him, the women revealed efforts to encourage positive connections between the children and their fathers.
A mi hijo, le digo, “No quiero hablar de tu papá, amor, es tu papá también... Ese es tu papá, respétalo, ya.” Y si él a veces le grita al padre y yo le digo, “No le grites porque es tu papá.” Yo no quiero hacerle daño a mi hijo, porque no le estoy haciendo daño a él, es a mi hijito, que cuando sea un adulto

I say to my son, “I don’t want you talk about your father, love, he is your father too… He is your father, respect him, that’s it.” And if he sometimes yells at his father I tell him, “Do not yell at him because he is your father.” When he becomes an adult he will respect [his father].

*estuve el primer año yendo a su casa los fines de semana...para que el niño compartiera con él.*

I spent the first year [after separating] going to his house every weekend… so that my son could spend time with him.

Involvement of the fathers was sometimes sustained by custodial agreements, which legally bound women to their children’s fathers. Despite disagreeing with the arrangements, women would make efforts ease the emotional impact for their children.

I always begged him to take him to the park – “Go play with him, let him interact with you in a way that help him feel more comfortable with you.” But no, he wouldn’t pay attention to me, the only thing he thought of was to yank him out of my arms and he would talk my son screaming to the car. And just like that, he would drive off driveway, while I was hearing my son screaming from the car, and I was well, you can imagine.

Protecting the children was a priority that was met with uncertainty of what options would yield most protection. The woman had difficulty identifying how to meet their children’s competing needs (e.g., financial stability, housing, intact family, predictable home environment, emotional health) and perceived both staying and leaving as high risk endeavors for their children’s sake. When direct harm to the children was obvious, women found more confidence in protecting by leaving, but ambiguity persisted.

*El estaba con el niño cuando llegué a la casa y lo encontré a él echándole humo de marihuana al niño y ya pues, después de ahí ya no volví. Me quedé en casa de mi mamá y así. Pero yo iba el primer año, siempre iba todos los fines de semana. Iba, por ejemplo los viernes por la noche me quedaba hasta los domingos por la tarde.*

He was at home with my son and I found him blowing marijuana smoke at my son and then, from there on I did not go back. I stayed in my mother’s house.
But for the first year I would go every weekend. I would go, for example, on Friday nights and stay until Sunday night.

Suffering came with the sacrifices made on behalf of the children but dedicating themselves to their children also offered unique fulfillment, pride, and happiness. When the women spoke about their children they all did so with immense pleasure. They shared about their children’s academic and career achievements, intelligence, personality traits, loyalty, and sense of family. Their children are their happiness, priority, and purpose.

*como te explico, todo es mi hijo, lo demás a mí no me interesa; mi hijo, la tranquilidad de mi hijo es lo que vale para mí.*

How do I explain it, my son is all to me, anything else does not matter to me, my son, his peace is what matters most to me.

The women’s identities are dimensional, with tensions often existing between each dimension. Messages from their families discouraged opportunities to explore their personal desires and needs. They appeared to enter the abusive relationships unsure of who they were, what they wanted, or where comfortable relationship parameters might be drawn. Through the experience of leaving the abusive relationship, many of the women found themselves and learned that they are no longer anything like the young, naïve women they thought themselves to be at the start of the relationship. Instead they stood as independent, empowered, and worthy individuals whose focus was on the wellbeing of their children.

**Connections Create Avenues Towards Safety**

Connections and disconnections emerged as the most frequently occurring theme, and therefore is designated as the largest gear because it has the most force in determining the pace and direction for how the other gears move. Isolation was
identified as a recurrent characteristic of the abusive relationship but for those who were able to remain in some contact with family and friends, connection proved to be instrumental. Several of the woman shared that the pivotal shift to leave the abusive relationship came from the urging of another person. For one woman, it was her employer, whose house she cleaned, whose emotional support and encouraged her to leave after becoming privy to the maltreatment.

For others, it was the women from their families who inspired the decision to leave.

The urging and questions from others gave the women permission and validation for leaving the relationship and not return. It also made her private trauma public and therefore she would now be accountable to those that supported her health and wellbeing.
For those women whose resources of social support were depleted, both informal and formal connections were powerful. One woman described how a friendly neighbor offered her son money (instrumental support) on a day that found herself without any money to eat. She took this gesture as a sign that she could withstand the economic instability that would ensue after leaving the abusive partner. All the women had sought guidance and support through formal services of emotional support (support groups, psychologists, psychiatrists). Many spoke about how valuable they found the friendships and sisterhood they made in support groups. Connection was perceived as the ultimate reward for having suffered so much.

*Sí, eso me ayudó mucho. El haber venido, de verdad que sí. Me ayudó mucho aquí. Yo me siento muy bien el haber venido…pues, Dios me ha mandado para – para recibir mi recompensa.*

Yes this helped me a lot. Coming here [the support group], truthfully, yes. I have been helped here. I feel very good about having come here…. Well, God has sent this to me---so that I may receive my reward.

There were discussions about how the women help each other by listening to each other’s stories, offering advice, and instilling hope. The mutual investment and reciprocity of the relationship allowed for a deeper connection and a more profound impact on how women respond to the abusive relationship. The connections are genuine and lasting.

*Entonces sí hablamos, ella me ha contado sus cosas y yo le conté las mías. Y hemos, tú sabes, hemos visto, y nos conectamos. Ella me dice, “No, todo va a estar bien, todo – vas a ver que todo va a cambiar. Y entonces son cosas que te van ayudando también en tu vida.*

So, we talk, she tells me her things and I tell her mine. And so, you know, we’ve seen, and we’ve connected. She tells me, “Everything will be fine—you’ll see that everything will change.” There are things that help you in your life.

Discussions about other sources of support, such as from police authorities and the judicial system, revealed inconsistencies for establishing positive connections primarily because of lack of trust and other barriers that are shared later in this chapter.
However, one woman who did feel supported stated that it was while speaking to a police
detective that she learned she was a victim of intimate partner violence.

yo un día llamo a la policía, conversé con el detective Garcia y ella me dice –
claro que era violación doméstica, ella me dice “¿Es tu esposo?” – “Sí.” – “¿Y
dijiste no?” – “No.” – “¿Y siguió?” – “Sí.” Pero la verdad mi esposo, para mí
era algo normal y ella fue la primera que me dijo “No, aunque sea tu esposo, si te
abusa sexualmente y tú no estás de acuerdo.” Y ella me llevó al hospital.
One day, I called the police and I talked to detective Garcia and she tells me, “of
course that is domestic violence”, she tells me, “is it your husband?”—“yes”—
“and you said no?”—“no”—“and he continued”—“yes”. Truthfully, it was my
husband, I thought this was something normal and she was the first one to tell me,
“no, even if it’s your husband, if he sexually abuses you and you don’t consent…”
and she took me to the hospital.

Connection was a critical push or force that helped women transcend their uncertainty
while experiencing life replete with trauma, isolation, and fear. After having made the
decision to leave the abusive relationship, connection continues to carry power in its
ability to help women move forward towards safe and fulfilling futures.

Disconnections Support Tolerance of Abuse

“El aguante”, which means to endure or tolerate, was a term used repeatedly
throughout my conversations. Mistrust of others and prolonged periods of disconnection
fostered tolerance. Disconnection was felt at various levels. On an interpersonal level,
the women described abandonment of family as particularly difficult to emotionally
sustain.

ahora me quedé sin familia, me quedé sin nada pero me di cuenta, me pregunto,
¿Yo alguna vez la tuve? – ¿En realidad alguna vez yo la tuve? Porque si no, no
me hubiera sucedido lo que me sucedió. Porque si tu familia es sólida es muy
importante, sí, porque no te dejan caer ¿me entiendes? – Están cuidando y están
pendientes “Oye, está con un ojo morado.” Yo llegué a Nueva York con la cara
hinchada, por tres meses me duró. Todavía mi cara así, con el hueso, pero fuerte.
Y a nadie le importó. Mi madre nunca me preguntó, “¿Qué fue eso?”
And now I have no family, I am left without any but, I ask myself, “did I ever?”—
in reality, did I ever have [a family]?” Because if I did, this wouldn’t have
happened to me. Because if you have a solid family, it is important, because they
don’t let you fall if they are taking care of you and are concerned, “Hey, your eye is bruised.” I arrived to New York with a swollen face, three months it lasted. Still, my face like that, and no one cared. My mother never asked, “What is that?”

Sometimes family was present, but the quality of their support appeared to be more hurtful than helpful. One woman described her feeling like she was being “kicked [her] while [she] was down” when her mother would argue with her about not defending herself against the abusive partner. Involvement from the abusive partner’s family also yielded a false sense of support that quickly shifted to a combative dynamic when the women would attempt to seek outside support (police) to stop the abuse.

Weakened relationships with friends were triggered by uncertainty of how to talk about her abusive relationship. Unsuccessful attempts at connecting often lead to silence. One woman described how her friend of 15 years would respond when she would disclose about the abuse.

“¡Ay, por Dios, me tienes que empezar con lo mismo!” Tú hablas como que él te golpeara todos los días.” ¿Me entiendes? Como que, tres o cuatro veces, cinco más al año, qué importa. “Oye, la última vez que yo te vi con el ojo morado, ¿qué fue? Hace como tres meses de eso.” Como qué importa. “Para mí, si fuera todos los días habría sido un problema, pero ahora, si se te ha puesto el ojo moreteado a los tres meses, no importa.” Entonces, esos son los consejos que una amiga te dan. Y después tú dices, ¡Pero qué estúpida soy yo! Porque yo estoy hablando de eso mejor me quedo callada.

Oh, God! You have to start with that again! You talk as if he hits you every day!” Like three or four times, five times a year, who cares? “Hey, the last time I saw you with a bruised eye, when was it? It’s been like three months” As if, who cares. “For me, if it was every day then it would be a problem, but if your eye is bruised three months later, it doesn’t matter” So, this is the advice a friend gives and then you say, “how stupid I am! Why am I even talking about it, better to just stay quiet.

Immigration, especially for those who immigrated as young adults or older, created a disconnection at social level. Women described several challenges related to adjusting to life as immigrant in the United States. Not speaking the language created
barriers for accessing resources and left them disempowered. Not having legal
documentation elicited fears of deportation and separation from their children. These
anxieties fostered mistrust in the legal and social service systems and created beliefs
would not qualify for services.

Pero nunca me di cuenta, me di cuenta … por una señora que me dijo, “Si aquí
hay lugar donde ayudan a las mujeres.” “Pero si no tengo papeles, ¿qué me van
a ayudar?” Decía yo, “¿Qué voy a ir a decir a la policía si no tengo nada, no
tengo documentos? ¿Qué me van a creer a una persona que no tiene nada de
identificación ni nada?” Es la verdad. No vales nada, no vales nada; como
persona ni nada, estás en la sombra,

But I never realized, it was a woman who told me, “Yes, there’s a place where
they help women.” “But I don’t have my papers, are they going to help me?” I
said, “What am I going to say to the police if I don’t have anything, no
documentation?” What are they going to believe from a person who has no
identification or anything? It’s the truth. You are worth nothing, you are worth
nothing, as a person, nothing, you are in the shadows.

Their undocumented status was used to psychologically and emotionally hurt them as
illustrated by their abusive partner’s public disclosure of her status and threats for
deportation. These gestures instilled fear and fostered tolerance.

yo lloraba en silencio, porque yo decía, “Bueno, no tengo papeles, este tipo me
lleva a migración, me quitan a mi hijo.” Y eso a mí me ponía mal, hasta yo me
enfermaba, yo ahora tengo - estoy enferma porque todo parece que se me está
dando ahora - la gente no cree pero las preocupaciones y los problemas te
afectan.

I would cry in silence, I would say, “Well, I don’t have papers and this man is
going to send me to immigration and take my child from me” And that would hurt
me. I would even get sick, and now, I am sick and everything is happening
now—people don’t believe that worries and problems have a physical impact.

Isolation also came from experiences of the public perception of undocumented
immigrants in this country. As one of the women mentioned, being undocumented
means not being worth anything and having to live in the shadows. Another stated that
she experienced “not racism, but something similar.” These women were alluding to
experiences of marginalization from society, which only made them feel more
disconnected in a place that was already so unfamiliar. One of the women recognized the political underpinnings to the perception of undocumented immigrants and expressed hope that new legislation would mean no longer having to worry about being separated from her son.

Those who had legal residency or citizenship also experienced disconnection from the communities where they lived. There was mistrust in police as an effective source of support. The women shared they felt ignored by the police and that petitions for restraining orders were denied for reasons they could not understand. One continues to be involved in a messy custody battle where she feels she cannot exercise any power or control.

Disconnection from the resources that are available in the community also reinforced isolation. One woman shared her concerns about the limited resources available in our community for victims. Once identified, connecting to those limited resources was a challenge she was unable to overcome.

Entonces también es la misma sociedad y tú ves que también, si tú llamas al shelter, “No tenemos ahora.” ¡Prag! Y te van decepcionando. Yo me cansé de buscarle a una muchacha shelter con dos niños. Y toditos decían “No, no, no.” Y ella se tuvo que regresar, todavía está en lo mismo. Te estoy hablando de eso ya para un año.

And so, even in society you see it too, if you call a shelter, “we don’t have any room now” and then you are disillusioned. I got tired of looking for a woman and her two children. And everyone would say, “No, no, no” and she had to go back [to him], she is still in the same situation. I am talking about what happened a year ago.

The disconnections reverberate across a woman’s interpersonal, community, and societal spheres. They also occur within her internal dialogue. The women often shared what emerged as internal conflict and inconsistencies in their thoughts and behaviors while
navigating through the abusive relationship. This internal dissonance seemed to create yet another layer of disconnection from within that made even identifying their beliefs and feelings a challenge.

No es que me arrepienta, pero sí me arrepiento porque todo eso se lo hubiera mandado a mis hijos, a mi familia. Y yo por enamorarme de una persona que no se lo merecía, me pasó esto.
It’s not that I regret it, well, yes I regret it because of everything I could have sent my children, my family. But I fell in love with a man that didn’t deserve it and this happened.

The sense of feeling disconnected from themselves, family, friends, communities, their country, and society-at-large left women alone and in silence. With no one to walk alongside them to offer guidance and encouragement, the women often stayed still in the abusive relationship.

**Decisions are Motivated by the Forces with Most Power**

The decisions are the gear that is situated over self-perception. The decisions available to the women are linked to the decisions she perceives to be within reach. What she believes to be within reach is connected to her capabilities. In the early stages of the relationship, women described themselves with scathing criticisms. The early stages of the relationship also coincided with identifying few options other than staying. The availability of alternative choices appeared to emerge with the experiences of connections and disconnections.

Decisions fell in one of two categories—tolerate the abuse or leave the relationship. As discussed in the preceding sections, decisions to stay were supported by family values that taught tolerance and servitude, a self-perception of a weak and incapable woman, and pervasive internal and social disconnections. Decisions to leave were motivated by the encouragement of loved ones. For those who were too isolated to
feel the “empuje” or push of social support, their decision to leave hinged on “tocando el fondo.” Descriptions of “tocando el fondo” or hitting rock bottom revealed arriving to an emotional place where they could no longer recognize themselves or their children underneath depression, anxiety, and addictions.

Reflections about the decisions the women made for themselves and their families indicated moments of questioning and self-talk. The dialogue was shared with either herself or to god. Questions seeking reasons for her misfortune was the most frequent ones posed. The women turned to God asking for guidance, wisdom, and protection during quiet moments of prayer and loud desperate pleas. These practices instilled hope and created a sense of being connected to a greater being and purpose. One woman stated,

Yo se que Dios nunca me desampara. Eso lo tengo muy presente. Dios nunca nos deja. Y Dios le da la prueba a los mejores soldados que tiene. Asi que voy para adelante.
I know that God will never abandon me. That I have very clear. He will never leave us. He tests the best soldiers that he has and with that conviction, I move forward.

Moments of self-talk involved self-questioning (e.g., “Why do I do this? And my children? Who is to blame here?”), which were fleeting that often resurfaced. One woman described having recognized how her thoughts could have power and therefore allowed for more possibilities for her perceived choices.

tiene que meterse al método de que, “Sí puedo”. Porque la boca y el pensamiento tiene poder. Si usted está negativa, todo va a salir mal.
You have to put yourself in the frame of mind of “yes, I can”. Because words and thoughts have a lot of power. If you are negative, then everything will turn out negative.
The self-talk was akin to self-encouragement and support. They included affirmative statements of self-worth and considerations what they believed was best for their children. Those that felt more connected, especially when encouraged by a love one, were the ones who left and did not return.

**Actions are Motivated by Decisions**

Action (or strategies) is the final gear of the mechanism and captures the behavior(s) that lead to the dissolution of the abusive relationship. The action gear is influenced by the movement of all the other gears but is most closely related to decisions. The decisions that led to actions were not premeditated and instead appeared more reactive, despite their having already engaged in thinking about how to navigate the abusive relationship. All women exhibited passive, inconsistent, and active behaviors. The final action that ended the relationship was always active.

Passive behaviors were those that were described as remaining silent and trying to maintain a peaceful home by not exacerbating the situation. Inconsistent behaviors were those that were contradictory, such as the several women who petitioned for restraining orders but never followed through with it. They also encompassed the pattern of leaving the relationship and then returning. Returning was often motivated by their desire to foster a relationship with their children and their father. They engaged in active actions that resulted in the dissolution of the relationship. They threatened and called law enforcement, moved out or kicked him out of their home, and made various demands (e.g., child support, custody). Many of them had heard about laws protecting women from violence and would threaten their abusive partners with their knowledge that violence against women was illegal in this country.
Hasta que llegué a este país. Y cuando vi que comentaban que si él me pegaba iba a la cárcel, aquí trató de pegarme y yo vivía con la hermana y un día me trató de pegar. Y le dije, “Tú sabes que te llamo la policía si tú me llegas a pegar en este país.” Y vas preso.

When I came to this country, I was told that he could going to go to jail if he hit me … he tried to hit me and I said, “You know that I can call the police if you hit me in this country. And you will go to jail.”

Accessing support to facilitate the transition out of the abusive relationship also proved to be helpful in ending the relationship. One of the women spoke about the utility of having formal supports in place and advocated for more.

Yo creo que necesitamos como más gente profesional porque yo creo que tú ahora, sentada aquí como psicóloga, tú vas a tener poder como para ayudar a las personas.

I think we need more professionals because I think that you, you sitting here as a psychologist, you have power to help people.

Ambiguity, Conflicting Messages, and Uncertainty

Reflections of their lived experience often revealed lack of clarity, internal dissonance, and uncertainty. While sharing about their lives as children, women shared about difficulties understanding their parents’ behavior and the choices they made for themselves and their families. Many of them wondered why their mothers had remained in the abusive relationship. They acknowledged the profound emotional impact of witnessing their mothers abused by their fathers, yet continued to express respect and love for their fathers. While speaking about their relationships, themes illustrating inconsistencies were apparent. This was particularly evident when they talked their responses to the abuse.

nunca me – Sí me dañó porque sí, pero nunca me dejé.
I never allowed---it did impact me but, I never allowed it to [impact me].

uno con su ignorancia, o no sea ignorancia porque tal vez yo me daba cuenta
one’s ignorance, well not exactly ignorance because maybe I did notice
I never feel unsafe with him. He’s a good guy so I don’t feel unsafe, but at that point I did feel unsafe so I don’t know what he’s capable of doing because I don’t even know him anymore.

Uncertainty emerged in discussions about how they responded to the abuse and appeared most frequently when thinking about how best to provide for their children. Mothers grappled with ideas about needing to provide a father figure while also considering how to create a safe distance from their children’s father. This is similar to what Lacey (2010) described as “double binds” and the experience of facing equally compelling, but competing desires.

Porque me di cuenta de que él llegó al hospital, y entonces el susto, que yo lo quería, que el papá de mi niña, y que él no sé, parece que me andaba buscando. Yo, con la cesárea, a los 10 días me fui a buscarlo. Le llevé la niña y se la enseñé. Because I became aware that he arrived at the hospital, and then, the fear, but what I wanted, was for the father of my daughter, and I don’t know, it seems like he was looking for me. And I, having just done a cesearan section 10 days prior, I went to go find him. I took him our daughter and showed her to him.

Outside of their abusive relationships, women also expressed frequent uncertainty in other areas of their life. As immigrants, they were confused and unsure about how to navigate an unfamiliar culture and city. They were unaware of the resources and misinformed about what was available to them. This contributed to persistent feelings of isolation.

Those who were connected sometimes experienced conflicting messages from their friends and family. One of the women reported shared about her relationship with her mother and describes her conflicting emotions.

[my mother] hasn’t been there for me and she hasn’t done anything for me and she has hurt me in so many ways, but my daughter, my oldest one, that’s her everything. So even though I went through, I feel like I hate her and I want nothing to do with her, I wish she didn’t even existed but the way she is with my daughter,
The combined effect of uncertainty and inconsistent messages yields to ambiguity when it comes to making decisions and actions about the relationship. In continuing with the metaphor of the gears, ambiguity exists in the spaces between the mechanisms and depending on the quantity, can either facilitate or impede movement. Less ambiguity (or more certainty) appeared to facilitate the process of getting the gears moving yielding women to reach a decision and action. More ambiguity would halt the process and delay any action at all.

**Context of the Research**

The findings of this research are bounded to the contexts of time and place under which they were constructed. The Violence Against Women Act, arguably the most influential piece of legislation towards the protection of victims of intimate partner violence, regained media attention last year for having been made into law twenty years ago. The timing of the anniversary coincided with a highly publicized abusive incident between a professional football player and his fiancée that resulted in her losing of consciousness. The incident was recorded by security cameras and made accessible to all. The general public responded passionately and brought conversations about “why she stays” and “why she leaves” once again into homes across the country. In an interview broadcasted on one of the main national media outlets, the fiancée expressed the tensions she felt from the public for not being able to identify as a victim of intimate partner violence. She assumed shared responsibility for the incident and identified it as an isolated incident. In the recording of the incident, the bystander is seen doing nothing to help her or intervene. He simply steps over her.
The experience of being overlooked, ignored, and subjected to oppressive and abusive acts was commonplace and illustrates profound disconnection. Despite efforts for the law to recognize the need to protect undocumented women from violence—the VAWA underwent revisions in 2013 to include the protection of undocumented immigrants—the women in this study felt isolated and disconnected, especially when they did not have legal documentation. Some reported a sense of increased security with recent media reports of President Obama’s immigration reform. Others appeared to be unaware.

All research activities took place in Miami, Florida, a location that is often regarded as more representative of Latin American than it is the southern United States. The acculturation stressors experienced by the participants may have been tempered given the availability of Spanish speaking communities in the area. Immigrants living in other parts of the country may confront additional barriers and further isolation from their communities. In addition, Miami-Dade County has several shelters and organizations dedicated to serving intimate partner violence. Women living in areas without such resources may also be more disconnected.
Chapter 5

Discussion

When I began this research study, I did so with the desire to learn from Latina immigrant mothers who are victims of IPV. I set out to construct a theory that captured an understanding of their decisions to stay or leave their abusing partners. Further I sought to identify key factors influencing their decisions and the strategies. In this chapter I discuss how the findings answer my research questions and emphasize the patterns and inconsistencies I encountered in the data. I also revisit the relevance of this research study and discuss how the findings compare to what we know from the existing literature. I share my impressions of the study’s practical and theoretical implications.

Patterns and Inconsistencies

Themes related to family values and upbringing, self-perception, and perceived connections and disconnections emerged as the forces leading to a decision to stay or leave the abusing partner. Women’s childhood experiences were shaped by values (e.g., faith, familism, fate, machismo, marianismo) modeled and taught to them by their families. These values are consistent with what is known in the literature about Latino cultural values and the experience of IPV (Galanti, 2003, Moreno, 2007; Perilla, 1999; Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994; Rivera, 1994). However, the women in the study did not perceive these beliefs as related to the Latino culture and instead described them as family beliefs. Only when speaking about themselves as mothers did they articulate a cultural difference between themselves and other mothers in the United States. Their descriptions revealed beliefs consistent with values of "familism". This was true even for one of the participants who had lived in the United States nearly all of her life. Other
generational patterns that emerged included exposure to family violence. Family history of violence corresponds with a factor already investigated in the literature as a predictor for staying or leaving abusive relationships, however, the literature offers mixed findings regarding its significance in its predictability for staying or leaving (Anderson & Sanders, 2003; Kim & Grey, 2008; Rhatigan et al., 2006; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998). In this study, having observed family violence contributed to women’s tolerance for the abuse.

The construct of self-perception consisted of discordant views of themselves (self-critical and self-praising) and their responsibilities. Closer examination revealed that perceptions of the self changed over the course of the abusive relationship and once out of the relationship, the women would begin to see themselves more positively. The research literature has identified predictors for leaving that are related to self-perception and include perceived self-efficacy, locus of control, and self-esteem (Kim & Grey, 2006; Rhatigan et al., 2005). This is different than how self-perception in this study was conceptualized. Rather than beliefs about whether they had power to create changes, the narratives shared in this study described how they viewed themselves in relation to others, specifically the abusing partner and their children. This captured how their identities—as partner and mother—were involved in the decisions and actions.

Victims’ upbringing played an important role in the formation of their identities and beliefs about being a partner and mother. When it came to making decisions about their relationship, I anticipated that their identities and responsibilities as mother would trigger their action as the literature suggests (Rhodes et al., 2010). Their identity as mother superseded any other aspect of their identity and providing for and protecting their children was unequivocally their priority. Ambiguity seeped in as they sought
answers for how to protect their children. Many responded to the ambiguity by maintaining stability of the family structure, even if stability meant enduring episodes of chaos and violence.

The experience of connections and disconnections emerged as the most powerful force to elicit a decision and subsequent action (or inaction). The intensity of the force was evident in the impact revealed in the women’s descriptions. The literature has indicated perceived social support as a significant predictor for leaving (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Randell, Bledsoe, Shroff, & Pierce, 2012). However, this study offers depth to the relevance of connection and disconnection in the lives of Latina immigrant mothers. Specifically, connections go beyond social support and serve as sparks for taking action. Connections provide continuity in a life that is unpredictable and a safe haven to move towards once out of the relationship. The literature suggests that isolation supports staying in an abusive relationship. This was also found to be true in this study, however, experiences of disconnection extended past social isolation. Disconnection was experienced at interpersonal (e.g., lack of social support), sociocultural (e.g., lack of documentation, acculturation stress), and internal (e.g., internal conflict) levels.

Ambiguity, while not conceptualized as a force, was found to influence the overall dynamic that exists between these constructs. The literature discusses the dissonance and “double-binds” Latina victims of IPV frequently encounter. I found that ambiguity encapsulates the entire process and not just when arriving at a decision. Ambiguity was an experience the women experienced in their childhood and persisted in their formation of themselves and relationship with others.
When these forces are in motion they move towards a decision and action. The decisions, while often involving an internal dialogue, required the urging of another person to trigger the action of leaving. Once having decided, women engaged in active actions (e.g., calling the police, making demands from the abusing partner, moving out of the home). Prior to these active actions, women often engaged in passive and inconsistent attempts before leaving for good.

**Relevance of Findings and Implications**

The theory presented here adds richness and depth to our understanding of the forces involved in the lives of Latina immigrant mothers by expanding the definitions of family values, self-perception, connection and disconnection, and ambiguity previously alluded in the literature. It contributes to the literature by framing these constructs as dynamic forces that together lead to decisions and actions (or strategies), rather than independent factors varying in predictability strength for a decision. The theory captures historical (upbringing), cultural (values), psychological (self-perception), interpersonal and sociocultural (connections and disconnections) factors that relate in multidirectional ways. Moreover, the model includes ambiguity as an added factor that facilitates or impedes movement in this process.

Existing models in the decision-making theoretical literature are linear (e.g., stage model), deficit-focused (barrier model), and assume rational cognitive processes (e.g., exchange theory). None of these models capture the multidimensional identity of mothers as relational and cultural beings. The Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 1997) appears to be a suitable lens for understanding the experiences of Latina immigrant mothers, given its emphasis on connection and culture. However, it does not speak
directly to the decisions Latina immigrant mothers make while in the abusive relationships.

The World Health Organization recently published guidelines for how healthcare providers and practitioners should respond to IPV (WHO, 2013). Recommendations include comprehensive assessment, support, education, and referral to services. Practitioners are urged to refrain from having expectations for the victim to leave the abusive partner. Similarly, in a review examining mental health interventions for victims of IPV service providers reportedly “did not try to pressure women to leave the abusive relationship” (Warshaw, Sullivan, & Rivera, 2013). The stance for service providers to remain neutral and attend to symptoms, rather than victims’ choices may create a missed opportunity for clinicians to intervene in a useful ways. Findings from this study indicate that Latina immigrant women found it beneficial to experience support from others to leave an abusive partner. Psychologists and mental health counselors, who may be seeing a victim of intimate partner violence for regularly scheduled therapy sessions, may wish to consider exploring victims’ decisions in addition to assessing and treating symptoms. While exploring victims’ decisions, clinicians might encounter how adherence to cultural values, along with experiences of disconnection and ambiguity make it difficult for her to leave. Clinicians can conceptualize their decision to stay within the context of conflicting forces that require a “push” so that she may decide to leave. Treatment could include preparing and engaging in active action plans (e.g., informing the police). While advocates may not have training in psychological processes, they are most often at the “front lines” serving victims of intimate partner violence. Advocate interventions should target helping victims access resources for them
and their children, and encouraging establishing social support given its perceived benefits by the women of this study.

Mothers in this study all spoke about the benefits of attending support groups and receiving legal, psychological, and financial services. They regarded these interventions as a critical component to their healing. In their narratives of how they initiated accessing services, many shared that they did not believe such services were available and were unaware of their legal rights in this country. Further, women without legal documentation identified fears of deportation as the primary barrier for delaying help-seeking. Latina immigrants’ underutilization of services is well established in the literature and communities should to continue educating the public about resources available for victims. Such information should be available in contexts where mothers take their children (schools, afterschool programs, and pediatrician’s offices). Providing information in child-centered environments could also be opportunity to educate mothers on the multiple consequences their children may experience from witnessing violence in the home. Early identification of symptoms and intervention could facilitate the prevention of IPV reoccurrence when the children are old enough for their own intimate relationships.

Limitations

While the findings of this study offer an interesting contribution to the literature, it is important to describe how they are limited. Methodological limitations include recruiting from only one site where women were already receiving interventions and presumably felt connected (to each other, the agency, the service providers). None of the participants were living in shelters and therefore likely had a greater level of stability and
social support, than women who live in shelters. While the data reached theoretical saturation with eight participants, the inclusion of additional women from other areas of our community would likely have led to new categories and themes not expressed by the participants in this study. An error in the recording of one participant’s interview and subsequent transcribing and coding also limits the findings, despite efforts to supplement with memos and telephone conversations.

The theory is limited by the time and place under which it was constructed. Changes in the sociocultural (e.g., shift in cultural norms) and political (e.g., immigration laws) contexts may have direct implications on how women come to decide whether to stay or leave an abusive relationship. While efforts were made to uphold trustworthiness and authenticity (fairness), it was difficult meet the criterion of fairness as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1986). I relied on member checking to clarify differing beliefs but was unable to secure an opportunity to share and engage in negotiations of meaning of the theoretical model with the stakeholders (participants and service providers). Also, extended engagement in the agency and with the women would have allowed for richer understanding of their lives.

Conclusions

Empirical studies identify various independent factors as predictors for staying or leaving abusive relationships and offer little understanding of how they might relate. Existing theoretical models on decision-making primarily rely on people’s engagement in rational thinking process. Neither the empirical nor the theoretical literature capture the nuances lived by Latina immigrant mothers victims of IPV.
The decision to stay or leave abusive relationships for Latina immigrant mothers victims of IPV is complicated by cultural beliefs, the impact of early exposure to violence, and experiences of connections and disconnections. Making a decision to stay or leave an abusive partner is dependent on a set of dynamic and overlapping gears that are set in motion by the onset of an abusive relationship. The gears, serve to illustrate forces that are defined by a woman’s family values (cultural beliefs) and upbringing (exposure to violence), her self-perception, and perceived interpersonal and sociocultural connections and disconnections. The space between the gears is saturated with ambiguity and inconsistencies, which impacts the ease at which she can move towards a decision and action. Momentum is regained when urged to leave by a friend or family member, suggesting that connection the catalyst that creates a pathway for Latina immigrant mothers to leave the abusive relationship.

Latina immigrant mothers who are IPV victims present with various vulnerabilities and personal strengths. Having a better understanding of their experiences can help address the concerning high incidences of victimization, tendencies to remain in abusive relationships longer, and severe consequences from the abuse. Future prevention and intervention programs should target aspects of each of the model’s forces to facilitate decision-making among Latina immigrant mothers. For example, engaging Latino immigrant families in conversations about how Latino cultural values influence women’s self-perception and tolerance for violence can increase awareness and foster opportunities to emphasize positive (and protective) cultural factors. Further, education and programs aimed at facilitating immigrant victims’ adjustment to the United States can help temper isolation and fear.
From a methodological perspective, this study contributes to the literature by its use of grounded theory as a suitable method for this purpose, as it has been demonstrated to be in other related areas in the IPV literature (e.g., decision to disclose abuse). This constructed grounded theory revealed various forces that ultimately activate decisions and actions. Subsequent studies should explore whether this model fits Latina immigrant populations where they may be exposed to increased disconnections (e.g., non-Spanish speaking communities). Finally, as the political climate in the United States shifts with changing immigration policies, replicating this study at a time when immigration laws do not persecute those without documents may reveal different findings.
References


# APPENDIX A

## Summary of Analytical Categories and Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selective Categories</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Summary of Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La relación abusiva es inesperada</td>
<td>El comienzo</td>
<td>Impresiones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The abusive relationship is unexpected</td>
<td>The beginning</td>
<td>Impressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Síntomas</strong></td>
<td><strong>Control y manipulación</strong></td>
<td>Insistencias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symptoms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Control and manipulation</strong></td>
<td>Insistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Alcoholismo y drogas</strong></td>
<td>Alcoholism and drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Aislamiento</strong></td>
<td>Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Celos</strong></td>
<td>Jealousy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>El abuso</strong></td>
<td><strong>Abuso emocional</strong></td>
<td>Abuso emocional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The abuse</strong></td>
<td><strong>Emotional abuse</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Abuso físico</strong></td>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Abuso sexual</strong></td>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Persecución</strong></td>
<td>Stalking</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Abuso económico</strong></td>
<td>Financial abuse</td>
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<td>Selective Categories</td>
<td>Categories</td>
<td>Summary of Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Valores de la familia y la crianza crea una fundación</strong>&lt;br&gt;Family values and upbringing create a foundation</td>
<td><strong>Arrastrando traumas y patrones</strong>&lt;br&gt;Dragging traumas and patterns</td>
<td><em>Consecuencias sufridas por los niños</em>&lt;br&gt;Consequences suffered by the children</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Enseñanzas para ser mujer</strong>&lt;br&gt;Lessons on being a woman</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Abuso físico de nina</em>&lt;br&gt;Childhood physical abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Abuso sexual de nina</em>&lt;br&gt;Childhood sexual abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Violencia en el hogar</em>&lt;br&gt;Domestic violence in the home</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fidelidad a los padres</em>&lt;br&gt;Loyalty to parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Servir y cuidar a los demás</em>&lt;br&gt;Serve and care for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Importancia de estudiar</em>&lt;br&gt;Importance of studying</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Enseñanzas para ser madres</strong>&lt;br&gt;Lessons on mothering</td>
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<td><em>Mantener la familia junta</em>&lt;br&gt;Keep the family together</td>
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<td>Categories</td>
<td>Summary of Codes</td>
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<td>Dedicarse a los hijos</td>
<td>Dedicarse a los hijos</td>
<td>Dedicate self to children</td>
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<td>Creencias religiosas</td>
<td>Pedir ayuda a Dios</td>
<td>Religious beliefs Ask God for help</td>
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<td>Quien es y lo que puede lograr se define por como elle se ve</td>
<td>Aceptar la fe</td>
<td>Who she is and what she can do is defined by who she sees herself Accept one’s faith</td>
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<td>Mientras el abuso</td>
<td>Débil y vulnerable</td>
<td>During the abuse Weak and vulnerable</td>
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<td>Estar ciega</td>
<td>Fuerte</td>
<td>Being blind Strength</td>
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<td>Estar callada</td>
<td>Con esperanza</td>
<td>Remain silent With hope</td>
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<td>Después de dejarlo</td>
<td>Ser mama y papa</td>
<td>After leaving him Being mother and father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crear metas</td>
<td>Poder perdonar</td>
<td>Create goals Able to forgive</td>
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<td>Reconocer logros</td>
<td>Reconocer logros</td>
<td>Recognize successes</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>Ser mama</td>
<td>“Levantarme”</td>
<td>“Get up” for my children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being a mother</td>
<td>Proveer, proteger, y sacrificarme</td>
<td>Give, protect, and sacrifice myself for my children</td>
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<td>para mis hijos</td>
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<td>Las conexiones crean avenidas hacia la seguridad</td>
<td>Ser mama más que mujer</td>
<td>Being a mother more than a woman</td>
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<td>Connection creates avenues towards safety</td>
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<td>Promises and following through</td>
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<td>Acceso a trabajo o dinero</td>
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<td>Desconexiones apoyan el aguante</td>
<td>Ser inmigrante</td>
<td>Necesidades basicas</td>
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<td>Disconnections support tolerance</td>
<td>Being an immigrant</td>
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<td>“Gente que te pisotean”</td>
<td>Conflicto con la familia</td>
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<td>People who step all over you</td>
<td>Family conflict</td>
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<td>Presiones de la familia</td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
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<td>Abandono de amigas y familia</td>
<td>Abandono de amigas y familia</td>
<td>Abandonment by friends and family</td>
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<td>Ausencia de apoyo en la comunidad</td>
<td>Absence of community support</td>
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<td>Pocos servicios y recursos</td>
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<td>Sistema legal responde</td>
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<td>Legal system responds</td>
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<td>Decisiones son motivadas por fuerzas con mas poder</td>
<td>Decisiones son motivadas por fuerzas con mas poder</td>
<td>Decisions are motivated by forces with most influence</td>
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<td>Aguantar</td>
<td>Aguantar</td>
<td>Tolerate</td>
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<td>Por desconexiones</td>
<td>Because of disconnection</td>
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<td>Por esperanza</td>
<td>Por esperanza</td>
<td>Because of faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Por la manera que se ve negativamente</td>
<td>Por la manera que se ve negativamente</td>
<td>Because of negative self-perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por enseñanzas</td>
<td>Por enseñanzas</td>
<td>Because of lessons learned</td>
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<td>Dejar la relación</td>
<td>Dejar la relación</td>
<td>Leave the relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por conexiones</td>
<td>Por conexiones</td>
<td>Because of connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por la manera que se ve positivamente</td>
<td>Por la manera que se ve positivamente</td>
<td>Due to positive self-perception</td>
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<td>Selective Categories</td>
<td>Categories</td>
<td>Summary of Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Acciones son motivadas por las decisiones | Estrategias activas | Darse cuenta  
Notice |
| Actions are motivated by decisions | Active strategies | Llamar a la policia  
Call the police |
| | | Buscar ayuda  
Seek help |
| | | Irse  
Leave |
| | | Enfrentar al hombre abusador  
Confront the abusive partner |
| | | Alguien le pide que deja la relación  
Somone tells them to leave the relationship |
| Estrategias pasivas | Passive strategies | Estar callada  
Remain quiet |
| Estrategias conflictivas | Conflicting strategies | Empieza con una acción activa pero retrocede y no termina la acción activa  
Begins with an active action but then does not follow through |
| | | Va y vuelve  
Leaves and returns |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selective Categories</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Summary of Codes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La ambigüedad llena cada aspecto de las vidas de victimas</td>
<td>Percepción del hombre y la relación</td>
<td>Desilusiones y mentiras</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambiguity informs every aspect of the lives of victims</td>
<td>Perception of men and the relationship</td>
<td>Disillusion and lies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mensaj es y observaciones</td>
<td>Enseñanzas de niña</td>
<td>El hombre perfecto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages and observations</td>
<td>Lessons from childhood</td>
<td>The perfect man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autoevaluación</td>
<td>Negativo (culpa, falta de confianza)</td>
<td>Estabilidad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-evaluation</td>
<td>Negative (guilt, lack of confidence)</td>
<td>Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict o interno</td>
<td>Incertidumbres</td>
<td>Ejemplos de madres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal conflict</td>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>Examples of mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nunca me lo imagine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I never imagined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positivo (fuerte, sin miedo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive (strong, fearless)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inconstantes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inconsistencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Example of Memo

While speaking with these women, I became aware of how my own emotions and thoughts were consistently triggered. These triggers served as cues that my filters were being activated. As a mother, I experienced a visceral response when hearing about the children having witnessed the violence. I alleviated the emotional discomfort by inquiring about current supportive services being offered for the children. I was relieved to hear that all had already taken those measures. As a spouse, I would find myself mentally wincing as if afraid that the descriptions of the abuse would elicit a vicarious sensation of being humiliated, violated, or choked. The days of the interviews and rereading the transcripts coincided with the days I would feel and express gratitude for being in a marriage free from abuse. As a Latina woman, I experienced anger at the persistence of traditional gender norms and guilt that I escaped the pressures of adhering to them. As a psychologist-in-training, aware of the psychological ramifications of trauma, I was prepared to sit across mothers who were disempowered, depressed, and anxious. Instead, I felt surprise while hearing awe-inspiring narratives of optimism and forgiveness. These women were survivors, in the physical and emotional sense of the word. I am humbled by their expertise on pathways to healing and commit to honoring their words to the best of my ability.
APPENDIX C

Participant Consent Form (English and Spanish versions)

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Immigrant mothers in abusive relationships: Decisions and Actions

Principal Investigator: Michelle C. Fernandez under the supervision of Dr. Etiony Aldarondo

Introduction:
We are interested in learning from Latina immigrant mothers previously involved in an abusive relationship. Before you decide if you would like to join, you need to know the purpose of the study, how it would help you, what the risks are, and what you need to do after you agree/consent. This process is called “informed consent.” This form will tell you about the study. If you agree to participate you will be asked to sign this consent form. We will give you a copy to keep.

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to understand how Latina immigrant mothers arrive at their decisions about staying or leaving an abusive partner. The information you share during two individual interviews will be used to possibly inform future interventions with Latina immigrant mothers. You have been asked to join this study because you are over 18 years of age and have identified yourself as a Latina immigrant mother and victim of intimate partner violence. Please read this form and ask questions before agreeing to participate in the research study.
Description of Study/Procedures:

If you agree to participate in the interview, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Complete a short and confidential questionnaire that asks about your background information.
- Participate in two interview sessions that will last approximately one hour each. You will be asked questions about your experiences as a mother, immigrant, Latina, and partner in an abusive relationship.
- The interviews will be audio-recorded and paper (i.e., field notes). These recordings and field notes will be confidential and secured in a locked office. The members of the research team are the only ones who have access to these materials. Once the audiotapes have been listened to and transcribed, major themes will be identified. Tapes will be destroyed three years upon the completion of this project. Your name will not be a part of the transcription or field notes.

Risks & Discomforts:

There are no serious risks related to participating in this study. However, you may feel uncomfortable talking about sensitive personal information about your experiences, relationships, and background. You may stop the interview at any time and request the additional support from a mental health professional, should you feel in distress. The professional will be able to assess your needs, stay with you until you feel stable, and connect you with the appropriate health services.

Expected benefits:

You will be offered a gift card valued at $25 for Target and the opportunity to participate in a raffle for two round-trip tickets in the continental U.S. courtesy of Southwest Airlines. No purchase is necessary. The odds of winning are about 1 in 30. The drawing will be held on June 1, 2015. Additionally, your participation can inform the service providers of ways to better serve Latina immigrant mothers, which may benefit other community members in the future.

Confidentiality:

The investigators and their assistants will consider your records confidential to the extent permitted by the law. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) may request to review and obtain copies of your records. Your records may also be reviewed for audit purposes by authorized University employees or other agents who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality.
The information you provide will remain confidential. The short questionnaire you will complete before the interview will contain no personal identifying information and will remain confidential. If the results from the interviews and questionnaire are published, discussed in conferences no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation in this focus group is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Miami, CVAC, or Fundacion Entre Nosotras. If you decide to withdraw from the study, your comments will not be transcribed but the tape will otherwise be treated the same as if you had remained in the study.

**Questions:**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject please contact the Humans Subjects Research Office at 305-243-3195. If you have any questions regarding this particular study please contact:

Michelle C. Fernandez, M.S.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
(305)724-4457

Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D.
Supervisor
(305)284-4372
I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and be audiotaped during the interview. I have read the information on this form and all my questions have been answered.

____________________________________________  Date: ____________

Subject’s Signature

____________________________________________

Subject’s Printed Name

____________________________________________  Date: ____________

Signature of person obtaining consent

____________________________________________

Person Obtaining Consent Printed Name

Principal Investigator: Michelle Fernandez

Phone Number: (305) 724-4457

Email: um.mirada@gmail.com
FORMA DE CONSENTIMIENTO DEL PARTICIPANTE

Título del Proyecto: Madres inmigrantes en relaciones abusivas: Decisiones y Medidas

Investigador Principal: Michelle C. Fernandez bajo la supervisión del Dr. Etiony Aldarondo

Introducción:
Estamos interesados en conocer las experiencias de madres inmigrantes latinas las cuales han estado en relaciones abusivas. Antes de decidir si le gustaría participar, necesita conocer el propósito del estudio, de que manera la puede ayudar, cuáles puedan ser los riesgos y lo que necesita hacer después de dar su consentimiento. Este proceso es designado un “consentimiento informado”. Este documento explica de que se trata el estudio. Si usted decide participar, se le pedirá que firme esta forma. Se le dará una copia.

Objetivos del Estudio:
El objetivo de este estudio es comprender como las madres latinas inmigrantes llegan a tomar sus decisiones acerca de si dejar o quedarse con el compañero abusivo. La información que usted nos proporcione durante dos entrevistas se podrá usar como posible ayuda a otras madres inmigrantes Latinas. Usted está siendo invitada a participar en este estudio porque usted tiene más de 18 años y se ha identificado como madre latina inmigrante además de haber sido víctima de violencia doméstica. Por favor lea este documento y pregunte lo que necesite antes de decidir si participa en este estudio.

Descripción del Estudio/Procedimientos:
Si usted decide participar en la entrevista, le pediremos lo siguiente:

- Terminar un corto cuestionario acerca de sus antecedentes.
- Participar en dos entrevistas de aproximadamente 1 hora cada una. Se le harán preguntas acerca de sus experiencias como madre, inmigrante, latina y participe en una relación abusiva o violencia doméstica.
- Las entrevistas serán audio-grabadas y se tomarán notas escritas. Estas grabaciones y notas serán tomadas en confianza y mantenidas en una oficina
cerrada con llave. Los miembros del equipo de investigaciones serán los únicos con acceso a este material. Después de escuchar las grabaciones y transcribirlas, los temas principales serán identificados. Se destruirán las cintas después de completar el estudio que se estima será 3 años. Su nombre no aparecerá en las notas o transcripciones.

**Riesgos e Inquietudes:**

No existen riesgos serios en tomar parte en este estudio. Aunque, usted se puede sentir molesta discutiendo intimidades suyas. Usted podrá detener la entrevista en cualquier momento, además puede pedir el apoyo de un profesional especializado en salud mental si se siente angustiada. Ese profesional podrá ayudarla y permanecerá con usted hasta que se sienta estable, además puede ponerla en contacto con los servicios apropiados si desea.

**Beneficios:**

Le ofrecemos una tarjeta de $25 para uso en la tienda Target y la oportunidad de participar en un sorteo para ganar dos boletos para un vuelo en los Estados Unidos, cortesía de Southwest Airlines. Sin obligación de compra. La probabilidad de ganar es aproximadamente 1 en 30. La ganadora se anuncia el primero de junio del 2015. Adicionalmente, su participación podría ayudar a las personas dedicadas a mejorar servir a madres inmigrantes latinas, y a su vez, ayudar a otros miembros de la comunidad a futuro.

**Confidencialidad:**

Los investigadores y sus asistentes tratarán su información confidencial de acuerdo a las leyes en vigencia. El Departamento de Salubridad y Servicios Humanos puede pedir y obtener copias de sus records. La información provista por usted también puede ser vista por razones de auditoría por empleados autorizados de la universidad y otros representantes los cuales también respetarán su confidencialidad.

La información que nos suministre será tratada como confidencial. El corto cuestionario que llenará antes de la entrevista no contiene nada que pueda identificarla y será mantenida como confidencial. Si los resultados de la entrevista y el cuestionario se llegaran a publicar o fueran tratados como tema en conferencias, nada estará incluido que podría revelar su identidad.

**Derecho a Retirarse:**

Su participación en este grupo focal es voluntaria. Su decisión de participar o no, no afectará futuras relaciones con la Universidad de Miami, CVAC, o la Fundación Entre Nosotras. Si decide retirarse del estudio, sus comentarios no serán transcritos pero la cinta se le tratará como si hubiese permanecido en el estudio.

**Preguntas:**
Si tiene alguna pregunta acerca de sus derechos como sujeto de investigaciones por favor póngase en contacto con la Oficina de Investigación de Sujetos Humanos, teléfono: 305-243-3195. Si tiene alguna pregunta acerca de este estudio en particular póngase en contacto con:

Michelle C. Fernandez, M.S.Ed.
   Doctoral Candidate
   (305)724-4457

Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D.
   Supervisor
   (305)284-4372
Yo voluntariamente acepto el participar en este estudio y ser audio-grabada durante la entrevista. He leído la información en esta forma y todas mis preguntas han sido respondidas.

Firma

_________________________________________ Fecha: ____________

_________________________________________
Nombre en molde

_________________________________________ Fecha: ____________
Firma de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento

_________________________________________
Nombre en molde de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento

Investigadora Principal: Michelle Fernandez
Número telefónico: (305) 724-4457
Email: um.mirada@gmail.com
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authorization for Audio/Video/Photography Recording in a Research Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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I hereby authorize the University of Miami, Department of __________________________, to take still photographs, videotapes, and/or sound recordings of me/ (my child).

I authorize the University to use in any manner said photographs, film, video or tape recordings, in whole or in part as follows (Please read and check box next to appropriate permission statement):

- For the purpose of teaching, research, scientific meetings and scientific publications, including professional journals or medical books;
- For research purposes only.

I agree that the University of Miami, its Trustees, officers, employees, faculty and agents will not be responsible for any claims arising in any way out of the taking and use as described above of such photographs and/or recordings. I understand that I will not have an opportunity to inspect and approve such photographs or recordings prior to their use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Participant:</th>
<th>Printed Name of Participant:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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<tr>
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<th>Printed Name of Witness:</th>
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</table>
Authorization for Audio/Video/Photography Recording in a Research Study

Por la presente autorizo a la Universidad de Miami, Departamento de __________ Educación, para que tome fotografías, grabe cintas de video y/o audio de mi persona/(mi hijo).

Autorizo a la Universidad para que use de cualquier modo tales fotografías y grabaciones en cintas de video o audio, en su totalidad o en parte, de la siguiente forma *(Lea y marque el cuadro junto a la declaración de autorización que corresponda)*:

- **Con fines de enseñanza, investigación, para reuniones científicas y publicaciones científicas, inclusive publicaciones profesionales o libros de medicina;**
- **Sólo con fines de investigación.**

Acepto que la Universidad de Miami, sus fiduciarios, ejecutivos, empleados, cuerpo docente y agentes no tendrán ninguna responsabilidad frente a cualquier reclamo que surja de alguna forma por la toma y el uso de tales fotografías y/o grabaciones conforme se describiera precedentemente. Comprendo que no tendré la oportunidad de inspeccionar y aprobar tales fotografías o grabaciones antes de su uso.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firma del Participante:</th>
<th>Nombre en letra de imprenta del Participante:</th>
<th>Fecha:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Firma del Padre/Madre</th>
<th>Nombre en letra de imprenta del Padre/Madre (según corresponda):</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(según corresponda):</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX E
Participant and Eligibility Tracking Form

Candidate Number: __________  Candidate Initials _____ _____ _____

[Assigned by Michelle Fernandez]

Part I. To be conducted by the person who is screening the candidate.

Screening Script

“This is a study about mothers who have been in violent relationships. To know if you are eligible, I have to ask you a few questions. Is it OK with you if I ask you these questions?”

“Este es un estudio de investigación que se trata de madres que han estado en relaciones violentas. Para saber si usted puede participar, necesito hacerle varias preguntas. ¿Me permites hacer las preguntas?”

Screened by: ______________________________

Date Screened: _____/_____/_____ (mm/dd/yyyy)

The following questions are asked of the candidate at screening:

1. What is your preferred language? ¿Cuál idioma prefieres hablar?
   (If eligible to participate, consent should be done in preferred language)
   ○ English Ingles          ○ Spanish Español
   ○ Both Ambos

(Interviewer, continue using candidate’s preferred language)

Candidate Demographics
2. “How old are you?” “¿Qué edad tienes?” __________

3. “What is your gender?” “¿Cuál es su género?” (sexo, if they don’t understand)

   ○ MALE Masculino          ○ FEMALE Femenina          ○ OTHER Otro
4. “Do you consider yourself to be Hispanic/Latino immigrant?” “¿Usted se considera hispana/Latina inmigrante?”

○ Yes Sí

○ No (If answers NO to Question #5, “I’m sorry, you do not qualify for this study.” “Lo siento pero usted no califica para este estudio.” End form. Read script for NO responses)

5. “Do you have children?” “¿Usted tiene hijos?”

○ Yes Sí

○ No (If answers NO to Question #5, “I’m sorry, you do not qualify for this study.” “Lo siento pero usted no califica para este estudio.” End form. Read script for NO responses)

6. “How did you learn about the study?” “¿Cómo te enteraste de este estudio de investigación?”

○ Fundacion Entre Nosotras referral Remisión de Fundacion Entre Nosotras
○ Study Staff Member Miembros del Equipo del Estudio
○ Flyer/Announcement in the community Panfletos/Avisos en la comunidad
○ Site (Lugar)____________________________
○ Friend/Relative Amigo/Familiar
○ Other Otro (Specify Especifique____________________________)

Inclusion criteria: ALL inclusion criteria must be “YES” for candidate to be eligible to participate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Over the age of 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Does this candidate meet eligibility criteria? ○YES ○NO (“I’m sorry, you do not qualify for this study.” “Lo siento pero usted no califica para este estudio.” End form. Read script for NO responses)

If YES, schedule an Interview appointment _____/_____/______ (mm/dd/yyyy)

_____ : _____ (hh:mm)
Part II. Participant Contact Information/to be completed by screener and filed in locked cabinet

Preferred Language: ○ English ○ Spanish
To be completed by Screener

Screening Date:__________________

Patient Study ID:__________________

Name: ________________________________________________________________

(First) (Middle) (Last)

Home phone: (____) _______ Cell phone: (____) _______ Wk. Phone: (____) _______

☐ Yes, we can call this number* ☐ Yes, we can call this number* ☐ Yes, we can call this number*
we can call this number*

☐ Yes, we can leave a message* ☐ Yes, we can leave a message* ☐ Yes, we can leave a message*
we can leave a message*

e-mail address:__________________________________

☐ Yes, we can send messages*

*Only check box if YES

Contact Persons (to be contacted in case participant cannot be reached; include only adults 18 and above):
Part III. To be completed by interviewer.

Date of interview 1 _____/_____/______ (mm/dd/yyyy)
Date of interview 2 _____/_____/______ (mm/dd/yyyy)

Enrollment
Did this candidate enroll (signed consent)? ○YES ○NO

Date of Signed Consent _____/_____/______ (mm/dd/yyyy)

If NO, reason for non-enrollment?
○Refused to participate
○Unable to understand study/unable to give “informed” consent
○Other (Specify) ____________________________________
APPENDIX F

Background Information Questionnaire (English and Spanish versions)

Date: __________    Participant #:________

Background Information Form

1. What year did you arrive in the United States? _______

2. Do you have legal documentation for residence in the U.S.?
   - Yes, ____________________________ (type)
   - No
   - In the process
   - Prefer not to answer

3. Please indicate the country where you were born
   - United States
   - Colombia
   - Costa Rica
   - Cuba
   - Dominican Republic
   - Ecuador
   - El Salvador
   - Guatemala
   - Honduras
   - Mexico
   - Nicaragua
   - Panama
   - Paraguay
   - Puerto Rico
   - Uruguay
   - Venezuela
   - Other ___________________________

4. In addition to whether you consider yourself Latina, which of the following categories would you use to describe yourself?
   - Asian
   - American Indian, Alaskan Native
   - Black, African-American
   - Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander
   - White, Caucasian
   - Biracial, Multiracial
   - None

5. What religious teachings do you follow?
   - Baptist
   - Christian
   - Episcopalian
   - Evangalist/Pentacostal
   - Jehovah’s Witness
   - Jewish
   - Methodist
   - Muslim
   - Presbyterian
   - Protestant
   - Roman Catholic
   - Other Christian
   - Other, Non-Christian
   - None
6. Do you belong to a church/temple/mosque/etc.?
   - Yes
   - No

7. How old are you? ______ years old

8. What is the highest grade of education you have completed? _______________

9. Are you currently employed?
   - Yes
   - No

10. If no, when was the last time you were employed?
    - More than one year ago
    - Less than one year ago
    - Never been employed

11. Last month, what was the total amount of money you and your family lived on, including public assistance?
    - Less than $499
    - $500 to $999
    - $1,000 to $1,999
    - $2,000 to $2,999
    - $3,000 to $3,999
    - $4,000 to $4,999
    - $5,000 to $5,999
    - $6,000 or more

12. Do you have health insurance?
    - Yes
    - No

13. How do you usually pay for your own health care?
    - Private insurance plan (provided by employer)
    - Private insurance plan (not provided by employer)
    - Medicaid
    - Medicare
    - Out of pocket
    - Don’t pay
    - Other
      ________________________________
14. What is your current marital status?
   - Divorced
   - Married
   - Single
   - Separated
   - Widowed
   - In a relationship

15. Are you currently living with your spouse or partner?
   - Yes
   - No

16. How many biological children do you have? ____________

17. What are your biological children’s ages? And where do they live (state/country)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Live</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 6</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fecha: ___________  Participante #: ___________

Formulario de Antecedentes

1. ¿En que año llegó a los Estados Unidos? __________

2. ¿Tiene usted documentos legales de residencia en los Estados Unidos?
   - Sí, ______________________________ (tipo)
   - No
   - En trámite
   - Prefiero no responder

3. Por favor indique el país donde nació
   - Estados Unidos
   - México
   - Colombia
   - Panamá
   - Costa Rica
   - Paraguay
   - Cuba
   - Puerto Rico
   - República Dominicana
   - Uruguay
   - Ecuador
   - Venezuela
   - El Salvador
   - Otro
   - Guatemala
   - ________________
   - Honduras

4. Además de considerarse usted Latina, cuál de las siguientes categorías usaría usted para definirse?
   - Asiática
   - Nativa Americana, Nativa de Alaska
   - Negra, Afro-Americana
   - Hawaiana Nativa, Isleña del Pacífico
   - Blanca
   - Mestiza, Multiracial
   - Ninguna de éstas

5. ¿A cuál religión pertenece?
   - Bautista
   - Cristiana
   - Episcopal
   - Evanglista/Pentecostal
   - Testigos de Jehová
   - Protestante
   - Católica
   - Otra religión Cristiana
   - Judio
   - Metodista
   - Musulmana
   - Presbiteriana
   - Otra religión no Cristiana
   - Ninguna
6. ¿Pertenece a una iglesia/templo/mezquita/etc.?
   - Si
   - No

7. ¿Qué edad tiene usted? ________ años

8. ¿Cuál es su nivel más alto de educación? _______________

9. ¿Está empleada actualmente?
   - Si
   - No

10. Si no, ¿cuándo fue la última vez que estuvo empleada?
    - Hace más de un año
    - Menos de un año
    - Nunca he estado empleada

11. En el mes pasado, ¿cuál fue el ingreso total con el cual usted y su familia vivieron, incluyendo asistencia pública?
    - Menos de $499
    - $500 a $999
    - $1,000 a $1,999
    - $2,000 a $2,999
    - $3,000 a $3,999
    - $4,000 a $4,999
    - $5,000 a $5,999
    - $6,000 o más

12. ¿Tiene usted seguro médico?
    - Sí
    - No

13. ¿Cómo paga usted usualmente por sus propios gastos médicos?
    - Plan de seguro médico privado
      (provisto por su empresa)
    - Plan de seguro médico privado
      (no provisto por su empresa)
    - Medicaid
    - Medicare
    - De su propio bolsillo
    - No paga
    - Otra_________________________
      __________
14. ¿Cuál es su estado marital?
   - [ ] Divorciada
   - [ ] Casada
   - [ ] Soltera
   - [ ] Separada
   - [ ] Viuda
   - [ ] En una relación

15. ¿Está usted actualmente viviendo con su esposo o compañero?
   - [ ] Si
   - [ ] No

16. ¿Cuántos hijos biológicos tiene usted? __________

17. ¿Cuáles son las edades de sus hijos biológicos? ¿Donde viven (estado/país)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hijo(a) 1</th>
<th>Edad</th>
<th>Vive en</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hijo(a) 2</td>
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<td>Hijo(a) 6</td>
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APPENDIX G

Semi-structured Interview

Interview Guide

I am interested in hearing you stories about what was like for you to have been in an abusive relationship. I will be asking you questions about the process of deciding to stay or leave your partner and what did after having made a decision. Although these are the specific areas I am interested in, we can discuss other aspects of your experiences that you find meaningful.

- Tell me about what is like when you first started dating your partner
- Tell me about the first time you recognized you were in an abusive relationship
- What happened that made you think about needing to make a decision about staying or leaving the relationship?
- Tell me about what was happening in other aspects of your life when you started thinking about making a decision
  - Friendships
  - Family
  - Workplace
- While in the process of making a decision, what caused
  - Worry, concern, anxiety, fear?
  - Happiness, confidence, relief?
  - Other emotions you experienced?
- How as your experience of the abusive relationship influenced by
  - Being a mother?
- Being a Latina woman?
- Being an immigrant?
- Other aspects of your identity?

- What impact did adjusting to life in the United States have on your experiences of IPV?

- What actions did you take to carry out your decision?
  - What facilitated being able to take these steps?
  - What barriers made it difficult to take actions

- As you reflect on your experiences, decisions, and actions, is there anything you would do differently? Why or Why not?

- In what ways can the community support women who are in similar situations that you were in?

- Are there any other important aspects of your experience you would like to share?

Thank you for sharing your stories with me today. After reflecting on our conversation, we will meet again to discuss any points needing clarification.
Guía para las Entrevistas

Estoy interesada en escuchar tus relatos acerca de tus experiencias en una relación abusiva. Te haré preguntas acerca del proceso que seguiste en cuanto a tu decisión de permanecer con tu compañero o dejarlo y que hiciste después de tomar tu decisión. Aunque éstas son las áreas de interés para mí, también podemos platicar acerca de otros aspectos de tus experiencias que tengan significado especial para ti.

• Cuéntame cómo eran las cosas cuando comenzaste a salir con tu pareja

• Cuéntame acerca de la primera vez que reconociste que estabas en una relación abusiva

• ¿Qué fue lo que sucedió que te hizo pensar que necesitabas tomar una decisión acerca de si continuabas en la relación o te retirabas de ella?

• Dime que estaba sucediendo en otros aspectos de tu vida cuando comenzaste a pensar acerca de tomar una decisión
  o Amistades
  o Familia
  o Lugar de trabajo

• Durante el proceso de tomar una decisión, ¿qué te causó:
  o Preocupación, ansiedad, temor?
  o Alegría, seguridad, alivio?
  o Qué otras emociones sentiste?

• ¿Cómo fue influenciada tu experiencia en una relación abusiva por lo siguiente?
  o Ser madre?
  o Ser una mujer Latina?
• Ser inmigrante?
  
• Otros aspectos acerca de tu identidad?
  
• ¿Qué impacto tuvo tu adaptación a la vida en los Estados Unidos en tus experiencias con violencia doméstica?
  
• ¿Cuáles medidas tomaste para implementar tu decisión?
  
  o ¿Qué fue lo que te facilitó el tomar estos pasos?
  
  o ¿Qué obstáculos dificultaron estos pasos?
  
• Reflexionando acerca de tus experiencias, decisiones, y medidas, hubieras hecho algo de diferente manera? ¿Por qué o por qué no?
  
• ¿De qué manera la comunidad puede apoyar mujeres quienes están en situaciones similares a la tuya?
  
• ¿Hay otros aspectos importantes acerca de tus experiencias que te gustaría compartir?

Gracias por compartir tus experiencias conmigo hoy. Después de reflexionar acerca de nuestra conversación, nos reuniremos de nuevo para discutir cualquier punto que necesite clarificación.
APPENDIX H

Recruitment Flyer (English and Spanish versions)

Voices of Immigrant Mothers

You are invited to participate in a research study that involves:

• Participating in two individual interviews that will be audio-recorded
• Sharing about your experiences as a Latina immigrant mother and victim of partner violence
• Answering a short questionnaire about yourself

If you are interested in participating, you must be

• 18 years or older
• Identify as a Latina immigrant mother

You will be compensated with a $25 gift card to Target and a chance to enter a raffle for two round trip tickets on Southwest Airlines

For more information call (305) 724-4457 or email: um.mirada@gmail.com
Se les invita a participar en un estudio que implica:

- Participar en dos entrevistas individuales que serán audio-grabadas
- Compartir sus experiencias de madre Latina inmigrante y víctima de un compañero abusivo
- Responder a una corta encuesta acerca de usted misma

Si está interesada en participar necesita:

- Tener 18 o más años
- Ser madre
- Identificar como inmigrante y Latina

Le ofrecemos una tarjeta de $25 para uso en la tienda Target y la oportunidad de participar en un sortido para ganar dos boletos para un vuelo en los Estados Unidos, cortesía de Southwest Airlines.

Para más información llame al (305) 724-4457 o escriba a: um.mirada@gmail.com