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THE IMPACT OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF HISPANIC WOMEN



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Resumen

La comunidad hispana en Estados Unidos ha crecido exponencialmente en años recientes y continuará creciendo en la medida en que la inmigración se convierte en su única alternativa para buscar una mejor calidad de vida. Cuando las familias hispanas llegan a Estados Unidos, es típico que mantengan las tradiciones que les permiten cumplir con los roles que se asignan a cada género en sus países de origen. Las mujeres son las amas de casa a cargo de criar a los hijos y de mantener el hogar, mientras que los hombres proveen el sustento de la familia que reside en Estados Unidos y fuera. La falta de destrezas lingüísticas en inglés les obliga a vivir en vecindarios en los que puedan mantener lazos culturales y de idioma con su país de origen. Ese arreglo requiere que las mujeres se mantengan en la casa en un ambiente resguardado que no les permite relacionarse con la cultura dominante y aprender el idioma. Cuando la estructura familiar cambia, los esposos se van del hogar o dificultades económicas sobrevienen, estas mujeres tienen que tomar medidas. Este estudio cualitativo evalúa las experiencias de mujeres hispanas en Estados Unidos y el proceso mediante el cual desarrollan destrezas lingüísticas en inglés. Se administraron entrevistas profundas a seis mujeres hispanas para evaluar las hipótesis situacionales y motivacionales que buscan descubrir los factores que dirigen, o no, a las latinas a aprender inglés una vez llegan a Estados Unidos.

Palabras Clave: Mujeres hispanas, bilingüismo, inmigración, estudios de género

Abstract

The Hispanic community in the United States has grown exponentially in recent years and will continue to grow as immigration becomes their only

alternative in search for a better quality of life. When Hispanic families arrive at the United States, it is common for them to maintain their traditions and fulfill the different roles assigned to each gender in their countries of origin. Women are, thus, seen as *amas de casa* in charge of child rearing and taking care of the house, while men are providers who ensure the sustenance of their family both in the United States and abroad. Their lack of English language skills forces them into neighborhoods where cultural and linguistic ties with home can be maintained. This arrangement requires women to stay in the house in a sheltered environment that does not allow them to relate with the mainstream culture and learn the language. When the family structure changes, husbands leave, or economic hardship ensues, measures must be taken. This is a qualitative study of the experiences of Hispanic women in the United States and the process of developing language skills in English. In depth interviews of six Hispanic women were used to test the situational or motivational hypotheses that seek to uncover the factors that drive, or do not drive, Latinas to learn English when they move to the United States.

Key Words: Hispanic women, bilingualism, immigration, gender studies



Introduction

Demographics relate to people, their ethnic background, traditions, social status, gender, age, and various other defining characteristics. Changing demographics are a social reality “shaping the provision of learning in contemporary American society” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p.7). For the first time in the American society adults outnumber youth (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007), and the population is better educated and more culturally diverse. Education is no longer left for young people to pursue, but a tenable goal for adults as well. Adults from all walks of life seek out learning experiences. Their motivations are personal, to some extent, or societal thanks to the requirements imposed by an ever-changing American economy, society, and culture (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

One significant demographic change that has occurred in recent years is the influx of Hispanic immigrants in the United States. Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the nation (Payán & Nettles, 2007). According to the most recent census, Hispanics account for 16.7% of the total U.S. population and their community is projected to more than double by the year 2060 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). However, when immigrant families arrive at the United States, they experience a culture

shock caused by their spoken language, different traditions, and a highly competitive commercial environment. This culture shock is observed particularly among immigrant students who arrive at the different schools unable to speak the language and relate to their new academic reality and culture (Ezra, 2003). It is also evidenced among professionals who cannot find high-paying jobs in their areas of expertise because their academic credentials are not valid in the United States. For some, the logical solution is to seek higher education—whether hands-on, vocational, or professional—to validate their credentials, become marketable, and provide for their families.

Some societal elements may act as a barrier for minorities, especially for women. In the Hispanic community, women are traditionally depicted as *amas de casa* (housewives) and in Latin American countries it is not uncommon for them to sacrifice their education and their personal life to take care of the house and children. These roles are deeply embedded into their culture and, while not every family lives under these expectations, many respond to the social and cultural responsibilities imposed on them. When Hispanic families arrive at the United States, they seek to maintain their traditions and fulfill these roles. They try to connect with people with common backgrounds and language, and create ties that will facilitate their living experience. Men seek for job opportunities that allow them to provide for the family, and women stay at home taking care of the house and the children. This means that men are more exposed to social environments that enable them to learn about the culture and the language at a faster pace than their female counterparts. Women, on the other hand, are generally devoid of these opportunities because they stay in an environment that is familiar to them but that limits their potential for personal and professional growth. However, the need for economic stability sometimes forces women to seek an active role in the workforce. Since many of these women do not know the language and may have little work and educational experience, they find many obstacles that affect their will and opportunity to pursue higher education and find a job.

Recent research explores the challenges Hispanic women must overcome to seek higher education and learn English (Chavez, 2015). However, “in the literature on bilingualism...gender is hardly mentioned” (Burton, 1994, p. 1). Thus, contributing to the development of academic literature in this area is of paramount importance. Chavez (2015) mentions six main factors that impact the success of these women when seeking higher education. These factors include: “personal attributes; home culture and language; support, opposition, and tradition; discrimination and equity issues; building connections and mentors; and college experience and instruction” (p. 1). These challenges, added to financial hardship, are a reality

that the majority of Hispanic women experience in the United States today. However, in spite of these factors, some Hispanic women find empowerment in bilingualism and choose to seek educational growth to change their conditions and make a positive contribution to the lives of their children and in their household (Pavlenko, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to uncover the dynamics and barriers of adult education from the perspective of Hispanic immigrant women. The study analyzes the impact of bilingualism on the potential empowerment of Hispanic women in the American society. More specifically, this study analyzes why Hispanic immigrant women choose to learn English as a second language, and it focuses on specific contextual conditions and situations that relate to the lives of these women and serve as internal or external motivators to pursue their goals. Social and academic factors are predicted to relate directly with the decision of these women to pursue higher education and learn the English language. Qualitative analyses of in-depth interviews provide the groundwork to analyze the experiences of Hispanic immigrant women. This study contributes to the growth of the academic literature on adult education, and promotes further and deeper analysis of the academic, social, and personal experiences of Hispanic women in the United States.

Hispanic Women: Situation and Motivation

Two hypotheses allow us to understand the experience of Hispanic immigrant women in the United States upon their arrival: the situational and the motivational hypotheses. The situational hypothesis asserts that the condition of Hispanic women in the United States is largely determined by cultural and social factors that impact their existence and living in a demanding society that greatly differs from their experience at home. The motivational hypothesis sustains that changes in these situations or conditions drives them out of the culturally-provoked inertia and into a new world of social, economic, political, and academic engagement. The reciprocal relationship between these two factors guarantees that changes in personal situations will impact their motivation, and that increasing motivation, from whichever source, will stimulate them to make changes in their social condition. We rely on theories of gender roles and social needs to understand the conditions that Hispanic immigrant women deal with and must overcome to pursue greater social activism. We then look at intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that enable their successful achievement of personal and professional goals through the attainment of language skills in English.

One situational factor that impinges on Hispanic immigrant women's condition is that of the assignment of gender roles. Lewis (2003) asserts that the definition of masculinity and femininity is "contingent on issues of national identity, class, race, religion, ethnicity, et cetera" (p. 11). He argues that

behavior differences between men and women are transmitted through cultural and socialization processes that link conduct to biological characteristics. The definition of gender is, thus, socially constructed through perceived differences in the biological determinants of femininity and masculinity. West and Zimmerman (1991) argue that gender is defined by “creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the ‘essentialness’ of gender” (p. 24). Gender roles are created and culturally assigned based on societal expectations that each gender must fulfill. In this sense, the definition of man and woman goes beyond the biological determinants and focuses on how each culture and society constructs meanings based on traditions, expectations, and customs.

It, thus, follows, that there is no universal definition of masculinity and femininity, and that each individual social group internally constructs the expectations imposed on men and women. It can also be deduced that the roles that Hispanic societies assign to men and women differ from the ones that are assigned in the United States. We could further assert that the assignment of roles could vary from state to state or from one region to another within the United States depending, for example, on people’s stance in the liberal-conservative continuum, and from one Hispanic society to another depending on their social and cultural development throughout the years. The point is that the social definitions of men and women vary from one society to another and that Hispanic immigrants clash with social definitions and expectations of gender when they come to the United States. To interpret social behavior in many of its manifestations, we must understand the extant differences between femininity and masculinity (Toledo Lopez, 2002, p. 10). Social expectations imposed on men and women determine behavior, perceptions, and decisions. For example, if women are taught that they must rear children, be affective caregivers and attentive to the needs of the family, they will most likely adopt all kinds of behaviors that materialize these learned categories. If all women exhibit these behaviors, not only will women see themselves as just that, but society in general will also impose these expectations on all women alike. It becomes a recursive process that moves from an individual requirement to a collective endeavor that all must engage in because they are socialized that this is what defines them. The same occurs with men who learn that their sole responsibility is to provide economic stability and support to the family. Child bearing and rearing is not their responsibility. They are not taught to be nurturing or to stay at home. Instead, they must meet the struggles of the surrounding environment face to face and engage in all activities necessary to support themselves and the family.

These definitions have particular implications for Hispanics who immigrate to the United States. As dominating, assertive, and independent providers, men move beyond the boundaries of house and the community to expose themselves to the milieu of social and cultural exchanges. This may be somewhat threatening at first, but as socialization processes unravel, men integrate into the society, learn the language, and actively participate in activities designed to fulfill their social roles. This is not done because of need, but because this is the role that they must fulfill. Women, on the other hand, are kept safe in a protected environment devoid of threats and dangers of an intimidating new society. They are spared from the difficulties of learning a new language because doing so is unnecessary. Their stability is guaranteed in a community of peers who speak their language, share their culture, and understand their needs.

These circumstances of Latina immigrant women are recreated in an environment that is foreign to them. The gender roles under which they lived in their home countries are reconstructed in a new environment where they remain “under the control of a male-husband-father, brother, or son-and more or less treated that same way as children” (Bullough, 1979, p. 145). Dávila (2013) relies on Memmi’s (1965) theory of the colonized-colonizer to explain that the female-male relationship among Hispanics is one of a male dominant and a female submissive in which women abide by the social and cultural norms that render them dependent, incapable of assuming heavy responsibilities, and in need of protection. Similarly, Wittig (1992) represents the female-male dichotomy as one similar to that of slaves and masters. She argues, “the perennality of the sexes and the perennality of slaves and masters proceed from the same belief, and, as there are no slaves without masters, there are no women without men” (Wittig, 1992, p. 2). Wittig (1992) depicts a relationship of codependence in which women are seen as weaker and in need of protection that the male counterpart must provide (Memmi, 1965; Dávila, 2013). This explains why Hispanic immigrant women, upon their arrival to the United States, are kept within the boundaries of their community where learning a new language is unnecessary and where they are protected from the dangers of an unknown society.

Three important factors determine the interplay between gender and the roles that they are expected to fulfill in Hispanic societies. Foster (1994) argues that military discipline, Catholic morality, and traditional family beliefs coexist in Hispanic communities and define significant relationships between sexes. These three institutions are built from a heavily patriarchal ideology to establish the foundations of the Hispanic society and to maintain power relationships between themselves and other institutions (Dávila, 2013). Morality, religious norms, and military power play a determinant role in establishing the roles that both men and women in Hispanic societies must

fulfill. It is not surprising that the male figure takes a dominant role and exerts influence over what is determined as socially, culturally, morally, legally, and spiritually accepted.

These arguments are based on Foucault's (1982) *History of Sexuality* that highlights how the emergence of bourgeois society in the XVII Century and its intimate relationship with Catholicism redefined the concept of family and relegated sexuality to the confinements of the marital room. The repressive measures taken against sexuality as an expression of freedom had an immediate effect on societal order and on the construction of family. This, Dávila (2013) suggests, created new definitions of "father," "mother," and "child," with the goal of maintaining familial, social, and national stability. Society members accepted these new definitions that helped create gender distinctions and that gave both Church and State supreme power over the different social institutions and the determination of the functions that each individual had to execute. Manzor-Coats (1994), argues that Latin American women were left with the responsibility of giving meaning to the patriarchal state by fulfilling their maternal, domestic roles. Women are required certain purity and strictness characteristic of religion, while men show power, dominance, and control. These relationships are recreated in the different social environments that Latino families adopt when they immigrate to other countries, regardless of the prevailing social and cultural milieu. It is, thus, normal to see Hispanic immigrant women among their peers, in their protected cultural oasis where language acquisition and education is unnecessary because social and cultural threats have been avoided.

The implications of this last argument are important. First, Hispanic immigrant women are kept within the geographical and social boundaries of her community where little or nothing threatens their personal stability. They do not need to learn the language because communication in anything other than her native tongue is unnecessary. Because anything outside their community is foreign to them, Hispanic immigrant women are overprotected inside a cultural and social environment that is familiar to them and where they can move with relative ease. Socialization at all levels takes place in this sheltered environment where daily exchanges and domestic activities occur in a language and a cultural framework that they understand. Meanwhile, their male counterparts must quickly integrate into the mainstream society and culture, learn the foreign language at a fast pace, and obtain a job with which to provide for the economic stability of the family as a whole. This guarantees that the wife and children are well taken care of and that the husband keeps his empowered position as the "man of the house."

Hispanic immigrant women's sense of need is, thus, reconstructed and their priorities are redefined in light of their supposed need of protection from whatever is foreign or unknown. Women are left to take care of the

house not only because they are safe there but also because that is part of their female role. In this safe environment, their needs are also redefined so that their husbands or male partners can amply satisfy them. Learning the language, integrating into the mainstream culture, pursuing higher education, or getting a job is, thus, not required or expected of them. Men, on the other hand, need to work, learn the language, and integrate into the social and business culture, because it is their responsibility to guarantee the safety and stability of the entire family.

This argument is consistent with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and links with the second hypothesis. According to Maslow (1943), human motivation is largely dependent on the satisfaction of specific needs. The actions and conduct of individuals are largely determined by their needs. Some needs are essential for the survival of the individual and should be attained first. These essential needs are typically related to physiological and personal security, and often times refer to the search for food, water, and shelter. Once these needs are taken care of, individuals feel free to pursue other more complex needs. These needs do not suddenly appear; they have always been there, but they remain unattainable until priority needs are met. Usually, these second tier needs relate to individuals' desire to grow as a person. They focus on the search for love, intimacy, accomplishment, and personal satisfaction or gratification. Thus, the motivation to pursue these more complex needs stems from the satisfaction of other more important needs that pertain to the individual's feeling of personal safety. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is summarized in the following figure.



Image from: Lee, S. (2015). Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how it relates to your child's education. Retrieved from <http://figur8.net/baby/2014/11/06/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-and-how-it-relates-to-your-childs-education/>

In light of Maslow's (1943) theory, it is clear why Hispanic immigrant women do not find internal or external motivations to move beyond the geographical and social boundaries of their community. Within these boundaries, women are protected and feel safe. They raise their children in an environment that is culturally familiar to them. Moreover, they are not threatened by their lack of communication skills in English. Furthering their education or learning the language becomes a second or third tier need that does not pertain to their immediate physical and personal safety. Miller (1967) argues that education "is seen primarily as a means of achieving status..." (p. 12) and status is not precisely what they are seeking upon arrival to the United States. Second language learning becomes irrelevant and unnecessary to them mainly because their husbands, who must fulfill their roles as men, take care of the needs that require them to move outside of their comfort zone.

However, situations can and do change. Circumstances related to the personal histories of individuals shift the course of their lives and force them into decisions that might be somewhat threatening. For instance, personal losses, divorce, obtaining degrees, or achieving particular milestones can move people out of their safety blankets and into a world of the unknown. Situations like the loss of a loved one or a divorce have economic implications and pose challenges to the security of individuals or families. This, according to Maslow (1943), will take them back to the first level of the needs hierarchy as they pursue personal and physiological safety. Changes must be made to take care of these new situations, and, sometimes, these situations are what motivate people to pursue significant changes. Education, for example, is seen as a means of achieving status (Miller, 1967), but it is also a way of obtaining personal and economic stability and safety. Hispanic immigrant women who undergo life-changing situations can turn to education, even when this only means learning English, as a means to access a job market that was inaccessible to them. This may imply assuming roles typically assigned to men, but may also be the only means of achieving their personal safety in a society and culture that is different from their own.

Educational motivations of Hispanic immigrant women

There are different factors that impinge on an individual's decision to pursue higher education, further their studies, or learn a new language. These factors can be personal in nature or societally imposed. The decision to undertake an academic opportunity is usually not an easy one because of the economic and time constraints involved. In addition to these costs, Hispanic immigrant women ignore the language and have not established enough social ties to facilitate their engagement in other endeavors unrelated to family care and upbringing. However, when family care and child rearing

are at the forefront, learning the language becomes necessary. Hispanic immigrant women are motivated by social factors that promote language learning and pursuing academic opportunities. The motivation to pursue educational opportunities comes from two sources: personal or intrinsic and family-related or extrinsic. The extrinsic motivations are discussed first followed by Hispanic immigrant women's personal interest, or intrinsic motivation, in learning English as a second language.

The educational experience of Hispanics in the United States is one of accumulated disadvantage (Tienda, Mitchell, & National Research Council, 2006). For Hispanic children, initial disadvantages often originate in their inability to communicate in the mainstream language, parents' lack of knowledge of the education system of the United States, inadequate school resources, and weak house-school relationships (Tienda et al). Hispanic monolingual mothers cannot provide adequate academic support to their children because they do not understand the language and oftentimes do not have a strong educational background. The requirements for graduation and school policies are foreign to them because of cultural and language barriers, and their lack of school involvement, fragile relationships with teachers, and no academic expectations and structure undermine the academic success of their children (Tienda et al).

Research concludes that some of the most relevant contributing factors to the existent achievement gap of the Hispanic population in our schools are poverty levels, segregated schools, and lack of parental involvement due to little or no proficiency in the English language (Craft & Slate, 2012). The lack of parental involvement is a real issue that many schools deal with and that cannot be resolved without proper support from the school systems and the community. Thus, seeking higher education or learning a new language for the average immigrant Hispanic woman goes beyond personal fulfillment; it entails the possibility of being present in the academic and personal lives of their children and collaborating with the school system to improve their children's academic experience. These mothers—single or married—understand the importance of their presence in their children's current and future achievements in school and life. As a matter of fact, research indicates that when Hispanic parents engage in their children's learning process and development, their children do better in school (Ramos, 2014). Academic success and achievement results from teamwork, and collaboration between school and home is essential to provide a safety net to immigrant students who have just been exposed to a new culture, language, and educational system.

Learning English is, thus, not a luxury that Hispanic immigrant mothers, as primary caretakers, can disregard or put off for a more affordable time. As children continue to learn the language and easily assimilate into the

American culture, parents are forced to become more knowledgeable of their surroundings to stay active in the daily lives of their children. From a family perspective and a mother's unique mindset, bilingualism is the only tool that will give immigrant Hispanic women the opportunity to encourage their children to reach academic success and to stay actively involved in their children's social circles and lives. Thus, Hispanic women can approach learning English as an opportunity to support their children and set high expectations for them to follow.

There are also personal factors that influence Hispanic immigrant women's decision to learn a new language and seek academic development. These factors relate to intrinsic motivations that promote their desire to learn. However, theories of adult education have paid very little attention to the topic of Hispanic women and their academic motivations. As a field of study and a theory, the current literature of andragogy focuses on majority groups and addresses their needs accordingly. The theory is constructed from a first world perspective and assumes that all adults, regardless of their culture, will react to educational experiences in the same way. The first world vision of andragogy suggests that adult women in general explore education with the purpose of learning skills that they can reproduce in a short amount of time and that will positively impact their personal and professional lives (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Through this learning process, they expect to achieve a transformational experience that will make them more culturally aware and will give them the ability to succeed as active members of their new community and professions. However, these first-world assumptions of andragogy in the United States may not apply entirely to all adult women. The theory ignores the particularities and needs of minority populations such as immigrant Hispanic women. This study expands on current theories of adult education and contributes a unique vision that theories of adult education have overlooked: the experiences of Hispanic immigrant women in the United States.

The teaching practices surrounding andragogy are based upon six main assumptions: "(a) Self-concept, (b) Role of experience, (c) Readiness to learn, (d) Orientation to learning, (e) Internal motivation, and (f) Need to know" (Chan, 2010, p.25). The first assumption holds that as individuals grow older, they start developing a sense of independence and self-directing personality. This concept states that adults prefer a learning environment that promotes independent learning proper of a more adult setting. Second, the role of experience highlights the importance of acknowledging the adults' wealth of experiences when approaching education. This includes life-changing experiences that motivate their interest in education as well as other circumstances that they bring with them to the classroom setting and can contribute to the development of important discussions. Certainly,

adults, or children for that matter, cannot be considered blank slates. Experiences and situations in life shape not only their lives as a whole, but also their learning processes as they unravel. Readiness to learn, assumes that as individuals mature they become more oriented to learn those things that they will need to cope effectively with personal and professional situations. This sense of relevance leads adult learners to engage in academic endeavors that are associated to their immediate needs and that will provide them with tools that they can put into practice. The investment of time and money must be worth it; focusing on an area that is unnecessary or irrelevant will certainly not spark their interest.

The remaining three assumptions relate to the urgency and relevance of education. Orientation to learning focuses on the idea that adults pursue education for immediate application rather than for future uses. One of the main purposes for seeking education at this stage of life is to become competitive, find a job, and provide for their families. Similarly, motivation to learn states that adults are driven by intrinsic motivation rather than by external factors. Pursuing higher education or learning a new language are choices that adults make because they want to achieve a goal that can only be completed through education. At this stage of learning, andragogy asserts that the most potent forces behind education are internal rather than external. Lastly, the need to know assumption holds that adults “need to know why they need to learn something” (Merriam et al., 2007, p.84). Adult learners need to understand and internalize their individual urgency to learn something before undertaking to learn it.

These assumptions set the stage for understanding the decision of Hispanic immigrant women to engage in academic endeavors that better their personal situation. The teaching practices of andragogy assume that the motivation to learn does not come from adults’ external circumstances; those that relate to the family or their surroundings. Instead, the six main assumptions on which andragogy is built suggest that there is an intrinsic need for self-betterment that drives adults into an educational setting (Merriam, et al., 2007). While these assumptions could apply in general to an average adult population, it is far-fetched to believe that all adults will equally respond to these six factors. There are certain differences that must be considered when evaluating the personal motivations of an aspiring adult.

Higher education used to be a myth for many women, especially minority women. As times continue to change, women have had to assume roles traditionally assigned to men, and have gotten involved in adult education and in professional development opportunities. During the past decade, the enrollment of Hispanic women in graduate degrees has more than doubled (ACE & Kim, 2011). As it stands, women now receive more

graduate degrees, including doctoral degrees, than men (ACE & Kim, 2011). This positive change in adult education reflects the active role women are taking towards education and the change in attitude towards becoming more independent individuals in their households and in society.

However, we cannot argue that all women, or all adults for that matter, equally respond to the same motivations, whether intrinsic or extrinsic. For example, the first three assumptions that provide the theoretical foundations of andragogy focus on personal experiences and values of the adult learner. Examining these experiences and values is, thus, necessary to conclude if and to what extent they influence the Hispanic immigrant women's decision to pursue an academic career or to learn English. We hypothesize that the personal experiences of adult Hispanic immigrant women are different from adult learners born and/or raised in a first world country; their internal motivators differ and so does their reality.

Methodology and Findings

Two main hypotheses drive the analysis of this study. These hypotheses are summarized below.

Situational hypothesis: Life situations of Hispanic immigrant women lead them to reaffirm and recreate the gender roles that exist in their home countries when they move to the United States. Their need for protection and personal safety forces them into socially and geographically limited environments where socialization is achieved only among members of their communities. However, situations occur that alter the way that roles are distributed or required from both men and women. These situations motivate them to break with traditional roles and pursue opportunities that guarantee their personal and physical safety.

Motivational hypothesis: As situations significantly change, motivations to learn languages, obtain a degree, or validate academic credentials appear. These motivations can be intrinsic or extrinsic, but they do emerge and become an incentive to achieve other personal and professional goals. Many times these goals are related to satisfying their family's and their own physiological needs that were once covered by their male counterparts.

To test these hypotheses, in-depth interviews of six Hispanic immigrant women were completed. These interviews are in the form of case studies that illustrate these women's experiences and provide the data for the analysis. Case study analyses "ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). According to Yin (2003), case study methodology is appropriate

when researchers want to answer “how” or “why” questions, and when the proposed research analyses the contextual conditions that relate to the phenomenon under study. Both of these instances characterize the analytical goals of the present study. This study analyzes why Hispanic immigrant women choose to learn English as a second language, and it focuses on specific contextual conditions and situations that relate to the lives of these women and serve as internal or external motivators to pursue their goals.

The multiple case study technique was chosen because it gives researchers the opportunity to analyze a specific phenomenon both within the individual settings and across the different settings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This type of analysis focuses on the different cases under study to “(a) predict similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predict contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)” (Yin, 2003, p. 47). The cases in this study were carefully chosen to represent one of three contextual situations of Hispanic immigrant women, all of which are explained in detail below. The constant was the participants’ gender and migratory condition, and the control variables under analysis were their work status and knowledge of English as a second language. The purpose is to delve into the situations and motivations of these six women to understand their choice to learn, or not, English. Why some Hispanic immigrant women choose to become bilingual while others do not helps us uncover the dynamics and barriers of adult education and validate or reject the hypotheses under study.

All participants in this study are adult, female, Hispanic, and immigrants in the United States. Five countries from Central and South America, and the Caribbean are represented in the sample: Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Honduras, and El Salvador. Their time of entrance in the United States, while different, is not a determinant variable in this analysis. They were carefully chosen to represent one of three groups: women who do not work and cannot speak English, women who work but cannot speak English, and women who work and can communicate in English. These three categories were designed to understand the dynamics that lead to second language learning in an environment that is foreign to the sample under study. Participants were asked to report their time of entrance to the United States, their reasons for learning English, the time it took for them to begin formal studies of English, how they felt about coming to the United States without being able to speak English, and how comfortable they feel with their level of English language skills. Answers to these questions allow us to understand the particular characteristics of each participant and to compare and contrast across the different experiences to illustrate the varying dynamics of the phenomenon under study.

Non-Speakers of English and Non-workers

Two participants reported not currently working and not being able to communicate in English. One of these participants is Cuban and the other is Salvadoran. They have both been in the United States for over ten years and both reported Spanish as their native tongue. Neither of them tried to learn English upon their arrival at the United States. Between three and five years after their arrival, both made an attempt at learning English, but they both left school for reasons related to their families. Taking care of the family is a priority and learning the mainstream language became a secondary goal in light of their responsibilities as mothers. Interestingly, they both believe that learning a second language is important for both personal and professional reasons. One argued that learning English would help her assist her daughter now that she is in school. They both argue that English is a necessary tool in the workplace.

Both feel uncomfortable about their lack of English language skills. They assert that there is little that they can do now because they must take care of their families. One argued, "I do not feel comfortable with my knowledge of the language. Now, all that I could do is take time away from my daughter to learn English, and I will not do that." They both agree that not knowing English has affected them significantly. They believe that it is very difficult to handle things in a foreign environment where no one speaks their language. This lack of security has forced them to stay within their environment taking care of the home and their children. Both have worked before; they do not work now. Their jobs have all been related to domestic labors where Spanish is the language of communication. Their surroundings have been limited to a Spanish speaking community of peers where communication is possible without much difficulty. They, however, assert that there are language barriers in English, now insurmountable, because they do not have the time or the need to learn the language.

Non-Speakers of English and Workers

Two participants reported currently being employed but not having sufficient English language skills to consider themselves speakers of English. The respondent from the Dominican Republic has been in the United States for ten years via Venezuela, the Latin American country where she lived for many years. A mother of two young girls, she decided not to focus on English language learning because she deemed it unnecessary. During her first pregnancy, her husband asked her to stay at home full time. From there on, and during her second pregnancy, she stayed at home as a full time mom and did not find a reason to learn English. Her husband was taking care of the family's needs and she used her pregnancies "as an excuse to stay at home

and not have to learn a new language.” Moreover, she “felt scared and insecure.” She experimented “cultural shock and became submissive and conformist” because her needs were being satisfied and her personal safety was not at risk.

After her divorce, she had to support herself and her two daughters. She now values the importance of learning English because she cannot communicate in anything other than her native language. This has limited her professional possibilities and her work options. As a matter of fact, she is concerned that she cannot practice her profession as a nurse because she cannot speak the language. She currently works selling dietary products within her community where English language skills are not necessary. However, she wants to pursue a career in nursing and she needs to take care of the educational needs of her daughters who are in school now. Internal and external motivation factors are driving her to learn English because it is necessary to help her daughters and for her development as a professional.

The second participant in this category is of Cuban origin and has been in the United States for about six years. She has not learned English because “in Miami it is not necessary. In Miami you have to know Spanish not English.” Her husband works and provides for her and their son. She did not work until recently when she found out that earning extra money was possible without having to learn English. “It was difficult to find a job because most employers required bilingual people, but where I am right now, I feel okay.” Still today, she works part time mainly because her son is in high school and she does not want to stay at home all day. The extra money helps pay the bills, but is not essential for her family’s survival.

Speakers of English and Workers

Two participants reported currently being employed and being able to communicate satisfactorily in English. Both have been in the United States for over fifteen years but their time of induction into the process of learning English vary significantly. The first of the two is from Colombia and began learning English within the first year of arriving at the United States. She needed to provide for her two daughters, so postponing English language learning was not an option for her. “Learning English was a decisive factor in my professional improvement. It also improved my role as a mother in that I was able to communicate better with my daughters’ teachers, doctors, and friends. It also helped me relate to my community and feel less isolated.”

She believes that full immersion is required to learn English at a professional level. At first, she relied on her daughters and friends to communicate and translate for her. Her social and employment options were very limited because she did not know the language. Her coming to the United States alone with her two daughters became a challenge that

motivated her to learn English and improve. Now she looks back and realizes that learning English was a requisite for her to handle her new life in a new country and sociocultural environment. It was not an option for her because she did not have anyone to rely on. Her options were limited and moving forward was her only choice. As she delved deeper into her professional and personal development, she saw that new and better opportunities became more accessible. This motivated her to continue and inspired her to pursue an academic degree in psychology, which she will finish within the next month.

The second participant in this category is originally from Honduras. She has been in the United States for over fifteen years, but did not start learning English until nine years after her arrival. She left her family behind and moved to the United States with her husband at the time. Because of this, she feels that she did not need to learn English right away, but later realized that “in this country if you do not know the language and study, you are nobody.” Her motivation to learn English as a second language came from her need to see both of her children succeed. She wants to be a role model for her children, reason for which she not only learned English, but also enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program, which she will complete within the next month. At some point in her life, after her separation from her previous partner, learning English was not an option but the only feasible alternative to provide for her and her children. She now feels comfortable with the level of English language skills that she has attained, but she wants to improve her writing, which she identified as her weakest area.

Analysis and Discussion

Six women of five different social and cultural backgrounds in Latin America were interviewed for this study. Their experiences provide the raw material for the analysis and shed light on the underpinnings of second language acquisition among Hispanic immigrant women. Their personal experiences, situations, and conditions allow us to closely examine the social and educational dynamics that impact their lives, and their decisions to pursue—or not—integration in a society that is, otherwise, foreign to them. The topics of gender and gender roles were explored as determinant factors in the process of acquiring language skills in English. In light of these theories, the participants’ experiences not only allowed us to examine the sociological foundations of bilingualism and language acquisition, but they also shed light on theories of motivation among adult learners.

Ricento (2005) argues that social distance between two cultures helps or hinders the process of acquiring a second language. A significant distance between the two cultures impedes the process of language learning, whereas a small distance between the two cultures greatly facilitates second

language learning. It is an issue of identity development and how much an immigrant or a second language learner identifies with the new culture. Of course, an individual who refrains from important and significant interactions with the new culture will have a difficult time learning the language. This is reasonably expected if we consider that learning is a social process that requires human interaction and exchange (Vigotsky, 1978).

Based on the gender roles assigned to Hispanic immigrant women, interaction with a new culture in a new setting might seem far-fetched or simply impossible. These women are protected from threatening social environments that put them at risk, even if this risk is only psychological. They rarely have the opportunity to have significant and meaningful interactions with the new culture, because they are geographically and socially bound to groups that they know and with which they can easily relate to. When this happens, social and cultural integration does not occur and motivation to learn the language does not emerge (Ricento, 2005).

Language learning has a direct impact on identity formation, but identification with cultural and social traits of a given group improves the likelihood of acquiring their language. Both women and men are affected by the decisions they make about their academic development and language learning (Burton, 1994). Exclusion from social interactions with the mainstream culture has a negative impact not only on language acquisition but also on the motivation that people have to learn the language. Usually these negative forces affect women more than men because “lack of power may limit women’s access to privileged forms of language, and to public forums in which such forms are used” (Burton, 1994, p. 2). As women are excluded from these social processes in an attempt to protect them from the challenges and risks of a society that is foreign to them, they are also excluded from educational processes that will help them acquire the mainstream language—or L2—and integrate into a web of cultural and social relations that now conform their permanent surroundings. Looking into these questions is important because it sheds light on the social relations, power struggles, and politics of difference that occur among genders (Tonkin, 1994), and how they all impact the learning process.

Burton (1994) argues that this exclusion may result, in part, from assigning women the responsibility of guarding their native language and culture, and transmitting it to their offspring. They must speak and use the language in their daily interactions so that their children can identify with it and make it their own. In this sense, holding on to their roots and their native language is seen as a female’s attempt to survive and remain loyal to her cultural traits (Burton, 1994). This is why living among their peers and confining their spaces to the geographical and social limits of a known community even in a different country is such an important component of a

Hispanic immigrant woman's role. However, this attitude ignores that "if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (Norton, 2000, p. 10). Thus, language learning helps rather than hinders one's knowledge of self and others in different social contexts.

Pavlenko and Piller (2001) assert that women are generally kept from gaining access to a second language mainly because of cultural practices that relate to their gender roles. Men, on the other hand, do have access to the symbolic meanings of a second language and acquire the concepts and meanings of an L2 to facilitate compliance with their male roles. When English language learning occurs among immigrant women it happens "as a means of liberating themselves from the confines of patriarchy" and as a motivation "to improve their social and economic status" (Ricento, 2005, p. 901).

The results of this study support the aforementioned theoretical arguments. Four of the six women did not speak or understand much English mainly because they did not feel the need to interact with U.S. society in general. They lived in the confines of their own home or community where interaction with and integration to the mainstream U.S. culture was unnecessary. As they fulfilled their roles as women and mothers, they lost access to an ample web of social relations with the mainstream culture and were excluded from learning processes that facilitate language acquisition. All six women highlighted their roles as mothers as one significant factor influencing their decision to learn or not learn a second language. The two women who currently work and speak English argued that their motivation to learn the second language stemmed from their need to provide for their children and for themselves. Keeping their sense of security and ensuring their physical safety moved them to adopt roles that are traditionally assigned to men. Meanwhile, the remaining four participants argued that they did not have the need to learn English as a second language. They do think that learning is important if one wants to succeed in the United States, but their circumstances do not merit the time and effort necessary to acquire these language skills. One of these four participants, however, decided to engage in academic activities to validate her academic credentials and saw English language learning as a requisite to facilitate this process and help her daughters in their educational process.

The idea that women occupy subordinate positions in society (Pavlenko, 2001) has forced some of our participants and other immigrant women to postpone or simply ignore their opportunity to learn English and significantly interact with the mainstream U.S. culture. Language as a symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) is seen as a man's mean to generate and gain both economic and social capital. It is their responsibility, and not a woman's, to

provide for the family and use language as a means to contribute to the sustenance of the family. When situations change or significant changes occur in the lives of Hispanic immigrant women, gender roles are transformed or inverted. This forces these women into the language market in search of alternatives to satisfy their needs and provide for their families. Such is the case of our Dominican participant who lost her husband years after entering the United States and now sees the value of learning English and merging into the mainstream culture and society, both enterprises previously deemed completely unnecessary by her.

In the words of Bhabha (1994) “social differences are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project –at once a vision and a construction– that takes you ‘beyond’ yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present” (p.3). Social and geographical boundaries are limiting in nature, but also a place where vortices of change emerge. They help create a third space (Bhabha, 1994) where interactions with male-female roles, social expectations of a new society, and language identities collide and create a need for transformation, growth, and social rebirth. In this process, it is important for Hispanic immigrant women to realize that “to be unhomed is not to be homeless” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9) and that accommodation in a new sociolinguistic environment might not be easy, but it is not impossible either.

Conclusions

Two hypotheses are tested in this study. The situational hypothesis sustains that Hispanic immigrant women recreate in their new social environments the situations and conditions that existed in their countries of origin prior to their arrival to the United States. Gender roles are deeply entrenched in the Hispanic cultures. Women are seen as passive agents in need of protection. They are caregivers at home, who should not and do not expose themselves to the risks and challenges of a complex foreign society. Their roles are limited to the house, neighborhood, and community. Men, on the other hand, are providers and protectors. They are called upon to sustain the family and provide for their general wellbeing. Situations occur that alter the way that roles are distributed or required from both men and women. When they happen, motivations to pursue other opportunities arise. Thus, the motivational hypothesis maintains that, as situations significantly change, motivations to learn languages, obtain a degree, or validate academic credentials appear. These motivations can be intrinsic or extrinsic, but they do appear and become an incentive to achieve other personal and professional goals.

Moving to the United States is a significant change that brings about many challenges. These challenges range from the social, to the economic,

and the political. Most Hispanic women immigrate without knowing or understanding the English language. As a result, their need for protection under their assigned gender roles is even greater. They usually move with or after their husbands into a community of peers who speak their native language and who can facilitate living in society. Because this community is geographically and socially limiting, women's moving space is confined to their boundaries. Within these boundaries, women are spoken to in their native language, they cook and eat what is ethnically appropriate, and they raise their children according to their home cultures. Cultural and social integration to the new environment does not take place because it does not become a need for survival. Men, on the other hand, need to hold their end of the bargain and provide sustenance and protection for their families. They must quickly integrate to the new culture and society, learn the language, get a job, and provide. Gender roles are, thus, recreated in the new society and relived with more intensity because of the threats imposed by the social unknowns.

These roles can and do change. Divorce, death, separation, or economic hardships force women into spaces that are foreign to them. As these changes occur, new motivations to preserve stability and provide for physiological and personal safety emerge. Women must take charge of what was once left to their male companions. They must fulfill other roles that require them to integrate socially and culturally into their previous unknown. This integration formally occurs through education and acquisition of language skills. Communication, thus, becomes the valued tool without which integration will not occur. It is a source of empowerment that creates new spaces for women to participate.

To test these hypotheses, six in-depth interviews to Hispanic immigrant women were conducted. These case studies provide the data with which to analyze the hypotheses and generate conclusions related to female empowerment and the role of bilingualism. Participants were chosen based on their work status and knowledge of the language. Two women do not work and do not speak English, two work but do not speak English, and the remaining two work and speak English.

The data provide support to both hypotheses. Women who do not work and do not speak the language recreate gender roles that existed prior to their immigration to the United States. Their male companions provide for them and satisfy their basic personal safety needs, thus making language learning and education unnecessary. Similarly, women who work but do not speak English have not broken with their deeply entrenched gender roles, and work not as a means for survival, but out of choice or desire. Their work is limited to manual or domestic labor which requires little or no training and that allows them to stay within the geographic and social limits of their

communities. Life-changing situations provoke challenges in the gender roles that exist in the social and cultural surroundings. Women who work and speak English learned the language as a result of significant ruptures with their habitual lifestyle. They were the only ones out of all the participants who developed a true motivation to pursue education as a means for survival. Whether intrinsic or extrinsic, motivation emerged among these women as a need to provide for them and their families. They saw the need to create a stable environment for them to live. They adopted roles that are usually assigned to or carried out by men to survive. In this process, these women had to integrate to an unknown society, learn English as a second language, and find new ways to provide for their needs. Bilingualism, thus, became the source of empowerment for these women. Communication was the door with which to pursue safety and stability.

This work contributes to the literature on gender and bilingualism, and highlights the importance of understanding the role of situation and motivation among adult learners. Further research must look into social and cultural variations in the processes of language acquisition and learning. “If gender is viewed as a social construct, then it comes as no surprise that normative masculinities and femininities, as well as beliefs and ideas about relations between the sexes, may vary across cultures” (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 124). Some groups of people or societies may value bilingualism more than others. Thus, concluding that the same gender dynamics that occur among Hispanic men and women are recreated in other cultural and ethnic groups could be misleading. Because beliefs about gender relations vary across cultures, the way that language is perceived as a symbolic capital and as a means of generating economic and social wealth must also vary across cultures. It would, thus, be interesting to study how people from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds who have relocated in the United States deal with processes of language acquisition and learning. Comparing across cultures will help us understand the ideologies of language that different groups develop and how these ideologies transform into affirmative processes of second language learning. Academics of adult education must take a close look at how these dynamics take place if they really want to understand how learning processes unravel and how motivation impacts education among adults from different cultures.

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