U.S. CITIZENS’ EXPERIENCE OF IMMIGRATION PROCEDURES:
AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The immigration procedures to petition for relatives of individuals with U.S. citizenship status who wish to immigrate to the U.S. have affected families, since the 1900’s. A historic overview of the literature on immigration policies showed a policy improvement but procedures to petition for foreigners remain lengthy and complex. Sometimes the immigration procedure asks for undocumented individuals to travel to their country of nationality for a tentative timeframe to continue immigration procedures through the U.S. consulate. This inquiry explored the immigration procedures to petition for a spouse’s legal permanent resident status from three U.S. citizens’ perspective using an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The primary question guiding this study was: How do U.S. citizens who have petitioned for their undocumented foreign spouse’s LPR statuses describe their experience? The theoretical framework lens for this research focused on the three participants’ description of their psychological, behavioral, and biological responses to their environment. The findings for this research confirmed the lengthy and complex procedure and its effects including financial burden and visa stress found on the literature. However, a view of the appraisal processes showed that the three participants also experienced fear, optimism, nervous, shock, and sleep behavior changes. Participants also described their experience as threatening.

Keywords: undocumented, petition, legal permanent resident status, immigration policy, mixed-status marriages.
# Table of Contents

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS........................................................................................................ 2

ABSTRACT..................................................................................................................... 3

LIST OF TABLES............................................................................................................... 7

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.......................................................................................... 8
   A. Statement of the Problem....................................................................................... 8
   B. Significance............................................................................................................ 9
   C. Practical and Intellectual Goals........................................................................ 11
   D. Statement of Research Question....................................................................... 11
   E. Theoretical Framework....................................................................................... 11
   F. Summary of Paper Contents and Organization................................................. 15

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW.............................................................................. 15
   A. Introduction......................................................................................................... 15
   B. Immigration Policy and its Impact: 1900-2000................................................ 15
      1. 1907-1929....................................................................................................... 16
      2. 1930-1959....................................................................................................... 17
      3. 1960-2000....................................................................................................... 18
   C. U.S. Citizen Sponsorship for Immigration Benefits.......................................... 19
      1. U.S. citizens petition for their undocumented foreign spouse present in the U.S. ........................................................................................................... 19
      2. U.S. citizens petition for their foreign spouse who entered the U.S. with a Visa ........................................................................................................... 23
   D. Immigration Process Effects.............................................................................. 25
      1. Visa stress......................................................................................................... 25
      2. Migration stress............................................................................................... 26
      3. Depression...................................................................................................... 26
      4. Financial burdens......................................................................................... 27
      5. Children affected by family separation during the immigration procedures ........................................................................................................... 27
   E. Summary of the Literature.................................................................................. 29

CHAPTER III. RESEARCH DESIGN.............................................................................. 29
   A. Introduction......................................................................................................... 29
   B. Purpose............................................................................................................... 30
   C. Research Question............................................................................................. 30
   D. Methodology...................................................................................................... 31
      1. Site and participants...................................................................................... 32
   E. Data Collection................................................................................................... 34
      1. Procedures...................................................................................................... 34
      2. Instruments for data collection................................................................... 35
   F. Data Analysis..................................................................................................... 35
CHAPTER IV. REPORT OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. Introduction

B. Participants

1. Amy
2. Kate
3. Eve

C. The Recollection of Immigration Procedures the Participants Experienced

1. Amy
2. Kate
3. Eve

D. Super-ordinate Themes

1. Marriage commitments
2. Religious belief
3. Fear
4. Guidance
5. LPR petition
6. Submission of forms
7. Financial burden
8. Optimism
9. Visa stress
10. Nervous
11. Shock
12. Sleep behavior changes

E. Experience the Same Event but Show Different Reactions

F. Conclusion

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. Introduction

B. Participants’ Appraisal Processes

1. Emotions, behaviors, and responses
   a. Fear
   b. Optimism
   c. Guidance
   d. LPR petition
   e. Visa stress
   f. Submission of forms
   g. Financial burden
   h. Nervous
   i. Shock
   j. Sleep behavior changes

C. Immigration Literature Informs the Findings

1. Policy
2. Immigration procedures
3. Immigration procedure effects................................. 82
D. Significance of Findings to Scholars and Practitioners....... 83
   1. Immigration attorneys........................................ 83
   2. Policy makers and advocates............................... 83
   3. Psychologists.................................................. 83
   4. Educators........................................................ 83
E. Implications for Future Research................................ 84
   1. Recommendations............................................ 84
   2. Suggestions................................................... 84
   3. Conclusion..................................................... 85

APPENDIX    Open-Ended Interview Questions of U.S. Citizens who
             Petitioned for their Spouses LPR Statuses................. 87
REFERENCES ......................................................... 89
## List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Table Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table 1 Summary of Participant Conversations</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table 2 Summary of Super-ordinate Themes</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table 3 Summary of Emotions, Behaviors, and Responses</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The immigration procedures for United States (U.S.) citizens’ foreign partner to attain U.S. legal permanent resident (LPR) status can be lengthy, expensive, and frustrating (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007). The process also involves extensive paperwork (Seto & Cavallaro). Wasem (2010) states that a LPR status grants permission to foreigners to reside in the U.S as documented individuals. The process is very complex (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2008) and little literature exists on the experience of individuals with U.S. citizenship married to undocumented foreigners. Some foreigners qualify for adjustment to LPR status while they continue to reside in the U.S. (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) as they first entered the U.S. as documented individuals, whereas those who entered undocumented are required to travel to their country of nationality to continue their procedures at the U.S. consulate (Seto & Cavallaro). In addition, the uncertainty of a timeframe complicates these draining demands (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services). The timeframe inconsistency can create an untenable situation for couples, particularly those individuals that are physically separated as a result of the process. During consular processing foreigners who entered the U.S. as undocumented do not initially qualify for an immigrant visa to travel as documented individuals to receive their LPR status. As a result, they are provided with opportunities to submit waivers to demonstrate extreme hardships (Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2012b). However, some foreigners are found ineligible for waivers and are banned from re-entering the U.S. for years or permanently (Litcher, 2006).

This study explored the experiences of U.S. citizens who petitioned for their spouses’ LPR statuses.
Significance

The importance to explore U.S. citizens’ experience of the immigration procedures to petition for their spouses’ LPR statuses accentuated in the aid the research can provide to U.S. citizens married to undocumented individuals as well as inform readers and immigration policy makers. Readers can reference this study should they wish to apply for LPR status as it provides knowledge about immigration forms such as I-130, G-325A, I-601, I-864, I-864W, and I-485. This research can also inform individuals on the rationale as to why immigration treats cases differently. For instance, immigration initiates the 10-year-bar for cases of individuals who have lived in the U.S. as undocumented and travel back to their country of nationality during procedures (Mercer, 2008). However, undocumented individuals can qualify to waive their undocumented presence except, immigration does not approve waivers that lack extreme hardships (Mercer). Also, immigration does not provide a set timeframe of when individuals can expect their waivers to be approved thus individuals are faced with uncertainty to experience long or short term family separations. On the other hand, cases of foreigners who have never entered the U.S. are processed faster as they have not violated the immigration laws. Waivers can be submitted for reasons other than undocumented presence in the U.S. such as criminal charges (Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2012b).

Moreover, this research can enlighten readers about the financial and emotional effects that U.S. citizens experience during the immigration procedures to petition for their spouse. The cost of required applications vary and couples have to consider the financial burdens they will stumble upon, due to the loss of income, should the foreign spouse travel to their country of nationality.
This research also informs immigration policy makers as it strives to humanize the process and bring to light the economic and emotional suffrage that U.S. citizens experience. Currently The Federal Registry approved U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’, abbreviated as USCIS, notice of intent to reduce family separation (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security, 2012b). The proposal created provisional waivers known as I-601a for immediate family members who qualify for waivers (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security). According to USCIS, this provisional waiver allows immediate family members to submit their waivers in the U.S. prior to departing to their country of nationality. This change will probably reduce emotional stress and financial strain on families. However, if provisional waivers are denied, individuals can re-submit the form and re-pay the fees before USCIS concludes their final decision (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013). The question remains, does this new provisional waiver reduce stress and financial strain on U.S. citizens who marry undocumented foreigners? Although this study focused on LPR status procedures and not I-601a procedures, due to USCIS’ introduction of the form on March 4, 2013, this research attempted to humanize the immigration procedure to support future changes of the law and possible future research on experiences of individuals who submit I-601a.

This study also strives to serve as reference to researchers on topics related to the immigration process. For instance, immigration lawyers may use this study to illustrate examples of experiences their clients can expect should they petition for their partner. Clients can also use this study to make informed decisions whether to petition or not. Lastly, immigration reform advocates who research this topic can benefit from this research as they may use the findings to advocate for policy change.
Practical and Intellectual Goals

The practical goal for this research stems from the focus of the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach to explore ways that individuals describe their experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Therefore, the practical goal for this inquiry was to explore ways that U.S. citizens view their experience during the immigration procedures to petition for their foreign spouses to attain LPR status. The attempt was for readers can gain insight of the procedures to better understand the financial burden, patience, and extensive paperwork the process requires.

The intellectual goal of this research was to explore the experiences U.S. citizens had as they petitioned for their foreign spouses to attain LPR status. This contributed to the current immigration literature in an attempt to humanize the experience.

Statement of Research Question

How do U.S. citizens who have petitioned for their undocumented foreign spouse’s LPR statuses describe their experience?

Theoretical Framework

The immigration procedures itself explain that the primary purpose to petition for foreign spouses to attain a LPR status is to reunite families (Wasem, 2010), but the goal itself as well as the scant literature that exist on this topic insufficiently expressed U.S. citizens’ assessment of the experience. Therefore, the appraisal framework sheds light on the experience of U.S. citizens who have experienced immigration procedures.

In 1966, (Peeters, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1995) Richard Lazarus introduced the cognitive appraisal framework as he believed that thoughts and perceptions related to “physiological consequences” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and that “mental events” caused “biological
outcomes” (Lazarus & Folkman). Although these were novel ideas at the time, as cognition was not yet associated with the field of psychology (Lazarus & Folkman), they remain both essential and relevant to the framework. Folkman et al. (1986) define cognitive appraisal as the process to understand an individuals’ significance of an experience as well as its purpose in their lives. However, some argue that the model can be used to understand the methods by which individuals process information (Lazarus & Folkman). Although the argument seems pertinent, the framework’s intent to categorize as well as evaluate an individual’s subjective interpretation of an event seems to remain as its foundation, specifically as it relates to phenomenology. Thus, the model confirms its appropriateness as this research seeks to unfold U.S. citizens’ assessment of the immigration procedures as well as explore the significance of the experience in their lives.

Similar to the intent of this inquiry, psychologists have used the cognitive perspective to view situations, reactions, and effects (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to understand the different experiences of individuals who have encountered the same event (Lazarus & Folkman). In contrast, some argue that different environments constitute different experiences regardless of individuals’ personalities (Lazarus & Folkman). However, Lazarus and Folkman, add that the model can be used to understand the “subtle, complex, and abstract” (p.23) between the introduction of the situation and the reactions as well as the factors that affect them.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) also argue that the theory can show the relationship between individuals’ “values, commitments, styles of perceiving and thinking” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 24) to environments. This inquiry strives to provide an understanding of these concepts as well as the methods in which they relate to immigration procedures from the U.S. citizen perspective. The framework’s relationship between the primary and secondary appraisal and its environment assists this research in humanizing the immigration procedures. For instance, figure

The model shows that during the primary appraisal stage, individuals assess whether they view the situation as a threat or challenge as well as benign or irrelevant (Folkman et al., 1986;
Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to the model, individuals who view their event as benign or irrelevant will ignore the situation and will not proceed to the secondary stage. Those individuals feel “joy, love, happiness, exhilaration, or peacefulness” (Lazarus & Folkman, p. 39). Additionally, individuals who view situations as irrelevant feel that “nothing is to be lost or gained in the transaction” (Lazarus & Folkman, p. 39).

Nevertheless, individuals who view their situation as threats or challenges proceed to the secondary stage. Lazarus and Folkman emphasize that threats and challenges can be related as well as occur concurrently but must be treated as two separate concepts. In explaining the difference between challenge and threat, Lazarus and Folkman reported:

The main difference is that challenge appraisals focus on the potential for gain or growth inherent in an encounter and they are characterized by pleasurable emotions such as eagerness, excitement, and exhilaration, whereas threat centers on the potential harms and is characterized by negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and anger (p. 33).

The cognitive appraisal model sets forth the notation that individuals need to differentiate between negative and positive situations to survive (Lazarus & Folkman).

During the secondary stage, individuals evaluate their coping mechanisms to beat, improve, or prevent their situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The model categorizes coping mechanisms as psychological or behavioral responses. The behavioral responses alter the event while the psychological responses alter beliefs and commitments as well as add biological responses. An analysis of conversations with U.S. citizens, who have experienced immigration procedures to petition for their undocumented foreign spouse, revealed participants’ psychological and behavioral coping mechanisms of their experience with immigration procedures.
The model’s framework to understand individuals’ appraisal process of events rationalized the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis research approach for this study. The research method strives to answer how individuals describe their experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This research sought to illustrate the immigration procedures of U.S. citizens as appraisal processes to evaluate the situation as meaningful or significant (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Hence, the model’s framework assisted to answer the research question of this study.

In summary, the appraisal model was chosen due to its primary and secondary appraisal of individuals’ reaction of an event as well as its attempt to understand the perspectives of individuals who experience the same event but show different reactions. The model also guided the research question, the literature review, and the methodology of this research.

Summary of Paper Contents and Organization

Chapter two of this inquiry reviews the literature on immigration policies to petition for foreign spouses’ LPR status. Chapter three focuses on the research design including research methodology, validity and credibility, and protection of human subjects.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Immigration literature show the way that policy, to petition for foreigners to gain legal permanent residency, have progressed over a century. The changes to immigration policy act illustrate the disparity of the law to women as well as the progression that led to close the gap. Review of the literature show current procedures to petition for spouses as well as the effects the immigration procedure has on families.

Immigration Policy and its Impact: 1900-2000
1907-1929. In 1907, The Expatriation Act was enacted and it stated that men who held U.S. citizenship regardless of their race could petition for their foreign wives, but women who held U.S. citizenship had to resign their citizenship and attain nationality of their foreign spouses (Orloff & Kaguyutan, 2002; Nicolosi, 2002). The foundation of this early immigration law originated from the coverture model that married women lived under their husbands’ authority and protection (Orloff & Kaguyutan). Thus, early immigration law demonstrates the disparity to U.S. women who married foreigners (Orloff & Kaguyutan) as well as methods in which the policy discouraged cross-cultural marriages (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007). Seto and Cavallaro define cross-cultural marriages as couples with different nationalities. The law denied wives, who held U.S. citizenship and were involved in cross-cultural marriages, the opportunity to reside in the U.S, but husbands who held U.S. citizenship had the option to reside in the U.S. with their foreign wives. According to Seto and Cavallaro, the decision of where to reside could ruin marriages or foster relationships (Seto & Cavallaro). Therefore, if moving to a foreign country ruined marriages, then immigration policy affected marriages.

Research also shows negative effects on individuals that have to reside in foreign countries. For instance, Adams (2003) found that females felt isolated in countries where they did not speak or understand the language. They felt as outsiders and experienced loneliness as well as fear (Adams). In contrast, foreigners experienced the opposite while living in the U.S. with their spouses (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007).

Since foreign wives could only obtain LPR status if their husbands’ with U.S. citizenship petitioned for them, immigration law put foreign wives at a distinct disadvantage particularly if their husbands refused to petition for them (Orloff & Kaguyutan, 2002). The literature on immigration and battered spouses emphasize that policy made undocumented wives afraid to
divorce their husbands as it meant they would lose their LPR status, possibly their children, and face deportation (Orloff & Kaguyutan; Shaw, 2009). This notion negatively affected victims of domestic violence as they could not petition for LPR status on their own (Orloff & Kaguyutan), and their husbands could use their immigration status to overpower them (Shaw, 2009).

The Expatriation Act of 1907 did not change until 1922 when female activists were successful in advocating for the Cable Act of 1922, named after John Cable who sponsored it (Cott, 1998). According to Cott, the act stated that women, who lived in their husbands’ country of nationality for more than 2 years or if they lived in another country for more than 5 years, were considered to have given up their U.S citizenship. The law was a positive start towards closing the disparity gap for females. However, it also stated that women with U.S. citizenship, who married individuals ineligible for citizenship, would still lose their citizenship in a manner similar to the Expatriation Act of 1907 (Cott). For instance, if they married Asian males; they would lose their U.S citizenship due to the Chinese Exclusion Act that categorized Asians as a foreign group ineligible for citizenship during that time (Cott). Nevertheless, the Cable Act created immigration procedures for foreign women who married U.S citizens; therefore, Congress concluded that placing immigration procedures to foreign women made the policy equal to everyone (Cott).

1930-1959. From 1930 to 1934 National Women’s Party advocated to Congress to make changes to the Cable Act, which eventually granted equal immigration benefits to men and women who married non-Asian foreigners (Cott, 1998). However, in 1947 Congress abolished the Chinese Exclusion Act. As a result, Asians were given the opportunity to apply for citizenship if they married U.S. citizens.
In 1952, the U.S. enacted the Immigration and Nationality Act known as the INA, which allowed foreigners regardless of their gender to adjust to legal permanent resident (LPR) status without having to return to their country of nationality. The act specified that foreigners qualified for LPR status if they entered the U.S. with proper documentation (Mercer, 2008). For instance, foreigners who entered with visas would qualify for a LPR status but, foreigners who entered as undocumented would not qualify.

1960-2000. Although the Immigration and Nationality Act created equality for foreign spouses to obtain LPR status, a new problem unfolded- fraudulent marriages. Immigration considers fraudulent marriages as those that were entered into with the intention to gain immigration benefits (Abrams, 2007). As a result, The Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendments of 1986, also known as IMFA, viewed marriages as fraudulent until proven faithful (Shaw, 2009). This amendment added an extra legal status known as a Conditional Legal Permanent Resident. A conditional legal permanent resident is a temporary LPR assigned to foreigners married to U.S. citizens for less than two years (Shaw). After being married for two years spouses apply for removal of the condition to obtain LPR status, but couples have to prove that their marriage was consummated in good faith (Orloff & Kaguyutan, 2002). If immigration finds that individuals entered into marriages for the sole purpose of gaining immigration benefits, the foreigners are deported (Abrams). In describing fraud marriage interviews, Moyce (1986) reported:

It is common in such interviews for the interviewer to demand details of the couple’s meeting, courtship, and wedding. However, interviewees claim that the questioning often becomes more intrusive and sometimes coercive. Interviewees have been asked to divulge details of their sexual behavior, including how and when the marriage was
consummated, what method of birth control the couple uses, and whether either spouse has had extramarital sexual relations. Citizens and aliens claim they have been accused of lying and threatened with imprisonment unless their petitions were withdrawn (p. 1762). After the interviews, the immigration officers either approve or deny LPR status (Jones, 1996).

Moyce found that immigration officers have complete discretion whether to approve or deny cases as Congress granted power to the Attorney General. Moreover, U.S. citizens “claim that decisions are often arbitrary or based on racial prejudice and personal bias” (Moyce, p. 1753).

While immigration law focused on fraudulent marriages during the 1980’s as well as provide immigration benefits to women in the 1920’s and 1930’s, congress had yet to discuss immigration laws giving benefits to undocumented battered women (Shaw, 2009). However, in 1994, the Violence Against Women Act, known as VAWA, was passed allowing battered women to petition on their own (Shaw). Prior to the act, battered women felt afraid of deportation thus they would suffer physical or emotional abuse by their husbands (Shaw) as they were seen as their covertures, since the early 1900’s.

Immigration policy continues to change as procedures deviate based on the status of foreigners. Currently, there are three methods by which undocumented individuals can obtain LPR status: immigration law provisions, a legalization program such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (Jasso et al., 2008), and U.S. citizen sponsorship. The following section describes current U.S. citizen sponsorship procedures to petition for foreign spouses.

**U.S. Citizen Sponsorship for Immigration Benefits**

**U.S. citizens petition for their undocumented foreign spouse present in the U.S.**

Marriages of undocumented individuals to U.S. citizens are referred to as “mixed-status marriage” (Mercer, 2008). Undocumented individuals include immigrants who entered without
inspection, also known as EWI, those who continue to reside in the U.S. with an expired visa, or individuals who work without authorization (Jasso, Massey, Rosenzweig, & Smith, 2008). These foreigners qualify for LPR status under immigration policy. Jasso et al. (2008) survey results show that in 1996 19% of adults entered without inspection, 12% became illegal after their visa expired, and 11% were employed without permission. Currently, procedures for undocumented spouses to obtain LPR status differentiate from the processes of spouses who entered the U.S as documented.

In a mixed-status marriage, U.S. citizenship spouses first submit an I-130 form to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) along with Form G-325A to capture the biographic information of the individuals. Raw data from USCIS (2012a) shows that USCIS offices received 193,216 I-130 petitions for foreign spouses and denied 24,572 in 2010. In 2011, they received 202,479 petitions and denied 22,827 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services). Denial of an I-130 can cause deportation of the foreigner (Matsumoto-Power, 1993).

Immigration categorizes foreign spouses of U.S. citizens under the immediate relative category within immigration policy (Wasem, 2010). The category gives the foreigner special considerations such as shorter timeframes to review and approve forms (Wasem) compared to other relatives. To petition for relatives of U.S. citizens means to sponsor them to immigrate to the U.S. (Wasem) as documented individuals. The first step of the procedure is similar for all applicants: submission of form I-130 to USCIS (Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2012a). Form I-130 establishes that relationships exist between U.S. citizens and their relatives such as a spouse through marriage (Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services).
Form I-130 asks for U.S. citizens, labeled petitioners, to submit proof of marriage to their partner, labeled applicants. Proof that individuals married in good faith may include

- pictures of the wedding ceremony,
- letters from relatives or friends who can attest their awareness that the marriage was forged in good faith,
- pictures showing the continuation of marriage,
- evidence showing that couples share mutual assets such as a house, car, bank account, lease agreements, and

USCIS can verify the documents submitted in conjunction with form I-130 through interviews, work and home visits, contacting those who submitted letters on behalf of the couples, and review of public records (Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2012a). USCIS can determine fraudulence of certain documents or marriages and deny immigration benefits to foreign spouses. Hence couples would “face severe penalties provided by law, and may be subject to criminal prosecution” (Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2012a, p. 7). However, should USCIS approve form I-130; couples move forward to the next step.

The waiting period after immigration approves form I-130 vary (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2008). For instance, foreigners who traveled to the U.S. with proper documentation and remained in the U.S. after their documents expired, experience a shorter waiting period as they qualify for a process called adjustment of status which can grant them a LPR status. However, if foreigners entered the U.S. undocumented they will not qualify for
adjustment of status and will have to travel to their country of nationality to continue their procedure with the U.S. consulate (Mercer, 2008) hence prolonging the process.

Should form I-130 be approved, the second step consists of filing the affidavit of support (Abrams, 2007) known as an I-864 to the National Visa Center. With the I-864 U.S. citizens attest that they have sufficient funds to support their foreign spouses’ should they immigrate to the U.S. (Abrams). On this form, U.S. citizens are referred to as the sponsors (Sainsbury, 2006). The sponsors’ income must exceed 125% of the federal poverty level, and the sponsor promises to support their spouse until the foreigners can work 40 hours in a five to ten year period or until the foreigner becomes a U.S. citizen (Sainsbury). The sponsor also attests responsibility to reimburse public agencies should they provide benefits to the foreigner (Sainsbury).

After the National Visa Center approves the Affidavit of Support, foreigners submit the Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration form known as the DS-230 (Rytina, 2008) or an electronic form called DS-260 for individuals whose country accepts electronic forms. At this stage the process deviates for the fact that foreigners resided as undocumented in the U.S.; therefore, the National Visa Center forwards the Affidavit of Support and the Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration form to the U.S. consulate of the spouse’s country of nationality. Then, foreigners make appointments at the consulate for their interviews. At the interviews the immigration officers find them inadmissible for immigrant visas as a consequence of their law violation due to their undocumented presence. The foreigners find themselves banned from the U.S. for a certain number of years or with the opportunity to submit a waiver known as an I-601 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2012b). In describing the reasons for inadmissibility, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services write:
Such acts, conditions, and conduct include certain criminal offenses, public health concerns, fraud, misrepresentation, failure to possess proper documents, accrual of more than 180 days of unlawful presence in the United States, and terrorism. The grounds of inadmissibility are set forth in section 212(a) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1182(a) (pp. 1041).

Although undocumented individuals can be found inadmissible for visas, section 212(a) (9) (B) (v) of Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security) allows U.S. citizens to show that they will suffer “extreme hardship” as part of form I-601. Examples of extreme hardships range from unavailable health care to U.S. citizens in their spouse’s country of nationality to the financial impact of moving to another country (Department of Homeland Security & U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2012b).

The consulate transfers the I-601 application to USCIS for review while the foreigners remain in their country of nationality. USCIS has complete discretion to approve or deny the I-601 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security, 2012b). A denied I-601 can be appealed or a new waiver can be submitted but, a final denial of I-601 causes the foreigner to be banned for three to ten years (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security).

**U.S. citizens petition for their foreign spouse who entered the U.S. with a Visa.**

Foreign spouses who entered with visas or who overstayed their visas can adjust their visa status (Rytina, 2008) to a LPR status. The process for adjustment is shorter compared to consulate processing as foreigners do not have to travel to their country of nationality.

The process to petition for foreign spouses begins in a similar manner as with undocumented individuals: I-130, and G-325A. However, form I-130 can be submitted together...
with the I-485, the Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjustment Status to expedite the process (Fieldheim, 2009). Approval of an I-130 depicts approval of the I-485 (Fieldheim) as shown by the literature. Also, denial of an I-130 can be appealed to the Board of Immigration Appeals, known as BIA, whereas denial of an I-485 cannot be appealed and foreigners may renew the I-485 during deportation procedures (Fieldheim).

After an I-130 approval, foreigners receive notification for fingerprints. Lastly, couples undergo interviews. Immigration officers conduct separate interviews to determine if marriages are consummated in good faith (Matsumoto-Power, 1993). At the interviews, the immigration officer asks questions relating to, but not limited to, a couple’s wedding ceremony, division of chores at home, or even the food they ate the morning of their interview (Matsumoto-Power). Immigration officers sometimes incorporate questions about couples’ sex life before and during their marriage (Matsumoto-Power). If immigration officers find marriages as fraudulent, they investigate by speaking to couples’ neighbors, friends, or landlords (Matsumoto-Power). If marriages seem fraudulent, foreigners face deportation (Matsumoto-power).

**U.S. citizens petition for foreign spouse who never entered the U.S.** The process for foreign spouses who have never entered the U.S. requires consular processing similar to the procedures for those who entered undocumented. However, individuals do not complete form I-601 as they did not enter the U.S. as undocumented. U.S. citizen spouses first submit form I-130 for approval. After approval of I-130, they submit forms I-864 and DS-230. Lastly, they attend the interviews. After the interviews foreigners are notified if they qualify for temporary LPR status. The temporary LPR status can be removed three months prior to the couples’ two year anniversary by filling a joint petition known as an I-751 (Shaw, 2009). Consequently, not filling
an I-751 petition causes termination of their marriage as well as termination of LPR status and foreign spouses can be deported (Shaw).

Moreover, the procedures can be expedited with the non-immigrant visa known as a K-3 visa (Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. State Department, 2012). With this visa, foreigners wait in the U.S. for LPR status approval (Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. State Department) instead of waiting in their country of nationality.

**Immigration Process Effects**

Whether foreigners have never entered the U.S. undocumented or entered with a visa, literature on immigration show that procedures experience causes stress due to extensive paperwork. Other emergent themes from literature on immigration and psychology include visa stress, migration stress, depression, and financial burden (Jasso et al., 2008; Jasso et al., 2005; Mercer, 2008). This section explores these themes.

**Visa stress.** Jasso et al., (2008) shows that the experience of immigration procedures causes visa stress. Salgado de Snyder (1987) provides a definition of stress as “an altered state of an organism produced by agents in the psychological, social, cultural, and/or physical environment” (p. 477), and visa stress as “the set of stresses related to obtaining a legal permanent residence” (Elo, Mehta, & Huang, 2011, p. 6) that end on the day that foreigners enter the U.S. (Jasso et al., 2005). Some examples of stressors that may cause visa stress include the conditional legal permanent resident or researching applications associated with the process (Jasso et al., 2005). The appraisal perspective can view visa stress as a psychological response that will last until foreigners enter the U.S. or has the condition removed from the LPR status. The theory can also view individuals who experience coping mechanisms as those who have moved on to the secondary stage.
**Migration stress.** According to the literature, citizens of the U.S. suffer migration stress but not visa stress as their spouses undergo immigration procedures (Jasso et al., 2005). Migration stress can be defined as “the set of stresses related to the process of moving from one country to another” (Jasso et al., 2005, p. 128). For instance, spouses with U.S. citizenship experience migration stress when moving to their spouses’ country of nationality during consular processing. Hence, U.S. citizens either experience migration stress or are forced to physically separate from their spouses as they have to depart the U.S. Moreover, U.S. citizens view the forced separation, due to the immigration process, as a harsh punishment (Mercer, 2008). The punishment causes extra marital stress on marriages (Mercer) on top of the stress already associated with marriage (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Similarly to visa stress, migration stress can be categorized as a psychological response of the appraisal theory. What coping mechanisms do U.S. citizens use during migration stress? If they do experience visa stress, what coping mechanisms do they use? The interpretative phenomenological analysis and the appraisal process reveal answers to these questions.

**Depression.** Jasso et al. (2005) found in their study that 15.9 percent of men and 18.5 percent of women reported that they felt depressed during their visa processing. Jasso et al. describes visa depression as a term used for individuals who expressed feeling ‘sad, blue, or depressed’ while psychologists view depression as an outcome of a stressful situation (Folkman et al., 1986). For instance, Salgado de Snyder (1987) found that Mexican females who unwillingly immigrated to the U.S. experienced more depression than those who chose to immigrate. Moreover, Jasso, et al. question whether visa stress without migration stress decreases depression. They also state the need for future research on this topic.
**Financial burdens.** Lack of financial support puts financial burdens on mixed-status families, during the immigration process, as foreign spouses would either stop working or stop caring for their children (Mercer, 2008). Mixed-status families would probably live with two incomes or have one spouse working while the other takes the role of caregiver to their children prior to their physical separation (Mercer).

Immigration literature acknowledge that there are costs associated with immigration forms (Seto & Cavallaro, 2007), but does not show the cost. Raw data from the USCIS website (2012c) show the costs (in parenthesis) associated with each form as the following: I-130 ($420), I-485 ($985 plus $85 for biometrics for a total of $1,070), I-601 ($585), and I-751 ($505 plus $85 for biometrics for a total of $590). USCIS offices do not charge for I-864 and for G-325A forms.

**Children affected by family separation during the immigration procedures.**

Literature on family separation is abundant nevertheless on the effect of immigration policy on children remain scarce. In their study, Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, (2002) showed that 79% of children were separated from their fathers while 28% were separated from their siblings, and 55% were separated from their mothers during immigration or migration processes. Although the percentages of children who experience separation are high, the literature show that immigration law do not consider the hardships that relate to education, economics, and health demonstrated by children of mixed-status families (Thronson, 2010). The law views these as normal results of immigration. Consequently parents would have to show “’exceptional and extremely unusual hardship’ standard” (Thronson, 2010, p. 256). Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie conclude that parents from families, who experience separation, can manage the separation and that decreased losses associated with the separation may not damage the children. However,
experience of family separation impacts the development of children and their parent-child relationship as shown in the literature (Mitrani, Santisteban, & Muir, 2004). Mitrani, Santisteban, and Muir developed strategies to help children cope with their experience of family separation, especially from their mother.

The first strategy is to establish the cognitive frame by interpreting anger as loss or pain, crises as opportunities, and feelings of overwhelm as a signal of time to “recharge one’s batteries” (Mitrani, Santisteban, & Muir, 2004, p. 225). Family members also view their experience as adjustments, and they learn that hope will help them overcome their experiences of family separation. The second strategy gives family members the opportunity to address “conflict resolution” (Mitrani, Santisteban, & Muir, p. 226) with therapists. The family members discuss and express their opinions of the separation. The third strategy, “managing affect” (Mitrani, Santisteban, & Muir, p. 227) created for therapists to assesses and measure how ready family members seem “to discuss this painful and emotional content and each member’s level of emotional strength/vulnerability” (Mitrani, Santisteban, & Muir, p. 227). The mothers discuss grief on lost time while their children react and therapists help with their reaction. The last strategy is “generalizing to other content areas” (Mitrani, Santisteban, & Muir, p. 227) where family members discuss other issues to set intervention strategies in solving these issues.

Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie, (2002) concluded that length of separation does not lead to psychological issues. However, Thronson (2010) argued that children do not understand immigration policy. Hence, they view the separation as abandonment causing them emotional trauma (Thronson, 2010). In addition, Winnicott (1958) stated that it is important for parents to be around their children so that they can develop into secure adults. Thronson also
argued that the separation affects children’s education as they are absent more frequently, showing signs of stress, and showing loss of appetite (Thronson).

Summary of the Literature

Literature on immigration show the history of policy change over the years, and suggest the need to further investigate the effects the immigration procedures have on U.S. citizens married to undocumented foreigners. For instance, immigration form I-601, states “Evidence can include but is not limited to: …financial impact of departure from the United States…other conditions that impact relocation, such as economic and social conditions impacting quality of life…” on the U.S. citizen (Department of Homeland Security & U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2012b, p. 7). However, the literature does not capture the impact. U.S. citizen spouses play an important role during the immigration process but that role needed to be emphasized. Lastly, current literature on immigration emphasize the financial stress associated with immigration process, but did not fully capture the depth of the effect on U.S. citizens including financial stress. The research design of this study describes the method that this inquiry used to capture the effect of immigration procedures on U.S. citizens.

Chapter III: Research Design

Introduction

A qualitative approach for this inquiry captured the experience as well as its negative and positive effect that immigration procedures have on U.S. citizens married to undocumented foreigners. This inquiry employed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to capture participants’ experience as well as to understand their experience. IPA is described as “an approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 1). Thus, an exploration of the ways in which
U.S. citizens describe their experience of the immigration procedure as well as their reasons for undergoing this complex procedure was well supported through the IPA research method (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

**Purpose**

This qualitative inquiry attempted to expand the current literature on immigration policy in an effort to humanize the procedure in describing the ramifications it entails for U.S. citizens. The literature currently note effect immigration procedures have on foreign spouses and children but do not provide the ways they affect the U.S citizen. This inquiry attempted to capture the full experience from the U.S. citizen’s full perspective to serve as a guide for those who may need to undergo the procedure in the future.

The importance to capture the experience of U.S. citizens who have petitioned for their undocumented foreign husband lies in its potential to inform immigration policymakers of the consequences of immigration policies on their constituents. The literature review on immigration policies exemplify the changes that policies undergo as well as the implications of change; therefore, this inquiry aims to inspire future policy change.

**Research Question**

The complex nature to petition for foreign spouses’ legal permanent residency status for individuals in cross-cultural marriages or mixed-status families directs this study. The research question is:

How do U.S. citizens who have petitioned for their foreign spouse’s LPR statuses describe their experience?

Complexities of the procedure include: submission of forms to USCIS, NVC, as well as to the U.S. consulate, submitting payments for each form, and understanding current immigration
policy. Particularly important is awareness of form I-601, which evaluates the extreme hardship U.S. citizens will encounter should they migrate to their partner’s country of nationality or reside in the U.S. without their partner.

**Methodology**

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, (2009) suggests that the researcher use the IPA approach to assume the role of listener. Therefore, this researcher listened to the three participants as they spoke about their immigration procedure experience. This researcher also viewed participants as experts as suggested in the IPA approach (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin). The methodology used for this inquiry included interviews for data collection as it strived to gather as much detail as possible about the participants’ experiences. Thus: “The aim of an interview is largely to facilitate an interaction which permits participants to tell their own stories, in their own words” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, p. 57).

Smith, Flowers, & Larkin suggest (2009) that the main task of this researcher was attentiveness as well as commitment during the interviews. They describe IPA as “committed to the detailed examination of the particular case. It wants to know in detail what the experience for this person is like, what sense this particular person is making of what is happening to them” (p. 3). Application of the IPA method for this inquiry assisted this research to capture the full experience of individuals who hold U.S. citizenship and have petitioned for LPR status for their spouses.

According to IPA methodology, a schedule of interview questions should be developed prior to the interviews to enable participants to provide as much detail as possible about their experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Therefore, this researcher developed questions to serve as guidelines during the conversations (see appendix). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin suggest
that interviews begin with a question that will allow participants to be descriptive as well as feel comfortable discussing their personal matters. Therefore, this researcher asked participants to begin their conversation as if they were telling their story. In addition, the IPA qualitative methodology for this research attempted to capture participants’ detailed personal story in an effort to understand their account of their experience during the immigration procedure to petition for their spouses.

An analysis of the interviews using the IPA method informed the practical and intellectual goals of this inquiry. The research method also tried to provide readers with an insight of the immigration procedure to petition for a foreign spouse. Most importantly, the exploration of individual experiences aimed to humanize the procedure.

**Site and participants.** This research took place in various counties of Florida as the three participants resided in Florida during the time of their interviews. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) suggested for participants to feel comfortable, safe and free from interruptions thus participants chose their method of interview and locations.

To gather answers for this inquiry, the researcher distributed a flyer that asked for participants to partake in two interviews that lasted between 45 to 90 minutes each. The participants had to have experienced the immigration procedure to petition for their husbands LPR statuses. Consequently, at the time of this study, interested participants were experiencing the procedure. Also, their spouses’ country of nationality was not Mexico. As a result, they did not meet the criteria to partake in this study. Other interested participants met the criteria for this study. However, they dropped before they could start their interviews. Other potential participants confirmed that they were not interested to be part of this inquiry after they read the consent form. The homogeneous sample (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) of participants for
this inquiry include participants that (a) were over 21 years old, (b) have U.S. citizenship status, (c) were married to a foreigner from Mexico, and (d) petitioned for their spouse’s LPR status. The LPR procedure result of whether or not the spouse received his or her LPR status as well as the gender of the participant was not a criterion for the homogeneous sample of this inquiry. Also, the sample “represent a perspective, rather than a population” in this inquiry (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 49).

At the time of the interview, the husbands of two participants had received their LPR status. In addition, one participant’s husband had received his LPR status as well as his U.S naturalized citizenship status. According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2013b), to obtain a naturalized citizenship status an applicant must take a civics test as well as an English test. Although to receive a naturalized citizenship status seems to be a step after the LPR status procedure, this research focused on the LPR status obtained prior to the naturalized citizenship status. Therefore, this participant qualified as part of the homogeneous sample in this inquiry. Table 1 displays the dates, total minutes, as well as the method of communication utilized for this inquiry.
Table 1

Summary of participant conversations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversations</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>April 22, 2013</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>April 28, 2013</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>One-on-one</td>
<td>May 3, 2013</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>One-on-one</td>
<td>May 3, 2013</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>One-on-one</td>
<td>June 30, 2013</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>One-on-one</td>
<td>June 30, 2013</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that the conversations with the participants lasted between 45 and 62 minutes. Hence, it met the timeframe between 45 to 90 minutes as suggested by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). The table also shows that the conversations were held in one month intervals that provided ample time for the researcher to transcribe as well as make linguistic, descriptive, and conceptual notes as suggested by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) before the researcher proceeded to the next interview. Lastly, the table shows the names used for this inquiry to protect the participants’ identities.

Data Collection

Procedures. Procedures for this inquiry followed the Northeastern University IRB protocol. First, participants read and signed a consent form that stated that they understood the recording of their anonymous conversations prior to the start of their interview. Then, participants were asked to choose an interview location as well as an interview method that made
them comfortable during the conversations. Lastly, participants were asked to schedule a date for their interviews that was convenient for them.

**Instruments for data collection.** This inquiry followed the interpretive phenomenological analysis research method for data collection. The method suggests that the researcher utilize semi-structured interview questions for data collection. During the conversations, the researcher remained very flexible and viewed participants as experts on the topic (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, planned questions merely serve as a guide for the researcher if participants needed prompts to continue conversing about their experience.

For this research, the interview questions were designed for various purposes including:

- To allow participants to feel comfortable during the interview (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009),
- ask participants to describe their experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin);
- assess the primary appraisal stage of the cognitive appraisal theory;
- assess the secondary appraisal stage; and
- capture what participants perceive as the purpose of this experience in their life as part of the appraisal concept.

The second conversation served as a follow-up based on the first conversation for each participant; therefore, the second conversation ensured all scheduled questions were answered by each participant. Both interviews were audiotaped.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach supported the content understanding of a participant’s experience of an event; therefore, analysis of semi-
structured interviews for this inquiry occurred in sequential stages (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). First, the researcher transcribed the conversations in an effort to read and re-read the content (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin). It also seemed important for the transcripts to reflect the participant and interviewer’s recorded words as well as “non-verbal utterances” such as laughter (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, p. 74). During this stage, the researcher engaged the data as a gateway to the participant’s world in a narrative format to focus on the participant’s account (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin) of the immigration procedures.

The second stage focused on the participant’s description of the immigration procedures. During this stage, the researcher constructed linguistic, descriptive, and conceptual notes to “identify specific ways by which the participant talks about, understands and thinks about an issue” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 83).

The third stage of the data analysis required an evaluation of each case to find emergent themes. At this point, the researcher rearranged the interview to reflect the individual’s words and thoughts as well as the “analyst’s interpretation” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 92). During the last step, the researcher looked for connections among the themes and “patterns across cases” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, p. 101) using Smith, Flowers, and Larkin’s suggested strategies including:

- Abstraction which involved putting like with like and developing a new name for the cluster;
- subsumption that brought together a series of related themes;
- polarization that focused on the differences;
- contextualization that identified contextual or narrative elements attending to temporal, cultural, and narrative themes;
numeration that indicated the importance of some emergent themes; and

function that enabled a deeper understanding of the data (pp. 96-98)

The themes and patterns of the analysis for this inquiry centered around the research question as well as the appraisal processes model to conclude with an understanding of how U.S. citizens’ describe their experience of the immigration procedures to petition for their foreign spouse.

Validity & Credibility

The research met the criteria for validity based on four principles; sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009):

- Sensitivity to context to establish rapport and become skilled, conscious, and dedicated to the interview;
- commitment and rigor to remain attentive to the participant during the interview;
- transparency and coherence to describe the stages of the research and read the narrative as reader instead of researcher; and
- impact and importance to relay important ideas to the reader (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, pp. 180-183)

To show credibility, transcripts were checked for mistakes (Creswell, 2009). Also, participants reviewed their transcripts of the conversations for accuracy (Creswell).

Protection of Human Subjects

For this inquiry, the researcher received approval of the IRB from Northeastern University to ensure participants’ protection. Participants were notified of their volunteer participation to the research as well as notified of anonymity to protect their identity. Also, if participants asked to view the scheduled interview questions prior to their interviews, they were
provided to them as suggested by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). Lastly, participants were offered the option to withdraw their participation as well as to review their transcripts without any consequences.

**Conclusion**

The complexities of the procedures to petition for foreign spouses seem apparent in the literature and confirm that applicants starting the procedure should understand the various procedures. For instance, applicants who petition for their spouse, who have had prior presence in the country as undocumented, will undergo a different procedure than those who have never entered the U.S. Hence, the focus of this research is on U.S. citizens whose foreign spouse had prior presence in the U.S. as undocumented individuals.

The literature on immigration also shed light on the need to explore the immigration procedure from U.S. citizens’ perspective as foreigners and battered spouses’ experience is shown in the current literature. Therefore, this inquiry explored the experience to capture the ways U.S. citizens’ describe their experience of the immigration procedure. The investigation also accentuated the experience of the immigration process in order to humanize the procedures.

Lastly, using the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach this research answered the question: How do U.S. citizens who have petitioned for their foreign spouse LPR statuses describe their experience? Hence, the semi-structured interviews, transcriptions, and data analysis of chapter four and five of this inquiry strived to answer this question and provide an understanding of the experience.

**Chapter IV: Report of Research Findings**

**Introduction**
This section outlines the findings of the inquiry: How do U.S. citizens who have petitioned for their undocumented foreign spouse’s LPR statuses describe their experience? An LPR status refers to a legal permanent resident status obtained through various immigration procedures that provide undocumented foreigners permission to reside in the U.S with legal status. Due to the fact that this inquiry focuses on the experiences that U.S. citizens encountered with the immigration procedure to petition, the participants for this inquiry have completed the immigration procedure. The goals for this inquiry include a view of the participants’ experience as well as to explore the ways they describe their encounter.

This chapter begins with a brief introduction of the participants as well as their knowledge of the procedure prior to their petition. It then discusses the participants’ reasons to petition for their husbands’ LPR status and a summary of the immigration procedure that the participants experienced as well as individual time line schematics of two participants as one participant did not describe her experience using dates.

To present the findings of the transcribed interviews referred to as narratives in this inquiry, this chapter identifies the researcher’s interpretation of the emergent themes that surfaced. In this inquiry, the emergent themes represent a recurrent experience of all participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin the emergent themes can be referred to as super-ordinate themes as they derive from “putting like with like and developing a new name for the cluster” (p. 96). It seems appropriate to cluster the super-ordinate themes using the appraisal model due to the fact that this inquiry uses the model to explore as well as understand the participants’ experience. Therefore, the names for the super-ordinate themes for this inquiry derive from Lovallo’s (1997) model of the appraisal process. The themes include (a) beliefs and commitments, (b) threat, (c) resources, options, and effectiveness, (d)
coping behaviors, (e) psychological responses, (f) behavioral responses, and (g) biological responses (Lovallo, 1997).

Although other super-ordinate themes may be identified as well as interpretations of the narratives may vary, the use of the appraisal processes lens to categorize the themes support this inquiry in an effort to:

- humanize the immigration procedure;
- capture the participants’ story;
- understand the participants’ experience; and
- explore ways that participants describe their occurrence.

This inquiry also sought to understand the notion that participants react differently to the same event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In an effort to explore this concept, this inquiry provides an overview of the three participants’ appraisal processes with additional super-ordinate themes as well as other behaviors and responses they encountered. Lastly, this research strives to remain faithful to each participant’s experience. Therefore, in several instances the findings include quotes from the transcribed narratives of the conversations in order to capture the words, narrative, and experience of each research participant.

Participants

It is essential to note that Amy, Kate, as well as Eve exemplified interest to share their experience for this inquiry. Also, it is important to note that their commitment to this inquiry was greatly appreciated by the researcher as their stories provide essential information to U.S. citizens that are interested in petitioning for their undocumented foreign spouses, informing immigration policy makers, as well as to researchers interested on the immigration procedure.
The following provides an overview of Amy, Kate, and Eve’s knowledge prior to their petition as well as their reasons to petition for their husbands.

**Amy.** Amy spoke freely about her experience during our conversations. She apologized that her recollection seemed scattered. As a result, Amy’s (Personal communication, April 22, 2013) recollection included the hardships she faced while she remained in the U.S without her husband as he waited in Mexico to receive his visa approval to re-enter the United States. Amy (Personal communication) also felt ashamed to share that she felt suicidal as well as attempted self-harm at the time she experienced the immigration procedure to petition for her husband’s LPR status.

Amy stated that she held conversations with her cousin to gain knowledge of the procedure (Personal communication, April 22, 2013) but she did not state whether her cousin is an immigration attorney or if her cousin also experienced the procedure. Amy also shared that prior to starting the petition, she thought that she would be separated from her husband for 3-4 months as he would be required to continue his LPR status procedure through the U.S. consulate in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. She thought this based on her sister’s prior experience of the same procedure. Amy was not prepared to experience a longer separation from her husband (Personal communication).

Amy shared that she petitioned for her husband because (a) she loves him, (b) she lived in fear of him being deported (Personal communication, April 22, 2013 & Personal communication, April 28, 2013), and (c) she viewed this as their method to follow immigration rules. Amy commented:
It's difficult living in America as an immigrant. We felt judged, kinda like judging a book by its cover. People being deported made me have fear. We lived in fear. We were trying to do the right thing (Personal communication, April 22, 2013)

Kate: Kate also spoke freely about her experience. She became teary during her recollection of the time she received the referral letter. Kate shared that she felt confident that her husband’s case would not be referred. Therefore, she was not prepared to receive a referral. Kate views her separation experience as traumatizing for her as she found herself crying on numerous occasions even after her husband had returned from Mexico with his approved visa. Kate also shared that she felt embarrassed to talk to her family about her feelings during the time her husband stayed in Mexico. Therefore, she spoke only to a counselor.

Kate (Personal communication, May 3, 2013) stated that she researched the internet to look for information as she lacked knowledge of the procedure to petition for her husband’s LPR status. She used the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services also known as USCIS website as well as their telephone services throughout the procedure experience. Kate also drove to a nearby USCIS office to speak with a representative about the procedure requirements before she submitted the I-130 application to USCIS.

Similar to Amy, Kate also decided to start the procedure to petition for her husband as she feared he could get deported. Kate commented:

The reason we decided to do this process was because… we were hearing that a lot of people were getting deported. So, we were afraid that he would get deported (Personal communication, May 23, 2013).

Eve: During the interview, Eve showed the interviewer her photo albums as well as copies of the documents she submitted. Eve also showed the interviewer receipts as these items
helped her with her recollection. Eve smiled and laughed as she recollected her story. She felt the procedure was easier than she thought it would be. However, she experienced stress at the time she submitted the forms as well as during the night prior to their interview. She shared that she felt very nervous the day of their interview.

Eve (Personal communication, June 30, 2013) shared that prior to starting the procedure; she heard various stories about people’s knowledge as well as their experience of the different immigration procedures. As a result, she and her husband decided to consult with two immigration lawyers. Eve commented that she and her husband did not have the money to pay a lawyer to take their case. Therefore, they consulted a Board of Immigration Appeals, also known as BIA, as well as a accredited representative of Catholic Charities.

Eve stated that she decided to petition for her husband’s LPR status for the reason that she loves him as her partner as well as due to fear that he would get deported, similar to Kate and Amy’s reasons. Eve commented:

But the freedom that you can come in and out. That you can work, that you are not worried that the police officer is going to deport you. That feeling is just so crazy that doesn’t let you sleep (Personal communication, June 30, 2013).

The following section discusses the experiences of the participants as well as a time line view of the procedure of two participants that recollected dates during the conversations.

The Recollection of Immigration Procedures the Participants Experienced

The transcribed narratives show that participants described their immigration procedure experience in non-chronological order. Therefore, the researcher organized their encounter in a story format as recommended by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) to understand their experience. The following findings show the immigration procedure that each participant
encountered. It includes the forms they submitted, the cost of the forms as well as a schematic of the immigration procedure that led to the approval of their husband’s LPR status.

**Amy.** Amy filed the I-130 application with USCIS to petition for her husband (Personal communication, April 28, 2013). According to Amy, the I-130’s approval arrived “about 3 months” after submission. She recalled that the application cost her “around $400” but she could not remember the name of the second application she submitted. However, she recollected that it cost her roughly $400 as well. In addition to the applications, Amy also submitted a copy of:

- a translated birth certificate of her spouse;
- their marriage certificate;
- their bank account statements;
- their apartment lease;
- their insurance; and
- the title of ownership of their vehicle (Personal communication, April 20, 2013).

Amy did not state that she sent her proof of her U.S. citizenship status but it is important to note that UCIS requires this. In total, Amy submitted three applications prior to the receipt of a notification that informed her of her husband’s visa appointment date at the U.S. consulate in Ciudad Juarez. Amy referred to this appointment as the “initial visa interview” (Personal communication, April 22, 2013).

Then, Amy and her husband flew to Ciudad Juarez (Personal communication, April 22, 2013). According to Amy, her husband “went to get the finger prints, pictures, and the medical” exam in Ciudad Juarez. Amy’s husband then attended his interview. USCIS denied his visa “because [he] entered the United States without an inspection,” but they informed him that he qualified for “the waiver” of inadmissibility also known as the I-601.
Amy shared that they paid “about 600 bucks” (Personal communication, April 22, 2013) for the waiver application and submitted a hardship letter of “6 to 8 pages” in addition to 50 attachments, for example, their bills and ways she would be effected if she moved to Mexico. (Personal communication, April 28, 2013). The attachments served as evidence of the hardships that Amy would face if she lived in the U.S. without her husband as well as the hardships she would face if she moved to Mexico. Amy’s hardships were financial, health, as well as psychological. Due to the fact that Amy discussed her hardships during the conversations; this inquiry explores the hardships in more details in the super-ordinate themes section of this inquiry. Also, it seems important to note that the transcribed narratives show that Amy experienced financial and health related hardships at the time her husband moved to Mexico.

Amy then received a referral letter (Personal communication, April, 28, 2013). According to her, being referred means that immigration officials “… were asking for more” hardships; hence, she submitted 100 to 150 additional attachments to show her hardships, for example, selling her husband’s truck, explaining and showing her health issues, and the way of living in Mexico vs. The U.S. Amy stated that the attachments as well as the letter she wrote to explain her attachments were roughly 30 inches thick. Therefore, she placed everything in a box and submitted it. Lastly, Amy’s husband was approved for his visa to immigrate to the U.S. Figure 2 shows Amy’s time line recollection of the procedure. The schematic also shows her flights to Mexico to visit her husband.
Figure 2. Shows a timeline schematic of the researcher’s interpretation of Amy’s experience of the immigration procedure as she petitioned for her husband’s LPR status.

The timeline schematic shows that Amy’s experience of the procedure lasted 1 year 9 months. It also shows that Amy traveled to Mexico on 3 different occasions to visit her husband (Personal communication, April 22, 2013 & Personal communication, April 28, 2013). The timeline schematic indicates that Amy describes her experience through specific dates.

Kate. Kate submitted an I-130 application to petition for her husband (Personal communication, May 3, 2013). According to Kate, she received an approval notification “roughly 3 months after.” Kate submitted the forms as well as the payments electronically via internet. Kate feels that USCIS did “very good with telling” her “what to submit” to them. After she submitted the required forms, Kate received an email that her husband had to go to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico for an interview. She stated that she and her husband flew to Mexico together.

Then, Kate flew back to the U.S as her husband stayed in Mexico to attend his interview
in Ciudad Juarez. Similar to Amy, USCIS denied Kate’s husband a visa. As a result, Kate’s husband also received notification of his visa denial. The notification stated that they “needed to submit the waiver [of inadmissibility].” Kate’s husband then attended the appointment to submit the waiver in Ciudad Juarez. Kate stated that she received a referral notification a few months after. According to her, a referral means that “someone else needs to review [the] case [and] that it was going to be sent to another office. They were asking for [proof of] extra hardships” (Personal communication, May 3, 2013).

Kate then submitted the proof of extra hardships “electronically trying to expedite the process” but did not receive a response as she feels she did not meet the criteria for an expedite[ed review] (Personal communication, May 3, 2013). According to USCIS, the expedition of a case may be granted if the case meets the following criteria:

- Severe financial loss to a company or the individual;

- Extreme emergent situation;

- Humanitarian situation;

- Nonprofit status of requesting organization in furtherance of the cultural and social interests of the United States;

- Department of Defense or National Interest Situation (Note: Request must come from an official United States Government entity and state that delay will be detrimental to our Government);

- USCIS error; and

- Compelling interest of USCIS (U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013a)

She then proceeded to mail the hardships. Kate stated that she followed the instructions of the referral notification. As a result, a few months after Kate submitted the waiver she received
notification of her husband’s immigration case as it was transferred to Nebraska. Lastly, her husband received his visa approval and Kate’s husband entered the U.S. with legal status. Figure 3 shows Kate’s timeline schematic of the procedure she experienced. The timeline shows her flights to Mexico to visit her husband as well as the time her husband entered the U.S with his visa.

Figure 3. A timeline schematic of the researcher’s interpretation of Kate’s immigration procedure as she petitioned for her husband’s LPR status.

The schematic shows that Kate’s petition for her husband lasted 1 year 7 months, 2 months less than Amy’s experience. It also shows that Kate flew in two different occasions from the U.S. to Mexico but her husband traveled in three different occasions from his hometown in Mexico to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Similar to Amy, the time line schematic also shows that Kate describes her experience through dates.

**Eve.** Eve and her husband began the immigration procedure to petition for her husband with lawyer consultations. They consulted with two different lawyers in their neighborhood.
However, Eve and her husband decided to consult with a BIA accredited representative of Catholic Charities after consulting with the lawyers. Eve and her husband decided to receive assistance for the LPR status procedure from Catholic Charities as opposed to a lawyer. According to her, Catholic Charities told them that it would cost them roughly $900 to $1000.

Eve and her husband submitted the I-130 application as well as other forms to Catholic Charities, via fax and mail. The other forms included:

- pictures;
- letters from friends;
- letters from church.

Eve’s husband then received notification to be fingerprinted as well as for him to complete his medical physical exam. According to Eve, this letter was mailed to the wrong address as they had moved but Catholic Charities followed up with them to confirm the appointments. Eve felt relieved that USCIS also sent a copy of the appointment notification to Catholic Charities. Eve and her husband then attended the interview appointment. Her husband received his employment authorization card as well as his LPR status by mail. According to Eve, the process did not take long. Figure 4 shows a schematic of Eve’s procedure experience.
Figure 4. A schematic of the researcher’s interpretation of Eve’s immigration procedure as she petitioned for her husband’s LPR status.

The figure shows Eve’s steps of the petition procedure. Eve’s timeline appears incomplete as the transcribed narratives show that the participant did not account dates during the conversations. It seems that Amy as well as Kate recollected specific months but Eve did not.

The timeline schematics show a way that two participants recollected their experience. To further explore their experience the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach used for this inquiry recommends an analysis of the transcribed narrative to find the super-ordinate themes that appear in the participants’ experience. The following section describes the super-ordinate themes found in Amy, Kate, as well as Eve’s story.

Super-ordinate Themes

An analysis of the transcribed narratives shows the uniqueness of each participant’s experience as seven super-ordinate themes emerged. The themes give support to this inquiry as
they provide a perspective of the LPR procedures that the participants experienced. Table 2 summarizes the seven super-ordinate themes that the researcher interpreted from the narratives.

Table 2

*Summary of Supper-ordinate themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Participants’ Description of their Experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs and Commitments</td>
<td>Religious beliefs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Marriage Commitments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>Fear</td>
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<td>Resources, options, effectiveness</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coping behaviors</td>
<td>LPR petition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological responses</td>
<td>Optimism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Visa stress</td>
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<td>Behavioral responses</td>
<td>Submission of forms</td>
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<td>Financial burden</td>
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<td>Biological responses</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shock</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sleep behavior changes</td>
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</table>

The table summarizes the emotions, the behaviors as well as the responses that emerged in the transcribed narratives as shared experiences of the three participants during the time they petitioned for their husband’s LPR status. The transcribed narratives also show that the participants experienced other responses as well as behaviors not identified on table 2 as they were not emergent for all participants’ experiences.

To understand the interactions between the emotions, behaviors, and responses that the participants encountered during the primary and secondary stages on Table 2, this inquiry shows the findings of the transcribed narratives with the use of Lovallo’s (1997) model of the cognitive appraisal theory as presented in Figure 5.
**Figure 5**: The appraisal model shows the researcher’s interpretation of the emotions, the behaviors as well as the responses that all participants experienced.

The diagram suggests that during the primary stage, the fear of deportation threatened the participants’ marriage commitments. The appraisal processes model supports this conclusion as it suggests that participants view their event as a threat if the event obstructs their life commitments (Lovallo, 1997). Lovallo adds that the emotions felt during the primary stage causes the participants’ psychological as well as the behavioral responses. Therefore, the participants’ fear of deportation motivated the participants to proceed to the secondary stage.

Starting the secondary stage, participants sought guidance regarding the LPR status procedure to petition for their husbands to live in the U.S. as documented foreigners. Based on
their research regarding the procedure, participants moved forward to their coping behaviors to reduce or remove the threat of deportation from their lives. As a result, they proceeded to petition for their undocumented foreign spouses’ LPR status. The decision to petition for their husbands led to the behavioral, the psychological as well as the biological responses of the participants.

The appraisal diagram shows that participants’ behavioral response seems to be the submission of forms. This behavioral response resulted in the approval of the participants’ husband’s LPR status as evident in the transcribed narratives of the participants’ conversations. Optimism as well as visa stress is the psychological response that each participant commonly experienced. The participants engaged in these responses to manage their experience of petitioning for their husband’s LPR status. Lastly, the diagram shows that participants experienced common biological responses including nervousness, shock, as well as sleep behavior changes. As a result, their psychological as well as their biological responses altered their religious commitments as shown on the appraisal diagram and seem evident in the transcribed narratives. The alteration of the religious commitments led to the reoccurrence of the appraisal process for participants to reassess their level of threat value as their goal was to reduce the threat value of events in the environment, to reduce the negative emotions in response to them, and therefore to reduce the inner state associated with stress reactions (Lovallo, 1997, p. 79). For instance, feeling nervous led Amy and Kate to pray more.

The following section details and defines the emotions, responses, and behaviors presented in the appraisal model that the participants experienced during the time they petitioned for their husbands’ LPR status. The section includes:

- marriage commitment;
- religious belief;
• fear;
• guidance;
• petitioning for LPR status;
• submission of forms;
• financial burden;
• optimism;
• visa stress;
• nervous;
• shock; and
• sleep behavior changes.

**Marriage commitments.** In this inquiry, marriage commitments can be defined as the responsibilities to work towards a better future with a spouse. For instance, with the immigration procedure to petition for their husbands’ LPR status, the participants aimed towards a future that will not threaten their marriage as they diminish the fear that their husbands could be deported to Mexico.

Love can be viewed as a marriage commitment in this inquiry as the narratives demonstrate as being one of the reasons the participants started the procedure to petition for their spouse. In the following quote, Eve discussed the procedure to petition for her husband as a love as well as a marriage commitment. She commented,

> The process of immigration is not the purpose. The purpose is our life, our marriage and then the other one just comes together. Perhaps we could have gotten married and just stayed on employment authorization card or permanent visa and that’s it…but I petitioned [for him]… out of love (Personal communication, June 30, 2013).
Kate’s commitment to her marriage seems to stem from the notion that she views her husband as her soul mate. She stated that she would have moved to Mexico, Canada, or Spain to be with him if he had not received his LPR status approval. She explained that she was crying during the conversations as she recollected that at the time her husband lived in Mexico, she wanted to move to Mexico to be with him. She also shared that if she had to experience the LPR status procedure again, that she would move to Mexico with her husband to wait for his LPR status approval.

Amy also showed a strong commitment towards her marriage. In her statement, Amy viewed the visa approval as being better than her law school acceptance letter. She freely stated, I value my marriage. He is my husband too, you know. It was…harsh just not having him here and now that he is back, I just wanna cherish… the fact that he is here with me. And I’m thankful; I’m very thankful… whenever we got that approval. You have no idea. You know, that it’s great, how… it’s amazing, one of the most amazing things that you can have, you know. It’s better than getting accepted into law school (Personal communication, April 23, 2013).

Religious belief. Religious beliefs were defined as the idea of spiritual faith. For instance, Kate recalled that during the time her husband lived in Mexico, she prayed on a daily basis for God to bring her husband home to the U.S. Kate’s religious faith seemed to have been effected during the time she received her husband’s referral notification. As a result, her pleads became more frequent.

Similar to Kate’s religious alterations during the time she received her referral letter, Amy also experienced a change. She stated, “But I started, like, questioning God. Like, why me? Why? Why did this have to happen to us?” (Personal communication, April 23, 2013). Amy
shared that she believes that her religion helped her move forward with the procedure to petition for her husband as she comes from a Catholic background. She commented that she had deviated from her religious practices. However, she started to feel religious as she petitioned for her husband. It can be concluded that Amy’s biological as well as psychological responses to the experience effected Amy’s religious belief found in the primary stage of the appraisal processes model.

The transcribed narratives show that the three participants thanked God during the time they received their husbands’ approvals. Kate also thanked The Virgin Mary at the time she received their notification of their case transfer to Nebraska. She stated, “I opened that letter and it stated that our case was transferred to Nebraska and I thought ‘Oh my God, thank you Lord, thank you Virgensita!’” (Personal communication, May 3, 2013). The term “Virgensita” is Spanish word for Virgin Mary.

Lastly, Eve shared that she attends church to practice her faith. She also shared that she asked church members to write a support letter on their behalf to submit to USCIS as proof that their marriage seemed to be in good faith.

**Fear.** Fear was defined as a negative feeling that causes doubts on future outcomes. For instance, the transcribed narratives clearly demonstrate that participants feared deportation during the time their husbands resided as undocumented foreigners in the U.S but after their husband came home to the U.S. with their LPR approvals, the participants felt at “peace.”

The appraisal processes model as well as the transcribed narratives show that the participants felt their future life was threatened due to the fear that their husbands faced deportation as an undocumented foreigner that resided in the U.S for an extended period of time. Amy stated,
I used to be where you know, ‘Oh my God he’s ganna go to work. What if I don’t see him again? What if he gets stopped and I don’t get to see him again? What I am supposed to do?’ You know (Personal communication, April 28, 2013).

Amy’s self-question illustrates that she lived in fear as well as insecurity. It seems evident in the transcribed narratives as well as the appraisal processes model that the fear of deportation contributed to the reasons the participants began to petition for their husband’s LPR status. It also seems that the fear originated from the stories they heard of other undocumented foreigners’ being deported to their country of origin. Kate stated,

…we were hearing that a lot of people were getting deported. So, we were afraid that he would get deported. So we went ahead and started the process (Personal communication, May 3, 2013).

The transcribed narratives show that Eve experienced fear during the interview with the immigration official but it decreased once the interview finished. However, Amy and Kate’s panic remained consistent throughout the experience as their husband’s cases were referred. During the second conversation, Kate became teary as she explained her feelings about receiving the referral notification. As she spoke about her experience, her eyes wandered around, lacking eye contact. The following quote captures Kate’s experience during the time she received the referral:

I am sorry I am getting teary right now. It’s just thinking back on it. It’s just, I can’t believe I survived that. So, we got the referral letter, I started working on it. I couldn’t think. I didn’t wanna talk to anybody. I, I would sometimes drive to work or drive places and I literally couldn’t remember how I got there. I couldn’t remember a green light, a red light. I couldn’t remember what roads I took. I just. My mind was, it was crazy. I
couldn’t remember things like that. So I thought ‘I need help.’ I was embarrassed to speak to my family about it. So, I went to a psychologist. I told her everything that was happening, everything that was going on. And I told her that I felt lonely. That I needed to talk to her and I started seeing her. She knew I was depressed. She did diagnose me for depression. Um…I don’t remember what kind of depression it was. But I wanna say it was like temporary depression. And so, I started seeing her once a month. And I felt better after seeing her. I cried and cried in her office. I couldn’t even talk when I was there cause I kept crying and crying (Personal communication, May 3, 2013).

Kate also expressed that she felt as if she was “traumatized” from the experience. In this inquiry, trauma is defined as a re-occurring fear experienced during the occurrence. For instance, Kate freely shared that although her husband came home with an approved LPR status, she felt like crying every time her husband left the house to go to work or to spend time with his friends. Kate also shared that she has overcome this fear as time has passed.

It is evident in the transcribed narratives that Amy seems to have experienced more fear than Kate did. Amy experienced panic attacks, separation anxiety, suicidal ideations as well as attempts, a sense of isolation, and mild depression. As she recalled her experience during the conversations, she stated that she felt embarrassed to share that she was suicidal. Amy commented,

So it got to the point where I was like very um…I was suffering from anxiety, I was suffering from panic attacks, and I was suffering from mild depression at the time, so I just found myself like I was crying all the time…So I threw it at the floor and I just started cutting myself. It didn’t hit a vein cause he came in around that time, but that was
kinda also embarrassing cause after that I had to wear a sweater, like a long sleeve so that nobody would ask me, you know. (Personal communication, April 28, 2013).

Amy also felt afraid that her husband could be denied to enter the U.S. as a documented foreigner due to their age. She felt that immigration would view their marriage as a “fake marriage” as it seemed they were young at the time she petitioned for his LPR status.

Amy, Kate, and Eve’s husbands have obtained their LPR status. Therefore they are not afraid of deportation anymore. Amy stated,

I’m not in fear like I used to be…Like now, I go to work, he goes to work, I come back home and I’m expecting him you know, unless something else happens but I know that um…I’ll get to see him, you know. Once, you have established a permanent resident or legal status in the United States, you have more potential for everything. You’re able to have a driver’s license, you’re able to have a more secure job, you’re able to live in peace without having to worry about being deported. The purpose was to avoid the repercussions of being illegal and also looking at the positive side also which are the benefits, you know, just having a better future. Feeling more at peace and a better future (Personal communication, April 28, 2013).

**Guidance.** The transcribed narratives show that participants sought guidance in various methods. For instance, Kate researched the internet to gain knowledge of the immigration procedure. She also used the telephone numbers provided to her in notifications to ask questions to USCIS as well as to The National Visa Center also known as NVC.

Amy sought advice from her cousin because he had knowledge of the required procedure. She also learned about the procedure to petition for her husband’s LPR status from her sister.
Eve was the only participant who sought guidance from lawyers as well as from Catholic Charities. Her reason to seek advice from professionals stems from the stories she heard of people’s experience with the different procedures.

Guidance fits under the secondary stage of the appraisal processes as it is a form of resource that participants used to gain knowledge of the immigration procedures. Lastly, guidance proved to be an effective option for participants as the advice influenced their decisions on ways to proceed with the immigration procedure. For instance, Kate stated that letters, emails, as well as the telephone services assisted her with the submission of forms.

**LPR petition.** According to the appraisal processes model, a result of the guidance that participants sought led to the start of the participants’ petition procedure of their husbands’ LPR status. This behavior seems to be the coping behavior exemplified in the appraisal processes model by the participants as an effort to cope with the fear of the possibility that their husbands faced deportation on a daily basis as undocumented foreigners.

**Submission of forms.** Submission of forms can be placed under the behavioral responses in the appraisal processes model. As a result, submission of appropriate forms to USCIS as well as to NVC influenced the LPR approvals. Although USCIS as well as NVC requires forms, participants shared that they had to translate certain additional attachments as well as collect evidence to attach to their hardship letters.

**Financial burden.** Financial burden was defined as money troubles. According to the narratives, participants paid for required applications submitted to USCIS as well as to NVC. Amy and Kate experienced flight expenses as well as financial hardships. Amy stated:
that semester I ended up dropping one class which was, I believe it was like a 5 credit
class. So I had to pay because I had a scholarship. I had to repay that with my own money
(personal communication, April 22, 2013).

She further commented:

I was making all the payment on the insurance, and so at that point, he said the best thing
to do right now because it was gonna take another year to just go ahead and sell his truck.
So I had to. I had no option basically you know (personal communication, April 22,
2013).

Kate added that there were times that she could not pay her utility bills. Eve and her husband
could not afford a lawyer. However, they were able to afford assistance from Catholic Charities.

**Optimism.** Optimism was defined as the experience of positive thoughts. According to
the transcribed narratives, participants seemed optimistic in various occasions. For instance,
Amy commented that the LPR status procedure outcome for her husband has changed their life
positively. She stated:

Our life has changed a lot between us. It’s almost going to be a year ago that he got back.
So, I’m very excited about that. Um…I’m more positive that’s for sure. You know, I’m
more positive, I have um… a better feeling about our future…like we just bought a car
not too long ago, so now we are thinking about a future. We are thinking about doing
things together (Personal communication, April 23, 2013).

Kate felt positive about the hardship letter she submitted as she felt she had explained her
hardships appropriately. She did not expect her husband’s case to be referred. She stated,

I felt so confident that my husband would come home in October. I mean, I researched
and calculated dates based on other people’s stories…before my husband left I told him
‘Baby, you will be back soon. Think of this as a vacation.’ He, he didn’t believe me (personal communication, May 3, 2013).

Eve added that she felt confident that her husband would receive his LPR status as she consulted with Catholic Charities. Eve explained that it was a tough decision but her coworker explained that Catholic Charities would do a good job as they would help her submit everything to USCIS. Eve shared that she listened to her coworker.

The transcribed narratives show that participants remained optimistic at the time of the conversations as they feel that they learned from the procedure to petition for their husbands. Amy commented, I feel like it was a learning experience, you know…. It might not be something that people would normally want to go towards because it’s a very, very challenging experience. It’s very rough to go through the situation. You’re being separated from this person, you know… It’s a learning experience, it’s something that… you know, you can’t go to school and just sit there and listen to lectures… it’s not the same thing when you hear someone talk about it and you feel pity for them or you like… you’re amazed… it’s not the same. You’re not gonna know even if someone tells their story, and you kinda put yourself in their shoes for that moment, but if you haven’t experienced it you are not gonna know, you are not gonna know how it feels like. Um… it’s just different, so yeah for me it was a learning experience (personal communication, April 28, 2013).

Kate also views the procedure as a learning experience. She commented, One of the positives about this experience is that I have learned to have more patience, to read forms carefully and also I thought ‘If I did this on my own without a lawyer, then I can tackle anything’ and I feel it has made me smarter specially at work. I feel like I am
smart, that I can do anything. So I read forms and I follow everything. I couldn’t believe it. It has made me appreciate life and it has made me a better person. I feel I am more efficient. I am able to do things more carefully (Personal communication, May 3, 2013).

Eve feels that because of her experience, she is able to understand other spouses that petition for an LPR status. She explained that she understands the reasons that others would be nervous with the procedure as she learned that immigration laws change.

**Visa stress.** Elo, Mehta, & Haung (2011) define visa stress as “the set of stresses related to obtaining a legal permanent residence” (p. 6). Their definition informs this inquiry as participants directly stated that they felt stressed and a review of the transcribed narratives revealed that participants described their stress symptoms as psychological stress responses. Lovallo (1997) describes psychological stress responses as “stress responses based on perceptions of threat…because their value depends largely on our interpretation of the event and its meaning for our own lives” (p. 79).

All participants experienced psychological stress responses. Amy shared that her sleeping behavior changed as she slept less. She was unable to concentrate at work and at school. Amy also experienced panic attacks. Eve stated that she did not sleep the night before the interview. She forgot her driver’s license the day of her and her husband’s interview with the USCIS officer. Kate found herself awake in numerous occasions. She felt distracted by the required paperwork as she felt they had to be accurate and error-free. She explained that if she had to experience the procedure again, that she would hire a lawyer to decrease the stress she experienced at the time she submitted and gathered all required forms.

**Nervous.** Nervous was defined as the experience of an edgy feeling. For instance, Eve stated that she felt nervous during the interview with the immigration officer. Therefore, she
explained to the immigration officer that her husband drove due to the fact that she felt nervous. Kate stated that she felt a jittery feeling during the time she received notification of her husband’s approval. She stated that she experienced shaky hands as well as kept a smile on her face. Amy, also felt nervous at the time she visited her husband as they met in Ciudad Juarez as Amy felt that it was dangerous for her to be there.

**Shock.** In this inquiry, shock can be defined as the element of surprise. For instance, Eve stated that she felt shocked during the time the lawyers explained to her the cost of their services with the LPR procedure. She felt she did not have the money to pay them. Therefore, she chose Catholic Charities as they charged less than the lawyers.

Kate felt surprised at the time she received the referral notification as she had felt confident that her husband’s case would be approved the first time they submitted the hardship letter. She shared that she felt she had proved to USCIS the hardships she would face if she resided in the U.S. without her husband as well as the ones she would face if she moved to Mexico with him.

Amy also felt surprised at the time that she learned that her husband’s case was approved. She commented,

I remember that, when I heard that he was approved, I was in my research methods for psychology which was like a five credit course, one of the last classes I needed to graduate and we were, you know, we were in groups. We were meeting outside of class before class was starting. I think, I am not sure if it was like a Monday or Tuesday morning and um, I was just sitting on the second or third floor, third floor to be exact…I remember I got the text, and I was in shock. You know, how when you have to see it for
your own eyes. I remember, I went outside and I called him. I was crying and he was very exciting (Personal communication, April 28, 2013).

The state of shock can be categorized under the biological response category in the appraisal processes method as it can be considered an autonomic behavior.

**Sleep behavior changes.** In this inquiry, sleep can be categorized under the biological responses in the appraisal processes model as participants shared that their sleeping behaviors seemed affected at the time they experienced the LPR status procedure. Amy commented “So I just started sleeping more exercising less” (personal communication, April 22, 2013). In contrast, Kate and Eve slept less. Kate commented that she faced sleepless nights especially during the weekends. She stated that she slept with the lights on as she watched TV shows in bed. Eve shared that she did not sleep the night prior to their interview. She stated that she experienced a feeling that “is just so crazy that doesn’t let you sleep” (personal communication, June 30, 2013).

The common experiences shared among the three participants’ story humanizes the LPR status procedure as it focuses on the behaviors, emotions, as well as the responses that the participants experienced. The exploration of the experience serves as a common perspective of the event.

In addition to the super-ordinate themes found among the transcribed narratives, the appraisal concept clarifies that the same event can cause different behaviors, emotions, as well as responses. The following section investigates this further.

**Experience the Same Event but Show Different Reactions**

The super-ordinate themes provide an experience perspective of U.S. citizens as they petitioned for their husbands’ LPR status. However, the transcribed narratives show that participants also experienced other behaviors, emotions, as well as responses that seem valuable
to explore further in this inquiry. For instance, Amy and Kate seem to have experienced the same procedure as their husbands were required to continue their LPR procedure through the U.S. consulate in Ciudad Juarez. However, the transcribed narratives show that they exemplified different reactions as well as behaviors in response to this event. For instance, Amy experienced unhealthy eating habits, she stopped exercising, and used cutting as a coping behavior. In contrast, Kate ate healthier as well as exercised more. During the conversations, Kate did not mention cutting as a coping behavior. It seems that Amy and Kate’s coping behaviors are opposites as Amy seems to use coping behaviors that can lead to self-harm as well as develop unhealthy habits nevertheless Kate’s coping behaviors seem healthy and safe.

Amy experienced a suicide attempt and stopped working but Kate worked more. The transcribed narratives also show that Kate did not experience suicidal ideation. The question remains, how can two people respond differently to the same occurrence? Some would argue that their environment might cause the different reactions. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) would argue that the understanding of the different reactions can be found through the cognitive appraisal model as it can provide a view of the “subtle, complex, and abstract” (p.23) of the affects during the situation. Lovallo (1997) adds that the difference relies in the primary stage of the appraisal model as people decide the level of harm of the event using their beliefs and commitments. The appraisal processes model of Amy as well as Kate’s would provide a view of their experience to understand the different reactions. Figure 6 depicts Amy’s appraisal processes and figure 7 shows Kate’s appraisal processes.
Figure 6. A model of the researcher’s interpretation of the appraisal processes that Amy experienced.

The model depicts Amy’s emotions, behaviors, as well as responses during the time she petitioned for her husband’s LPR status. Amy’s experience includes;

- Primary: Beliefs & Commitments: Religion (Catholic), marriage commitment, and family;
- threat: Fear of deportation and uncertainty of future;
- challenge: Separation;
- secondary: Guidance and visit a psychologist;
- Coping behaviors: LPR petition
- behavioral responses: Submission of forms, financial burden, unhealthy habits, fly to Mexico, and loss of social life;
• psychological responses: Optimism, visa stress, suicidal thoughts, panic attacks, and loss of motivation; and

• biological responses: Nervous, shock, sleep behavior changes, and asthma attacks.

Amy’s appraisal process model shows that Amy viewed her situation as a threat as well as a challenge in her life as her family and her marriage commitments seemed to be threatened due to the possibility of deportation as well as separation. Amy’s level of threat seemed severe as Lovallo (1997) suggests that a person categorizes the level of threat using their beliefs and commitments. For Amy, the physical separation from her husband meant family separation.

Amy’s appraisal process shows that her view of the severe threat to her situation caused her psychological responses of suicidal ideation. For instance, it can be argued that Amy’s separation from her husband impaired her ability to foresee her future goal of a family (Lennings, 1994). She experienced one of the warning signs of suicide as she lacked sense of purpose in her life (Statewide office of suicide prevention and suicide prevention council, brochure, 2011). Amy commented,

I just found myself like I was crying all the time. And Instead of progressing I was like you know going back and just falling into this you know into this whole like black hole where I couldn’t see beyond that day, I couldn’t see beyond what was going on. I wish I could off you know at that moment um…just looked into a positive future, but at that moment just not knowing anything not knowing what was ganna to happen. And everything that was just going on and everything happening with us, it was hard for me to even concentrate and see that perhaps you know a couple of more days in a couple of more weeks everything would be back to normal and we would have a response (Personal communication, April 28, 2013).
Lastly, Amy’s view of threat encompassed her view of challenge as her behaviors and responses can be categorized as “negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and anger” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.33).

Kate’s appraisal process shows that her behaviors and responses differentiate from Amy’s appraisal processes.

Kate experienced the following:

- Primary: Beliefs & commitments: Religion (Catholic) and marriage commitment;
- threat: Fear;
- challenge: Separation;
- secondary: guidance and visit a psychologist;

*Figure 7:* A model of the researcher’s interpretation of the appraisal processes that Kate experienced.
• coping behaviors: LPR petition;
• behavioral responses: Submission of forms, financial burden, healthy habits, and fly to Mexico.
• psychological responses: Optimism, visa stress, motivated, and trauma; and
• biological responses: nervous, shock, sleep behavior changes, and anger.

Although Kate’s appraisal model shows that she viewed her experience as a threat and challenge, it seems that her behaviors derive from her view as a challenge. Support for this notion stems from Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) idea that a challenge is described as “pleasurable emotions such as eagerness, excitement, and exhilaration” (p. 33). Kate’s level of threat seems less severe than Amy’s as she exercised more, ate healthier, and worked more. She stated that she needed extra money and that work kept her busy. Kate also stated that she spoke to her husband daily.

Conclusion

Chapter four of this inquiry provided an overview of the findings of the transcribed narratives of the conversations held with the participants. It also provided conclusions that the researcher formed using the appraisal processes model as well as the transcribed narratives. The conclusions seem supported by the appraisal theory, the transcribed narratives, as well as current literature on the immigration procedures. The findings serve as evidence that the immigration procedure to petition for an undocumented foreign spouse should be improved in an effort to decrease these emotions as participants exemplified psychological, behavioral, and biological responses during their experience. Given the small sample size of this study conclusions cannot be made that apply beyond the three participants.
Chapter V: Discussion of the Research Findings

Introduction

This chapter discusses the significance of the researcher’s interpretation of the findings of the inquiry: How do U.S. citizens who have petitioned for their undocumented foreign spouse’s LPR statuses describe their experience? The purpose for this inquiry focused on the experience of U.S. citizens as captured through Lovallo’s (1997) interpretation of the appraisal processes lens as well as the interpretative phenomenological analysis research approach.

The appraisal processes’ focus consists of a view of a person’s “values, commitments, styles of perceiving and thinking” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 24) as it relates to their environment. This investigation attempted to capture the view of three U.S citizens that petitioned for their husband’s legal permanent resident status also known as an LPR. Using Lovallo’s (1997) interpretation of the appraisal process view, the findings showed that participants described their experience as a threat. However, the severity of threat varied based on the emotions, behaviors, and responses of each participant as captured in the transcribed narratives and displayed in figures 5, 6, and 7.

The interpretative phenomenological analysis research approach (IPA) focuses on each participant’s case as the approach attempts to gather as much details as possible from the occurrence (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Semi-structured interview questions assisted with the conversations held with each participant in an attempt to gather as much details as possible from the experience of the time that the U.S. citizen petitioned for her husband to re-enter the U.S. as a documented foreigner.

This chapter first discusses the significance of the appraisal processes of the participants focusing on the emotions, behaviors, and responses within the seven super-ordinate themes. It
then discusses methods that the findings of the conversations supported the literature on immigration and the research on the effects the procedure has had on its constituents. A summary of the significance to scholars and practitioners as well as implications for future research are also discussed in this chapter.

**Participant’s Appraisal Processes**

The appraisal process model used for this inquiry proved instrumental as it showed the ways participants described their experience. It provided an overview of the processes that participants experienced at the time they petitioned for their foreign spouses’ LPR status. The model enlightened the psychological, behavioral, as well as the biological experiences of the participants. It also provided an overview of the beliefs and commitments that participants had during the primary stage of the appraisal process.

The appraisal lens used to analyze the findings for this inquiry also gave significance to the interpretations of the findings. The emotions, behaviors, and responses captured in the findings enlighten activists of policy change and U.S. citizens that may chose to petition for their undocumented foreign spouse.

**Emotions, behaviors, and responses.** This inquiry found that participants described their occurrence as an emotional, behavioral, and responding experience. It found that participants commonly experienced two emotions, three behaviors, and five responses. Table 3 summarizes these findings.
Table 3

Summary of Emotions, Behaviors, and Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotions</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>Submission of forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>LPR petition</td>
<td>Financial burden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visa stress</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shock</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sleep behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>changes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The table summarizes the emotions, behaviors, and responses that emerged in the transcribed narratives. These findings serve as evidence of the humanization of the immigration procedure to petition for a spouses’ LPR status as it shows that the procedure to petition causes emotions, behaviors, and responses to the U.S. citizen. The questions remain, how can policy makers address these emotions, behaviors, and responses? The literature showed policy changes over time due to the disparity of the law to women (Orloff & Kaguyutan, 2002). How can policy advocates focus on the U.S. citizens’ experience of the procedure to reduce or eliminate these emotions, behaviors, and responses? The I-601a application is a provisional waiver that has been established for U.S. citizens to submit their waiver in the U.S. in an effort to reduce the time it takes USCIS to make their decision but will this change reduce the emotions, behaviors, and responses as exhibited by the three participants of this inquiry?
These findings were classified under the super ordinate themes as described within the appraisal processes including beliefs and commitments; resources, options, and effectiveness; coping behaviors; psychological behaviors; behavioral responses; and biological responses. The emotions, behaviors, and responses presented in the table are discussed below.

**Fear.** Lovallo (1997) suggests that the severity of threat depends of the person’s beliefs and commitments. Amy viewed her threat as more severe than Kate and Eve based on her negative behaviors, emotions, and responses. However, participants described fear as the common negative emotion that they experienced as they feared the possibility of their husbands’ deportation as a threat to their lives. This showed consistent with the cognitive appraisal view as threat includes emotions such as anxiety and fear (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Amy and Kate’s fear continued throughout their experience as their husbands’ cases were referred. Their fear increased as their husbands also had to travel to Mexico causing their physical separation during the procedure.

Although participants commonly described their experience as fearful, two participants also described it as challenging. The cognitive appraisal view clearly showed that the two concepts needed separate treatment as they are as equally important (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The challenge and fear contributed to a reason for Amy and Kate’s same occurrence yet different response. This inquiry also viewed fear from the researcher as well as the participants’ perspective to meet this inquiry’s goal to understand the participants’ experiences.

**Optimism.** The three participants described optimism as an emotion that they experienced during the time they petitioned for their husbands. On certain occasions, participants felt confident, positive, and viewed their experience of the procedure from a learner’s perspective. Kate learned patience. Eve understands other petitioners’ feelings of nervousness and learned
that immigration policies change over time. Amy can place herself in another U.S. citizen’s shoes that experienced the procedure.

Optimism represents a positive effect of the immigration procedure that remained unidentified in the literature presented in this research. How can the findings of this positive effect be explained? It could be argued that the appraisal processes lens provides a view of the participants’ full experience including the times they reassessed their level of threat. Lovallo, (1997) would argue that optimism could have occurred during the reoccurrence of the appraisal processes’ of the participants. This notion is particularly interesting as participants could have been experiencing a reoccurrence of the appraisal processes at the time they shared that their lives have changed positively after their husbands received their LPR status. Participants could have been reassessing their situation during their conversations as “joy, happiness, exhilaration, or peacefulness” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 39) thus ending their appraisal processes with optimism.

**Guidance.** Participants sought guidance as a behavioral response prior to starting their petitions. Eve spoke with immigration attorneys, Kate researched via internet and drove to a USCIS office, and Amy held conversations with family members.

Although participants focused on seeking guidance for the immigration procedure, it can be argued that due to the emotions, behaviors, and responses that this inquiry found, it could prove essential for U.S. citizens thinking of petitioning for their spouse to also seek guidance to focus on their emotions. Lovallo (1997) would argue that “emotion-focused strategies call for psychological changes designed primarily to limit the degree of emotional disruption caused by the event” (p. 79). The questions remain, should policy changes on the immigration procedure to
petition for an LPR status focus on emotion-focused strategies to assist U.S. citizens to cope with the experience? Or is it the U.S. citizens’ responsibility to seek guidance for their emotions?

**LPR petition.** Participants described their LPR petition as a coping behavior to remove the fear of deportation in their lives as they explained it as one of the reasons to petition. Although figure 5 presented the LPR procedure as the environmental event as well as the coping behavior, it proved essential to label them as such due to the fact that participants stated that they loved their husbands, they feared deportation, and they searched for guidance to make an informed decision to cope with their fear.

It can be argued that the participants described their experience as problem-focused as their “strategies attack[ed] the problem itself, with behaviors to gain information, to alter the event, and to alter beliefs and commitments” (Lovallo, 1997, p. 78-79). The LPR petition served as their main strategy to decrease their threat of deportation of their husbands. For this reason, the LPR petition is classified under the coping behavior within the appraisal processes model in figure 5.

**Visa stress.** The literature on immigration effects showed that visa stress started at the time of the immigration procedure and ended at the time the foreigner received his or her visa. The findings of this inquiry also showed similar results. The three participants experienced stress with the applications associated with the immigration procedure. The literature also showed that stress was also experienced with the conditional LPR; however, participants of this inquiry did not share stress associated with the conditional LPR during their conversations.

The participants’ visa stress found in this inquiry unfolded as psychological stress responses including distractions, panic attacks, and sleeping behavior changes. It can be argued that the three participants’ stress differentiated and that participants varied on their coping
strategies as seen with Amy and Kate’s appraisal processes. This notion unfolds as Lovallo (1997) explains that psychological stressors:

- Achieve their threat value not through their physical ability to do harm but because of their appraised threat value.
- Are not equally stressful to all persons.
- Persons will vary in their ability to cope with perceived stressors.
- The physiological systems we use to respond to psychological stressors are the same ones that we use to react to physical threats to homeostasis. (p. 80)

**Submission of forms.** Participants showed to have submitted required forms including additional forms such as the waiver of inadmissibility also referred to as form I-601. The applications that the three participants submitted show consistency with the procedure explained in the literature for this inquiry. It is important to note that forms can change. Therefore, it is essential that constituents refer to USCIS for required forms. One example of change is the I-601a form, also known as a provisional waiver. This is a new form designed for U.S. citizens to submit their waiver in the U.S. prior to their foreign spouse’s departure to their country of birth.

**Financial burden.** The literature on the effects of immigration showed that constituents experienced financial burden and this inquiry showed similar results. Amy and Kate paid the finances associated with the applications in addition to their flight expenses. Amy sold her husband’s truck as she could not afford it on a single salary. Kate was unable to pay her electric bills on several occasions.

**Nervous.** The three participants experienced different forms of nervousness described as an edgy feeling, jittery, hand shakiness, and constant smiling. However, this response is not mentioned in the literature on immigration as an effect. It can be argued that this is a biological
response unfolded in the appraisal processes of each participants as it varies based on the participants’ abilities to cope with their stressors. (Lovallo, 1997).

**Shock.** In this inquiry participants described shock as an element of either a negative or positive surprise. Eve felt surprised on the cost of hiring a lawyer. Kate felt surprised at the time she received notification of her husband’s case referral. Amy felt surprised that her husband’s LPR status was approved. This behavior was not presented in the literature but it can be argued that it surfaced in this inquiry similar to optimism as a behavior brought about at time of the reassessment of the appraisal processes of the immigration procedure (Lovallo, 1997). For instance, Eve reassessed her finances for the LPR procedure. Kate reassessed her proof of hardships, and Amy reassessed her view that she was too young to petition for her husband. Also, Lovallo (1997) would argue that shock is a biological response to a change for the participants.

**Sleep behavior changes.** Another behavior not exemplified in the literature on immigration effects but surfaced in this inquiry is sleep behavior changes. Participants shared that their sleeping patterns were altered at the time that they petitioned for their foreign spouse. Amy described it as sleeping more as opposed to Kate and Eve who slept less. Similar to shock, sleep behavior changes can be seen as a biological response to a change (Lovallo, 1997).

The following section further discusses the findings as they relate to the literature.

**Immigration Literature Informs the Findings**

In this inquiry, the literature review on immigration focused on:

- the policy changes from the 1900’s to the 2000’s;
- the different immigration procedures based on the foreign spouse’s previous entrance to the U.S; and
the effects of the immigration procedures such as visa stress, migration stress, depression, financial burdens, as well as the procedure effects on children.

Although the literature showed that the effects on children seem important, this inquiry did not focus on children as participants did not discuss their children during the conversations. However, the findings of this inquiry informed the literature in various ways.

**Policy.** The literature review on policy showed that policy changes have impacted constituents in various ways. For instance, the Expatriation Act of 1907 allowed U.S. citizen males to petition for their foreign wives. However, the act did not allow females to petition for their foreign husbands. Then, the Cable Act of 1922 allowed U.S. citizen females to petition for their foreign spouse but they could not reside outside the U.S. for more than 2 years as it was considered that they had given up their U.S. citizenship status. Lastly, the Immigration and Nationality Act, the act at the time of this inquiry, allows U.S. citizen males, females, as well as LPR status holders to petition for their foreign spouse. Although the act change focused on family unification, the findings of this inquiry shows that it continues to psychologically, behaviorally, and biologically impact U.S. citizens.

The negative psychological, behavioral, and the biological impact revealed in the findings of this inquiry demonstrate the need to change the current Immigration and Nationality Act in an effort to reduce the negative emotions of the U.S. citizens that petition for an undocumented foreign spouse. Currently the act reunites families (Wasem, 2010) but it does not focus on the U.S. citizen’s emotions as shown in the findings of this inquiry.

Although the findings of this inquiry show the need to add a U.S. citizen focus on the Immigration and Nationality Act, the literature review shows an ongoing act change as a gradual process. For instance, The Cable Act change to grant immigration benefits to men and women
passed in 1952 (Cott, 1998), 30 years after the establishment of the original act. Therefore, this inquiry informs advocates of policy change to call for a policy focus on the suffering of U.S. citizens involved in mixed-status marriages.

**Immigration procedures.** The literature on immigration for this inquiry also focused on the three methods that U.S. citizens can experience to petition for their foreign spouse’s LPR status. The literature shows that the procedure to petition for a foreign spouse varies based on the foreign spouse’s status. For instance, the immigration procedure to petition for a foreign spouse present in the U.S. as undocumented differentiates from that of a foreign spouse that has entered the U.S. as documented but has overstayed his or her visa. The findings of this inquiry confirm this difference as Eve’s husband’s case showed that their procedure seemed simple compared to Kate and Amy’s case. The transcribed narratives showed that Eve’s husband became undocumented as he overstayed his visa. Hence, her husband qualified to complete his LPR procedure in the U.S. as he entered the U.S. as documented. In contrast, Kate and Amy’s husbands’ procedure requirement included their interviews at the U.S consulate in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Figure 8 illustrates the variations of the procedures that this inquiry found through the transcribed narratives of the conversations with Amy, Kate, and Eve.
Amy and Kate's husband entered the U.S. as undocumented foreigners

Amy, Kate, and Eve submitted an I-130 application

Amy and Kate submitted required forms to NVC

Eve submitted required forms to USCIS in the U.S.

Amy and Kate's husbands attended their interviews in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

Eve and her husband attended their interview in the U.S.

Amy and Kate submitted the waiver as their husbands’ visas were denied

Eve’s husband received his LPR status

Amy and Kate's husbands entered the U.S. as documented foreigners as their waivers were approved

Amy and Kate's husbands received their LPR status.
Figure 8: Compares the LPR procedure of Amy, Kate, and Eve. The method that their husbands entered the U.S. differed, therefore, their immigration procedure also differed.

The figure represents the different procedures that the findings of this inquiry show that participants experienced. It also informs mixed-status couples that might want to start the procedure, on the experience that the U.S. citizen spouse encountered during the immigration procedure. Lastly, the figure confirms two of the immigration procedures exemplified in the literature review of this inquiry that included the methods to petition for a foreigner that entered the U.S. as undocumented as well as a foreigner that entered documented but became undocumented after overstaying his visa.

**Immigration procedure effects.** The literature on the effects of the procedure on its constituents show that foreigners experience visa stress, migration stress, depression, as well as financial burdens. However, this inquiry found that the transcribed narratives as well as the appraisal processes models illustrate these effects on the U.S. citizen spouse as well. The findings show that Amy, Kate, and Eve commonly experienced financial burdens as well as visa stress. The findings also show that Amy and Kate experienced depression. However, Eve did not experience depression.

In addition to the effects found in the literature on immigration, the findings of this inquiry show that participants also commonly experienced optimism, nervous, shock, as well as sleep behavior changes. The findings also show that Amy and Kate experienced other emotions, behaviors, as well as responses that Eve did not experience. Hence, the findings of this inquiry contribute new information to the current literature on immigration.
Significance of Findings to Scholars and Practitioners

This inquiry showed significant findings that may interest immigration attorneys, policy makers and advocates, psychologists, and educators. The significance is discussed below.

Immigration attorneys. The findings of this inquiry inform immigration attorneys of the immigration procedure to petition for a spouse’s LPR at the time of this inquiry. It also informs them of the new I-106a application. Immigration attorneys may use this inquiry to understand their client’s emotions, behaviors, and responses in an effort to refer their clients to appropriate resources as this inquiry shed light on Amy’s negative responses. Attorneys may also use this information to work together with psychologists, educators, policy makers, as well as policy change advocates to focus on the U.S. citizen as he or she experiences the LPR status petition.

Policy makers and advocates. This inquiry informs policy makers and advocates on the need to focus on the emotions, behaviors, and responses that the three participants experienced at the time that they petitioned for their undocumented foreign spouses. The literature on policy change showed that the change could be gradually and possible if advocated for it.

Psychologists. The appraisal processes view of this inquiry assists psychologists to assess their clients that might experience the immigration procedure to petition for an LPR status in an effort for their clients to understand their experiences. Clients may view, understand, and analyze their experience in an effort to reassess their experience.

Educators. Educators may use the findings of this inquiry as a method to understand their students that might experience the immigration procedure. Amy was in college at the time she petitioned for her spouse. She dropped a class due to her inability to concentrate. With this information, college professors would be able to understand their students’ reasons for dropping their class.
It is essential to note that although children were not focused on this inquiry, that educators may also strive to understand children of mixed-status families as their parents might be undergoing to procedure. They may also try to find resources in the community that may help children understand why their undocumented foreign parent has moved to another country. This is seen in the literature that focuses on the effects immigrations on children.

**Implications for Future Research**

**Recommendations.** Recommendations stemming from this inquiry are important as it can decrease the emotions caused from the petition procedures of an LPR status. It is recommended for a focus from policy makers and advocates on U.S. citizens’ experiences such as Amy and Kate’s to advocate for a change on the current Immigration and Nationality Act. The findings showed that negative emotions, behaviors, and responses could be psychologically harmful in mixed-status marriages.

It is also recommended for U.S. citizens of mixed-status marriages to seek emotional guidance prior to and during the petition as the three participants of this inquiry described their experience as threatening. For instance, community agencies such as DISC Village Inc., a non-profit organization in Tallahassee, Florida may assist individuals with coping mechanisms in an effort to reduce stress through the agency’s prevention programs. Catholic Charities of Northwest Florida also provides counseling to individuals “who suffer from emotional distress” (Catholic Charities of Northwest Florida, 2013, para. 5). It is recommended for individuals to research agencies available in their community that may assist them as well as seek psychologists, counselors, or other professionals.

**Suggestions.** Suggestions for future research stem from the many questions left unanswered in this inquiry. During the time that this inquiry took place changes were made to
the provisional waiver, I-601 form. Hence this inquiry was limited to this focus. A suggestion for future research could be to focus on the experience of U.S. citizens with the I-601a procedure. This could shed light on whether the change to the procedure decreased the emotions, behaviors, and responses of U.S. citizens that submit the I-601 compared to the participants of this inquiry.

Another suggestion is to explore children’s experience of mixed-status families where their undocumented foreign parent departs to their country of nationality. It would also be interesting to compare the experience of U.S. citizens married to Mexican foreign spouses compared to those married to spouses of another nationality.

It is also suggested to investigate the experience of individuals who seek support during the time they petition for their spouse’s LPR status in an effort to capture the ways in which they describe their experience and whether the assistance helped them cope with their stress.

**Conclusion**

This inquiry met its objectives as it showed the methods in which U.S. citizens who experienced the procedure to petition for their husbands’ LPR statuses describe their experience. The appraisal processes view as well as the use of the IPA research method showed an inclusive view of the experience. The appraisal processes models included in the findings of this inquiry showed the interactions of the appraisal processes of U.S. citizens at the time that they petitioned for their undocumented foreign spouses. The view informed the need for a policy change that focuses on U.S. citizen’s negative experience. For instance, Figures 6 and 7 show that the individual appraisal processes for Amy and Kate included negative experiences. Figure 6 showed that Amy viewed her experience as a threat that led to her to experience negative responses. Hence, she felt suicidal. Kate viewed her experience as a challenge that led her to experience more positive responses than negative. This shows Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) concept of the
difference between a threat and a challenge in their theory. Therefore, a view of the immigration procedure experience using the appraisal procedure model also confirms the need of a policy change that would assist U.S. citizens such as Amy to view the procedure as a challenge as opposed to a threat.

A view of the experience using the appraisal processes lens informs U.S. citizens that have married an undocumented foreigner as it provides an overview of the experience that participants from this inquiry encountered. As a result, the findings may assist U.S. citizens to make the inform-decision whether or not they seem prepared to petition for their spouse.
Appendix

Open-Ended Interview Questions of U.S. Citizens who
Petitioned for their Spouses LPR Statuses

Interview One:

1. How did you feel after this journey was over and your husband crossed over to the US legally?

2. Please, could you tell me what you did during the process? What actions you took and how you felt.

3. In what way did the experience affect you?

4. Please tell me how you overcame this experience? What did you do to improve your situation? What, do you think you could have done to prevent this experience?

5. What do you think was the purpose or reason of having to experience the immigration process in your life? How do you think your life would be without this experience? How is your life different now because of this experience?

“Going deeper” (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2008)

1. “Why?” (Smith, Flowers, Larkin)

2. “How?” (Smith, Flowers, Larkin)

3. “Can you tell me more about that?” (Smith, Flowers, Larkin)

4. “Tell me what you are thinking?” (Smith, Flowers, Larkin)

5. “How did you feel?” (Smith, Flowers, Larkin)

Interview Two:

Possible follow up interview questions:

1. In your last interview, you stated…please tell me a little more about that.
2. Tell me a little more about the process and the actions you took. Last time you stated…what happened after that?
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