Shared immigration process, different perspectives: The impact of immigration-related gaps on couple relationships

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Improving couples' immigration experience requires characterizing aspects of the immigration process that affect couple relationships. Past research has set forth that post-immigration gaps between partners (discrepancies in their respective cultural adaptation) represent a key aspect. Accordingly, the present research investigated what kind of post-immigration gaps impact migrants' couple relationship following immigration and how they do so. We used a qualitative dyadic research design, including in-depth open-ended interviews with each partner separately. This design allowed us to understand the experience of migrant couples at the dyadic level. The most notable challenges for couples were related to gaps in employment, finances, legal status, and satisfaction. Gaps led to conflicts in four situations: when one partner felt a lack of support from, or quality time with the other partner; when one partner experienced economic pressure because of his–her gender role values; when one partner had sole responsibility for his–her family stability and legal status in the host country; and when partners did not manage to make joint decisions when facing disagreement.

Keywords: acculturation gap, immigration, couple relationship, intracouple conflicts

Introduction

Lisa and Michael were born in France. They met when they were 16 years old and fell in love soon after. After their studies, they started dreaming of a better quality of life and a better future for each other, their couple, and future family. They decided to start a new life in Canada and initiated legal immigration procedures. They are now living in Canada and facing challenges that strain their well-being and relationship. This scenario is by no means unique: of the roughly 200,000 people who settle in Canada each year, more than 50 per cent come with their partner or family (Bonikowska and Hou 2017). Yet, most psychological research on immigration focuses on individual migrants without considering the close and intimate social relationships within which immigration and cultural adaptation often occur. As a result, we know fairly little about how couple dynamics play out in such important life changes (Hyman, Guruge and Mason 2008). To help fill this gap, we explore some implications of immigration on couples by documenting how discrepancies between partners' respective immigration experiences impact their couple relationship.

Immigration and couple relationships

Some studies have shown that immigration can have positive consequences for couple relationships. Couples sometimes experience increases in intimacy and mutual reliance as they settle in their new country (Hartman and Hartman 1986; Cheung 2008; Hyman, Guruge and Mason 2008; Maciel, Van Putten and Knudson-Martin 2009; Hormozi, Miller and Banford 2018; Leblanc 2020; Pandya 2021). However, the extant literature has also demonstrated that immigration can tax the family's adaptive resources and increase tensions between partners. Indeed, migrant couples experience more romantic distress (Ben-David and Lave´e 1994; Negy and Snyder 1997; Santos, Bohon and Sanchez-Sosa 1998; Umubyeyi 2019), domestic violence (Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler and McGrath 2004; Hyman, Guruge and Mason 2008; Alvarez et al. 2020), and intracouple conflicts and separations (Ben-David and Lave´e 1994; Min 2001; Darvishpour 2002; Flores et al. 2004; Grzywacz et al. 2009; Jibeen 2019) than locally born couples. Thus, it is essential to understand what aspects of the immigration process affect couple relationships in order to make that transition as smooth and positive as possible.

In cross-cultural psychology—the discipline informing this study and most of the literature reviewed here—acculturation refers to changes in language, identity, values, and behaviors resulting from living in a new cultural environment (Berry 2006; Schwartz et al. 2010). Even though migrant couples typically largely agree on the acculturation strategies they should adopt (Rania, Migliorini and Rebora 2018), discrepancies exist in how partners respectively experience settlement in the new country and in how they individually adapt to it. These discrepancies, or

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post-immigration gaps, can play a key role in couples' post-immigration adaptation, especially when they are related to gender role values (Grzywacz et al. 2009; Cruz et al. 2014; Accordini, Giuliani and Gennari 2018) or motivation and acculturation (Ben-David and Lave´e 1994; Kisselev, Brown and Brown 2010; Kanat-Maymon et al. 2016).

Gaps in gender roles

A lot of international immigration flows from the Global South to the Global North, such that many migrant couples are confronted with new gender role values in their new country. Migrant women also tend to gain economic power by accessing the labor force more commonly than in their country of origin, thus challenging traditional patriarchal gender role values. These changes can generate conflicts within couples, especially for those coming from cultural communities where patriarchal values are more typically endorsed, such as Mexican (Grzywacz et al. 2009; Cruz et al. 2014) or Middle Eastern societies (Accordini, Giuliani and Gennari 2018). For example, a qualitative study of Mexican couples in the USA showed that women's employment following immigration created intracouple conflict by challenging gender-based norms and behaviors surrounding division of household labor, financial decision making, and how women and men interact within intimate relationship (Grzywacz et al. 2009). Furthermore, women may be more willing to compromise or work outside of their trained professions to maintain family income and stability (Yu 2011)—something that may boost the prevalence of such conflicts. Successfully addressing these difficulties requires both partners to adjust their expectations and define new gender roles that fit their current situation (Cheung 2008; Grzywacz et al. 2009; Maciel, Van Putten and Knudson-Martin 2009; Accordini et al. 2018).

Gaps in motivation and acculturation

In interviews of migrant couples, Ben- David and Lave´e (1994) found that conflicts arose when one partner did not want to immigrate or accepted to do so to please the other partner. Once in the new country, couples' adjustment was easier when both partners acculturated similarly (Ben-David and Lave´e 1994). Several studies have obtained similar findings, documenting negative impacts of gaps in using/mastering the new country's language (Kisselev, Brown and Brown 2010; Kanat-Maymon et al. 2016), adopting new values and behaviors prevalent in the new cultural environment, or relinquishing practices common in the country of origin (Ben-David and Lave´e 1994; Vega, Kolody and Valle 1988; Darvishpour 2002; Flores et al. 2004; Miranda et al. 2006; Grzywacz et al. 2009; Hyman, Guruge, and Mason 2008; Cruz et al. 2014).

Couple difficulties are especially likely to arise if discrepancies in partners' adaptation challenge traditional gender role values. For example, a study of Russian-speaking couples in the USA showed that spouses were less satisfied with their relationship when men were less acculturated to the American cultural stream (in the language domain) than women (Kisselev, Brown and Brown 2010). Similarly, among couples from the Former Soviet Union in Germany and Israel, differences between spouses' mainstream language proficiency predicted marital dissatisfaction and this effect was exacerbated over time (Kanat- Maymon et al. 2016). Another study of Mexican couples in the USA showed that women tended to embrace an assimilation acculturation strategy, whereby they adopt the new mainstream cultural tradition but relinquish their heritage culture. In contrast, men tended to adopt a separation strategy (maintenance of heritage culture, but nonengagement with the mainstream culture), particularly in the employment domain. These strategy differences generated intracouple conflict (Grzywacz et al. 2009).

Couples with partners who supported each other and coped together were able to curb the negative impact of acculturation gaps on their relationship and adjusted harmoniously to immigration challenges. For example, a quantitative study of Turkish migrants in Canada (Ataca and Berry 2002) revealed that couple adaptation was tied to couple stressors and support. This work also showed that men and women did not adjust similarly following immigration, necessitating that partners adjust to each other's differences. Using positive forms of dyadic coping, such as collaborative common coping or supportive coping, allows couples to experience higher relationship satisfaction (Falconier et al. 2015). In short, within-couple conflicts seem to be tied to differences between partners, be it in terms of gender role values, motivation to immigrate, or acculturation strategies. Relying on each other for support and using positive dyadic coping strategies seem to curtail these conflicts.

Limitations of past studies on post-immigration gaps

The studies reviewed above have limited their investigations to domain-specific gaps (e.g. mainstream versus heritage language use or adherence to mainstream versus heritage values) rather than considering migrants' experiences holistically. Furthermore, they relied primarily on structured interviews, thus focusing on constructs pre-selected by researchers. This approach is liable to preventing participants from discussing the most salient immigration challenges impacting their integration and couple relationship. We need to further investigate what postimmigration gaps have the greatest negative impact on migrant's relationship and life from their own perspective. In addition, to our knowledge, qualitative studies of postimmigration gaps interviewed only one partner or, at best, both partners together during the same session (Ben-David and Lave´e 1994; Cheung 2008; Grzywacz et al. 2009; Maciel, Van Putten and Knudson-Martin 2009;

Accordini, Giuliani and Gennari 2018). Both approaches have major limitations. Interviewing only one partner yields a one-sided and incomplete account, because we miss the second partner's perspective. Interviewing both partners together may lead some participants to censure their discourse to avoid conflicts with their partner. In addition, power asymmetries can give more voice to one of the partners, thus biasing our understanding of their joint experience.

The present study

The present research aims to address the shortcomings identified above by interviewing each partner separately, using an exploratory, open-ended qualitative design. This dyadic design allows us to identify similarities and overlap, as well as discrepancies and contrasts, in partners' answers. We adopt an inductive, bottom-up position, and use an open-ended design to discern what couple challenges are spontaneously mentioned and salient for both partners. In short, we adopt a dyadic perspective with a focus on elements that are central to both partners' experience in order to (1) document dyadically salient postimmigration gaps and (2) analyze how these gaps affect migrants' couple relationship.

Method

Participants

Ten heterosexual couples (all participants cisgendered) participated in this study, which was part of a larger longitudinal research project on acculturation and couple relationships. Participants' mean age was 32.55 years old. Partners had been in a relationship for an average of 9 years and 5months (ranging from 4 to 15 years) and had immigrated to Canada on average 2 years and 2months (ranging from 7months to 5 years) prior to the study. Table 1 provides demographic information on individual participants. Eight participants were from Europe, six from Latin America, six from Maghreb or the Middle East, and one from Asia. Two couples were intercultural. Four couples had children prior to immigration and arrived in Canada with their children. In terms of educational level, 17 participants had completed post-secondary education or were currently attending university, and 3 participants held professional diplomas. In terms of legal status, 10 participants were permanent residents, 2 had become Canadian citizen, 6 held a work visa, 1 a student visa, and 1 a visit visa to accompany a family member.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via posters displayed throughout the authors' university campus (located in downtown Montreal, QC, a highly multicultural city) and advertisements on social media (e.g., Facebook groups targeting migrant communities). Inclusion criteria were: (1) speaking French or English well enough to take part in the interview; (2) being older than 18 years old; (3) having lived in Canada for at least 6months; and (4) having immigrated to Canada with one's current romantic partner (i.e. both partners arrived in Canada as a couple).

The interviews took place in an interview room of the senior author's research laboratory and were conducted with each partner separately. Participants read an information letter and provided written informed consent. Each couple received $20 as compensation for their time. The first author conducted all interviews, which lasted an average of 1 h and 22 min (range: 51 min to 1 h and 39 min). Interviews were audio and video recorded and fully transcribed (further details below). The study received approval from the authors' university ethical review board.

Materials

Our semi-structured interview protocol was based on the life story interview (McAdams 2001; Bauer and McAdams 2004), adapted to focus on immigration and couple relationships. The interview began by asking for a short abstract of participants' life story as follows: 'We would like you to begin by thinking about your life as a story. All stories have characters, scenes, plots, and so forth. Think about your life story as having at least a few different chapters. What might those chapters be? I would like you to describe for me each of the main chapters of your life story.' The interviewer then asked elaboration questions on each of the chapters that participants had outlined. In general, topics brought up during interviews dealt with the beginning of the couple's relationship, the immigration project's origins, the immigration process, adaptation to Canada, couple conflicts and satisfaction, and participants' plans for the future. This protocol allowed us to obtain a longitudinal retrospective overview of participants' immigration process and couple relationship well-being. This was important to obtain a more comprehensive view of potential gaps over time, rather than divergences and conflicts salient only at the time the study.

Data analysis

Step 1: Transcription and thematic analysis

We conducted an inductive thematic analysis of the data (Braun and Clark 2006). The analysis proceeded as follows, with all steps first conducted by the first author and then validated by the second author through iterative discussions. (1) Recordings were first transcribed following instructions from Hsiung's (2010) conventions for transcribing interviews. (2) Familiarization with the data involved carefully reading and re-reading the transcripts while taking notes on the side. (3) Generating initial codes consisted of coding features related to the immigration process of participants' discourse across the entire dataset. (4) Revising codes consisted of adjusting and/or rewording the initial codes by merging similar codes

Table 1

Participants' sociodemographic information

Couple code	Age	Country of origin	Having children	Employment status	Legal status
Couple 1W	30	Colombia	No	Employed	Permanent residency
Couple 1M	33	Colombia	No	Unemployed	Permanent residency
Couple 2W	35	Japan	Yes (1)	Unemployed at first, then employed	Family reunification
Couple 2M	33	France	Yes (1)	Employed	Work permit
Couple 3W	28	France	No	Student	Student permit
Couple 3M	29	France	No	Employed	Work permit
Couple 4W	30	Chili	No	Employed	Work permit
Couple 4M	32	Chili	No	Employed	Work permit
Couple 5W	38	Morocco	Yes (3)	Unemployed	Permanent residency
Couple 5M	39	Morocco	Yes (3)	Employed	Permanent residency
Couple 6W	31	Morocco	Yes (1)	Unemployed	Permanent residency
Couple 6M	34	Morocco	Yes (1)	Student	Permanent residency
Couple 7W	30	France	Yes (1)	Employed	Citizenship
Couple 7M	30	France	Yes (1)	Employed	Citizenship
Couple 8W	32	Finland	No	Employed (overqualified)	Work permit
Couple 8M	28	Belgium	No	Employed	Work permit
Couple 9W	34	Venezuela	No	Employed	Permanent residency
Couple 9M	38	Venezuela	No	Employed	Permanent residency
Couple 10W	31	Iran	No	Unemployed at first, then employed	Permanent residency
Couple 10M	36	Iran	No	Student and employed	Permanent residency

Note. To protect their anonymity, we refer to participants using codes composed of a couple number followed by 'W' for woman and 'M' for man..

or clarifying ambiguous ones. (5) Searching for themes involved examining how the revised codes fit into broader conceptual categories and gathering codes into potential themes. (6) Defining and naming themes consisted of refining the specific content of each theme and developing clear definitions and names for each theme. To illustrate, we created an initial code 'daily life', then revised it by dividing it into more specific domains such as 'accommodation', 'food', and 'behaviors'. In the next step, we searched for overarching themes that would encompass these various codes. For example, we created a theme that comprised cultural aspects of participants' discourse (e.g. 'food' and 'behaviors' codes) and another one that included more sociodemographic aspects. We called these themes 'acculturation' and 'sociodemographic', respectively. Once all themes and codes were created, we probed inter-judge consensus by having two experts code the same sample data separately. Differences between coders were discussed and codes were adjusted accordingly if needed. This supplementary check was conducted on 10 per cent of the data, randomly selected.

Step 2: Dyadic data analysis

The first author conducted separate interviews with each partner within a multiadic analysis framework (Eisikovits and Koren 2010; Manning and Kunkel 2013). This approach examines partners' individual perceptions and understandings, while considering the context of their joint life, in order to understand the essence of their experience. It also allows each partner to share her/his perspective on potentially sensitive domains with the researcher— here, their immigration and couple relationship. The interviewer followed the interview protocol identically for both partners to minimize their influence on the second partner's answers as much as possible.

We used a dyadic triangulation procedure (Forbat and Henderson 2003; Messersmith, Kunkel, and Guthrie 2015) to analyze the similarities and differences between partners' perspectives (Brannan 1988; Lincoln and Guba 1990; Morris 2001). That is, we compared the information reported by each partner for a given code (e.g. 'food'). Differences between partners' perceptions for that domain indicated a gap in their immigration experience.

Results

We collected immigration stories from both partners and explored how these stories differ and what sources of couple conflict were present. Individuals, and especially individuals from different cultural backgrounds, can express (or not express) conflict in different ways. Exploring such variety in conflict expression is beyond the scope of the present study. Here, we focused on sources of conflict by directly asking each partner what elements brought about discord in their couple, regardless of how they subjectively define conflict. In other words, we assumed elements were conflictual when participants reported them as initiating tensions or dissatisfaction with their partner.

A first general insight emerging from our dyadic analysis of partners' immigration stories is that, for some couples, immigration conditions differed across partners. Some couples experienced employment gaps (i.e., one partner was employed but not the other), financial gaps (i.e., partners have different financial resources), or legal status gaps (i.e., partners have different immigration statuses in Canada). Beyond these fairly 'objective' gaps, partners also experienced 'perceived' gaps in how satisfied they were with their situation, be it in terms of accommodation, employment, finances, or future projects. In participants' assessment, couple conflicts were all tied to these various gaps.[1] Below, we describe how gaps and conflicts play out in the four domains participants brought up. To protect their anonymity, we refer to participants using codes composed of a couple number followed by 'W' for woman and 'M' for man.

Employment gaps and missing one's partner

The first recurrent source of conflict among migrant couples in our study was related to lacking time with, and support from, one's partner. Participants attributed this absence and associated feelings of isolation to employment gaps, for example when one partner worked more than the other. Six couples reported employment gaps. Participant 1W was currently employed, whereas her husband was unemployed and looking for a job. Conversely, the men in couples 3 and 6 were employed, whereas the women were, respectively, studying and taking on a homemaker role. For other couples, employment gaps were present at the beginning of their settlement process, with only one partner in the couple being employed. This gap then disappeared when both partners found a job, which helped relieve their stress.

Employment gaps entailed lacking support from and/or quality time with one's partner. Partners were dissatisfied with this imbalance and felt it affected the quality of their relationship by fostering conflicts. For instance, participant 2 M had to work a lot and could not spend quality time with his wife and daughter. Both partners felt their couple relationship suffered from 2M's absence, as illustrated by 2W's words:

> There's no family time. I hope he can just change job or change how he does his job, the conditions. And that, after he comes home, we come home, we can just focus on family, like cooking together, eating together, play together. I really miss the family time and the couple time.

[1] Only two couples reported one conflict unrelated to gaps.

Couple 5 also experienced conflicts because of employment gaps. Participant 5M went back to work only a week after participant 5W gave birth to their child. Participant 5W was left alone, having to take care of the household without any external support because they had just arrived in Canada. This loneliness and pressure was hard for couple 5W and generated conflicts between them, as described by participant 5W:

> I just gave birth by myself, and I have to do everything, again I'm responsible for the household and the children. I have to wake up early to prepare the children's lunches and take care of the house. I was in pain after giving birth, I had a tear and it hurt so much. And him, he just left to work. That's it![2]

In contrast, employment gaps did not engender couple conflicts when both partners had a similar life rhythm despite their different job status or when they were not affected by their partner's relative absence. Thus, conflicts related to employment gaps seemed to stem from loneliness and the void left by one's partner absence.

Financial gaps and economic pressure

The second main source of conflict participants brought up pertained to partners' feelings of uneven economic pressure within their couple. In several couples, partners faced different levels of economic stress in their immigration process, which was often related to their employment status. Some participants were financially more comfortable than their partner. The most financially comfortable partner then felt pressure to singlehandedly manage the family budget, while the other experienced a different kind of pressure, namely to contribute to the family budget without being able to. Situations where one partner experienced stress and pressure, while the other was financially at ease, were conflictual, especially when the situation was at odds with the disadvantaged partner's gender role values.

Five couples experienced financial gaps. In couples 3 and 8, women contributed as much as their partner to daily expenses, although they had less money. In couples 5 and 6, men were preoccupied with financial management, whereas women were not. Participant 5M took steps to set money aside without consulting his wife because he was stressed about their family budget. In the case of couple 6, both partners found that their savings allowed them to enjoy their immigration process, but 6M experienced more distress about money and was relieved to finally receive financial support to study.

In situations of conflictual financial gaps, one partner had fewer financial resources than the other but still participated equally to the family budget. This economic pressure on the disadvantaged partner led to frustration and generated couple conflicts. For instance, participant 3W was studying whereas her partner had a job. They both contributed equally to the family budget despite 3W's low income, leading to conflicts. They had to adjust their functioning to accommodate their respective situations. Similarly, participant 8W was looking for a job whereas her partner was employed. Like couple 3, they both contributed equally to couple expenses even though they had very different financial resources. Dealing with this imbalance became a source of conflict between them, as shown by participant 8W discourse:

> I was always very independent in Finland, and it's our culture to be very independent so when we moved here, he was the one who is working and who had all the money, like I had to like – I was trying to control his use of money as if it was mine, my money (laugh) but then we just – I just had to accept like we have to come up with a way – for me to accept that I'm more dependent on his money (. . .). So that was one of the frictions.

In both couples, women became more dependent on their partner because of financial gaps and struggled to accept complete economic reliance on their partner. Conflicts emerged because partners valued equal gender roles that imply equal financial contribution. In contrast, couples 5 and 6 reported financial gaps but did not experience any related conflict because of different gender role values. Both partners embraced more patriarchal values where men are expected to provide for their family. As such, both partners expected the man to shoulder the charge of the family budget without the woman having to deal with it. In short, financial gaps lead to conflicts when they generated differential financial pressures challenging values promoting gender role equality.

Legal status gaps and family responsibility

The third main source of conflict participants reported was related to responsibility for the family's legal status. Partners single-handedly shouldering this responsibility experienced pressure and stress, especially given that their job options were limited to one company in order to maintain their family visa. Three couples were experiencing legal status gaps or had been in the past. Participant 2M held a work visa on which depended his entire family. Couple 10 was in the same situation until both partners obtained permanent residency. In couple 3, participant 3Whad a student visa, whereas her partner had a work visa.

Legal status gaps led to conflicts when the entire family's status and stability in the new country depended on one partner's work visa. Several participants immigrated to Canada on a work visa, which allows their entire family to

[2]Quotes from French-speaking participants were translated by the authors. Originals are available on request.

stay in Canada as long as they, as visaholders, work for a specific company. Such situations put visa-holding partners under pressure, which negatively affected couples' relationship quality. For example, although participant 2M became dissatisfied with his job, he could not leave or change it because doing so would have revoked his visa and jeopardized his family status in Canada. This situation frustrated him and affected his mood. It also affected the couple's relationship indirectly, because of his stress stemming from having to tolerate a dissatisfying job. To illustrate, participant 2M said:

> If I can't take it anymore and I want to quit, then we all have to leave the country. So it's really the visa that's a horror.

Such legal status gaps were not always reported as conflictual, notably when uneven status responsibilities matched couples' gender role values (e.g. man solely responsible for legal status in couples with more patriarchal values). In these instances, participants mentioned differences in status responsibilities but did not describe them as a source of tension or conflict in the couple.

Satisfaction gaps and lack of joint decision-making

The last main source of discord participants reported pertained to gaps between partners' satisfaction with their current situation. These satisfaction gaps resulted from a lack of discussion and joint decision-making, leading to resentment on the part of the aggrieved partner. Participants making decisions without consulting their partner or without considering their opinion is a first instance of satisfaction gaps. For example, participant 5M made unilateral decisions about family accommodations. He chose an apartment without consulting his wife, and they ended up in a small, one-bedroom basement apartment. His wife spent a lot of time at home because she was on maternity leave and their living conditions affected her greatly. In contrast, 5M was often at work and did not suffer as much from the quality of their accommodation. This satisfaction gap occasioned many conflicts between them, as described by participant 5W:

> This three-and-a-half in a basement, he accepted without asking me. So, when I saw him, I got upset about it. We can't live in a house with only one bedroom, with two children. I cried a lot, I was alone.[3]

Conflicts arose because participant 5M chose an apartment based on his own selection criteria, which did not meet 5W's criteria. Participant 5W blamed her partner for her dissatisfaction, illustrating situations where one partner acted unilaterally, leaving the other feeling uncared for and not considered.

Couple 1's disagreements about the husband's employment situation provide another instance of satisfaction gap inducing conflicts. Participant 1W wanted her partner to find a job as quickly as possible and be more active in his job search, whereas participant 1M wanted to find a job meeting his criteria and felt active enough in his search. Participant 1M felt indirect pressure from this wife and participant 1W did not feel respected by her husband, a combination that negatively affected their relationship, as described by 1M:

> She was like questioning me a lot about "hey, you are sure, you don't want to find a part-time job? There are many opportunities, you should be looking for a job". I'm like "no, I prefer to be full time looking for a job than to be part-time looking for a job and doing something that I don't like to do". We had like conflicts about that.

This gap was a significant source of conflict between them because they did not try to understand their partner's position and were entrenched in their own, preventing them from engaging in a shared decision-making process.

Satisfaction gaps were also present when partners faced predicaments they did not manage to solve jointly, especially with respect to partners' joint future in the country. Choosing how to move forward with the immigration process and where to settle, which has implications for ensuing administrative and visa procedures, was an important source of conflict. Such dilemmas forced partners to make joint decisions or consider terminating their relationship. Participant 4W's words illustrate this kind of situation:

> So it is a problem and that is causing problems between me and 4M now. Because I want to stay here in Montreal, in spite of the work, in spite of the company that I really don't like too much. But he's still thinking of moving to Vancouver.

Participant 8M's discourse offers another illustration:

> So it's more – it's been more the fact that she wanted to leave, our conflicts were about that, the fact that when we began the permanent residency 'we are losing our money, it's not useful, we should leave, we should leave instead'.

In short, satisfaction gaps resulting from a lack of discussion and joint decision-making led to resentment on the part of the unsatisfied partner, which in turn caused couple conflicts.

Discussion

The present study aimed at better understanding sources of conflicts within migrant couples. We explored (1) what dyadic gaps emerge from partners' immigration life stories and (2) how these gaps impact their couple relationship. A first finding is that participants reported employment gaps

[3] «Three-and-a-half » refers to a one-bedroom apartment in Quebec.

(e.g., one partner was employed but not the other), financial gaps (i.e., partners have different levels of financial resources), legal status gaps (i.e., partners have different immigration statuses in Canada), and satisfaction gaps (i.e., partners evaluate an aspect of their immigration experience differently). A second finding was that all the conflict sources participants brought up were related to these gaps. At the same time, gaps were not always problematic. Our results reveal that conflicts emerged when gaps entailed (1) one partner feeling a lack of support from or quality time with the other, (2) one partner experiencing economic pressure conflicting with his–her gender role values, (3) one partner being solely responsible for his–her family stability and legal status in the country, or (4) partners not managing to make joint decisions when facing predicaments.

Post-immigration gaps are couple challenges

Several studies have documented the impact of post-immigration gaps between partners on their relationship, in terms of gender role values (Cheung 2008; Grzywacz et al. 2009; Cruz et al. 2014; Accordini, Giuliani and Gennari 2018), acculturation (Vega, Kolody and Valle 1988; Ben-David and Lave´e 1994; Darvishpour 2002; Flores et al. 2004; Miranda et al. 2006; Grzywacz et al. 2009; Hyman et al. 2010; Kisselev, Brown and Brown 2010; Cruz et al. 2014; Kanat-Maymon et al. 2016), or motivation (Ben-David and Lave´e 1994). In contrast, using an inductive dyadic design, we find that conflict-inducing gaps are tied to more concrete cultural aspects of migrants' experience and status (e.g., work, accommodation, visa) rather than more abstract cultural aspects of immigration (e.g., language, social behaviors). Namely, participants bring up gaps in employment, finances, legal status, or satisfaction as sources of discord. In contrast, when acculturation gaps were present, participants did not tie them to couple conflicts.

As they settle in a new country, migrants must find a job, shoulder high costs, find a place to live and maintain or change their legal status. These concrete immigration challenges seem to be more liable to affect partners' couple relationship than other cultural changes. One possibility for this pattern of results is that these concrete challenges are particularly salient in migrants' perceptions because they threaten their survival more directly. The absence of a job, money, or a place to live has more immediate and severe consequences than cultural adjustments, such as culinary differences or communication and social norms. As Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) proposes, people can only start addressing higher-level needs when their basic needs are adequately fulfilled. In the present case, several of the conflict-inducing gaps partners brought up were related to physiological and safety needs, at the base of Maslow's pyramid. Further along the immigration process, once basic needs are secured, partners may have conflicts around higher-level needs such as love and belonging, esteem, or self-actualization. More abstract cultural aspects of the immigration process (e.g., cultural identification) may be more likely to challenge these higher needs than basic ones. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to better understand how post immigration-related challenges impacts couples' experiences and relationship differently throughout their journey.

Furthermore, the gaps described above were not problematic for all couples. They generated conflicts in specific situations, such as when they entailed feeling a lack of support from or quality time with one's partner. Past research has established that immigration can lead to feelings of isolation and lack of support in the new country (Lee, Crittenden, and Yu 1996; Kim, Sangalang, and Kihl 2012). People lose their established social network and associated sources of support during immigration, which increases their dependence on their partner to obtain the support they very much need to navigate immigration challenges. The present research confirms that this critical need for support can weigh on the couple relationships. One clear applied implication is that structures offering support to migrants outside of the couple, such as peer helpers or intercultural twinnings, could help alleviate couple conflicts by lightening support demands that are put on one's partner.

Gaps were also conflictual when they involved one partner experiencing economic pressure that challenged his–her gender role values. This is consistent with past research showing that gaps in gender role values are problematic when they challenge patriarchal values and male economic power (Negy and Snyder 1997; Flores et al. 2004; Garcia, Hurwitz, and Kraus 2005; Hyman, Guruge and Mason 2008; Grzywacz et al. 2009; Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale, and Chinichian 2011). The present study generalizes these findings to nonpatriarchal values. Couples endorsing gender role values of equality between partners were negatively affected when post immigration-related changes in their economic situation jeopardized this equality value. Thus, it seems that gaps that confront partners' gender role values negatively impact their relationship, regardless of what those values are. Our findings underscore the importance of values, something that future research should take into account when exploring the effects of gaps in immigration contexts. Other potential factors moderating gaps' deleterious influence should also be explored.

Another category of conflict-inducing gaps concerned situations involving one partner being solely responsible for his–her family stability, which limited his–her own freedom. Notably, work visas allow an entire family unit to live in Canada provided the visa holder stay employed with a specific company. Such legal situations place high pressure on visaholding partners who cannot change jobs without jeopardizing their family status in Canada. Research on sacrifice in romantic relationships shows that attitudes about sac-

rifice predict marital success and maintenance of relationship adjustment (Van Lange et al. 1997; Stanley et al. 2006; Whitton, Stanley and Markman 2007). Beyond sacrifice attitudes, the present study documented the impact of real sacrifices made for one's family and our results paint a different portrait. Frustrations resulting from sacrifices made for the family seem to weigh heavily in the balance and breed conflicts. This is consistent with research finding that adjustments made in the employment domain to adapt to the new country are often a source of couple conflicts (Grzywacz et al. 2009) and that women are more inclined to adjust their career orientation for the benefit of their family (Yu 2011). Our results suggest that beyond the role of employment access, future research should also explore the influence of work conditions on couple relationships, for example in terms of flexibility or potential for self-actualization.

Finally, gaps were conflictual when they involved a lack of joint decision-making. When partners disagreed about employment, accommodation, or prospects, conflicts arose if one partner imposed his–her point of view at the expense of the other's. Immigrating couples must adapt to a new environment with many stressors. These stressors easily breed conflicts if partners experience them with different levels of satisfaction or needs. In such situations, couples' communication quality and dyadic coping are key to help find a joint path forward (Schwartz 2012; Falconier, Nussbeck and Bodenmann 2013). Past research has established that dyadic coping moderates the relationship between immigration stress and relationship satisfaction. Common dyadic coping ('joint problem solving, joint information seeking, sharing of feelings, mutual commitment, or relaxing together'; Bodenmann 2005: 38) and supportive dyadic coping (partner's efforts to assist the other partner in coping with his or her stress by providing emotional and/or problem-focused support; Bodenmann 1997) may be playing such a moderating role, mostly for women (Falconier, Nussbeck, and Bodenmann 2013). Our findings are consistent with these past findings, confirming the importance of dyadic coping for couples' harmonious adjustment to the immigration process.

Present research contributions

Past cross-cultural psychology studies documented the impact of gaps related to more abstract cultural aspects of immigration on couple conflicts (e.g., cultural identities). The present research uncovered the importance of gaps in other, more concrete cultural domains. Similarly, while the extant literature established that gaps challenging traditional gender role values were deleterious, our results show that this pattern generalizes to egalitarian gender role values. Both sets of findings enrich the literature on immigration and couple relationships.

In addition to these conceptual contributions, the present research is also noteworthy thanks to its methodology. First, gathering qualitative data from both partners separately in the context of couple adaptation to immigration is a novel approach. Compared to interviewing dyads simultaneously, this method has the potential to collect more information because participants do not censure themselves for fear of hurting their partner or because of power differentials. As a case in point, some participants asked us not to mention some issues to their partner because they were not comfortable with him–her knowing about it. Compared to interviewing only one partner about differences between his– her own experience and what he–she perceives about his–her partners' experience, this method can document actual gaps between partners' discourses on the same topic. For instance, one participant disclosed a problem she was experiencing in her couple but that she had not discussed with her partner. In a joint interview with her husband, she would probably not have mentioned this issue. Thus, using separate interviews can yield a more valid measure of actual gaps.

Secondly, given that partners were interviewed separately, they could touch on different elements of their immigration experience. Interestingly, the aspects both partners brought up were the ones impacting their couple relationship. This suggests that both partners agreed about sources of couple conflicts and were aware of problematic aspects of their relationship. Past studies with more close-ended designs exploring gaps in specific domains, such as motivation or acculturation (Vega, Kolody and Valle 1988; Ben-David and Lave´e 1994; Darvishpour 2002; Flores et al. 2004; Miranda et al 2006; Grzywacz et al. 2009; Hyman et al. 2010; Kisselev, Brown and Brown 2010; Cruz et al. 2014; Kanat-Maymon et al. 2016), may have been less able to pick up on these consensual aspects. Here, our open-ended exploratory design allowed participants to discuss the immigration challenges subjectively most salient to them and highlights the high level of congruity between partners' perspectives.

Limitations and future research

A first important limitation pertains to the cultural composition in our sample. Participants recounted different experiences depending on their cultural background. For example, some struggles were present only for Maghrebi participants, such as suffering from long work hours hindering their religious practices. Other challenges were present only for French participants who had to adapt to a cultural environment (Quebec) where the dominant language is similar with differences from that of their country of origin. In addition, some couples were intercultural, introducing other cultural dynamics between partners that may not be present in same-culture couples. These drawbacks suggest that a culturally homogeneous sample may have been preferable. On the other hand, a multicultural sample allowed us to detect patterns that were similar across cultural backgrounds, thus raising issues about cultural representativity. European and

Maghrebi cultural backgrounds were well represented in our sample, which are prevalent in the local urban context of the study (Montreal) but may not be representative of the main sources of immigration to Quebec and Canada more broadly. In short, future research will need to pay closer attention to migrants' cultural backgrounds to generalize and refine our results.

Using separate interviews with open-ended questions is also not without limitations. This methodology allowed us to access what is important and salient for each partner and limits partners' influence on each other. At the same time, this approach limits the amount of data available for dyadic analyses. Partners do not always discuss the same topics, which does not necessarily mean they have opposite views on these topics. Similarly, some topics may be conflictual even though they appear in the discourse of only one partner, for example if conflicts stem from one partner being convinced of the importance of an issue in spite of the other partner's indifference. Our method would be less apt to detect such patterns. However, in the present case, the domains both partners brought up were the ones, in their own estimation, impacting their couple relationship. Thus, we feel fairly confident that the present results were not overly affected by this methodological limit.

A third limitation is related to the interviewer's gender. This research was interested in the experience of migrants from various cultures, and participants from some cultural groups may have censured their discourse in front of the researcher because she was a woman. Although all participants answered thoroughly to all our questions and did not report any discomfort during the interviews, it must be kept in mind that the interviewer's gender may have played a role in the present results.

Fourthly, we focused on couple challenges that migrant couples encountered. Accordingly, our findings only described gaps associated with couple conflicts. However, we observed gaps in other, more psychological spheres of participants' experience. Participants did not attribute couple conflicts or tensions to these gaps, but future research should further investigate their potential impact. In addition, it is plausible that gaps in concrete aspects may be influenced by cultural differences in priorities and decision-making. Future research should explore this possible underlying dynamic.

Finally, the present results reveal that gaps in concrete cultural aspects of the migration process are causing conflicts and are particularly problematic when they entail a lack of support and quality time with spouse, economic pressures challenging gender role values, sole responsibility for one's family stability, or lack of joint decision makings. However, these stressors may also directly cause conflicts, irrespective of the gaps observed. Longitudinal qualitative studies would be needed to explore these alternatives.

Conclusion

Immigration brings about many changes and challenges for migrant couples. Our results suggest that the most salient ones are related to concrete cultural aspects of the immigration process, such as employment, accommodation, finances, and immigration status. Gaps between partners in these domains impacted their couple relationship by causing conflicts between them. Gaps were particularly problematic when they entailed a lack of support and quality time with one's partner, economic pressure challenging gender role values, sole responsibility for one's family stability, or lack of joint decision-making. These findings underscore the importance of better understanding couple dynamics following immigration. Remembering that a substantial proportion of migrants settle in a new country with their partner and/or family, doing so is not only theoretically meaningful, but also has substantial societal implications.

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