Parent-Child Separations and the Process of Reunification in Transnational Hispanic Families: A Collective Case Study

Virginia Alfonso

University of Miami, virginia.fundora@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations

Recommended Citation

https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations/2310

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

PARENT-CHILD SEPARATIONS AND THE PROCESS OF REUNIFICATION IN TRANSNATIONAL HISPANIC FAMILIES: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY

By

Virginia Alfonso

A DISSERTATION

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

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2019
A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

PARENT-CHILD SEPARATIONS AND THE PROCESS OF REUNIFICATION IN
TRANSNATIONAL HISPANIC FAMILIES: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY

Virginia Alfonso

Approved:

Lydia Buki, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Educational
and Psychological Studies

Daniel Santisteban, Ph.D.
Professor of Educational and
Psychological Studies

Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D.
Executive Director
The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention
and Treatment
Miami, Florida

Guillermo Prado, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Carlos Salgado, M.F.A.
Director of EnFamilia Inc.
Miami, Florida
This collective case study aimed to gain a better understanding of how families experience prolonged parent-child separations due to migration and the reunification process thereafter. Research thus far shows congruent accounts of child and adolescent distress and ambivalence upon reunification and parental confusion and anger at the difficulties in reconnecting with their child. This study was designed to examine both parent and adolescent experiences with each process, in more depth. Through within and cross-case analysis, I identified factors that make separation and reunification more difficult and that foster family well-being. A total of 3 families (3 mothers, 3 adolescents) participated in the study and engaged in multiple data collection methods including genograms, photovoice and semi-structured interviews.

Results of this collective case study highlight the importance of the quality of contact and investment in parenting by (a) having an active co-parenting relationship with their child(ren)'s caretaker, (b) engaging in direct communication with their child(ren) to bond from afar through sharing of experiences, and (c) storytelling and providing emotional support. When these protective factors were present, other risk factors such as
length of the separation were mitigated. Implications for research and clinical practice are discussed.
DEDICATION

To my children
Lucas, Noah & Marina
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There were many times where I thought that the completion of this dissertation would not be possible. During each of those difficult moments there was someone to guide me, console me or simply cheer me on. I was very fortunate to have such an expansive support system every step of the way without whom I would not have been able to complete this academic endeavor.

I first want to thank the families who gave their time to share their stories with me. Their courage, love and resilience is something that I will always remember. I felt honored to have been trusted with their stories, and am grateful to the lessons they taught me on sacrifice and family.

This study would not have been possible without the constant support of my dissertation co-chairs, Dr. Lydia Buki and Dr. Daniel Santisteban, along with my committee members Dr. Etiony Aldarondo and Carlos Salgado. Thank you for investing in me and for your words of encouragement. I have each of you to thank for my development as a researcher and clinician. I also want to thank Tinisha Hollinshead for her guidance throughout this process and always finding the time to help me and point me in the right direction.

To my husband, Gabriel who has walked alongside me through every step of this journey, thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for making my dream a priority and for believing in me and loving me so much.

I want to thank my parents, Maria and Pablo Alfonso for teaching me the value of education and for always believing in my ability to achieve my dreams.
I am grateful to my vast extended network of family and friends who have provided me with so much love and support every step of the way. Achieving my doctoral degree has been a long-standing dream of mine and I am overwhelmed with joy to be able to share the fulfillment of this dream with each of you. During this process I learned to ask for help and was humbled to receive it with so much love and care. I especially want to thank: Victoria Alfonso, Jeannette Alonso, Esther Fundora, Dr. Michael Fundora, Alina Hart, Oneida Moreno, Hilda Varela, and The CCF.

I would also like to thank the St. Louis Catholic Church Women’s & Men’s Emmaus for their constant prayers, especially in times where I experienced so much self-doubt; your faith strengthened me and provided me with so much comfort and peace.

My hope is that this dissertation serves as a testimony that your dreams are within reach if you believe in yourself and allow others to help you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION
- Overview ............................................................................................................................. 1
- Background Of Problem ..................................................................................................... 3
- Case Example...................................................................................................................... 6
- Purpose of the Study ......................................................................................................... 12
- Research Questions ........................................................................................................... 13
- Definition of Terms ........................................................................................................... 14

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
- Background ....................................................................................................................... 15
- Prevalence and Migration Patterns of Hispanic Transnational Families .......................... 17
- Process of Separation ........................................................................................................ 22
- Process of Reunification ................................................................................................... 27
- Theoretical Underpinnings............................................................................................... 32
  - *Multicultural Ecosystemic Comparative Approach (MECA)* ........................................... 32
  - *Family Systems* ............................................................................................................ 36
  - *Attachment Theory* .................................................................................................... 39
- Research and Clinical Significance of the Study .............................................................. 42

## CHAPTER III: METHODS AND PROCEDURES
- Research Design ............................................................................................................... 43
- Researcher’s Role ............................................................................................................. 44
- Participants ........................................................................................................................ 46
- Protection of Human Participants, Setting, and Recruitment ........................................... 47
- Data Collection ................................................................................................................. 48
- Analysis Plan .................................................................................................................... 52

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS
- Case One: "The Rodriguez Family" ................................................................................. 55
- Case Two: "The Hernandez Family" ................................................................................ 76
- Case Three: "The Gomez Family" .................................................................................... 89

## CHAPTER V: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
- Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion .............................................................................. 105
- Discussion ......................................................................................................................... 111
- Implications for Practice ................................................................................................. 114
- Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research ................................................ 115

## REFERENCES .............................................................................................................. 117

## APPENDIX I ................................................................................................................. 129
## APPENDIX II ................................................................................................................ 133
## APPENDIX III ............................................................................................................... 136
## APPENDIX IV ............................................................................................................... 142
Chapter I: Introduction

Overview

Immigration issues have been at the forefront of today’s socio-political climate and a source of increasing controversy. Fueling this controversy is the current administration's increase in immigration enforcement and restrictions on legal immigration and refugee resettlement. Although it has been known for some time that the country's immigration system suffers from systemic issues and is in need of policy reforms, the images provided by the media of children being forcefully separated from their parent by law enforcement has provided a new sense of alarm and urgency. As a result, researchers from different domains have been called to disseminate current knowledge on the physical and psychological well-being of immigrant families, and to identify and fill the gaps in order to inform policies and provide useful services. Because the experiences of immigrant families vary significantly and there are several issues that require investigation. This study was designed to develop a better understanding of how transnational Hispanic families experience the process of separation due to migration, and subsequent reunification.

In general, immigration is made difficult by the stressors associated with moving from one’s home country to the host country and adapting to the new country’s values, language and customs. This process is generally referred to as the acculturation process. While navigating what can be a challenging acculturation process, many families undergo separations from their children and parents during migration. All of these processes are further complicated when families have little social or economic resources at their disposal (Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012). Research examining at the effects of family
separations due to immigration has suggested that these separations cause both short-term and long-term socio-emotional struggles that can be passed along for generations (Falicov, 2007). Yet, with great sacrifice families continue to take on the challenges of step-wise immigration and family separations, in the hope that it will be for the betterment of their loved ones.

Family separation as a result of migration is not a new phenomenon. What is new in recent decades and of increasing interest to immigration researchers is the increase in transnational families as immigrant families try to maintain both economic and emotional connections to family back home (Falicov, 2005). In today’s socio-political climate, family separations due to immigration take on several forms. Most prevalent is the practice of parents migrating to the U.S and entrusting their children’s care to extended family members in their home country with the hope of reunifying when they are financially stable (Suarez-Orozco, 2005). There are also traumatic family separations that many undocumented immigrant families with U.S. born children live in fear, which is the threat of their parent(s) deportation. Most recently, there was another form of family separation where parents, now criminally charged for illegally crossing the border, were separated from their children and housed at separate detention centers. This forced separation places these children and parents at risk for negative psychological and developmental effects. In effect, we are seeing that it is not just voluntary separations of family members that mental health professionals are being confronted with but also a growing number of forced separations due to immigration policy.

Although there are significant differences in each of these scenarios, more notable being whether the separation is planned or enforced upon, the common denominator is
that many immigrant families experience parent-child separations which can influence individual and family well-being. This study will be focusing on family separations experienced when parents migrate ahead of their children and then after a prolonged separation are reunited once again, in the United States.

**Background of Problem**

It is important to understand how immigration patterns have changed over time and how families are impacted. For a long time families have migrated to the U.S. through what we can call a step-wise process. Through this process, the father-figure leaves his family for long periods of time in order to work abroad and send back funds to support his family. Once settled, the family might then decide to reunify and the mother will migrate followed by their children. This process may take decades as families often face numerous financial and legal difficulties. Increasingly, we have seen mothers who are the first to migrate and separate from her young children leaving them with extended family members, usually the maternal grandparents. This change may be due, in part, to the changing job climate in which industrial and agricultural work is on the decline and more domestic jobs are available (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). It may also be that more single mothers are choosing to make this sacrifice because they are the primary breadwinners in the family.

During the separation phase, children may experience feelings of abandonment and may respond with despair and detachment (Artico, 2003). In a large empirical study of a non-clinical sample of 385 early adolescents from China, Central America, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Mexico, Suarez-Orozco, Todorova and Louie (2002), cited reports in the clinical literature of negative sequelae for children including
attachment difficulties and depressive symptomatology. Factors that may influence the consequences of the separation experience include the child’s age at separation, how the separation was planned and discussed, the commitment and ability to maintain communication, the relationship between the child and caregiver, as well as the relationship between parent and caregiver. These factors may also be important predictors of how the family may experience the process of reunification.

When parents plan to migrate, they may or may not inform their children of the upcoming separation or, in some cases, children may be told that their parents are somewhere else. The latter was reported in a case shared by Suarez-Orozco (2005) that narrates how one child was told her mother was “out shopping”. How the child is or is not informed may depend on the age of the child at the time of separation. It is customary in Hispanic cultures for children to be cared for by extended family members, this initial transition might not be as highly traumatic for the child. However, as time passes the effects of this separation might become more significant. As children mature, they may begin to question the parent's decision to separate, and depending on their parent's level of communication with them, they may feel abandoned, angry, or experience an intense desire to reunify. Due to our current legal immigration process or because the parent immigrated illegally, the parent may be unable to visit their children and so their relationship is limited to letters and phone calls. Thus, the quality of the parent-child relationship can deteriorate even when a healthy attachment had formed prior to the separation. Research indicates that mother-child separations can play a decisive role in weakening the relationship between mothers and children, causing friction between the
reunified child and new family members in the U.S., and can disrupt key parenting practices such as monitoring and disciplining (Mitrani & Santisteban, 2003).

The Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation (LISA) study reported the psychological experiences of youth who reunited with their parents after various lengths of separations through the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data. Youths who ranged from 9-14 years of age and who underwent family separations, were recruited through the school system from Boston and the San Francisco area, and included youth from Central America, China, Dominican Republic, Haiti and Mexico. Results of this study concluded that children who were separated from their parents were more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression compared to those who were not separated. Youths who reported the longest separations from their mothers also reported the highest levels of anxiety and depression. Those families who experienced long term separations, typically 5 years or more, were more likely to receive mental health services.

Upon reunification, children have to adapt to a new country and parents, and children have to adjust to living together again or to living with other children they do not know. This can be further complicated by negative feelings the child may have about the separation, which may foster resentment and emotional distance, parent(s) lack of experience in parenting an adolescent, parent(s) reluctance to set limits due to feeling guilt about the separation, and in cases where a parent has remarried this process is further complicated as the parent attempts to navigate both reunifying and blending the family (Mitrani, Santisteban & Muir 2004). Additionally, upon the reunification phase, these youths may experience grief due to their secondary separation with their caregiver in their home country, attachment difficulties (Wilkes, 1992) and low self-esteem (Smith,
Depressive symptomatology is also reported among both children and mothers in reunited immigrant families (Bernhard 2006; Rutter 1971).

Case Example

To put into context the effects of migration related parent-child separation and reunification, I will discuss a case of a family that sought treatment. It is important to note that the following is a compilation of families that I treated, all of whom had undergone prolonged separations, and experienced difficulties with the reunification process (no identifying information has been provided).

Gloria

Gloria is a 15-year-old Guatemalan girl referred for therapy by her school counselor, who indicated that she was at risk for repeating her grade level and expressed concerns related to her irritability and sad mood. As a result, Gloria and her family sought treatment and began family therapy. Therapy sessions were conducted in Spanish.

After a long 8-year separation, Gloria and her 8-year-old sister were reunited with their mother in the U.S. This was the first time Gloria and her sister met their younger half-brother, age 5, and stepfather. The initial phase of their reunion was one of joy and excitement as a journey that had continued for so long had in many ways ended, and the family was now complete. However, once this “honeymoon phase” faded, there were challenges that followed the reunification. Gloria and her sister began to grieve the extended family in Guatemala who cared for them during their mother’s absence. They did so in silence, so as to not hurt their mother’s feelings. Any expression of sadness about leaving the extended family could be experienced as an attack on the mother. They felt intense guilt and began to doubt their place in their new family. Along with the
known difficulties of acculturation, Gloria and her family faced the challenge of establishing a healthy relationship and were unsure as to how to behave or what their role in this new family was. In addition, Gloria experienced a lack of interest in her school work, irritability, and moments of intense sadness. She began to experiment with marijuana and skip school. Gloria’s mother was unsure of how to deal with her irritable mood and troublesome drug use. She felt overwhelmed and disappointed, as this was not the daughter she remembered or struggled for so long to reunite with.

Gloria’s case: Initial Visit

Gloria: My mother just doesn’t understand me. She thinks she can just control me like I was 7 again. I thought coming here [to the U.S.] would be better (begins to cry silently).

Therapist: I understand it has been a very difficult transition for you, tell me how did you imagine it [the reunification] would be?

Gloria: I imagined “un castillo en el cielo” [a castle in the sky]. I thought coming to Miami and living with my mom would be this great adventure and we would spend all this time together and have all these new things...

Therapist: And how has it been?

Gloria: Nothing like how I thought it would be...my mom isn’t like I thought she would be and I don’t really know my step-father. My little brother is all they care about, and I hate school. I miss my family and friends in Guatemala...sometimes I regret coming here at all.

Therapist: Have you shared these feelings with your mom?
Gloria: No, I wouldn’t know how, I don’t think she’d get it. We never talk about those kinds of things.

During this session, Gloria brought to light a sentiment that has been raised before by other clients undergoing similar circumstances. The “castle in the sky,” as she labeled it, refers to a perception held by many children about how their parent(s) live in the U.S. and of how their lives will be once they come here. This false perception may be fueled by parent(s) who depict a picture of how wonderful life is in the U.S. in order to encourage and excite their children to migrate. Once here, children are usually exposed to difficult realities, one in which their parents work long hours—and possibly multiple jobs—and still experience financial distress in high-risk neighborhoods, all while adjusting to new cultural norms. Therefore, the idealistic expectations they may have held for so long are quickly replaced by real stressors including adjusting to a new cultural climate, acquiring a new language, adapting to a new family structure, feeling like an outsider at home and in the community, and experiencing socio-economic hardships. When these life stressors combine with the typical developmental stressors of adolescence within a parent-child attachment that is very fragile, the likelihood of experiencing psychosocial distress increases significantly.

Along with the child’s idealized vision of what reunification may be like, is the parent’s own idealized perception. Commonly, the separation will occur when the child is very young (pre-adolescence) and the long-awaited reunification may occur years later when the child is now in a new developmental stage, typically early or mid-adolescence. Yet, the parent has held on to a mental and emotional representation of their child from the age at which they separated. They remember and long for that 7 or 8-year-old child
they left behind, and dream of picking up where they left off. It can be very difficult for a parent who has recently reunified with their child years later to accept and embrace the child's new developmental stage, and along with it, a different way of relating and parenting. Clinicians may also find that many families are resistant to discussing these issues openly. There is an unspoken understanding that these issues should be “swept under the rug” as to not drudge up the past or stir feelings of guilt or sadness for either the parent or the child. This silence is especially difficult for the child as they are experiencing the effects of a significant second loss, which is that of those who cared for them in their home country during the parent’s absence. Thus, considerable amount of time may be spent in delicately unraveling these feelings first in individual therapy, and then jointly within family therapy.

Gloria: session 4 (individual therapy)

Gloria: I miss my grandmother...it makes me sad to talk about it… I would just rather forget.

Therapist: It’s ok to feel sad when we are away from a loved one...what do you do when you feel sad?

Gloria: I go out with friends and smoke...I don’t think my mother cares. She only worries about her new family.

Therapist: And you are not a part of this new family?

Gloria: It doesn’t feel like it...I mean, I do love her I just wish it was easier to be close to her...to talk.

Session with parent without Gloria present:
Mother: I am very concerned for Gloria. I feel as if I am living with a stranger. I spent so many years dreaming and working towards having my girls with me, and now it’s all unraveling.

Therapist: Coming together after a separation is difficult for all families. You all of a sudden have a teenager in your home and connecting with her is a challenge.

Mother: Yes, I forget she’s not the sweet 8-year-old I left with her grandmother. I remember being her age...I can only imagine how she feels; I know she misses her grandmother.

Therapist: Gloria has been struggling with her feelings...She desires to connect with you as well but hasn’t been able to figure out how. You are right she is not the same 8-year-old anymore... perhaps it is time to get to know her for who she is today and who she wants to become? She needs you.

Mother: I need her too...I need to get to know her again.

Many times parents' and children’s idealized visions of what reunification will be and feel like is far from what actually occurs. Their expectations may be followed by feelings of disappointment and inadequacy (Suarez-Orozco, Kim, & Bang, 2012.) A salient issue within the process of reunification that I observed was the family’s struggle to adapt to a new family structure, particularly when children try to incorporate themselves into a blended family with new siblings or step-parents. For this reason, including dedicated family sessions to address issues related to blended families, the effects of separation, a process of normalizing the stressors that come with separation and reunification,
experiencing loss, and addressing challenges with parenting was an essential part of their treatment.

Gloria: Session 8 (Family Therapy)

Therapist: “Thank you for coming together today…Mrs. A (Gloria’s mother), as we had discussed in our previous session, I understand there is something you would like to share.”

Mother: Yes, I want to tell Gloria that I know it has been difficult for all of us and that I understand that coming to the U.S. and starting a new life with a new family must not be easy for her…Gloria I love you and I am sorry we were apart for so long…I want to be here for you…I want to get to know you again.

Therapist: Gloria, how does hearing this from your mother make you feel?

Gloria: It’s the first time she acknowledges my feelings…I feel hopeful that we can become closer, that I can share things with her…I love you too mama and it has been difficult, I miss Abuela and sometimes I feel out of place here…Sometimes I feel like I’m living with strangers, I feel like I barely know Mr. A (Gloria’s step-father).

Step-Father: I’m not sure what my role is either…I don’t want to overstep my boundaries and so I have separated myself from the situation…but I do care and I do want the best for my family and that includes Gloria and her sister.

My treatment approach was influenced by family systems theory, specifically Bowenian concepts, and the inclusion of narrative therapy techniques which highlighted the importance of acknowledging milestones, encouraging celebrations of these milestones and establishing a new platform to discuss time apart and the actual narrative
of that separation (i.e. how the mother met her new partner, places lived, memories they had of them while separated, etc.) to “bridge” the distance and reconnect through new family rituals. Both theorists and practitioners have known about the power of rituals and their potential role in strengthening ties between family members’ experiences of past, present, and future events (Imber-Black, Roberts & Whiting, 2003).

**Purpose of the Study**

Although we have a growing body of literature pertaining to family separations and its effects, we have little insight as to how the process of reunification affects the family’s overall well-being. Additionally, the clinical literature does not shed adequate light on understanding the effects of separations on generally functional families, as only those who are in need of treatment are usually represented. A qualitative research study conducted by Suarez-Orozco et.al, claimed that immigrant families and youth demonstrate remarkable resiliency and capacity to overcome the challenges that accompany migrations. However, we need to develop a clearer understanding of the factors that increase or decrease the likelihood of negative psychological consequences during separation and reunification. This information would lead to a better understanding of the kinds of social and psychological services needed to strengthen transnational family bonds and facilitate family reunification towards positive outcomes. Evidence-based interventions should be developed with the aim of attenuating the effects of separations as well as developing strategies to help families manage the reunification process (Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012).

Given the significant gaps in the literature on immigration-related parent-child separations and reunifications, and the prevalence of Hispanic immigrants in the U.S., I
conducted a qualitative research study that is exploratory in nature. The intent of the study was to engage in an in-depth examination of how families experience prolonged parent-child separations due to migration, as well as the reunification process thereafter. Research thus far shows congruent accounts of child and adolescent distress and ambivalence upon reunification, and parental confusion and anger at the difficulties in reconnecting with their child; not as clear are which factors in the separation and reunification experience make reunification more difficult and which help smooth the way (Black, 2006).

**Research Questions**

In this study, I will examine, in depth, the separation and reunification process of three Hispanic families who have experienced parent-child separation and reunification as part of their migration experience. The primary goal of the study is to develop a richer understanding of the separation and reunification process and its effects on family relationships with an understanding that these experiences will be influenced by various community and family factors (i.e., legal status, socio-economic status, community resources). Utilizing a collective case study methodology, I will be able to identify similarities and differences across families. The following research questions will guide my exploration.

1. How do parents and adolescents experience the process of separation and reunification?
2. What similarities and differences do they share in their perceptions?
3. What factors promote resiliency and family cohesion, and which add to family conflict and/or distress?
Definition of Terms

Transnational families: Families in which its members may live some or most of the time separated from each other due to migration. The formation of the term has emerged after acknowledging that migration is an ongoing process that does not end once the individual arrives to the host country. The term also emphasizes the ways that immigrants maintain connections to more than one culture through economic and emotional ties (Falicov, 2005).

Step-wise migration: Migration which takes place in a series of distinct stages. Also referred to as piece-meal migration, wherein family members (typically the father or mother) migrates to the host country first and then makes arrangements to bring other family members, such as their spouse and children.

Separations: The physical distance of parents from children due to the parent’s immigration to the U.S. (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2005).

Reunification: The event and process of being reunited after having been separated for some time due to migration (Falicov, 2009).

Remittances: Money/goods sent by the migrant parent to their home country to support their child and extended family back home.

Unaccompanied immigrant youth: Children under the age of 18 traveling without their parents/adult guardian to the U.S.

Coyote: Individual who smuggles immigrants to the U.S. for a profit.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Background

Family separation due to migration is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the increasing number of children who are being left behind while parents migrate internationally for economic opportunities (Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012). As I will show in this chapter, there are a number of stressors that come with this migration pattern. In addition, there is what Falicov calls "living with two hearts rather than with a divided heart" (Falicov, 2005). Many immigrants are keeping up their economic and emotional ties with relatives "back home" by using technology to stay in touch with their relatives and to stay up to date with current events in their home country. Although the term transnationalism has been around for several decades, it is only recently that it has captured the attention of researchers across social disciplines (Falicov, 2007). For family therapists, transnational families present a new set of theoretical and therapeutic challenges and demand a new analytic frame for addressing issues of migration and acculturation.

As I will discuss further in this chapter, acculturation theory has evolved from a theory of how an individual replaces old with new cultural values and practices, to one that is less predictable as values and preferences of both cultures can be present. The type of acculturation that seems to be closest to transnationalism is selective acculturation, in which both parents and children are able to retain the original language and aspects of their culture of origin in several crucial areas of family life. In the case of dissonant acculturation, children and parents separate along language and cultural lines and risk engaging in cultural conflicts that negatively impact family relationships and processes.
The issues discussed here of parent-child separations due to immigration and later family reunifications may be considered as significant factors that influence the families’ acculturation process.

The intent of this chapter is to review the relevant literature as it relates to Hispanic immigrant families and the impact of separation and reunification on their lives. First I will briefly summarize the history of immigration of Hispanic families to the U.S. and discuss the prevalence and patterns of migration. I will then discuss the literature pertaining to the patterns and effects of separations. This will be followed by a presentation of what we know thus far about reunification and factors that may influence the process. Following this discussion, I will present the theoretical underpinnings of this study, including three major theories that have been utilized in the literature pertaining to family separations and reunification to advance the field’s understanding of this process.

The first and primary framework this research will focus on is the Multidimensional Ecosystemic Comparative Approach (MECA), created by Falicov (2003) to increase clinicians' understanding of the experiences of individuals who experience migration. Through this framework, Falicov takes into account multiple variables of the individual's identity such as ethnicity, race, language, education, religion, occupation, and family organization, which comprise their own "ecological niche" whereby they derive their meanings and personal histories from. In addition, this chapter will include concepts from family systems theory, which focuses on the family as a unit and how a family’s development might be affected by separation and later reunification and attachment theory; which focuses on the bonds between individuals and the effect that separation and reunification may have on lifelong patterns of attachment. Whenever
applicable, I will comment on the role that in public policy and immigration enforcement has played in the stressful process of immigration, acculturation, and reunification.

My initial exploration of the literature began with computer searches of psychological and sociological abstracts. Specific online databases included Psych Info, ERIC, PubMed, EBSCO and UMI Pro-Quest Digital Dissertations databases. The following keywords were used in the search: immigration and reunification, family separation, reunification and Hispanic families, transnational families, effects of separation, and reunification.

**Prevalence and Migration Patterns of Hispanic Transnational Families**

The significance of the term “transnational” is that it provides a perspective that allows us to explore how migrants maintain cultural ties to their home country while simultaneously adapting to the host country. Transnationalism is increasingly relevant due to developing globalization. Of particular interest is how transnationalism impacts the family unit, specifically migrant parents who have left their children in their home country and attempt to find ways to remain connected across borders. The exact prevalence of transnational families is still unknown, as this phenomenon requires more academic and policy attention. UNICEF indicated that approximately 25% of children in select migrant sending countries have at least one parent abroad (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). As a result, researchers in the past decade have begun to turn their attention toward transnational families.

The effects of transnationalism on children has been of specific interest to many researchers across different disciplines. Studies have shown that whether children benefit from their parents’ migration depends on several economic and psychological factors.
Despite the increased amount of research related to transnational families, gaps in the literature still remain. Of specific interest to this review of the literature is the lack of child interviews that explore their perceptions of transnational family practices, as most studies require caregivers to evaluate the well-being of the child.

Migration patterns of Hispanic transnational families in the United States

There have been different patterns of migration to the U.S. depending on which members of the family leave the family first and travel to establish a home prior to reunification. Early immigration patterns to the United States showed men as the pioneer immigrant, as agricultural work and migrant farm worker programs were on the rise. Typically, the man would migrate first and after establishing some economic security, his wife and children would join him. In families where the mother was the primary caretaker and the child stayed with the mother, this pattern of migration may not have been as substantial a change for the child.

As employment opportunities for women have increased and as more families are headed by the mother, more women have led their family's step-wise migration to the Unites States (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). The demand for service workers and especially caretakers for children and the elderly has drawn more and more mothers to migrate to the U.S. seeking financial opportunities. Internal Naturalization Service's data continuously shows that a considerable number of women are immigrating alone, leaving children behind in their home country. Moreover, in recent years the number of mothers who have made the decision to migrate has increased significantly (Donato, 2010). Many of these women are single mothers and the primary financial breadwinners of the family.
In most cases, children are left with extended family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles.

When children are separated from their mothers, mothers seem to focus more on the emotional aspects of their relationships with their children, compared to fathers, but children often blame mothers more than fathers for their absence (Dreby, 2006). Mothers experience depression, guilt and a sense of loss as they adapt to working abroad while being separated from their children. Miranda et al., (2005) found that Latina mothers who were separated from their children due to migration were at higher risk for depression compared to non-separated mothers. In a more recent study, McCabe et al., (2017) examined self-reported data of 37 mothers separated from a minor child who participated in a randomized trial of a sexual health group and concluded that these mothers are at higher risk for substance abuse, violence, sexual risk and depression.

Another pattern of migration is when children travel alone without a parent or caregiver to the United States. There has been an influx of unaccompanied immigrant children arriving to the United States in the past several years despite government efforts to restrict immigration. According to Aldarondo and Becker (2011) 85% of unaccompanied youth are between the ages of 14 to 18 and are predominantly from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, where there is notable political upheaval and gang violence. Youth begin this journey through different means. Some families hire a coyote while some children travel alone or with a friend/family member. Most children travel by foot or, if accessible, by bus and by train to the U.S.-Mexico border (Gonzalez, 2004). Thomas and Lau (2002) discussed the many dangers that unaccompanied youths may encounter on their migration journey, consistent with this, unaccompanied
immigrant children tend to describe their immigration journey as stressful and traumatic. These children are vulnerable due to their age and unaccompanied status, therefore they are at risk for becoming victims of human trafficking, abuse, ransom and other crimes.

Research studies designed to understand the experiences of unaccompanied immigrant children corroborate that their primary motivator for migrating was to reunify with family, followed by obtaining employment and escaping abuse (Becker & Aldarondo, 2017; Scott, 2009; Ungar, 2007.) Scott's (2009) study sampled 118 unaccompanied youths, one third of which cited reuniting with their family members as a primary reason for migrating, while the other two thirds named education and vocational opportunities.

**Challenges Faced by Undocumented Transnational Families**

Suarez-Orozco (2010) stated that circumstances under which children and their family migrate may create additional challenges. How the family is able to migrate, whether it is through legal channels or not, will ultimately play a role in how they experience the separation and reunification process. One-fifth of U.S. immigrants are children, and an estimated 40% of these children are undocumented (Passel, 2011) making this a prevalent and important factor that may affect immigrant child and family well-being. Unfortunately, many families do not have the resources to pursue documented status or are unsuccessful in navigating the very complex migration system that the United States currently employs. As a result, many families are faced with the added challenge of being undocumented, and live in fear of deportation. Zayas (2015) highlighted that parents and adolescents living under threat of deportation are at risk for emotional and physical health concerns. Despite this risk, many families express concern
about seeking health care services due to their fear of exposure. These families are also unable to claim their children legally, which may lead them to explore other ways, albeit highly risky alternatives, of reunifying the family. This leads us to the phenomenon of unaccompanied immigrant minors (UIC) and the journey they embark.

For those children who take the perilous journey of crossing the border alone or with hired coyotes and risk experiencing trauma, additional complications may arise. If caught, these children may stay at detention centers that are ill-equipped to support their physical or emotional needs. Unaccompanied children who are detained may endure long stays at detention centers where they have little control over their life. When they will leave and where they will go is a daily uncertainty that can lead to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

Despite the variety of potentially negative influences on unaccompanied immigrant children, these children are also very resilient. Scott (2009) explored both risk and protective factors amongst these youths, and found that many unaccompanied immigrant children learn successful coping strategies that help them stay motivated and succeed in their goals. In fact, many UIC’s develop positive social networks and feelings of self-efficacy. The research findings suggest that a strength-based model that focuses on promoting resiliency and capitalizes on protective factors can be utilized with these youths. Therefore, although unaccompanied immigrant youth face many dangers and challenges throughout their journey, they are also a resilient group that can thrive given the opportunity for a safe and supportive environment.
Process of Separation

Behavioral and Emotional Problems Linked to Separations

Family separations, specifically those of mothers and children, are identified in the literature as a significant immigration-related life stressor (Mitrani et al., 2004) and have been linked to difficulties in the youth. Mitrani and colleagues have identified through their work with Hispanic families with behavior problem youths that a history of mother child separations may weaken parental bonds and parenting practices. In response to this, Santisteban and colleagues have developed family therapy interventions to address the specific issues of mother-child separations due to immigration which focus on the parent-child bond and parenting practices (Santisteban, Mena, & Abalo, 2013). Mena et al (2019) have shown that the length of the separation is linked to higher levels of depression in Hispanic females. In this particular research, youngsters tended to be separated from their mothers for approximately 4 years and separation typically took place at about age 7.

Data from the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation study (L.I.S.A), a 5 year longitudinal mixed methods study, examined the impact of lengthy family separations on youths' mental health and perceived family conflict. The authors of the study conducted parent and child interviews to gather data on a variety of topics including migration and family life. This research indicated that 85% of the participants had been separated from one or both parents for extended periods. From the data, Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie (2002) identified negative sequelae for children separated from their parents, including attachment difficulties, depression, and behavior problems. The authors also warned that because these reports were based on a clinical sample, they
may overestimate the psychological consequences of separation, specifically among cultures where the practice of child-fostering is commonplace. In their study of a non-clinical sample of 385 early adolescents from China, Central America, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico, Suarez-Orozco and colleagues (2002) found that children who had experienced separations were more likely to report depressive symptoms than their non-separated counterparts. This result is similar to the finding reported by Mena et al., for Hispanic female children.

Factors that Influence the Impact of the Separation

The literature discusses several potential variables that may affect the parent-child separation experience and that may contribute to behavioral and emotional difficulties. Variables include age of child at separation, the quality and frequency of contact during separation (whether in person, by phone, or by letter), the quality of substitute caregivers, and the sending of remittances. Also important to consider are the family’s socio-economic circumstances, household structure and the history and current level of migration from the sending areas. In addition, the nature of social policy institutions that may provide social welfare and child protection can be influential. Finally, an additional factor to consider is parent gender differences. For example, Abrego and Derby, (2006) reported that children adapted more easily when the father was away. This may be a result of gender expectations and cultural norms where the mother is seen as the primary caregiver. It also may be that when it is the father who leaves, the mother is still present. These findings are interesting given the changing patterns of migration reported previously, in which mothers are increasingly migrating first without the children.

The quality and frequency of contact during separation is perceived
by psychologists and social service providers as one important factor that influences the success of reunifications (Artico, 2003; Boss, 1999; Falicov, 2002). Glasgow and Gouse-Sheese (1995) and Falicov (2002) found that children may interpret inconsistent or minimal contact as lack of caring or possible abandonment. Conversely, regular contact may help children deal with the experience of separation such that although a parent is physically absent, they are psychologically available (Boss, 1999). This has important implications for how counselors can help families buffer the effects of separations by encouraging healthy communication during the separation. Unfortunately, for some parents contacting their children may be difficult, even with today’s technological advances for communication, as not all immigrant parents or their families back home have access to these technological resources.

Remittances are an important part of transnational parenting and is one of the leading potential benefits that offset the emotional costs of separations for parents, as parents hope that the remittances they provide will mitigate potentially negative effects (Zentraf & Chinchilla, 2012). Migrant parents hope that the financial support they are able to send serves as a way to remain connected as well as provide their children with resources and opportunities that they would not have had access to had the parent not migrated. Unfortunately, even when remittances are intended for the direct benefit of their children, transnational parents may have little or no control over how they are used. It is also important that parents not only focus on remittances for economic support but also tend to the child’s emotional and psychological needs, given that children might benefit from remittances while suffering emotionally from prolonged separations (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002).
Another important factor is the quality of the substitute caregiver. In their study, Zentraf and Chinchilla (2012), observed that there was not a uniform experience for children during the separation. Their experiences ranged from loving care to neglect and abuse. Caregivers also play an important role in the level of contact between the parent and child. In some cases, children are left with family members who are overburdened by their own stressors and are unable to provide adequate care. Other cases may involve the child being left with a familiar and loving caregiver with whom the child already has an established attachment. This makes the parent-child separation initially less traumatic.

Child fostering is a term that is used to describe the practice of children being raised by extended family members and considered common in many Hispanic cultures. As a result, the initial separation may not be as traumatic as we may believe it to be because it is not as uncommon and fits within cultural norms. However, when separations are long, children may eventually become accustomed to the loss and their willingness to reunify may fade, especially during adolescent years. The act of leaving the new parent figures and returning to the biological parent may represent a second painful separation.

Parents are reliant on the caregiver not only in ensuring that their child is cared for, but also in facilitating communication and asserting their parenting from afar. Suarez Orozco and colleagues (2002) reported that youths’ attitudes towards their mothers during separation may be influenced by the attitudes held by surrogate caregivers. The explanations given for the mother’s absence is often distorted in an effort to either protect the children’s feelings or because caregivers aimed to turn them against the mother.

“One child I befriended at a detention center was told that her mother was on a shopping trip; other children were told that they had been abandoned. Children whose caregivers had imparted negative attitudes towards the mother may have more difficulty accepting
the mother’s attempt to reconnect and establish a nurturing relationship.” (Suarez-Orozco, 2002)

_Families undergo cost-benefit analysis_

With so many factors to consider, it is important to explore the decision-making process that families undergo when deciding to separate from their children to migrate. Thus far, the literature almost always depicts parent-child separations as traumatic and leading to negative effects. For example, a Pulitzer prize winning novel by Sonia Nazario, “Enrique’s Journey,” is a story about a boy’s dangerous journey to the United States as he longs to reunite with his mother. The message many take away is that if migrant mothers knew all the negative outcomes that would result from separation they would not leave their children behind. However, some argue that these negative effects may be based on cultural biases and that resiliency within these transnational families is underestimated.

Suarez-Orozco (2002) has argued that the consensus of migrant parent-child separations always leading to traumatic loss and long lasting negative effects are based on some unquestioned cultural biases and assumptions. She argues that viewing parent-child attachment through a Western focus on the nuclear family diminishes the important role of extended family and the practice of child-fostering in Hispanic families. Suarez-Orozco (2002) also highlighted the concept of relational resilience, defined as the process by which families cope and attempt to overcome persistent stress (Walsh, 1998). This is done through creating meaning out of loss and maintaining family connectedness even when far away by maintaining psychological presence in the form of cultural rituals and beliefs. Supporting this argument is Neimeyer (2001), who stated that given the capacity
of resiliency in children when they make meaning of loss or trauma, it is important for research on parent-child separations not to assume negative outcomes.

Zentgraf and Chinchilla (2012) offered a cost-benefit analysis of family separation that takes into consideration social, cultural and economic factors. These factors may account for different outcomes in the family reunification process. Additionally, Bernhard et al., (2005) and Suarez Orozco et al., (2002) have suggested that the cost and benefits of parent-child separations should be seen as varied and influenced by the micro and macro level context in which they occur, taking into consideration the country they live in, family make up, child rearing practices, socio-economic factors, and the meanings given to this type of separation.

Although the effects of parent-child separations, due to immigration, requires more research, what can be said is that the decision to separate is multi-layered and is associated with several cultural and contextual factors. Qualitative research thus far has shown that families view the decision to separate as a sacrifice to benefit their children (Suarez-Orozco, et.al 2005). It is an open question whether the children ever fully understand this and whether they agree with the cost-benefit analysis. Ultimately, this is a significant parenting decision that is made with the belief that the benefits will outweigh the potential costs.

**Process of Reunification**

*Factors that Influence Reunification*

Documented and undocumented immigrant children who are reunified with their family, must adapt to shifts in family structure, a new language, and culture. Even in the best of circumstances (i.e., no trauma) once children are reunited with the family, a
multitude of psychological adjustments are required. In many cases, the effects of a long separation and a long awaited reunion is extremely difficult for both the parent(s) and children. Also, frequent contact is not always enough to mitigate the difficulties experienced upon reunification. Reunited children may have difficulty accepting their parents and adjusting to a new family dynamic. A study of Chinese immigrant children's reuinion with their parents found that there is an initial “honeymoon period” where family members pull together to make adjustments and fulfill a strong cultural norm that all family members desire reunification. If problems do develop in these reunions, they occur after this honeymoon period when the gaps between expectations and realities become visible (Lam et al., 2005). There may be different timelines for the development of a honeymoon period early in the reunification process due to coping with loss of a surrogate caregiver for example.

After an initial “honeymoon period,” both youths and parents may uncover a different reality. Parents expect that children will be grateful for their sacrifices but often find that the children are ambivalent about joining parents in the new country (Rousseau, 2009). Children may also be disappointed with their parents, compared to their fantasies and expectations (Artico, 2003). Parents often report having difficulty asserting their authority and being frustrated that their financial and emotional sacrifices are not fully appreciated by their children (Menjivar & Abrego, 2009).

There is a body of literature derived from clinical reports which points to a pattern of family conflict during the reunification phase (Glasglow & Guse-Shees, 1995). Findings suggest that over time the family may have evolved in such a way that excludes the parents who have been away, making reunification difficult (Falicov, 2007). The
longer the separation, the less likely adolescents report being able to identify with their parents or being willing to conform to their rules at the time of reunification. Many reunified families experience tensions, conflict, and adjustment difficulties, particularly during the child's adolescent phase of development (Crawford-Brown & Melrose 2001). Parents' attempts to reestablish control are complicated by guilt and may result in inconsistencies and overindulgence (Arnold, 1991; Burke, 1980). Parents may also use parenting practices that fit the child at the age of separation but that are not appropriate or effective for the child’s developmental stage at the time of reunification (Mitrani et al., 2004).

A pattern of rejection and counter-rejection may emerge that prompts some families to seek treatment while others suffer but do not seek help. Therapists have also found that mothers' parenting styles in reunited families may be incongruent with a adolescents’ development, and this incongruity is heightened by the fact that the child often had to be self-reliant while in his or her home country (Mitrani et al., 2004). All these emotional and behavioral factors may combine with a lack of parenting experience to create challenges for the parent-child reunion. However, consistent with Suarez-Orozco and colleagues’ (2002) view, it is possible for families with similar histories to adjust to separation and reunification without symptomatic outcomes among their children, or for whom symptoms do not manifest themselves as conduct problems. Qualitative results in a longitudinal study conducted by Suarez-Orozco and colleagues (2005) depicted that youths were not only migrating to a new land, but also to a new family and lifestyle. They reported “feelings of disorientation” and “coming to terms with new family members” as many youths were required to adapt to an entirely new family
constellation (step-parents and new siblings). Not only were these youths expected to navigate a new cultural landscape, but they were also met with the challenge of adapting to the culture of a new family (Chinchilla & Zentgraf, 2008; Mitrani et al., 2004).

Encouragingly, previous research has revealed that, on average, 7 years after reunification, participants reported that psychological symptoms have abated considerably (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2005; Bang & Kim, 2011). Likewise, qualitative interviews reveal that while parents and youth described acute discomfort in the initial period following reunification, in most cases they displayed strength, resourcefulness and resilience in coping with the challenges imposed by the separations and adjusting to new family constellations.

**Barriers to reunification**

The United States’ current immigration policy on family reunification serves as a significant barrier to transnational families who are trying to navigate the legal system with the hope of reunification. A significant percentage of the estimated 11 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. are spouses/children of legal residents. However, even when parents have legal status they may resort to illegal avenues for their children, such as crossing the border or over-staying a visitor or student visa. This occurs because of the barriers presented to them in the process of a visa petition for family reunification including significant financial requirements and extended processing delays of five or more years on average. In 2016, legislation to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act was introduced with the goal to provide a more efficient and timely way for lawful immigrant families to reunite. This amendment titled the Reuniting Families Act (RFA) was presented to the House subcommittee of Immigration Policy and Enforcement but
did not move forward. Additional research is needed to highlight how these barriers negatively influence transnational families.

Factors that Prompt the Reunification

Just as there are several factors that guide the decision making process of separation, there are factors that influence the decision of how and when to reunify. Qualitative studies thus far have identified that most parents wish to gain some financial stability before reunifying with their children. Some families may become discouraged by the lengthy and financially taxing process of acquiring documented status to legally claim their children, which may lead them to make the difficult decision to hire a coyote to smuggle their children into the country. As discussed previously, this puts children at risk of experiencing trauma, as the journey to the U.S. is many times a perilous one. However, parents may feel that this is their only viable option if they wish to reunify. Bledsoe and Sow (2011) argued that ethnic and racial attitudes of those in the host country will also influence parental decisions regarding where to raise their children and as a result, reunification may not be the ultimate goal.

In other cases, it may be the youth themselves who make the decision to migrate (Hernandez, 2013). For UIC the motivators for migration may vary. For some, gang violence and political instability of Latin American countries has prompted them to seek refuge in the United States, especially if they lived in Central American countries such as El Salvador. While many UIC migrate to escape violence, others come with different motivations such as acquiring an education or seeking employment. Another prevalent reason UIC immigrate to the United States, which is directly related to this study, is to reunite with their parent(s).
In circumstances where a child is no longer receiving adequate care from their caretaker in their country of origin, either due to emotional or financial reasons, a parent may feel the need to reunify more quickly than originally anticipated. The length of separation may also play an important role as parents and children may become restless when they perceive too much time has passed. At this time, it appears that the quality of their child’s care, length of separation and economic factors guide the decision to begin the process of reunification, however ongoing research is needed to understand in more depth what leads parents to decide when to reunify and how various factors influence the reunification process.

Theoretical Underpinnings

In this section I describe the theoretical frameworks guiding the proposed exploration of parent-child separation and reunification process among transnational Hispanic families. These theories include the Multidimensional Ecosystemic Comparative Approach (MECA), family systems theory and attachment theory. All three theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the experiences of Hispanic transnational families. All of these theories have been utilized in researching issues related to Hispanic immigrant families.

**Multicultural Ecosystemic Comparative Approach (MECA)**

First introduced by Falicov in 1995 and expanded since then, the Multidimensional Ecosystemic Comparative Approach (MECA) was created to provide a framework for understanding the experiences of migration, acculturation, changes in ecological context, and issues related to the family life cycle and family organization. MECA brings together concepts from family systems theory and therapy with research on
immigration and its effects on family processes (Falicov, 2012), making it useful to understand the process of adaptation and acculturation for individuals and families through an ecological lens.

The framework posits that the immigration experience is not homogeneous. It takes a number of variables into account that can be examined separately as well as in combination with each other. This analysis is done for the host culture and, for the home culture, such that each individual and family unit has their own ecological niche. For example, the model incorporates a combination of variables such as ethnicity, race, religion, legal status, community resources, and education, and examines at the similarities and differences within the migrants’ home culture and host culture, providing a deeper understanding of each individual family’s own experience with the acculturation process. The model also recognizes that there are multiple factors that influence the migration experience including the reception of the host country, proximity to the homeland, gender, age, and family composition at the time of migration. The framework provides a generalist view to provide both researchers and clinicians the ability to create and implement interventions. However, it forces us to look at multiple dimensions of culture that influence the migration and acculturation process that go beyond the “culture as ethnicity” framework that limits our understanding culture by focusing on only one angle, that of the individual’s ethnic background, and as a result discounting the influence of multiple factors that impacts one’s culture more comprehensively (Falicov, 2007).

In its effort to move towards a more comprehensive and multidimensional lens of understanding culture and family processes, MECA is comprised of four key domains, as described next.
Key Generic Domains:

A. Migration History: This domain focuses on when, why and how the family migrated. The journey of migration and culture change includes their migration story and process of acculturation.

B. Ecological context: This domain examines diversity in where and how the family lives and examines at social class, race, occupation, education, social support, immigration status, and other ecological factors.

C. Family Organization: This domain considers diversity within the family structure such as child-rearing and cultural parenting practices over the life cycle, as well as their impact upon reunification.

D. Family Life Cycle: This domain focuses on diversity in how the family transitions through life events and developmental stages.

These dimensions encompassed by MECA provide an integrative framework can provide a comprehensive understanding of the processes that immigrant families undergo, including separation and reunification, this study’s focus. MECA highlights important implications for family connections and disconnections that affect how the family copes with the stressors of separation and reunification (Falicov, 2012).

Consistent with the rising literature on transnational families, parent-child separations and subsequent reunifications add a layer of complexity to the migration process and contribute significantly to the family’s sense of loss. It also raises issues around the potential inclusion and exclusion of family members that may take place during this process, for example when a parent remarries, separates from a partner/spouse, or welcomes new children into the family structure during the time of
separation, these changes in family configuration may heighten the risk of significant family conflict, especially after reunification (Falicov, 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). This theoretical framework also acknowledges, as does Suarez-Orozco (2002) that many families who undergo migration-related separations and subsequent reunifications are able to cope successfully and demonstrate an ability to maintain a healthy sense of family cohesion and resiliency.

Family therapists have developed behavioral interventions for families with adolescents who have experienced migration-related separations (Santisteban & Mena, 2009; Santisteban, Mena, & Abalo, 2013). In order to further inform this clinical research, models such as MECA can contribute to the development of family interventions by helping explore and identify potential protective factors of families who have coped successfully. There are several factors present in the dimensions of MECA that may help identify potential protective factors that occur at the time of separation, and that facilitate an adaptive reunification process. One example is the use of rituals to promote family coherence and hope. Family systems theorists and clinicians are aware of the power of rituals which can validate ties between the past, present and future (Imber-Black, Roberts and Whiting, 2003). Falicov (2012) discussed that migration is a significant life transition with no formal ritual tied to it. For individuals and families who create these rituals, this practice can produce resiliency. Rituals that foster family connections may include sending remittances, visiting home, frequency/type of communication (calls, letters etc.). While other rituals may serve as a way of re-creating memories and experiences such as visiting specific restaurants, neighborhoods and church communities. Telling stories, including the family's migration story, is another
ritual that can help in providing a more cohesive family narrative that may can be passed
down the generations. Falicov’s work also discusses the importance of immigrant family
communications and credits the advances in communication, and technology that
positively impact immigrant families and their experience as “transnationals.” The ability
to maintain ties across borders is an important factor that can significantly influence the
quality of the parent-child relationship(s).

The theory also moves away from a “deficit-oriented” description of migration
which uses language such as “between two worlds” and “broken hearts,” as it is
described in Suarez-Orozco’s research, towards language that may facilitate a more
“strength-based” approach and results in a narrative that promotes resiliency for
transnational families such as “in two worlds” and “two hearts” (Falicov, 2007). Through
a more strength-based approach, clinicians may be able to foster a conceptual shift that
would allow the families to reframe parent-child separations towards a more empowering
and resourceful narrative of “transnational collaboration” where the process of living a
transnational lifestyle and its challenges are better understood, prepared for and more
effectively supported.

**Family Systems**

Family systems theory was introduced in the 1940’s as an alternative to the idea
that problem behaviors and psychological distress reside within the individual alone (i.e.,
due only to individual deficits) the theory opened up avenues to explore the notion that
one can identify systemic contributions to individual behavior, that dysfunction can occur
between persons, and that problems can be assessed and treated at the relationship level
(Fenell & Weinhold, 1997). As a result, the focus of family systems theory is the family
unit. Psychological problems and behaviors are thought to be maintained by interactions and behaviors of other family members. As a consequence, the family system itself, rather than the individual, becomes the primary unit of assessment and treatment.

Family Systems Theory is particularly useful when we consider the reunification phase that transnational families may undergo. Although it may seem that the period of separation might be the most difficult phase and reunification is the most joyful, reunification can be complicated by the expectations and the emotional reactions of multiple family members (Falicov, 2007). After a lengthy separation the child may be rejoining a family whose dynamics have been set in place for some time. Therefore, the reunification process involves an adaptation period to a new family system which should be understood within the context of their interactions. Bowen’s family systems theory has been found to be an appropriate approach to use with Transnational Hispanic families as it takes into account the role of multigenerational and extended family members. Given the influence of intergenerational family members in Hispanic families, it is important to include them as an important component of the family system. Within Bowen’s family systems theory, the family is seen as an emotional unit that undergoes complex interactions (Bowen, 1978). Bowen focuses on the family’s emotional interdependence that can lead to cohesion and cooperation but also cause problems when the system is experiencing heightened tension, such as stress related to migration.

Family systems also has the benefit of conceptualizing multiple levels of the system – for example the contexts in which families reside and migrate. McGoldrick and Carter (1989) contributed their own theory under the umbrella of family systems theory, identified as the Family Life Cycle theory. In their theory, they posited that the family’s
ability to adapt to change is associated with family wellness. The family life cycle addresses transitions that include the loss or addition of family members, relocations of family, traumatic events, etc., which can all create stressful transitions that may precipitate negative responses in family members. These concepts overlap with key MECA domains, specifically domain C identified as “family organization” and domain D the “family life cycle.” This makes the two models very compatible for use in this research.

An important concept within family systems theory that is used to understand the emotional process of transnational families is that of ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss is defined as grief that is “unclear, indeterminate” (Boss, 1999) either because of lack of knowledge, or because of a lack of clarity as to whether the individual is part of the family unit or not. There are two types of ambiguous loss. The first is one in which the family member is physically absent but psychologically present, such as a missing person, and the second is when the family member is physically present but psychologically absent, such as someone with a severe impairment such as dementia.

Ambiguous loss provides us with another frame for understanding the possible consequences of ruptures in parent child relationships (Boss, 1999; Doka, 1989). It is particularly relevant to parent-child separations during the migratory process, as it is a transition that requires adaptation that may trigger a variety of physical, emotional, and behavioral responses. When a loved one is either physically present but psychologically unavailable or vice versa psychologically present but physically unavailable; this might cause complications in the resolution of grief. From this concept the term migration loss is described as a loss with no closure or finality as many immigrants fantasize of one-day
returning home or being reunited with family members. Social communities and ethnic communities function as sources of remembrance which can create mixed emotions and make grieving one’s home country incomplete and “ambiguous.”

In looking at the stages of immigration, Carlos Sluzki (1979) outlined how each stage elicits different conflicts and family coping mechanisms. Dependent on the context, some cultural rules/beliefs may be adaptive to both cultures, while others may need to undergo significant changes. Overall, how the family develops ways to cope with these changes will predict the level of family conflict and disconnection that they experience. High levels of conflict and stress due to the challenges of each stage of migration can cause intergenerational effects.

**Attachment Theory**

Another psychological theory that helps explain the relationship between parent and child and the impact of experiencing prolonged separation is attachment theory. Bowlby defined attachment theory as behavior that results in a person retaining proximity to a preferred individual. In general, the attachment figure serves as a secure base from which the child feels safe to explore their environment. Bowlby explored the process through which bonds of affection are formed and broken. He described how infants become emotionally attached to primary caregivers and emotionally distressed when separated from them (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Attachment theory can then provide a valuable conceptual model for understanding the role of the parent-child relationship and the child’s emerging self-concept and view of the social world.

The temporary loss of a parent because of immigration can have a powerful influence on the developmental trajectory of a child, and particularly on the parent-child
attachment. Because mothers are most often the primary caregivers, long-term separation from them may be particularly disruptive to the relationship. According to Bowlby (1969) the impact of a parent-child separation depends upon the quality of the early attachment. Bowlby (1982) suggested that the lack of a stable maternal figure disrupts the development of an enduring attachment bond and places children at risk for psychological disturbance. Although Bowlby’s (1969) theory was based primarily on the infant and caregiver relationship, he and others have recognized that parent-child attachment remains significant in childhood and adolescence, and can be influenced by later separations (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982; Heiss, Berman & Sperling, 1996).

Masterson (1985) emphasized two critical stages of separation-individuation, each of which may be impacted by the quality of the parent-child attachment. The first separation-individuation stage occurs at 1.5 to 3 years of age when the infant becomes mobile and begins to physically separate from the mother. The second separation-individuation stage, a recapitulation of the first, occurs at ages 10 to 12 years when there is a thrust of new activity and a turning toward growth and independence. Clinical studies thus far suggest that reunifications (and separation from surrogate parents) often occur during or close to the second separation-individuation stage (Santisteban & Mena, 2009). The timing of these events may cause disruptions in the normative development of individuation processes. Parent expectations of a very close relationship, child anger regarding the separation, adjustment to totally unfamiliar surroundings, and many other powerful dynamics are occurring at the same time that separation-individuation issues are normally arising.
Woodward, Fergusson and Belsky’s (2000) retrospective study of parent–child separation because of marital disruption, with participants ranging from infancy through adolescence, suggests that the younger the child is at the time of separation, the more severe the influence is on self-reported attachment to the parent. The authors examined children aged 0–5, 5–10, and 10–15 years old and found that parent–child separation at a young age was related to lower attachment to parents in late adolescence. Also, important to note is the impact of the correlates of quality of caretaker, and the quality and quantity of parent contact on the second separation experienced when reunified with parents and leaving his/her caretaker in their home country.

Attachment theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding the process involved when family separations occur, there is some controversy in its use with Hispanic immigrant families due to questioning of its cross-cultural validity (Artico 2003; Behrens, 2010; Peluso, Miranda, Firpo-Jimenez, & Pham 2010) and critiques that it may be a reflection of western cultural assumptions. In spite of this, attachment theory has been cited as part of the theoretical framework for several contemporary studies about families who have been separated and then reunited due to immigration (Arnold, 2006; Artico, 2001, 2003; Black, 2006; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Hine-St. Hilaire, 2008; Lemy, 2000; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002).

Because, Falicov’s Multidimensional Ecosystemic Comparative Approach (MECA), is successful in integrating important concepts from family systems theory, such as the family life cycle and ambiguous loss, as well as key aspects of attachment theory. As a result, this study will utilize MECA as its primary framework. Therefore, MECA will serve as a guide in conceptualizing and creating the study’s parent and youth
interview questions.

**Research and Clinical Significance of the Study**

Social services that address the issues of separation and reunification rarely exist for immigrant families in the U.S. (Artico, 2003; Suarez-Orozco, 2011). Bernhard (2005) emphasized that particular efforts should be made to provide services for mothers who have separated from their children, perhaps through the use of technology to facilitate connecting from afar, along with child care and after school care subsidies for newly arrived immigrants regardless of their legal status. In addition, social service and mental health providers should be properly trained to address immigration issues, including family history of parent-child separations/reunifications and challenges stemming from these experiences. Research can give direction to the types of services provided such that they can be most effective. Several questions remain unanswered, including how the question of government programs and non-profits can better facilitate successful and healthy transnational family reunifications with the goals of decreasing family conflict and increasing family bonds (Rodriguez & Hagan, 2004).

Additionally, research supports the notion that immigrant families have a remarkable capacity to overcome the challenges presented from separations due to migration. Evidence-based interventions should be developed with the aim of attenuating the effects of separation as well as developing strategies to help families successfully manage the reunification process. This proposed study aims to provide a deeper understanding of these families' experiences of separation and subsequent reunification process.
Chapter 3: Method and Procedures

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative collective case study approach. Creswell (2007) describes this case study approach as: A qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a bounded system (case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources (interviews, observations, field notes etc.) and reports a case description and case based themes (p. 73). This methodology allows for comparisons across cases to identify similarities and differences across participants (Stake, 1995).

Given the limited research around the reunification process, it is important to first give voice to the parents and youths who are reuniting after an immigration-related separation. The exploration of parent-child experiences from both the parent and child’s perspectives allowed for the development of a conceptual framework (Yin, 2003) that considers the unique experiences and contextual conditions of the participants. I explored participants’ experiences and perceptions through the use of semi-structured interviews, the creation of family genograms, and an adaptation of photovoice. Through detailed and in-depth data collection involving multiple sources (e.g., observations, interviews, visual materials), a case description and case-based themes were explored (Creswell, 2007). As a result, a rich and in-depth understanding of the separation and reunification process along with its effects on the family system was provided.
Table 1: Overview of the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do parents and adolescents experience the process of separation and reunification?</td>
<td>- Self-identification as a Hispanic family</td>
<td>- Genogram- Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Experienced immigration-related separation where a parent migrated to the United States from his or her home country before the child</td>
<td>- Photovoice activity- adolescent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What similarities and differences do they share?</td>
<td>- Experienced reunification in the U.S after four or more years of separation</td>
<td>- Individual semi-structured interviews with parent and adolescent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What factors promote resiliency and family cohesion, and which add to family conflict and/or distress.</td>
<td>- Adolescent between the ages of 13 and 17</td>
<td>- Field notes and observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One- or two-parent household</td>
<td>- Member-checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Minimum of one year post-reunification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Spanish/English speaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researcher’s Role

Transparency in relation to the researcher’s position, experiences, and possible subjectivities is essential in qualitative research (Charmaz, 2006). Reflexivity is critical to ensure that the findings presented reflect, as much as possible, the voices of the participants and not only the biases or perspectives of the researcher. This is referred in qualitative methods as *reflexivity*, and is defined by Charmaz (2006) as “the researcher’s scrutiny of his/her experience, decisions, and interpretations in ways that bring the
researcher into the process and allow the reader to assess how and to what extent the researcher's interests, positions, and assumptions influenced inquiry” (p. 188).

My work as a researcher is intricately linked to my identity and life experiences, As Denzin explained, “Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher” (1986, p. 12). In other words, who I am determines, to a large extent, what I want to study. Because I cannot separate my personal and researcher identities, and because my previous experiences and expectations are part of my researcher identity, I need to acknowledge the subjectivities that I bring to this process. In doing this research, it was important that I be considerate of both the similarities and differences between myself and the research participants. As a researcher, I was aware of my own personal dimensions and how they affect my interactions with participants and my perceptions of them and of the data.

As a child of immigrants, family separations due to migration are an important part of my own personal narrative. My father left his home country of Cuba thanks to Operation Peter Pan, after his parents began to fear the country’s indoctrination of their youth in the 1960s. Operation Peter Pan was the largest exodus of unaccompanied minors in the Western hemisphere (Cauce, 2012). It is documented that approximately half of these minors were reunited with relatives at a later date. Fifteen years after leaving Cuba, my father was able to fly back and visit his parents for the first time since their separation. My father perceived this experience as the most influential event of his life, and often wonders what his life would have been like if he had been, as many of his peers were, reunited with his parents had they been able to migrate to the United States.
As a graduate student, I was instantly drawn to immigrant families and the multiple and complex immigration issues that affect their psychological well-being. In my clinical work, I have assisted multiple families who have experienced long-term separations and who have faced significant family stressors after reunification. I also had the opportunity to facilitate a strengths-based resiliency group for unaccompanied minors detained in a shelter led by Catholic Charities—the same organization that coordinated Operation Peter Pan.

These life experiences have influenced my views on the effects of immigration-related issues on contemporary Hispanic families. For example, I expected that families may have encountered a significant period of adjustment after reunification. To provide some safeguard and ensure that it is the voices of these families and its individual members that are being reflected in the data, I recording my own personal reflections and observations after each interview. I also conducted "member checks" whereby participants were called a week after the interview and were provided the opportunity to verify that the emerging themes were consistent with their lived experiences, provide feedback and clarify or add information.

**Participants**

A total of six family members (i.e., 3 mothers and 3 adolescents, from 3 families) participated in the study. Participants were all Hispanic immigrant families from Central American countries who had experienced parent-child reunification in the United States after an immigration-related separation of at least four years. This length of separation was chosen as an inclusion criterion based on research literature indicating that separations of four years or more are common (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008), and
that long-term separations categorized as four or more years might be associated with more difficult reunifications (Smith, Lalonde, & Johnson, 2004).

The study focused on families who were one year or more post-reunification, to allow for an adjustment period, and whose reunified children were between 13 and 17 years of age, as research has shown that most children reunify during the adolescent years. Gender was also considered during case selection, with the goal of capturing any possible themes related to gender differences within data analysis; thus, I aimed to recruit both female and male adolescents. Sampling was purposeful, given the study’s aims and methodology.

Inclusion Criteria:

a. Self-identification as a Hispanic family
b. Experienced immigration-related separation where a parent migrated to the United States from his or her home country before the child
c. Experienced reunification in the U.S after four or more years of separation
d. Adolescent between the ages of 13 and 17
e. One- or two-parent household
f. Minimum of one year post-reunification
g. Spanish/English speaking

Protection of Human Participants, Setting, and Recruitment

This research study was approved by the Human Subjects Research Office of the University of Miami. Written consent from each parent, and written assent from each child, in the participants’ preferred language was acquired. Participants were identified by their preferred first name during the interview and assigned a pseudonym that was used in the transcription and analysis. Additionally, the photos and genograms produced by the participants remain secure to ensure their confidentiality. In place of these images is a description of the photos and genograms provided in the results of the study. All measures to protect participants’ identity and ensure privacy were taken in conducting
this research, as participants are often emotionally vulnerable when they speak of their immigration experience.

Families were identified through community partnerships and traditional research recruitment methods such as flyers. A $50 gift card was provided to the participating families as compensation for their time and effort. Interviews were conducted in a setting of the participants’ preference. Families were also offered a referral list of counseling services in the event that they may benefit or are interested in receiving treatment.

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

I utilized semi-structured interviews consistent with previous work conducted with immigrant families (Artico, 2003; Rosseau et al., 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 2002, 2011; Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2008, 2012). I conducted individual interviews with the youth and the parent with whom they were reunified. Interview questions were open ended with a separate interview guide developed for the parent and adolescent interviews (see Appendix I). The theoretical framework MECA was used to guide the questioning during the interview.

Parent interviews were conducted first, followed by adolescent interviews. Interviews were conducted in the language of each participant’s preference. I conducted all interviews personally, and was able to guide the interview in either English, Spanish, or a combination of both languages. Each interview ranged between 60 and 90 minutes and were audio-recorded with the consent of the participant.

Genograms
A genogram is a graphic portrayal of the structure of the family, which allows for the identification of changes in family dynamics over time and for the detection of repeated patterns of family behaviors. Genograms are a tool used extensively in clinical practice and significantly less often in research. However, there is emerging evidence in the literature of genogram use in research on families (Helling & Stovers, 2005). The use of genograms in this study provides a visual representation of the families’ migration narrative. The Multicultural Family Institute Standard Symbols for Genograms were used.

A family genogram was constructed collaboratively with the parent prior to their interview. The process of creating the genogram with the parent served to provide a visual that helped stimulate their thoughts and reflect on their migration narrative. The parent was asked to assist in constructing a genogram of their family at the time prior to their migration to the United States. The construction of the genogram began by obtaining information on the basic family structure and demographic information of each family member (McGoldrick, 2008). In conjunction with the interview questions, information related to the quality of family relationships and family roles were included in the genogram. Changes in the quality of family relationships (distant, close, conflictual) as they entered different phases in their migration experience (during separation, at the time of reunification, present) were recorded on the genogram in different colors to differentiate each time period (black was used to indicate the time prior to the separation and red for after the reunification).
Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory action research approach. It was designed to help participants share their expertise and knowledge of their everyday lives through photography (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Wang, 1999). The primary aim of photovoice has been to foster social awareness and community empowerment. Through the use of photovoice, participants can capture their experiences through photos and use storytelling to share the subjective meaning behind each image (Wang & Burris, 1997). Traditionally, this methodology is conducted within a group dynamic where members discuss their photos and together derive meaning from them. However, photovoice has been shown to be fluid and adaptable. Catalani and Minkler (2010) assessed the use of photovoice as a research method by examining 37 peer-reviewed articles utilizing photovoice, concluding that the method is diverse within its protocol and open to adaptation.

This study utilized an adaptation of photovoice with the adolescent participants as a tool for increased rapport building and engagement given how powerful the use of visual images can be as a communication tool. Rather than using group discussion to uncover meaning from photos, I asked the adolescent to narrate their photos during our individual interview, consistent with the constructivist framework and collective case study approach. The adolescent participated in the photovoice activity, making them co-researchers as they narrated the photos and interpreted their own meaning for the researcher. Each adolescent was provided with a low-cost digital camera and asked to take 10 pictures that expressed their thoughts, feelings, and views about their reunification experience. They were then asked to select three images out of the ten captured and provide a two or three-sentence caption for each selected photo. Assigning a
specific number of photos has been identified by previous photovoice researchers to encourage participation (Marquis & Manceau, 2007). The adolescents were provided the camera along with instructions on the day that the parents were interviewed (Appendix II), and were allotted a short interval of time (2-3 days) to take the photos. Adolescents were also asked not to share their photos with family members to prevent them from influencing their interpretation of their reunification experience.

Guidelines on the ethics related to the use of photography in research was provided to ensure the confidentiality of the participants and community members. Specifically, adolescents were instructed not to take images of people’s faces or identifiable places. The adolescent interview began by reviewing the images they captured and using specific prompts focusing on why the photographs were chosen and what makes them meaningful.

*Reflexive Journal and Field Notes*

I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study. The purpose of this journal was to increase my awareness of my subjective experiences as a researcher by documenting my thoughts and reactions. Field notes were included in this journal to capture my observations of each participant, in order to provide a rich description of each case.

*Table 2: Steps in Data Collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Open-Ended</td>
<td>Observations/</td>
<td>Photovoice</td>
<td>Open-Ended</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member-Checking</td>
<td>Genogram</td>
<td>Parent-Interview</td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>Adolescent</td>
<td>Adolescent-Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Analysis Plan**

Through a constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2006), the primary focus was on identifying the meanings these families attribute to the separation and reunification process by examining their thoughts, feelings, values, and viewpoints. Consistent with constructivist qualitative research, data was analyzed as it was collected (Creswell, 2007). Each case was examined (within case analysis) and then the individual findings were aggregated to identify patterns that would lead to cross-case conclusions (Creswell, 2007). Cross-case analysis then highlight themes, both salient and distinct, that emerged after the coding process across the three cases. Within this strategy, I was able to predict similar or contrasting results based on theory or what Stake (1995) termed *propositions*. Propositions derived from the literature or professional experience guide the study and in essence helped form a hypothesis.

Thematic analysis was used as a method for identifying, analyzing ad reporting patterns (themes) within the data. This method resembles some of the characteristics of grounded theory analysis, in that themes emerge from (are grounded in) the primary data. The study took a inductive approach to coding whereby the analysis was driven by the data itself (from the bottom up). Clarke and Braun's (2006) six step framework for thematic analysis was followed. First, I familiarized myself with the data by reading the transcripts as a whole followed by generating initial codes (open-coding) line by line. I then began the search for themes. Themes were derived based on patterns in the data as well as significance (identified as data with high emotional impact/emphasis provided by the subject) as was the case with undocumented families. As a result, some themes
emerged due to recurrent patterns whereas others emerged due to their critical importance.

The development of themes within this framework was a multi-step process where I identified lower level themes (sub-themes), moving from a low level of abstraction to higher level themes, linking the data. What the themes are saying and how they relate was continuously assessed throughout the process in order to avoid creating themes as "descriptors" rather than interpreting the data to derive meaning and risk under-analyzing. Once thematic analysis of each case was completed I engaged in cross-case analysis that examined themes across each case noting commonalities and differences. Writing the results as the final step within this framework. Once the themes were identified, a conceptual framework that included all the themes was developed from the data. Detailed case descriptions of each case utilizing quotes was provided followed by the cross-case synthesis of themes led by each research question.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure analytic rigor, as delineated in Morrow (2005), standards of trustworthiness in constructivist research was utilized. First, researcher reflexivity was addressed throughout the research process by documenting my experiences through field notes. Triangulation is a key technique used to ensure that data analysis is rich, comprehensive, and well-developed. A single method of data collection may not adequately shed light on a phenomenon; for this reason, using multiple methods helped in facilitating a deeper understanding from different perspectives. In this study, triangulation took place as multiple data sources were utilized to corroborate emerging themes through
the individual parent and child interviews, family genograms, and photos. I also reported findings using rich descriptions with sufficient detail as well as quotes from each participant. After the interviews were conducted and preliminary themes were identified, I followed up with each family member by phone for the purpose of “member checking” to allow the participants a separate time to briefly reflect on their experience and corroborate the research findings.
Chapter 4: Results

Results will be presented in this chapter using within-case analysis. Therefore, each case will be individually presented to highlight the family's unique characteristics and provide the reader with context. This within-case analysis will then lead to the comparison of cases that will be presented in the cross-case analysis in the following chapter. This chapter is organized as follows (a) introduction of the family, (b) genogram created with the parent, (c) narrative of the parent's experience, (d) adolescent's photovoice activity, and (e) narrative of the adolescent's experience. The narrative of each participant's experience is derived from the semi-structured interview conducted and follows the progression of the interview describing the participants experience at the time prior to migration, separation, and reunification. Thick descriptions and direct quotes from the individual narratives is provided to illustrate the findings of each case.

Case One: "The Rodriguez Family"

Description

Maria is a single parent raising her adolescent daughter, Laura, and a younger son. Maria has lived in the United States for the past several years since deciding to migrate from her home country. Her daughter, Laura, was a young child when her mother migrated to the United States. She remained in her home country with her brother under the care of her aunt. Laura and her mother underwent a prolonged separation until they were reunified when Laura was in her early adolescence.
**Genogram Description**

The genogram illustrates how the relationship between Maria and her daughter, Laura, is identified as distant prior to the separation and remains the same after reunification. Maria's relationship with her sister is identified as close at both time points as is Laura's relationship with her aunt. Maria also identified her daughter's relationship with her father as close while her relationship with him evolved from conflictual to a complete cut-off, as they have not communicated since the separation.

**Parent Interview**

To conduct the interview, I drove to a small apartment complex in an urban area of the city. Maria quickly came to the door and greeted me with a hug and asked me to come in and sit on the living room couch. Maria then asked me to sit and wait a few minutes while she finished in the kitchen. She then returned and sat beside me on the couch to begin the interview process. I thanked her for agreeing to meet with me, and we began the interview. She was soft-spoken and agreeable. I reflect now on the fact that after the initial question, she talked about her experience and answered many of my questions without my asking. I remember thinking I had given her permission to talk about her experiences, and once the floodgates opened, I was just there to listen and capture her story.

**Pre-Migration**

_Tomando la decisión de migrar (making the decision to migrate)._ Maria shared that the decision-making process of migrating to the United States was an emotionally challenging and lengthy process. She pointed to leaving her marriage due to her
husband's infidelity and escalating marital conflict, as the impetus for her desire to explore the possibility of migrating to the United States.

"Bueno como allá vivía con el papá de ella y era una vida muy difícil, con el al final yo decía, yo mejor me quiero ir...me quería ir pero nunca tuve el valor de venirme hasta que empezamos los pleitos...entonces fue cuando yo me decidí a venirme para acá."

"Well, since over there I lived with her father and it was a very difficult life with him, at the end I said, I’d better leave ... I wanted to go but I never had the courage to come until we started the fights ... and that was when I decided to come here."

Along with the dissolution of her marriage came a need for her to deal with economic concerns, as Maria faced a new role as single mother with limited opportunities for income.

"No sabía como iba a mantener a mi familia...no podía confiar en su papá para mantenernos."

"I did not know how I was going to support my family ... I could not trust her dad to support us."

Maria was able to move to her sister's home with her children while she explored her options. She described how a family member, who had several years earlier migrated to the United States and in the process left her child in her mother's care, supported and later facilitated her decision to migrate. Maria reflected on the role that this family member played in her decision to migrate and shared that these conversations were an important part in her decision-making process. Having a family member who had undergone not only the physical journey of migration but also the emotional sacrifice of leaving her child played a major role in Maria's final decision to make the difficult decision of migrating and leaving behind her children for an unknown period of time.
Proceso de elegir el cuidado de mis hijos (process of selecting who would care for my children). Once Maria decided that she would migrate, the next step was to decide who would care for her children during her absence. For Maria this was an automatic decision. There was no one she would want to care for her children other than her sister. Although selecting an adequate and trustworthy caretaker came easy for Maria, the process of agreeing to this arrangement was not a smooth one. Maria's sister expressed concerns about the separation as well as her own ability to care for the children. These concerns were met with an ultimatum of sorts as Maria expressed that she would be leaving with her children if she did not agree to care for them, knowing that her sister would not want the children to experience the risky journey to the United States at such a young age.

"Le dije yo “yo me voy, y será usted quien se encarga de mis hijos...y me dijo que ‘no’, entonces yo le dije ‘Bueno, si usted no se hace cargo de los niños, yo me voy con ellos’...y cuando ella vio que yo venia con los niños, entonces me dice ‘déjame con ellos, no te los puedes llevar por que van a sufrir en el camino...y pues le dije ok entonces te los dejo y se los di a ella.""

"I told her I’m leaving and it's you who will take care of the children ... and she said ‘no,’ so I said "well, if you do not take care of the children, I'll leave with them " ... and when she saw that I was coming with the children, she says to me "leave me with them, you cannot take them because they are going to suffer along the way. And well I said ok so I left them and gave them to her."

Proceso de despedida (process of saying goodbye). Saying goodbye brought about another set of decisions Maria needed to make. She was faced with the challenge of deciding how to say goodbye and how much information to provide her children, debating what would be helpful and how much they would be able to understand. This part of her story was shared through tears depicting her deep sadness in reflecting on this moment.
"Fue horrible, fue tremendo ese día que dejé a mis hijos...¿Qué iba a decirle? Ellos no iban a entender...nunca hablé con ellos porque para mi fue muy duro decirles...fue ese día tan horrible."

"It was horrible it was terrible that day that I left my children ...what was I going to tell them?... they were not going to understand ... I never talked to them because for me it was very hard to tell them ... that day was so horrible.

The benefits of her departure, primarily the ability to send remittances, was shared as her primary motivation for leaving and to serve as a silver lining to hold on to in the midst of their sadness. However, the children were not provided with any information as it was too painful an experience and Maria was not convinced that they would fully understand and felt that it would only cause additional pain to an already difficult experience.

Fe (faith). The theme of faith was prevalent throughout Maria’s narrative, but was most prominent for her at this time point. Perhaps this was the case because she experienced the most uncertainty about her and her family’s future during the migration experience. "Que Dios me ilumine el camino," "May God enlighten my way" she recalls praying as she prepared for the upcoming journey along with prayers for her children's well-being. "Que Dios los proteja," "May God protect them" she would pray daily.

Time of Separation

El viaje (the journey). During the interview, Maria spoke freely until describing her journey to the United States. At this point in her story, she lowered her voice almost to a whisper. She was hesitant for the first time during the interview: "Fue muy duro y muy largo...es un viaje muy difícil y entrar en esa forma...es muy difícil...hay que tener mucho cuidado," "It was very hard and very long...it's a very difficult trip and arriving in that way...it is very difficult...you have to be very careful" she struggled to say. Her head
shook back and forth as she expressed the difficulties of the journey and her experience as an undocumented immigrant. "Te sigo contando desde que llegué... al fin," "I will keep sharing from when I arrived...finally" was my signal to move forward in the interview.

*Apoyo en los Estados Unidos (support in the United States).* For Maria, the choice to migrate to the United States was a challenging one. What provided her with hope was the understanding that she could rely on support from her family member who had encouraged her to make the decision to migrate. However, she did not receive the financial or emotional support she was expecting. This lack of support made it increasingly difficult to manage the adjustment to a new country as well as to navigate the emotional struggles associated with being away from her children.

"No tuve mucho apoyo, fue muy difícil...ella le gustaba la calle y entonces yo hacía todo y pagaba todo...no tenía su apoyo y era muy difícil estar en esa situación y también extrañando mis hijos...por lo último me cansé y le reclamé y tuvimos problemas y me sacó de la casa...."

"I did not have much support, it was very difficult ...she liked the streets, and so I did everything and paid everything ... I did not have her support and it was very difficult to be in that situation and also missing my children ... In the end I got tired and I complained and had problems and she kicked me out of the house ...

This event led Maria to seek support outside of her family. With gratitude, she shared receiving support from trusted co-workers, leading her to a new romantic relationship. When that relationship ended, she found support in her church community.

"Busqué ayuda con los compañeros de trabajo y busqué un cuartito y ahí estuve viviendo casi un año...yo lloraba en la noche y decía Dios mío qué hago en este país? Sentirme sola en este país sin mis hijos fue duro, duro, duro..."

"I looked for help with my co-workers and I looked for a little room and there I was living for almost a year until... I cried at night and say my God what am I doing in this country? Feeling alone in this country without my children was hard, hard, hard ..."
"Cuando me mudé para acá fue bastante difícil, yo sola, no tenia gente conocida...yo iba a la iglesia porque la gente ahí era como mi familia...ahí me sentía bien, ellos estaban pendientes de mí...me llamaban y me visitaban para ver si estaba bien."

"When I moved here it was quite difficult, I was alone, I knew no one... I went to church because the people there were like my family ... there I felt good, they looked after me ... they called and visited to see if I was okay."

In this case, Maria was able to find support first in her place of employment and later within her church community. In speaking with Maria at a later date she shared being very grateful to a co-worker she trusted who invited her to a church service after confiding that she too experienced similar struggles some time ago.

**Comunicación (Communication).** As a transnational family, navigating how to stay connected to loved ones across borders is at the heart of a transnational family's experience. In this case, Maria shared with a disheartened tone "mi hija casi no hablaba conmigo cuando estaba allá... entonces yo decía que ella no me quiere," "My daughter barely spoke with me while she was over there...so I would say that she must not love me." For the duration of their separation, Maria and her daughter Laura had minimal contact, which contributed significantly to the lack of emotional connection they experienced in their relationship.

Maria made daily phone calls to her aunt: "Yo siempre hablaba con ella, y le preguntaba por los niños," "I always spoke with her, and would ask about the children." Frequent contact via text messages and phone calls were also a norm with her eldest daughter. This frequent contact undoubtedly fostered their ongoing connection from afar. Maria also experienced other communication challenges such as her work schedule, time
difference, and most notably, the limited modes of communication available at the time of their separation.

"Era duro porque yo trabajaba tarde en la noche y no podía siempre responderle los mensajes... Yo deseaba que hubiera como hoy se llama uno y se está viendo...y no sólo escuchar la voz, y así pasamos mucho tiempo."

"It was hard because I worked late at night and I could not always answer the messages ... I wish it would be like today that you can call and see one another... and not just listen to the voice, and like that we were for a long time"

**Papel de madre (role of mother).** During the time of separation, Maria experienced a shift in her role as a parent. For her, this shift was related to traditional gender norms where she took on the more traditional "father as provider" role, and her aunt "the mother and nurturer" role.

"Yo hablaba... y nos decíamos que ella era la mamá y yo era el papá, porque como yo llevaba todo el cargo de ahí para ellas entonces ella me decía que siempre que yo llevaba el papel de papá por mandar dinero que tradicionalmente es la responsabilidad del hombre...y entonces yo le decía a ella que ella era como la esposa en casa cuidando los niños."

"I would talk...and we would tell one another that she was the mother and I was the father, because since I provided for them then she would tell me always that I took the role of dad for sending money that is traditionally the responsibility of the man ... and then I told her that she was like the wife at home taking care of the children."

For Maria this shift in roles came at a cost. She does not feel loved as she expects a child would love her mother. The pain she experiences due to this emotional distance is appeased by reaffirming what she was able to provide her daughter with financial support.

"Ella no tiene el amor verdadero como madre que soy...pero le digo yo estuve pendiente de mis hijos mandando dinero"

"She does not have a real mother's love ... but I tell you I was taking care of my children by sending money"
Reunification

Tomando la decisión de reunificar (making the decision to reunify). Unlike the decision-making process of migrating to the United States, Maria made the decision to reunify in an instant. She described how her memories of suffering in her home country left her with no desire to return, and her ultimate goal was to reunify with each of her children by bringing them to the United States.

"Siempre mi idea fue venir y poco a poco traer los para acá y nunca regresar a [mi país]...sufri mucho y tengo malos recuerdos de todos los sufrimientos que tuve y por eso nunca quisiera regresar..."

"Always my idea was to come and bring them here and never return to [my country] ...I suffered a lot and I have bad memories of all the pain I had and that's why I never want to return..."

Although a desirable goal, it was not one without doubts or fears. Maria described feeling insecure in her ability to parent an older child and unsure of what emotions would surface when the time finally came to take on the mother role again.

"Miraba cuando ya venía mi niña y me decía yo, cómo voy hacer yo? Porque ya ella venía tan grandecita...y yo me preguntaba cómo voy a hacer? Cómo me voy a sentir? Cuando ella esté conmigo? Porque yo nunca había tenido una hija grande a mi lado."

"I would see when my daughter was coming and ask myself, how am I going to do it? because she was already so big....and I would ask myself how am I going to manage? How am I going to feel? When she is with me? because I had never had an older daughter at my side before."

Additional fears she experienced were the well-being of her children during their journey. Maria's younger child needed medical treatment that was unavailable in her home country. Thus, this was the deciding factor in making the necessary arrangements for her children to make the journey to the United States.
"Fue una decisión fácil porque no había otra alternativa... necesitaba medicina... Yo reuní el dinero y busqué el coyote... rezándole a Dios que llegaran bien... y gracias a Dios pudieron venir."

"It was an easy decision because there was no other alternative... we needed medicine ... I gathered the money and looked for the coyote... praying to God that they would arrive well... and thank God they made it.

Proceso de reunificación (process of reunification). A long awaited moment is that of a parent and their child’s reunion. Maria described this moment with glee in her voice--as if it were happening in the present. She described how her children had made it to the border safely and were detained by border patrol, and soon after sent to a shelter for unaccompanied children in the Midwest before relocating them to a shelter in South Florida where they were reunified. She expressed minimal concerns during this process as she knew her children’s detention was a possible outcome. What was of concern was her child's medical care. "No estaba segura si la iba a tratar un médico... no quería que se pusiera peor," "I was not sure if a doctor was going to treat him... I did not want him to get any worse." Her child was able to receive the medical care needed, which extended both of her children’s stay at the shelter for one month. She described her eagerness at wanting to take them home the moment she saw them, but her child's medical needs were a priority.

"Yo la vi por primera vez desde que me vine para acá cuando la tenían detenida en el albergue de niños... yo saqué permiso del trabajo y la fui a ver y en ese momento quería agarrarla y traérmela para la casa... pero me aguanté hasta el mes que me la entregaron..."

"I saw her for the first time since I came here when she was detained in the children's shelter ... I got permission from work and I went to see her and at that moment I wanted to grab her and bring her home ... but I restrained myself until a month later that they released her to me."
Maria recalls what her expectations were when first reunifying with her daughter. Similar to other accounts shared by parents who have been reunified with children after a prolonged separation, Maria expected her daughter to be as she was when she was last with her. Adjusting to her daughter's development in her absence took time. The desire Maria had to start where she left off was not an option, rather getting to know the young adolescent she last experienced as a child was what she was faced with.

"Cuando vi a mi hija grande...me parecía que todavía estaba pequeña...me parecía que la niña iba a venir como siempre la había dejado y me tomó tiempo para acostumbrarme a verla tan grande...ya no podía tratarla como una niña pequeña"

"When I saw my daughter all grown ... it seemed to me that she was still small ... it seemed to me that she was going to come as I had left her and it took me time to get used to seeing her so big ... I could not treat her like a little girl"

Relación con mi hija (relationship with my daughter). The mother-daughter relationship after the reunification was described as distant and cold. Maria experienced difficulty in connecting with her daughter as she perceived her daughter's avoidance as rejection.

"Los primeros días en casa estuve tan feliz...pero después fue bastante difícil con ella porque no hablaba conmigo ni se acercaba, si yo estaba aquí ella se iba para allá y así fue..."

"The first few days at home I was so happy ... but then it was quite difficult with her because she did not talk to me or come near me, if I was here she would go there and that's how it was ..."

Maria shared how she experienced her daughter's lack of love and affection with great sadness and regret. She was aware of her daughter's anger towards the separation but expressed feeling overwhelmed when it was discussed and unable to address her daughter's feelings.
"Me he sentido como así, como que ella no tiene el amor suficiente para mí, como que ella le dio más el cariño a mi hermana y siempre me ha reclamado que yo la dejé...cuando me dice eso yo sólo lloro y me voy a mi cuarto"

"I have felt like that, like she does not have enough love for me, like she gave more love to my sister and she has always claimed that I left her ... when she tells me that I just cry and I go to my room"

"Yo digo que si el tiempo pudiera retroceder para atrás no volvería a dejar a mis hijos otra vez porque ellos sufrieron mucho...me quitaron bastante amor a mí..."

"I say that if time could go backwards I would never leave my children again because they suffered a lot ... they took away a lot of love from me ..."

During this challenging process of reunification, Maria found herself in need of additional support for herself and for her children, who were undergoing their own adjustment. Maria knew who she and her children needed and that was her sister. The family was lucky enough to be granted a visa for the sister; with the visa, the children’s aunt can visit them in the United States for a few months at a time. Having the presence of her sister, who was also her daughter’s caregiver during the time of separation, was described as a significant source of support as her sister’s presence in the home has improved their relationship by serving as a mediator.

"Gracias a Dios, algo que nos ha ayudado es que pude sacar una visa donde ella puede visitarnos...qué lindo cuando está aquí...ella se pone pendiente de los niños y me ayuda en comunicarse con la más mayor aquí porque ella la respeta mucho..., no sé lo que voy a hacer cuando ella no esté con nosotros...."

"Thank God, something that has helped us is that I was able to get a visa so she can visit us ... how nice when she is here ... she takes care of the children and helps me communicate with the older one because she respects her a lot..., I do not know what I'm going to do when she is not with us ...

Esperanzas para el futuro (hopes for the future). Although her relationship with her daughter since the reunification has been challenging, she holds on to the hope that with time it will improve. She again reflected on her own relationship with her mother
and how she has always wished to have a closer relationship with her, not wanting that unmet need for her own daughter. She also spent time reflecting on the sacrifices she has made, both emotionally and financially, to be here with her children in the United States. She expressed hope that these sacrifices will have opened opportunities for her daughter that she herself did not have access to, primarily through education.

"Hice el valor de no ahorrar nada para traérmela para acá y que estuviera conmigo para poder recuperar ese amor...el que yo quisiera tener para mi madre..."

"I was brave enough to not save anything to bring her here so that she was with me in order to recover that love ... the one I wanted to have for my mother ...

"Quiero que ella sea alguien en la vida que no vaya a quedar como quedé yo, trabajando por poco dinero, no!...no quiero que ella sea así...quiero que tenga buen estudio, una buena carrera para que viva bien y sea feliz...para que mi sacrificio valga la pena... estoy quemándome las uñas para sacarlas adelante para que puedan tener mejor vida y para que ellos se puedan ayudar uno a otro como hermanos."

"I want her to be someone in life and not to end up like I did, that is not going to stay as I was, working for little money, no! ... I do not want her to be like this ... I want her to have a good education, a good career so that she can live well and be happy ... so that my sacrifice is worth it... I am burning my nails to bring them forward so they can have a better life and so that they can help each other as siblings."

**Photovoice with Adolescent**

**Title:** Un regalo especial (A special gift)

**Caption:** Me lo dio la trabajadora social que tuve en el albergue de niños donde estuve cuando llegué a Miami. Fue el primer regalo que recibí aquí en los Estados Unidos.

It was given to me by the social worker I had at the children's shelter where I was when I arrived in Miami. It was the first gift I received here in the United States.

**Title:** El Teléfono (the telephone)

**Caption:** Lo uso para hablar con mis familiares. Es muy importante para mantenerme cerca de ellos. Ahora uso WhatsApp y los puedo ver.

I use it to talk to my relatives. It is very important to stay close to them. Now I use WhatsApp and I can see them.
Title: La Olla (The pot)

Caption: Mi tía me cocina cuando yo ando en la escuela. Me encanta como ella cocina y estoy tan alegre que ella está con nosotros.

My aunt cooks me when I go to school. I love how she cooks and I am so happy that she is with us.

Adolescent Interview

I arrived to the participant’s home and there was no answer. I called to confirm our meeting and left a voicemail. I sat across the street on a bench and waited. A few minutes passed and I saw Laura walking home with her brother. A few minutes later, her mom was dropped off at the home and went inside the apartment, at which time I started walking toward the building. I knocked on the door and was greeted by Laura who recognized me and again greeted me with a hug. Laura took the camera I provided her out of her book bag and quickly explained that she took a few pictures but not as many as she wanted because of something unexpected that came up this past weekend. We then began the photovoice and interview. Throughout the interview, she was open in answering all my questions. She was very detailed in the telling of her journey to the United States, sharing that she had never shared that much of "el viaje" with anyone outside her family before. At the end of the interview, I thanked her for her time and she expressed appreciation for the camera and for the interview, saying "se siente uno bien después de contar su historia." "one feels good after sharing their story." She asked her mom to come outside, and they gave me a hug and said goodbye.
Pre-(Parent) Migration

Relación con mi mamá (relationship with my mom). Laura described her relationship with her mom prior to her mother's departure as somewhat distant. She shared never truly feeling connected to her mom because she spent a lot of time with her aunt. However, this distance began to change when her parents separated, and she recalled her mother spending more time in the home with her. This change was short-lived, as her mother migrated to the Unites States shortly after.

Proceso de despedida (process of saying goodbye). Laura recalled seeing her mom crying the night before her mother left. She remembers her mother telling her that she was visiting her grandmother, who lived in a neighboring Central American country. Although a young school-aged child, she was able to deduce from her observations that her mother was not being forthcoming and was leaving home to go to the United States.

"Estaba llorando pero yo no sabía por qué hasta que vi las maletas...ella me dijo que iba donde su mamá, donde mi Abuela vivía...y ahí fue cuando me di de cuenta que mi mamá se iba a venir para acá..."

"I was crying but I did not know why until I saw the bags ... she told me she was going to see her mom, where my grandmother lived ... and that's when I realized that my mom was going to come here..."

She recalled feeling sad and being consoled by her aunt. When asked about her mother's reasons for coming to the United States, Laura explained with an irritated tone that "Ella dejó a mi papá y vino para acá para un mejor futuro...sólo eso es lo que sabía," "She left my dad and came here for a better future...that's all I knew." Laura's experience during this time period was complicated by the multiple transitions that took place during this period in her life, including her parents’ separation, moving homes, and finally her mother's departure.
Time of Separation

*Relación con mi madre (relationship with my mother).* Laura described her mother's departure as a betrayal of her trust. At a time when she felt she was becoming closer with her mother, this bonding abruptly ended when she decided to leave to the United States. What Laura was not aware of at this time was that her mother was likely trying to spend as much time with her children as possible knowing that she would soon be leaving them. Unfortunately, the outcome was not what was intended and Laura's perception of events due to lack of information, misinformation, and little preparation for the upcoming family changes that were about to transpire, fostered feelings of abandonment that influenced her emotional well-being and performance in school.

"Me dolía porque ya no podía tener confianza en ella porque me dejó chiquita...ya cuando yo iba conociéndola me dejó...me dolió tanto que a veces me daba ganas de no ir a la escuela...me bajaron las notas y no iba bien."

"It hurt because I could not have trust in her because she left me so small ... when I was just getting to know her she left me ... it hurt me so much that sometimes I didn't feel like going to school... my grades lowered and I was not doing well."

Laura's account of her emotional experience during the time of separation vacillated between feelings of deep hurt and of indifference. She described a time when she felt she needed her mother, and feeling angry at being rejected, she reminded herself that she did not need her mother, as she had the love and support of her father.

"Sentía que me hacía falta mi mamá los primeros días...pera ya después ya no me hacía falta...Ella me dejó y ya no sentía nada por ella...tenía a mi papá que me daba amor y siempre iba a visitarme..."

"I felt that I needed my mom the first few days ... but later on I did not need her ... She left me and I did not feel anything for her ... I had my dad who gave me love and he was always visiting me ..."
Despite her anger, she acknowledged feeling distress when special occasions or holidays took place, specifically Mother's Day.

"Me venía a la mente que mi mamá no me quería y que me dejó y entonces si me sentía mal...cuando eran los días de las madres y en la escuela se reunían...yo no iba a la fiesta porque lo que hacía era darle un regalo a mi tía en la casa...si me dolió porque no tenía mi verdadera mamá..."

"It would come to my mind that my mom did not love me and that she left me and then I felt bad ... when it was the mothers’ day and they would meet at school ... I did not go to the party because what I would do is give my aunt a gift in the house ... it did hurt because I did not have my real mother ...

Experiencia de cuidado: Relación con mi tía (relationship with my aunt). Laura described her relationship with her aunt as always being close and trusting. She fondly recalled her aunt caring for her as a young child and spending time with her after school. As a result, Laura experienced the transition to her aunt being her full-time caretaker as requiring little adjustment.

"Siempre iba los fines de semana con mi tía...ella siempre ha sido como mi segunda mamá siempre estaba pendiente de mí y la quiero como mi madre..."

"I always went on the weekends with my aunt... she's always been like my second mom and was always looking out for me and I love her like my mother ...

"Yo era feliz... porque ella me cuidaba bien...me daba sopita cuando me enfermaba...con mi tía hablaba y siempre le he dicho todo y le tengo confianza...le he dicho todo lo que siente mi corazón, siempre."

"I was happy... because she took good care of me ... she gave me soup when I got sick ... with my aunt I talked and I've always told her everything and I trust her ... I've told her everything my heart feels, always."

Comunicación (communication). Communication during the separation reinforced Laura's narrative of abandonment. From her perspective, her mother's interest in only speaking with her brother reinforced her belief that she was not loved.
“Ella llamaba...pero yo no hablaba con ella. Era rara la vez que hablaba con ella...ella sólo quería hablar con mi hermano...yo preguntaba por ella pero cuando miré que casi no hablaba conmigo pensé que quería más a mi hermano...a él le mandaba dinero y a veces le mandaba ropa y yo miraba que no, a mí no me daba nada, no me compraba ropa...mi mamá dice que cuando mandaba dinero ella decía que me dieran a mí, pero el único que me daba era mi papá.”

"She would call... but I would not talk to her. It was rare the moments I would talk to her ... she just wanted to talk to my brother... I would ask about her but when I saw that she would hardly speak to me I thought she loved my brother more ... she would send him money and sometimes send him clothes and I noticed that she did not give me anything, she did not buy me clothes ... my mom says that when she sent money she would ask that they also give me, but the only one that gave me was my dad."

**Reunification**

_Tomando la decisión de reunificar (making the decision to reunify)._ For Laura, the decision to reunify was not within her control. She explained that she had no desire to come to the United States and be reunified with her mother. It was arranged that Laura would make the journey to the United States with her cousin who needed specialized medical treatment that was otherwise unavailable in her home country. Given the risks associated with the journey, as well as her cousin's age and delicate physical condition, the family decided that having the younger child travel with his older cousin would be safer than having him travel alone. Initially, Laura refused to come to the United States, but felt pressured to make the trip, and ultimately agreed to the arrangement.

"Mira que sufrí...yo lloraba porque no quería venir...Entonces me dijeron que si le pasaba algo a mi primo que yo iba ser la culpable y toda mi vida iba vivir con esa culpa...y por eso tomé la decisión de venirmme aunque no quería."

"Oh how I suffered ... I would cry because I did not want to come ... they told me that if something happened to my cousin I would be to blame and would carry that guilt all my life...and that's why I made the decision to come even though I did not want to."
Thus, the context of the decision to migrate for Laura fueled her feelings of anger and resentment towards her mother; Laura felt that in making this family decision, her family conveyed to her that her own needs did not matter.

*El viaje* (the journey). Laura spent a considerable amount of time sharing various aspects of her journey to the United States. Most notable was her depiction of how fellow travelers supported one another and how she and her cousin felt cared for: "nos llevaban comida y sopa a mi primo para sentirse mejor...nos daban todo," "They brought food and soup to my cousin so she could feel better...they gave us everything." She provided several anecdotes of moments where she experienced laughter, connection, and gratitude, in the mist of challenging and even frightening circumstances.

She recalled a special moment along the journey where she celebrated her birthday alongside fellow travelers and described how grateful she felt that they would go out of their way to celebrate her birthday.

"Llegamos ha una casa ha descansar y ahí cumpli años...me regalaron un pastel y me lo celebraron muy bonito...no me lo esperaba y estaba muy agradecida."

"We arrived at a house to rest and there I had my birthday ... they gave me a cake and they celebrated it very nice ... I did not expect it and I was very grateful"

For Laura, her most difficult moments of her journey took place once she arrived to the United States and was detained at a shelter along with her sister. She recalled feeling lost for the first time, and feeling constant anxiety, as she did now know what would happen to her or her brother. The lack of information was disorienting and traumatic for her. She recalled being escorted along with her sister and other minors to an airport where she boarded a flight, her first ever, where she believed she was being sent back home.
"Estuve unos días en las jaulas...había mucho frío...después a las 4 de la mañana nos llevaron y llegamos a donde están los aviones...no nos decían dónde íbamos y un señor nos dijo que regresábamos a nuestro país."

"I spent a few days in the cages ... it was very cold ... after 4 in the morning they took us and we got to where the planes are ... they did not tell us where we were going and a man told us that we were going back to our country."

Partially relieved and partially scared for her cousin’s decompensating health, she remembers experiencing significant distress at this time. No longer did she feel cared for as she did with her fellow travelers, experiencing hunger and thirst for several days after being processed:

"queríamos ir al baño y los dejaron encerradas...eran las 2 del día y estábamos sin comer y sin agua..."

"We wanted to go to the bathroom and they left us locked up ... it was 2 o'clock in the afternoon and we were without food and without water ..."

It was not until she landed in a different city and took in the sites and landscape that she realized she was not returning home but going to another shelter, where she may or may not be reunified with her mother.

_Proceso de reunificación (process of reunification)._ This was a moment of great relief for Laura, as she felt that her journey had finally come to an end and a new beginning was to commence. However, this moment was also made difficult by the fact that her stay at the shelter was extended so that both her cousin and her could be processed at the same time. For Laura, this was another instance where her needs were overlooked.

She recounts the day she was able to go home as a joyful day "llena de alegría," "full of joy" and also feeling uneasy, as she was unfamiliar with her mother: "yo la
miraba diferente...pero deseaba conocerla," "I would see her differently...but I had a desire to get to know her."

Relación con mi mamá (relationship with my mom). "No le tenía amor ni le tenía mucha confianza," "I didn't have love for her or trust her very much" is how Laura summarized her relationship post-reunification. She described an event where she confronted her mother about how she felt during the time they were separated:

"Todo lo que tenía guardado...que no me quería...que me abandonó...se lo reclamé y se puso a llorar...me sentí mal al verla llorar y nunca más se lo reclamé...está en el pasado."

"Everything that I had kept inside...that she didn't love me...that she abandoned me...I confronted her about it and she began to cry...I felt bad after seeing her cry and never again did bring it up...it's in the past."

Both Laura and her mother referred to this same event from their own perspective, noting its significance. Each of them was confronted with difficult feelings that had, until this point, remained unspoken. Unfortunately, the moment proved to be too overwhelming at the time, and those feelings do not seem to have been addressed, but rather avoided and left for each one of them to deal with individually.

Esperanzas para el futuro (hopes for the future). Laura said she hoped to have an education that would lead her to attain a desirable career someday: "Mi esperanza es seguir estudiando y tener mi carrera algún día," "My hope is to continue studying and to have a career someday." She added that she also hopes her relationship with her mom continues to improve: "También espero que nuestra relación siga mejorando...con el tiempo le voy cogiendo más confianza y pasamos más tiempo juntas," "I also hope that
our relationship continues to improve...with time I will gain more trust as we spend more
time together."

Case Two: "The Hernandez Family"

Description

Ana is a single parent raising her youngest child, Lucía, an older adolescent. Ana
also has an older son, who is married. Ana migrated to the United States several years
ago. Her daughter Lucía is in high school. Lucía was a young school-aged child when her
mother migrated to the United States. She remained in her home in country in Central
America under the care of her grandmother. Lucía and her mother were separated for a
prolonged period of time until they were reunified when Lucía was entering her pre-
adolescent years.

Genogram Description

The genogram illustrates how the relationship between Ana and Lucía is
identified as very close both before the separation and after the reunification. Lucía's
relationship with her father is described as distant prior to her leaving to the United States
and, at this time, emotionally cut-off. Also important to note from the genogram is Ana's
perception of her daughter's relationship with her grandmother which she identified as
close while she was under her care and now distant, although Ana has maintained a close
relationship with her mother.

Parent Interview

I arrived at the participant’s apartment and was greeted by Ana, who gave me a
kiss hello and walked me to the living room where we could talk. This apartment
complex was in a suburban area familiar to me. I entered into the living room and sat on the sofa. Ana asked me to wait while she finished making coffee. During the interview, she was open and appeared comfortable talking about her experiences, including her journey to the United States. After the interview, she showed me a family album and a box containing all the letters and keepsakes that she acquired from her daughter through the years.

**Pre-Migration**

Tomando la decisión de migrar (making the decision to migrate). Ana's decision to migrate to the United States was motivated by economic reasons. She was a single parent and received minimal financial support from her children's father. The idea of coming to the United States was one that she explored for years, weighing the costs and benefits of each outcome. Not wanting to leave her young daughter was what kept her from making the decision to move. However, Ana reconsidered her options once her cousins, who had already migrated to the United States for economic reasons, began to petition her to join them.

"Yo adoro a mis primos y ellos me decían "yo quiero que tu vengas, aquí tendrás mejor trabajo y más dinero para cuidar a la niña" me decían, y yo lo pensé por mucho tiempo."

"I adore my cousins and they told me" I want you to come, here you will have a better job and more money to take care of your daughter "they would tell me, and I thought about it for a long time."

After much time, Ana made up her mind to migrate to the United States. She recalled feeling that her daughter was at a less vulnerable age and that she could not continue to struggle and provide less than what she felt her daughter deserved.
"Ella ya no era una bebé y se daba de cuenta que éramos pobres...yo quería más para ella entonces al final me decidí que me iba a ir a tratar de ser algo mejor."

"She was not a baby anymore and she realized that we were poor ... I wanted more for her so in the end I decided that I was going to leave and try to be something better."

Proceso de elegir el cuidado de mi hija (process of selecting who would care for my daughter). Ana turned to her sister, who lived in a rural community outside of town, to care for her daughter. "Aunque no teníamos una relación muy cercana pensé bueno...mi hermana es mi hermana, puedo confiar en ella," "Although we did not have a very close relationship, I thought well...my sister is my sister, I can trust her."

This arrangement was short-lived, as her daughter expressed difficulty in adjusting to a rural lifestyle away from her school, friends, and familiar surroundings. In speaking about the situation with her mother, her mother offered to care for her instead. Ana discussed this arrangement with her daughter, who was thrilled with the change. Ana expressed feeling grateful for the role that her mother played.

"Ella (mi hija) la quería mucho...me sentía tranquila sabiendo que la niña estaba feliz con ella... y siempre le agradeceré por cuidármela...hasta ahora le sigo mandando dinero por agradecimiento."

"She (my daughter) loved her dearly... I felt calm knowing that my daughter was happy with her... and I will always thank her for taking care of her ... to this day I keep sending her money out of gratitude."

Proceso de despedida (process of saying goodbye). Ana remembered not wanting her daughter to worry or suffer. She shared with her daughter that she would be going on a business trip and she would be staying with her aunt.

"Era muy difícil para mí dejar a la niña...no quería que sufriera entonces no quise llorar delante de ella, sólo le dije que me tenia que ir a un viaje y que pronto íbamos estar juntas otra vez...la abracé y me fui..."
"It was very difficult for me to leave my daughter ... I did not want her to suffer so I did not want to cry in front of her, I just told her that I had to go on a trip and that soon we would be together again ... I hugged her and I left..."

*Fe (faith).* Ana noted that her faith strengthened during this time of uncertainty and risk. She held on to a medallion of baby Jesus as she talked about her faith.

"*Le pedía tanto a Dios que todo saliera bien y que mi decisión sería la correcta. Yo le tengo mucha fe al niño Jesús y le recé mucho para que todo saliera bien...*"

"I pleaded so much with God that everything would turn out well and that I was making the right decision. I have a lot of faith in the child Jesus and I prayed a lot so that everything would turn out ok."

**Time of Separation**

*El viaje (the journey).* Ana did not hesitate to share details of her journey to the United States. She narrated a detailed account of her experience with the various coyotes, guides, and the 75 fellow travelers for the duration of 15 days until successfully crossing the border. Overall, the journey was physically challenging; in addition, she witnessed several events of violence between travelers and coyotes as well as multiple instances of sexual harassment.

"*Era muy difícil el viaje, fue horrible...los hombres son horribles y te tienes que cuidar muchísimo. Yo casi no dormía...no es una experiencia que le deseo a mis enemigos...*"

"The trip was very difficult, it was horrible ... the men are horrible and you have to take good care of yourself, I almost did not sleep ... it is not an experience that I wish on my enemies ..."

*Apoyo en los Estados Unidos (support in the United States).* A major factor in Ana's decision to come to the United States was her cousins’ presence here. Upon arrival she shared being met by them and settling in with their support. Her cousins had also already arranged employment that she began a few days after arriving. She described
having the support of her cousins to orient her and provide her with emotional support as she adjusted to her new living arrangements as priceless.

"la ayuda que mis primos me dieron y que me siguen dando no tiene precio...no creo que pudiera ir por todo eso sola sin el apoyo de mi familia..."

"The help that my cousins gave me and that they continue to give me is priceless ... I do not think I could go through all that alone without the support of my family ..."

Comunicación (communication). For Ana, communication to her daughter during this time consisted of daily phone calls and occasional cards and letters. All the letters she received from her daughter were of value to her and she continues to treasure them.

"Yo siempre llamé cada día, cada día siempre. A veces nos mandaba cartas...las cartas que ella me mandaba y las fotos todas las tengo guardadas...también le mandaba regalitos como ropa y cositas bonitas para que supiera que la tenía en mente."

"I always called every day, every day always, and sometimes she sent us letters ... the letters she sent me and the pictures I kept all of them ... I also sent her little gifts like clothes and pretty things so she would know I had her in mind."

During the majority of their time apart, video chat access was not yet easily available such as applications like WhatsApp.

Papel de madre (role of mother). Ana described a shift in her parenting role as going from a needed caregiver and single parent to a secondary co-parent. She described her relationship with her mother as a positive one, and maintained trust in her care throughout the time of separation. Due to this level of trust, Ana felt that she could more easily focus on working multiple jobs in order to send remittances and save money. This also meant that she took on a less active parenting role, as she trusted the parenting decisions being made by her mother for her daughter.
"Yo le tenía mucha confianza...sabía que era buena mamá entonces no me preocupaba y podía enfocarme en trabajar lo más posible para mandarle todo lo que podía y ahorrar lo más posible..."

"I had a lot of trust in her... I knew she was a good mom so I did not worry and I could focus on working as much as possible to send everything I could and save as much as possible ..."

Reunification

Tomando la decisión de reunificar (making the decision to reunify). Reunification was not the initial goal for Ana. Her plan at the outset was to work and save as much money as possible for a period of roughly 5 years and return to her home country. Several factors changed this path for Ana. First, she became increasingly concerned with the growing level of gang violence in her community. This frightened her, as her father had been a victim of gang violence. She also heard through family and friends about young adolescent girls being victims of gang related activities, sex trafficking, and abduction near her town. Although Ana felt that her daughter was safe with her mother, she did not want her daughter to experience her adolescence in such a violent culture. Additionally, Ana began to hear of stories in her workplace of parents sending for their children to offer them a better life in the United States.

"Yo pensaba...ella tendría mejor oportunidades aquí..hasta que me decidí y empecé a ahorrar para un viaje especial de niños."

"I thought...she will have better opportunities here...until I decided and began to save for a special trip for children."

"Yo quería  lo mejor para mi hija...allá las niñas no tienen las mismas "Yo oportunidades....se casan jovencitas y tienen que depender de un hombre...también hay mas peligro para las mujeres."

"I wanted the best for my daughter...over there the girls don't have the same opportunities...they marry young and have to depend on a man...there is also more danger for women."
Ana reported saving $12,000 in a period of one year to arrange for her daughters’ passage to the United States. She emphasized that the price she paid the coyote was for a special trip for a child that would ensure an added level of safety and care. Given Ana's own traumatic journey, she did what she could to ensure her daughter's safety, although she continued to experience fears and concerns.

"Hice todo lo posible para que pudiera cruzar bien y me prometieron que la iban a cuidar ...porque pagué por un viaje especial para niños...Gracias a Dios pudo venir bien y no la detuvieron...pero me preocupé mucho durante ese tiempo ni casi podía trabajar porque sabía que ella estaba en camino."

"I did everything possible so she could cross well and they promised me that they would take care of her ... because I paid for a special trip for children ... Thank God she could come well and they did not stop her ... but I worried a lot during that time I could not even work because I knew she was on the way."

Proceso de reunificación (process of reunification). Ana recounted the moment of reunification with relief and excitement: "No puedo explicar cómo me sentí...lo agradecida que me sentí por Dios permitir esta reunion," "I cannot explain how I felt...how grateful I felt to God for permitting this reunion." She recalled waiting with anticipation her daughter’s arrival along with her brother and sister. She described her daughter being dropped off at the front of her apartment building as she rushed to embrace her. "La abracé muy pero muy fuerte y las dos lloramos de la alegría...no lo podía creer...al fin estábamos juntas," "I hugged her very tightly and we both cried from so much joy...I could not believe it...finally we were together."

Relación con mi hija (relationship with my daughter). Ana described how her relationship with her daughter underwent a slow process of working through her
daughter's anger towards her, and of validating the painful emotions of being homesick and missing her grandmother.

Ana recalled those months after the reunification when her daughter would lash out in anger. With sadness in her voice, Ana spoke through tears and shared one of many difficult interactions.

"Ella me dijo un día que no quería estar conmigo y que quería regresar con su verdadera mamá... eso me dolió mucho pero sabía que ella lo decía porque extrañaba...yo solo la escuché, le di de entender que esta transición es difícil para todo el mundo y con tiempo se iba sentir mejor...y que yo siempre seré su mamá"

"She told me one day that she did not want to be with me and that she wanted to go back to her real mom ... that hurt a lot but I knew she said it because she was homesick ... I just heard her, I understood that this transition is difficult for everyone and with time she would feel better ... and that I will always be her mother"

*Esperanzas para el futuro (hopes for the future).* Ana hopes to provide her daughter with the opportunity to receive an education that would lead her to a career in which she can prosper. She also shared her hopes that one day soon, families like theirs may be given a pathway for legal residency and citizenship. She reflected on the challenges she worries her daughter will face due to being undocumented, but noted that the risk is worth it. "Mi esperanza es su educación y las oportunidades que pueda tener para una carrera buena. Ojalá que algún día logremos tener papeles porque es difícil...pero vale la pena," "My hope is for her education and the opportunities she can have for a good career...hopefully one day we will have papers because it is difficult...but it's worth it."
Photovoice with Adolescent

**Title:** My Faith

**Caption:** I had this rosary with me when I was traveling to the United States. I remember praying that I would see my mom soon. I remember feeling so relieved when I finally saw her and thanking God for bringing us together again.

**Title:** A Gift From my Mom

**Caption:** I got this bear for my birthday...My mom made that day very special for me.

**Title:** A Better Life

**Caption:** When I miss [my home country] I take a look at the buildings, the roads, the schools, and remind myself that I can have a better life here. Here I can do something big.

**Adolescent Interview**

I arrived to the apartment and was greeted by Ana. She insisted that I try an empanada she just made while I waited for Lucía to come home from school. I thanked her for her hospitality. Lucía arrived a few minutes later, and we were left alone in the living room to begin the interview. Until now, she had spoken to me in Spanish but it became evident that she was more comfortable in English. I reminded her that we can speak in whichever language she preferred, even both. I then conducted the interview in English. Lucía was energetic and open throughout the interview process. At the end, she asked me questions about what it was like to study psychology and shared that one day she would like to help immigrant families who have undergone similar challenges.
Pre-(Parent) Migration

*Relationship with my mom.* Lucía described having a significantly close relationship with her mom. She recalled going everywhere with her mom and feeling that she was her "best friend." She recounted happy memories of her childhood with her mom stating "my mom was my whole world."

*Process of saying goodbye.* Lucía's relationship with her mom was the only close attachment she has experienced thus far in her life. She reported feeling distant from her father. This made experiencing her mother's departure especially difficult. She remembered being taken to her aunt's home where her mom told Lucía she needed to leave for a while and would be returning soon. Lucía's understanding of "returning soon" was within the next few hours, and when this was not her reality, she felt confused and scared.

"I was a little kid so I thought she meant she would come back for me in a couple of hours... I didn't know she was leaving to the United States until two weeks passed, when she called and told me where she was... I was so confused and scared because I didn't know when I would see her again, and I didn't understand why she had left even though she would tell me it was to give us a better life."

Time of Separation

*Relationship with my mom.* Lucía shared that the initial months after her mother’s departure were the most challenging, as she had to adjust to new surroundings. She remembers feeling angry toward her mother and asking her each time she called why she left and when she would be returning. Lucía then confided in a friend from school about her mother's departure and her struggle with her feelings. Her friend had been undergoing her own separation from both parents for a significant period of time and empathized
with her experience. This exchange allowed Lucía to experience a different perspective which, although painful, allowed for more understanding of her mother's decision to migrate.

"I didn’t understand why any parent would leave their child...my friend helped me see that some parents do make this decision because they want to provide a better life for their kids...it was still hurtful but I wasn’t as angry anymore."

Experiencia with caregiver: Relationship with my grandmother. Lucía spoke of her relationship with her grandmother with great fondness. She shared feeling loved and cared for by her grandmother and her family. She stood quickly at this point in the interview to show me a photo of her grandmother and her. In the photo were Lucía and her grandmother smiling next to one another. Lucía and her grandmother speak regularly, and Lucía is hopeful that one day they will see one another again. The quality of care that Lucía received helped in her adjustment during this time period, as did knowing that her mother and grandmother had a healthy relationship.

" I love my grandmother. I miss her a lot...my mom is still close to her too...they have always been close, so my mom knew she could trust her...we both hope to see her again one day."

Communication. Lucía remembers receiving daily calls from her mother at a similar time each day. She shared after a while struggling to know what to say on the phone so conversations became short. She did, however, express enjoying receiving gifts and photos her mom would send her. She was also aware of her mom's contact with her grandmother to check in on her, which demonstrated mom's investment in her well-being and her continued role as a parent.
"She would call like every day which after a while was hard because I didn’t know what to say sometimes...I liked getting gifts and she would send photos too...she talked to my grandmother too, to make sure I was doing well."

Lucía's communication with her mom was later enriched when her mom sent her a laptop and they were able to speak through Facebook Messenger and later apps like Skype and *WhatsApp*.

"It wasn't until the last year that we were able to use the computer, but that made it so much better...I remember the first time we used it I was so shocked to see my mom because she had changed her hair."

**Reunification**

*Making the decision to reunify.* For months Lucía's mom had shared with her that soon they would be reunited. She recalled her mom sharing with her that she was arranging a special trip that would bring her to the United States. During this time, Lucía described feeling ambivalent about this potential trip and questioned its actual realization. She did desire to be reunified but through her mother's return. When the day arrived for her departure, she was surprised as she never thought this day would come.

"I was in shock because for so long my mom would say she would send for me but I didn’t think it would actually happen...it all happened so quickly but I was excited to see her."

*The journey.* Lucia remembers traveling in several cars and buses alongside different "guides" who were charged with looking after her and ensuring that she had food and water. She described different homes that she stayed at along the way, and although she felt lonely and tired, she recalled feeling safe. As Lucía shared about her experience, she found it important to say that her journey was not typical, knowing that
her mother had paid a significant amount of money to facilitate an easier journey and minimize the risk of being detained and placed in a shelter. She shared feeling lucky for this being her experience, acknowledging that other children do not receive the same care.

"My mother arranged a special trip to have people look after me...I hardly had to walk and instead took cars and buses most of the way...I know that not everyone has this experience and that I was lucky."

**Process of reunification.** Lucía shared feeling very happy to have finally arrived after such a long journey. She recalled those first initial days with her mom as some of the happiest she has experienced in her life. The reunification, however, was followed by conflict as Lucía described her intensity in executing her plan to convince her mother to return with her to their home country. It was at this moment that Lucía experienced a sense of loss for those whom she cared about back home. "My plan was to see my mom and then convince her to come back with me...when she said we were not returning, I was so mad...then it hit me that I had left everything and everyone behind."

**Relationship with my mom.** Lucía's sense of loss created resentment and anger towards her mother. She was homesick and struggling with conflicting emotions all the while adjusting to new surroundings. "I was really mean to my mom for months after I was here...I missed my family back home and was so overwhelmed...it was hard but slowly it got better." Lucia attributed her ability to continue developing a positive relationship with her mother to her mom's patience and understanding during this initial transition. "She never got mad at me and took time to listen to what I was feeling."
Hopes for the future. "I want to be something big!" Lucia aspires to pursue a career that will allow her to help others. She talked about making her mother proud one day by going to college and being financially successful in order to care for her mother and family back home.

Case Three: "The Gomez Family"

Description

Elvira is raising her son Pedro who is an older adolescent. She also has an older daughter. Her husband lives in their home country in Central America. Elvira migrated to the United States over 10 years ago. Pedro was a young school-aged boy when his mother migrated to the United States. He remained in his home country under the care of his grandmother for one year and then his father returned from the United States to care for the children. Pedro and his mother underwent a significantly prolonged separation until they were reunified less than two years ago.

Genogram Description

The genogram depicts the relationship between Elvira and Pedro as very close both prior to the separation and after reunification. The relationship between Pedro and his father is also described as remaining close. An emotional cut-off is identified between Elvira and Pedro's initial caretaker during the separation.

Parent Interview

Over the phone, Elvira sounded hesitant to meet in her home and asked if we could meet at a local public library. I agreed. She came accompanied with her son, Pedro, and we sat in a quiet table near the back of the library. It was a weekday and the library
seemed empty except for the front desk. Pedro then agreed to go to another section of the library where he could wait while I interviewed his mom. His mom made sure he had his phone with him and reminded him to call her if he needed anything as they hugged goodbye. As he left his mom, she said "él es un niño bien bueno," "He is a very good kid." with a smile on her face. I remember thinking that this mother-son dyad appeared very connected. We began the interview and she was pleasant, soft-spoken, and hesitant when sharing about her journey to the United States.

Pre-Migration

Tomando la decision de migrar (making the decision to migrate). Elvira's decision to migrate to the United States was based on economic struggles. Although a difficult decision to make, it was seen as the only viable option to be able to provide for her children. The decision was a collaborative one that she made with her husband who had some years prior made the journey to the United States himself in order to send remittances to his family, but who was struggling to find consistent work.

"Me vine porque no tenía donde vivir...el dueño de la casa donde estábamos subió la renta y cuando no pude pagar a tiempo nos sacó...entonces hablé con mis esposo que estaba en acá hace unos años pero estaba sin trabajo y decidimos que yo viniera para trabajar...no había otra forma"

"I came because I had no place to live ... the owner of the house where we were raised the rent and when I could not pay on time he evicted us... then I spoke with my husband who was here a few years ago but was unemployed and we decided that I would come to work ... there was no other way "

Proceso de elegir cuidado de mis hijos (Process of selecting who would care for my children). Together with her husband, Elvira decided who would be caring for their children during her absence. They decided that the best option was her mother, as they felt that their children had a good relationship with their grandmother. Her mother agreed
to care of her children without reservation: "Me dijo no te preocupes que yo los voy a cuidar como si fueran mis hijos," "She told me not to worry that she would take care of them as if they were her own." However, a year into caring for her grandchildren, concerns arose of how they were being cared for, and shortly after, her sister contacted them sharing that she was no longer able to care for their children. This required that they make different arrangements from afar.

"Al principio estaba encantada por cuidar de los niños...pero con el tiempo hubo problemas y cuando hablaba con los niños me decían que su abuela no los quería y que no le daba del dinero que yo le mandaba...fue muy difícil."

"In the beginning she was delighted to take care of the children ... but over time there were problems and when I talked to the children they told me that their grandmother did not love them and that she did not give the, the money that I sent ... it was very difficult."

Both Elvira and her husband agreed that being separated from both their parents for a prolonged period of time would not be in their children's best interest and that one of them needed to return to care for their children. They decided that the children's father would return to their home country to care for them. Factors that led to this decision were (a) economic reasons, as Elvira had more consistent work and would be able to provide the family with more financial support, and (b) their father had been separated from their children for a prolonged period of time, and both parents felt their children needed their father at this time in their upbringing.

"Tomamos la decisión que yo me quedaría...fue una decisión muy difícil pero no hubo de otra yo tenía trabajo casi todos los días y él no...sabíamos que sería mejor para los niños."

"We made the decision that I would stay ... it was a very difficult decision but there was no other, I had work almost every day and he did not ... we knew it would be better for the children."
Proceso de despedida (process of saying goodbye). Elvira described this moment as a difficult and emotionally distressing time. She shared with her children that she would be going to the United States to provide them with better living arrangements and be able to afford things that they would want.

"Voy a mandar juguetes...y ya no vas andar con esos zapatos rotos...van a tener muchas cosas buenas...les decía que iban a tener una vida mejor."

"I'm going to send toys ... and you're not going to walk around with those broken shoes ... you're going to have many good things ... I told them they were going to have a better life."

She would have these conversations with her children in the weeks leading to her departure in an attempt to prepare them for her absence. Discussing who they would be staying with and reassuring them that there would be daily contact between them during the time she was gone was an important part of this process for Elvira.

"Aunque eran pequeños yo sabía que entendían algo y les hablé en una manera que niños entendieran... que mamá iba a ir a trabajar para la familia y que se quedaban con su abuela por un tiempo...y que los iba a llamar todos los días"

"Even though they were little I knew they understood something and I talked to them in a way that children understood ... that Mom was going to work for the family and that they were staying with their grandmother for a while ... and that she was going to call them everyday"

Fe (faith). In preparing for her departure, Elvira recalls relying on her faith more than ever. "Le pedía ha Dios que cuidara a mis hijos...sabía que con la ayuda de Dios y la Virgen Milagrosa ibamos a seguir adelante," "I would ask God to take care of my children...I knew that with God's help and the Miraculous Virgin we would move forward."
Time of Separation

*El Viaje (the journey).* Elvira described her journey to the United States as long and arduous. Through moments of silence and hesitant speech, she shared that she endured a 45-day journey where she was detained multiple times and finally, on her last attempt, she was able to cross the border without being detected. During this time, Elvira had limited contact with her family members and was preoccupied with thoughts of putting her life at risk and what this would mean for the well-being of her family.

"Fue muy difícil y largo el viaje...tuve que tener mucha persistencia...me agarraron tres veces y cada vez no sabía si podía seguir pero ya a la cuarta Dios me iluminó el camino."

"It was very difficult and long the journey...I had to be very persistent...they detained me three times and each time I didn’t know if I could continue but on the fourth God lit my path."

*Apoyo en los Estados Unidos (support in the United States).* The first year, her husband was a source of comfort and provided emotional support as she adjusted to a new life in a new country. She described their relationship as being strengthened during this reunion.

"Era bueno ese año con él porque habíamos estado separados... y ese tiempo juntos hablamos mucho de lo que queríamos para el futuro de la familia...era difícil extrañar a los niños pero teniendo mi esposo a mi lado ayudó."

"It was good that year with him because we had been separated ... and that time together we talked a lot about what we wanted for the future of the family ... it was hard to miss the children but having my husband by my side helped."

Once her husband returned to their home country to care for their children, Elvira experienced loneliness and feelings of loss. Being apart from both her children and her
husband was a difficult experience for Elvira, one that she described with pain and sadness.

"El corazón se me partía...no tenía familia y lo único que podía hacer era trabajar para ellos...era un tiempo muy triste para mí."

"My heart was breaking ... I had no family and the only thing I could do was work for them ... it was a very sad time for me."

Comunicación (communication). Elvira described communication within her family as a commitment and dedicated practice that she prioritizes above all things.

"Todos los días yo hablaba con cada uno de los niños...a veces solo unos minutos y otras veces más tiempo pero si todos los días...les hacía cuentos y les daba consejos...hablar con ellos diariamente era una prioridad para mí."

"Every day I talked with each of the children ... sometimes just a few minutes and sometimes more time but every day ... I would tell them stories and give them advice ... talking to them daily was a priority for me."

"Era como cepillándome los dientes ...las llamadas a mis hijos era una necesidad diaria."

"It was like brushing my teeth...phone calls to my children where a daily necessity."

Elvira also shared sending cards and gifts to her children on special occasions. Sending and receiving photos was also important for Elvira, as time passed, because they allowed her to witness, from afar, her children growing. This changed, however, in the past few years, as technological advances have made video communication more accessible. Elvira expressed a deep sense of gratitude for her ability to provide her family in her home country with access to the Internet and cellular devices that can support communication applications such as WhatsApp.

"Ahora es mucho más fácil estar conectados...poder vernos cara a cara por teléfono y no solo la voz es mucho mejor..."
"Now it's much easier to be connected ... to be able to see each other face to face on the phone and not only the voice much better ..."

_Papel de madre (role of mother)._ During the time that her children were under the care of her mother, Elvira described feeling helpless. She soon discovered that her children were not being cared for as she had hoped and she felt that her role as a mother was being diminished. She reported that her mother did not honor her requests as they had different parenting styles.

"Teníamos diferente ideas en la crianza de hijos... yo le pedía que hiciera algo con los niños y no lo hacía...me sentía impotente como mamá."

"We had different ideas about raising children ... I would ask her to do something with the children and she would not ... I felt helpless as a mother."

This changed once her children were under the care of their father. She described a period of adjustment for her husband and children as they underwent their own reunification after being separated for several years. Her husband relied on her to make parenting decisions and she was able to co-parent from afar. Elvira also reflected on her role as being the "provider" of the family and her husband as the stay-at-home parent, a deviation of traditional gender roles. She shared this using humor and engaged in laughter.

"Con el papá ahí era mucho mejor...él me contaba todo de los niños y hacíamos decisiones para ellos juntos...ahora yo tengo el papel de esposo y el de esposa."

"With their father there it was much better ... he told me everything about the children and we made decisions for them together ... now I have the role of husband and he has the role of wife."
**Reunification**

*Tomando la decisión de reunificar (making the decision or reunify).* Elvira's reunification with her son, Pedro, was motivated by his desire to migrate to the United States once he felt he was old enough to make the journey. She supported him in his decision, although she had concerns about the journey. These concerns were mitigated by the fact that he would be traveling with his older sister, who was at this time a young adult, and a few male cousins. *"Yo lo apoyé y su papá también...el quería venir...me sentía mejor que el venía acompañado de su hermana mayor,"* "I supported him and his dad too...he wanted to come...I felt better that he was accompanied by his older sister.*

*Proceso de reunificación (process of reunification).* Elvira experienced the days prior to her reunion with her son as a time of great anticipation. *"Tenía una desesperación y las horas se hacían grandes esperando ese momento...sentí mucha alegría,"* "I had a feeling of desperation and the hours appeared longer waiting for that moment...I felt a lot of joy."

For Elvira, anticipating the moment of reunification was described as a time of joy and little concern for how she would respond to seeing him for the first time since their separation. This process, she recounted, was facilitated by the fact that she had seen him grow up through photos and (later) video chat. *"Yo sabía como iba a lucir el por nuestras llamadas y las fotos,"* "I knew how he would look because of our calls and photos."

*Relación con mi hijo (relationship with my son).* Elvira described her relationship with her son Pedro with a sense of pride. *"Él es un hijo tan bueno,"* "He is such as good
son." She shared feeling very proud of her son for his efforts in learning English and for his strong work ethic. She expressed gratitude that so many years of separation did not impede them from having a loving and supportive relationship once reunified.

"Él es un orgullo para mí...le doy gracias a Dios que todo ese tiempo separados no los quitó de poder tener la relación que tenemos hoy..."

"I am so proud of him ... I thank God that all that time separated did not take away from being able to have the relationship we have today ..."

Elvira credits the open communication she has always tried to maintain with her children as well as their commitment to having daily contact as key factors in helping them have the relationship they have today.

*Esperanza para el futuro (hopes for the future).* Without a second thought, Elvira identified her biggest hope for her family as staying in good health. "La salud es lo más importante...después todo lo demás," "Health is the most important...then comes everything else." She shared a desire to return to her home country and reunify with her husband some day in the future. She hopes to save enough money to return and open a family business and build a house where her family can live together.

"Deseo que todo le vaya bien a mi hijo...y quisiera regresar a (mi país) en el futuro cuando pueda ahorrar bastante para tener un negocio y construir una casita para la familia poder estar junta."

"I want everything to go well for my son ... and I would like to return to (my country) in the future when I can save enough to have a business and build a house for the family to be together."
Photovoice with Adolescent

**Title:** Mi primer viaje en avión (*My first trip on an airplane*)

**Caption:** Fue una memoria muy bonita. Me fascinó esa experiencia y nunca lo voy a olvidar. Fue una aventura. Me sentía tan feliz porque sabía que iba a ver a mi mamá pronto.

It was a very beautiful memory. I was fascinated by that experience and I will never forget it. It was an adventure. I was so happy because I knew I was going to see my mom soon.

**Title:** Mi primera experiencia en la playa (*My first time at the beach*)

**Caption:** Nunca había visto la playa antes, solo en la tele y en fotos. Mi mamá me llevó unos días después de nuestra reunión.

It was a very beautiful memory. I was fascinated by that experience and I will never forget it. It was an adventure. I was so happy because I knew I was going to see my mom soon.

**Title:** Mi chaqueta favorita de mi país (*My favorite jacket from my country*)

**Caption:** Vine a los Estados Unidos con esta chaqueta. Es mi favorita y siempre me la pongo. Me recuerda de mi papá porque el me la dio antes de yo viajar para acá.

I came to the United States with this jacket. It's my favorite and I always wear it. It reminds me of my dad because he gave it to me before I traveled here.

**Adolescent Interview**

I arrived at the library and Pedro and Elvira were waiting for me at the entrance. We greeted each other hello and went inside to the same quiet area as before. Elvira took a moment to reassure him that she would be nearby reading and asked that we call her when we were done. Overall, Pedro was open and pleasant throughout the interview. He shared that he enjoyed taking the photos, expressing that he felt like a journalist.
Pre-(Parent) Migration

*Relación con mi mamá (relationship with my mom).* Pedro recalls feeling close with his mother prior to her migrating to the United States. His father had migrated to the United States when Pedro was a toddler; therefore, the only parent he felt a connection to at the time was with his mother. He remembers his mother sharing stories about his father and her telling him that he had left to care for them.

"Lo que me recuerdo, si yo siempre me llevaba bien con mi mamá...ella me cuidaba...me contaba de mi papá que estaba aquí para cuidarnos y darnos mejor vida."

"What I remember, if I always got along with my mom ... she took care of me ... she told me about my dad who was here to take care of us and give us a better life."

*El proceso de despedida (process of saying goodbye).* Although he was young when his mother left, he did remember discussions his mother would have with him and his sister about needing to leave for a period of time to work in the United States. He recalled his mother telling him that this would provide them with better material things.

"Como era chiquito, me puse alegre porque iba a tener cosas mejores," "Since I was little I was happy because I was going to have better things." For Pedro, this moment was not marked as a time of great sadness or despair. As the days progressed, he missed his mother but felt secure in knowing where she was (with his father).

**Time of Separation**

*Relación con mi mamá (relationship with my mom).* As time passed, Pedro recalled becoming accustomed to a new routine. Although at times he felt sad about being physically apart from his mom, he maintained an emotional connection to her through her daily phone calls. He did not express ever feeling anger or resentment
towards his mother for migrating to the United States. Rather, he shared feeling proud of her for making the sacrifice to leave her home and provide for them. His sense of compassion and understanding towards his parents’ decision to migrate is notable. When asked about this he shared that it has always been what he has known and he has always trusted that his mother has his best interest in mind.

“Aunque era difícil por la distancia hacíamos el esfuerzo de mantenernos cerca hablando por teléfono...y si a veces me ponía triste pero yo estaba orgulloso de mis padres por su sacrificio...yo sé que ella siempre quiere lo mejor para nosotros.”

"Although it was difficult because of the distance we made an effort to keep close by talking on the phone ... and yes sometimes it made me sad but I was proud of my parents for their sacrifice ... I know that she always wants the best for us."

Experiencia de cuidado: Relación con mi abuela y luego papá (experience with caregiver: my relationship with my grandmother and later my father). Pedro described having a distant and tense relationship with his grandmother and feeling that he and his sister were burdensome to her. Once his father arrived to take over their care, Pedro felt more at ease and cared for, despite having to adjust to his father being present after a prolonged separation. He also acknowledged the economic support they had, which allowed his father to hire a nanny to help him with daily living tasks such as cooking and cleaning.

"Aunque era primera vez que iba vivir con él era mucho mejor...porque tu papá siempre será tu papá y él se encargó de nosotros y todo mejoró...también teníamos el dinero gracias a mi mamá para pagarle a una señora que nos ayudaba en la casa con la comida y la limpieza..."

"Although it was the first time I would live with him it was much better...because your dad will always be your dad and he took care of us and everything got better... we also had money thanks to my mom to pay a lady to help us around the house with cooking and cleaning..."
Comunicación (communication). The frequency and predictability of their calls created a ritual for the family that has continued to this day.

"Todo los días casi siempre a la misma hora yo sabía que mi mami llamaba y siempre hablaba con nosotros...cuando la extrañaba duraba poco porque sabía que íbamos a hablar pronto."

"Every day almost always at the same time I knew that my mom called and always talked to us ... when I missed her it lasted very little because I knew we were going to talk soon."

Aside from their daily calls, Pedro fondly recalled receiving letters, photos, and gifts from his mother on special occasions and valuing these.

"Mi favorito era cuando nos mandaba cosas de allá (Estados Unidos) por las Navidades o mi cumpleaños siempre me mandaba algo."

"My favorite was when she sent us things from there (United States) for Christmas or my birthday she always sent me something."

During the last few years of their separation, Pedro was able to use WhatsApp. This allowed him to see his mother through video chat and improved the quality of their communication considerably. Pedro also shared being able to see where his mother lived and places she would visit, which undoubtedly fostered their connection.

"Cuando empezamos a usar el WhatsApp fue chévere...podía ver a mi mamá y también ver como lucía donde estaba viviendo y como se veía la ciudad donde ella estaba...me encanta ese app."

"When we started using WhatsApp it was cool ... I could see my mom and also see how she looked where she was living and how the city where she was looked ... I love that app."

Reunification

Tomando la decision de reunificar (making the decision to reunify). Pedro shared that it was his decision to come to the United States. He described his experience as that
of a coming of age story where migrating to the States was a sort of milestone for young men in an effort to help their families.

"Muchos de mis amigos estaban viniendo para acá para ayudar a sus familias...quería venir antes pero esperé para tener un poco más de edad..."

"Many of my friends were coming here to help their families ... I wanted to come earlier but I waited to be a little older ..."

What also helped facilitate this decision was that his older sister had also decided to make the journey to the United States. Both Pedro and his older sister felt that it was their time to migrate as many of their peers had been doing.

*El viaje (the journey).* "¡Una Aventura!," "An Adventure!" were Pedro's first words when sharing about his journey to the United States. He remembered feeling nervous the night before and reminded himself that many had undergone the journey before him, and that the reward outweighed the risks.

"Si estaba un poco nervioso la noche antes...pero sabía que mucha gente hacía el viaje y sentía que Dios me iba proteger...la alegría de ver a mi mamá y de poder trabajar me quitó esos nervios."

"Yes I was a little nervous the night before...but I knew that many people made the journey and I felt that God would protect me...the joy of seeing my mom and being able to work took away those nerves."

His most memorable moments on the journey were those that he experienced while in the United States after being detained and escorted to a shelter for unaccompanied children. Here his adventurous nature continued as he described the excitement he felt when boarding his first airplane ride, and the joy he had knowing that soon he would be reunited with his mother. Although alone and without his older sister, who was able to escape border patrol officials, he did not experience fear or anxiety. He reported knowing
what to expect, as the social workers at the shelter kept him informed of each step in the process.

"Yo sabía lo que iba pasar porque la trabajadora social me lo explicaba todo...yo estaba tranquilo porque sabía que iba venir a ver a mi mamá."

"I knew what was going to happen because the social worker explained everything to me ... I was calm because I knew I was coming to see my mom."

_Proceso de reunificación (process of reunification)._ Although the moment of their reunion took place some time ago, Pedro described this occasion as if he were living it in the present. He spoke with excitement as he described being able to hug his mom for the first time in so long. "Yo la abracé y no quería despégarme de ella," "I hugged her and didn't want to let go." Pedro shared how his first days in the United States with his mom were like a vacation. His older sister had also made it to their mother's home and the three of them celebrated their reunion with a special dinner that their family made for them. A special moment he described with his mom the day after their reunion was seeing the beach for the first time. This reunion was marked with so much joy and celebration that he plans to celebrate the anniversary of their reunion yearly.

"Era tan especial...nos hicieron una comida especial era como una fiesta...siempre me recuerdo de esa fecha y lo voy a celebrar el aniversario de ese día cada año como si fuera un día de fiesta."

"It was so special ... they made us a special meal it was like a party ... I always remember that date and I'm going to celebrate the anniversary of that day every year as if it were a holiday."

_Relación con mi mamá (relationship with my mom)._ Pedro described his current relationship with his mom as an open, loving, and supportive relationship. He shared confiding in her and relying on her for support. It was evident in observing how Pedro and his mother relate with each other that they have a close bond and look after one
another. "Mi mamá me apoya y me quiere muchísimo y yo a ella...nos llevamos bien y nos cuidamos," "My mom supports me and loves me very much and I love her... we get along well and look after one another."

**Esperanzas para el futuro (hopes for the future).** Pedro and his mother share the same hopes for the future. Pedro plans on saving enough money to someday return to his home country and open a small family business. "Quisiera regresar algun día con bastante dinero para tener un negocio," "I would like to return someday with enough money to open a business." He looks forward to a time where his family can be together.
Chapter 5: Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion

Each case underwent within-case analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of each family's unique experience. In this chapter, I will use the data derived from each individual case to provide a cross-case analysis. The goal of the cross-case analysis is to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. This section is organized by each research question.

Research Question #1. How do parents and adolescents experience the process of separation and reunification?

The process of separation for parents. In all three cases, the mothers described the process of being separated from their child(ren) as difficult and emotionally challenging. Their concerns for the influence the separation would have on their families were present at the onset of the decision-making process to migrate. All three mothers described taking months struggling to decide whether or not leaving their child(ren) behind was worth the risks of the journey and the subsequent pain of separation. For each of these mothers, their families’ economic struggles was the deciding factor to migrate, with the hope of being able to send remittances and help provide financially. "Aunque muy triste...no había de otra, no teníamos dinero." Family members in the United States also played a significant role in the mothers’ decision-making process to migrate by persuading mothers to make the journey as well.

During the time of separation, the mothers’ relationship with their child(ren)'s caregiver was an important aspect of their experiences. Having a trusting relationship with the caregiver allowed mothers to experience less anxiety related to their child(ren)'s well-being and allowed them to work without feeling worried or preoccupied. Two out of
the three families who participated in this study experienced a change in caregiver during the separation for different reasons. In both cases, although stressful, the change marked an improvement for the child(ren)'s quality of care and provided the mother with added peace of mind.

Another important aspect for mothers during the separation was how they experienced their role as a parent. Women noted their shifting parenting roles from child-rearing to providing financially as their families’ primary breadwinners. Their experiences are congruent with those reported in studies of migratory patterns in transnational families, whereby mothers migrate to provide remittances due to an increase in employment opportunities for women abroad (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992).

Overall, the process of separation for each of these families was portrayed by the participants as a sacrifice they endured in hopes of providing their children with a better future. One of the three mothers shared experiencing regret in undergoing a prolonged separation, as she and her daughter continue to struggle with their relationship. Despite the outcome of the separation, each mother reported relying heavily on her faith to strengthen her in overcoming the challenges of separation.

*The process of reunification for parents.* Given all three families’ undocumented status, the decision to reunify was one with unique risks. These mothers invested the majority of their savings to pay for their child's passage to the United States with the assistance of coyotes. This process presented a second cost-benefit analysis that mothers underwent as they weighed the risks of the journey against the benefits of reunification and of their children living in the United States. The days leading up to the reunion was
experienced by all with intense anticipation and excitement. The moment of reunification was described in each case as a moment of joy and relief.

*The process of separation for adolescents.* Each adolescent described the initial weeks after the separation as a sad and disorienting time. What they were told about their mother’s departure also played a part in their emotional experience, and ultimately influenced their relationship with their mother. In two of the cases, the mother was indirect and provided misinformation in an attempt to spare the child any emotional pain, leading daughters to believe that they would see each other again soon, in one case within a few hours. In these cases, this separation process ruptured the trust within the mother-daughter relationship and fostered feelings of abandonment.

*The process of reunification for adolescents.* A significant factor for adolescents at the onset of this process was their role in the decision to reunify. Each adolescent interviewed had a unique experience in this. For the two adolescent girls, feelings of resentment and anger surfaced as they felt they did not have control over the decision to migrate to the United States, but rather felt the decision was imposed on them. For the only male adolescent participant, it was a dissimilar experience, as he initiated the decision to reunify and it was supported by his family members.

Another important aspect of the reunification process was the children’s journey to the United States. Specifically, two out of the three adolescents experienced being at a shelter for unaccompanied children. In their description of this experience, we learned of the importance of providing these adolescents with information related to the process they were undergoing. Providing information helped address their emotional needs and
minimize their distress during detainment; in addition, it helped prepare them mentally and emotionally for reunification.

**Research Question #2. What similarities and differences do they share in their perceptions?**

The cross-case analysis brought to light that regardless of the quality of the parent-child relationship, both parents and adolescents shared similar hopes for the future. For those families that planned to remain in the United States, education leading to career opportunities for their children was their biggest hope. The Gomez family expressed a desire to one day return to their home country and be reunified with family there. For them, education, although valued, was not their primary aspiration; their focus was working towards financial stability in their home country.

Several factors could account for families hopes to stay or return to their home country, one being the gender expectations of the adolescent. For the male adolescent in this study, migrating to the United States was perceived as a milestone for young men his age. This coming of age milestone was motivated by a desire and expectation to assist in his family's livelihood. A second factor may be the structure of the family system that influences their desire to start a new life in the United States or working to make a better life back home. Mothers of daughters also felt that daughters would have a better quality of life in the United States, given their concerns about sexism and violence in their home countries.

Although the adolescents expressed varying experiences in how much was shared with them at the time of their mother's departure, they still had an awareness of their
mothers’ motivation to provide them with a better life. Overall, both mothers and their children shared an understanding of how the sacrifices they have made could change the family's trajectory for themselves and future generations.

Research Question #3. What factors promote resiliency and family cohesion, and which add to family conflict and/or distress?

*Communication.* Communication during the time of separation played a significant factor in how well families were able to remain emotionally connected, and was a predictor of how they would experience reunification. Each mother shared making daily phone calls in an effort to stay informed of their child(ren)s' development and well-being. Although their children were aware of their mothers’ communication with their caregivers, it was the direct conversations with them that helped foster a healthy connection with one another from afar. For the Rodriguez family, direct communication was a significant challenge, as both mother and adolescent perceived that the other was disinterested in speaking to them. These perceptions resulted in feelings of rejection and a growing sense of disconnection. These feelings, in turn, caused each of them additional distress during the separation and presented an added barrier in the reunification process.

The cross-case analysis revealed that families who prioritized daily and direct communication with their child as a consistent and predictable part of their child's day were able to mitigating some of the negative possible outcomes of these prolonged separations. This was the case for the Gomez family who prioritized daily contact in such a way that it was experienced as a necessary and predictable daily ritual.

For two of these families, the development of communication technology eventually allowed for the use of video capabilities through applications like *WhatsApp.*
They perceived this technology as allowing for a significant enhancement in the quality of their communication. For the Rodriguez family, this technology was not yet accessible. Both mother and daughter agreed that had these apps been available during the time of their separation, it may have made it easier for them to foster a relationship from afar. The Hernandez family also relied on daily phone calls and only had access to video chat platforms for a small part of their separation. The availability of this technology was described as a "game changer," as it allowed for both mother and daughter to re-familiarize themselves with one another and share information about each other’s surroundings. As a result, when their reunion took place, they felt a sense of familiarity in one another's physical appearance and mannerisms.

*Family support* in the United States can also serve as a protective factor. Families shared a deep sense of gratitude for the support that their cousin(s), aunts, and uncles were able to provide them. It was important for the children to have a larger sense of family in the United States and not feel alone. Although two of the mothers relied on the support of their family in the U.S. to help them adjust and navigate the challenges of separation and reunification, the Rodriguez family lacked this support initially. To mitigate for this loss, they relied on the support of their church community. For the adolescents, having same-aged peer support through friends and family members assisted them in their adjustment as well. For example, Lucía and Pedro both had friends and cousins who had undergone similar experiences, providing validation for their own experiences. Sources of support, being emotional or financial, are an important factor predicting the well-being of immigrants, especially during the initial phases of adjustment. Access to a support system may be even more critical for those individuals
who are newly separated from their families and at heightened risk for mental and emotional distress.

Families who were able to openly talk about their experiences and have a dialogue with their adolescent about the struggles that they each faced were able to reconnect and improve their relationship once reunified. Avoidance of these issues or sharing misinformation in an effort to protect the child from emotional pain, although well-intended, proved in this study, to add to the struggles that they experienced later on by creating mistrust and confusion which ultimately had a negative impact on their relationship. Mothers who actively provided emotional support to their adolescent by validating their struggles, especially during the early phase of reunification where the adolescent was experiencing a sense of loss and may have had feelings of sadness and anger, were more successful in reconnecting later with their child and increasing cohesion.

Discussion

A primary finding of this collective case study was highlighting the importance of the frequency and quality of contact during the time of separation. Results of this study are in line with previous research that identified contact as a factor influencing how children and parents experience separations (Artico, 2003; Boss, 1999; Falicov, 2002). A contribution of this research is providing greater specificity about the typical frequency and type of contact in which families engage and its potential influence on child well-being. In this study, all mothers identified adequate frequency as daily contact, primarily through phone calls. They viewed photos, gifts, and letters as supplemental means of connection that occurred less frequently but were valued. The quality of contact has
changed since technological advances in communication have made video chat capabilities more easily accessible. The use of these applications demonstrated to have a significant influence on the quality of contact. As a result of this technology, transnational families are relying on these applications to maintain and foster their relationships with family members back home. It is important to note that not all families may be able to take advantage of this technology due to financial limitations or lack of Internet access in remote areas.

This collective case study also provides additional insight into the cost-benefit analysis that parents undergo when deciding whether or not to migrate to the United States. Zentgraf and Chinchilla (2012) discussed this process and concluded that the benefit of providing remittances for transnational families mitigated the potentially negative effects of separation. This proved to be the case for each of the mothers I interviewed. However, it was only when the potential benefit of providing remittances was accompanied by the encouragement of family members to make the choice to migrate that these mothers felt able to move forward with their decision. The findings from the cross-case analysis also bring attention to a second cost-benefit analysis that these families take on when deciding if and when to reunify with their child(ren). For undocumented families, the cost-benefit analysis includes additional factors to consider as they face additional risks such as deportation and limited resources. Adolescents may also experience their own process of weighing the costs and benefits of reunification, which may differ from those of their parents. Discussing these side-by-side processes together may help in allowing adolescents to express their concerns and feel emotionally supported during this significant transition.
These results also support the research by Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie (2002) indicating that although the provision of remittances was the primary goal for parents in migrating to the United States, it was also important to not solely focus on providing financial support but also tend to their child's emotional and psychological needs during the time of separation. The adolescents in this study corroborated that feeling cared for by their parents went beyond receiving remittances. Thus, results highlight the importance of the quality of contact and investment in parenting by (a) maintaining an active co-parenting relationship with their child(ren)'s caretaker, and (b) engaging in meaningful conversations to bond from afar through sharing of experiences, storytelling and providing emotional support. When these protective factors were present, other risk factors such as the emotional distress due to the length of the separation appeared to minimize.

In analyzing the similarities and differences within and across each family it was useful to refer back to the MECA framework. Utilizing this framework as a lens to understanding the multiple variables that play a role in immigrant family experiences was critical. For example, how families transitioned through developmental milestones and events had important implications with their ability to connect and parent their adolescent. The separation and reunification phases of migration are critical moments within their family life cycle and their willingness and ability to address issues within these phases may determine if they are able to move forward or remain stuck in unhealthy relational patterns. Another important aspect to consider within the family's ecological context (e.g., family support, church community, faith, employment, anti-immigration sentiment) are variables that impact their acculturation process and well-
being. As the adolescents in the study continue to acculturate it would be interesting to see how this process impacts their relationship with their parent.

The use of multiple methods of data collection was another vital part of the study. The primary source of data was the interview for both parent and adolescent. However, without the use of the genogram with the parent or photovoice with the adolescent, I would not have been able to acquire the rich data that emerged, especially from the adolescents. The adapted photovoice activity they engaged in created a space where as collaborators in the research, they were presenting me with their stories rather than agreeing to answer my questions. There was a sense of pride in their work that they each expressed and an excitement in sharing what they reflected on while capturing each image. Having each participant engage in an activity that primed them for the interview, especially given the personal and sensitive experiences they were asked to share, proved to be successful. This was confirmed when conducting "member checks" with each participant. During this process participants were provided with the themes that had emerged from the data which were all validated. Several participants also shared their gratitude for being provided the opportunity to share their story.

**Implications for Practice**

*Implications for shelters.* The results of this collective case study depicts the importance of attending to the adolescents’ needs during their time in the shelters. For some, the experience may be disorienting or even traumatic as they navigate feeling a loss of control and uncertainty about their future. Shelters can help these adolescents, fostering empowerment and resilience by taking the time to educate children on the reunification process and preparing them for potential outcomes in a manner that is
developmentally appropriate. Shelters may also provide families that are preparing to reunify with psychoeducation and/or counseling on what to expect within the reunification process, as well as with referrals for community resources that may feel safe to migrating families.

*Implications for clinicians.* Professionals who provide counseling services to Hispanic transnational families should familiarize themselves with the factors that influence the separation and reunification process. Clinicians and community service agencies may consider offering preventive care for these families by identifying transnational families who may benefit from psychoeducation, parent coaching, and counseling during the time of separation. In addition, they may help families who are preparing to reunify rather than focusing solely on intervening post-reunification. The use of tele-health may facilitate these services, as it would enable families to address many of these issues earlier on by including the participation of family members in their home country. Service providers and agencies may also consider assisting families by providing access to devices (cell phones, tablets, laptops) as well as instructions on how to use different video chat applications to improve the quality of their communication.

*Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research*

This collective-case study consisted of an in-depth within-case and cross-case analysis of three undocumented Central American families in which the mother and child underwent a prolonged separation, with each reunification taking place when the child was an adolescent. The experiences of families recruited through this purposeful sampling may not reflect the experiences of all transnational Hispanic families. The inclusion of more families may have provided additional findings and richer cross-case
analysis. For instance, the recruitment of a family with an adolescent male to further explore the theme of gender expectations and experiences could have enriched the study. Future research can aim to explore different types of transnational families to identify additional factors that have not been fully understood thus far. Additional qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods research should be conducted to assist in the development of clinical interventions that aim to support these families in successfully navigating the challenging process of separation and reunification.
References


Appendix I
Interview Guide (English and Spanish version)

Parent Interview

**Pre-migration**
- Tell me about your decision/reasons behind immigrating to the U.S. What were your hopes and expectations?
- Describe what your life was like before migrating to the U.S.
- Was your decision to migrate to the U.S. supported by family members?
- How long did you anticipate your separation from your child(ren) would be?
- Was the decision to immigrate discussed with your child(ren) before your departure? If so, to what extent?
- How was a caregiver for your child(ren) chosen? Describe your relationship with them.

**Parent migration (Time of Separation)**
- Tell me about your journey to the U.S.
- Describe your support network (family, friends, co-workers, community resources etc.) when arriving to the U.S.
- Describe your role as a parent during the time of separation.
- Describe your relationship with your child(ren’s) caretaker while separated?
- What kind of contact were you able to have with your child while separated (means of communication and frequency)?
- What were some of the challenges/barriers of parenting or communicating with your child(ren) if any?

**Reunification**
- How has the separation affected you and your relationship with your child?
- Describe how you experienced the days in anticipation of the reunion, the day you reunified with your child(ren) and the days that followed.
- How would you describe your relationship with your child(ren) after being reunified?
- Have you observed any changes in your child’s behavior since arriving to the U.S.?
- Did you discuss the separation or possible difficulties of reunification with your child(ren)?
- Have you in the past, or are you currently, receiving treatment from a counselor or therapist? If so, has the issue of separation and/or reunification been discussed? How has it impacted your experience?

- How would you describe your family values/goals and perspective on your family’s future?

Youth Interview

Pre-Migration
- What do you know about the reasons why your parent(s) came to the U.S.?
- Who took care of you before your parent(s) migrated to the U.S.?
- Describe your family life prior to your parent(s) coming to the U.S.
- Do you remember your parent(s)’ speaking with you about their decision to migrate to the U.S.?
- What were your expectations of what your separation from your parent(s) would be like?

Parent Migration (Time of Separation)
- What was life in your home country like after your parent(s) migrated to the U.S.?
- Describe what your relationship with your caregiver was like during this time.
- What kind of contact did you have with your parent(s) while they were away?
- Did you discuss how you felt about the separation with your caregiver/family members/friends?
- Did you have family members or peers at home who were also separated from their parent(s) due to them migrating to the U.S.?

Reunification
- How was it decided that you would migrate to the U.S.?
- Describe your journey to the U.S.
- Do you communicate with your caregiver/family/friends in your home country?
- Describe how you experienced being reunified with your parent(s). What were your expectations? What were/are some of the challenges?
- How would you describe your relationship with your parent(s) after being reunified?
- Do you discuss the separation or possible difficulties of reunification with your parent(s)?
Have you in the past, or are you currently, receiving treatment from a counselor or therapist? If so, has the issue of separation and/or reunification been discussed? How has it impacted your experience?

How would you describe your family values/goals and perspective on your family’s future?

Guía de Entrevista

Entrevista con los padres

Pre-migración
- Cuéntame sobre tu decisión / razones detrás de inmigrar a los Estados Unidos.
- ¿Cuáles fueron tus esperanzas y expectativas?
- Describe cómo era tu vida antes de migrar a los Estados Unidos.
- ¿Hiciste la decisión de migrar a los Estados Unidos con el apoyo de miembros de la familia?
- ¿Cuánto tiempo anticipó que sería su separación de su(s) hijo/a?
- ¿Discutió la decisión de inmigrar con su (s) hijo/a antes de su despedida? Si es así, ¿en qué manera?
- ¿Cómo eligió a alguien para el cuidado de su(s) hijo/a? Describe tu relación con ellos.

Migración posterior al padre (tiempo de separación)
- Cuéntame sobre tu viaje a los Estados Unidos.
- Describa su sistema de apoyo (familia, amigos, compañeros de trabajo, recursos de la comunidad, etc.) al llegar a los Estados Unidos.
- Describa su papel como padre durante el tiempo de la separación.
- Describa su relación con el cuidador de su hijo/a mientras estaban separados.
- ¿Qué tipo de contacto pudo tener con su hijo mientras estaba separados (medios de comunicación y frecuencia)?
- ¿Cuáles fueron algunos de las dificultades/barreras en la crianza de los hijo/a o la comunicación con su hijo/a?

Reunificación
- ¿Cómo te ha afectado la separación y su relación con su hijo/a?
- Describa cómo viviste los días previos a la reunión, el día en que se reunificó con su hijo/a y los días siguientes.
- ¿Cómo describirías su relación con su hijo/a después de reunificarse?
- ¿Has observado algún cambio en el comportamiento de su hijo/a desde que llegó a los Estados Unidos?
- ¿Discutes la separación o posibles dificultades de reunificación con su hijo/a?
- ¿Has en el pasado o en este momento estás recibiendo tratamiento de un consejero o terapeuta? Si es así, ¿se ha discutido el tema de la separación y / o reunificación? ¿Cómo ha impactado tu experiencia?
- ¿Cómo describirías los valores / metas de su familia y su perspectiva para el futuro de
su familia?

Entrevista para adolescente

Pre-migración
- ¿Qué sabes sobre las razones por las cuales tus padres emigraron a los Estados Unidos?
- ¿Quién se ocupó de usted antes de que sus padre(s) migraran a los Estados Unidos?
- Describa su vida familiar antes de que sus padre(s) migraran a los Estados Unidos.
- ¿Recuerda que sus padre(s) hablaron con usted sobre su decisión de migrar a los Estados Unidos?
- ¿Cuáles eran tus expectativas de cómo sería tu separación de tus padre(s)?

Migración posterior a los padre(s) (tiempo de separación)
- ¿Cómo era tu vida después de que sus padre(s) migraron a los Estados Unidos?
- Describa cómo fue su relación con las persona(s) que te cuidaron durante este tiempo.
- ¿Qué tipo de contacto tenías con tus padre(s) durante la separación?
- ¿Discutió cómo se sentías acerca de la separación con su familiares/ amigos?
- ¿Tuviste familiares o compañeros en casa que también fueron separados de sus padres debido a que migraron a los Estados Unidos?

Reunificación
- ¿Cómo se decidió que migrarías a los Estados Unidos?
- Describe tu viaje a los Estados Unidos.
- ¿Se comunica con la persona(s) que te cuidó / familia / amigos en su país de origen?
- Describa cómo viviste la reunificación con sus padre(s). ¿Cuáles fueron sus expectativas? ¿Cuáles fueron/son algunos de las dificultades?
- ¿Cómo describiría su relación con su padre(s) después de reunirse?
- ¿Hablas de la separación y posibles dificultades de reunificación con sus padres?
- ¿Has en el pasado o en este momento estás recibiendo tratamiento de un consejero o terapeuta? Si es así, ¿se ha discutido el tema de la separación y/o reunificación? ¿Cómo ha impactado tu experiencia?
- ¿Cómo describiría los valores / metas de su familia y la perspectiva del futuro de su familia?
Appendix II
Photovoice Instructions (English and Spanish versions)

Photovoice Instructions

As part of this research study you have been given a digital camera. For the next couple of days I ask that you utilize this camera to take ten photographs that capture your thoughts, feelings, perspective on how you experienced being reunified with your parent(s). In order to keep your identity and that of your family and community members protected I ask that you NOT take any photos of individuals. You may take photos indoors and outdoors and include items and scenery that represent or symbolize your experience. You are free to use different angles, lighting or be abstract or concrete in the capturing of these photos.

Once you have taken ten photographs I ask that you select three photos from the ten that you think represent your experience the most. You may then give each of these photos a title and provide a caption of one to three sentences explaining why you took this photo and what it represents.

When we meet again you will have the opportunity to share these photos with me. You may keep the digital camera after our meeting.

Please use the following space to write down your photo captions.

Photograph #1
Title: _____________________________________

Caption:__________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Photograph #2
Title: _____________________________________

Caption:__________________________________________________________
Instrucciones de Photovoice

Como parte de este estudio, se le ha dado una cámara digital. Durante los próximos días le pido que use esta cámara para tomar diez fotos que capturen sus pensamientos, sentimientos y perspectivas sobre cómo se reúne con su (s) padre (s). Para mantener su identidad y la de sus familiares y miembros de la comunidad protegidos, le pido que NO tome fotografías de personas. Puede tomar fotografías en interiores y exteriores e incluir elementos y escenarios que representan o simbolizan su experiencia. Puede usar diferentes ángulos, iluminación o ser abstracto o concreto al tomar estas fotos.

Una vez que haya tomado diez fotos, le pido que seleccione tres de las diez fotos que cree que representan mejor su experiencia. En estas tres fotos, le pedimos que escriba una o tres oraciones que expliquen por qué tomó esta foto y qué representa.

Durante nuestra próxima cita, tendrá la oportunidad de compartir estas fotos conmigo. Puede mantener la cámara digital después de nuestra reunión.

Usa el siguiente espacio para escribir las descripciones de tus fotos.
Foto #1

Título: _____________________________________

Descripción:__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Foto #2

Título: _____________________________________

Descripción:__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Foto #3

Título: _____________________________________

Descripción:__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
University of Miami

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Parent-Child Separations and the Process of Reunification in Transnational Hispanic Families: A Collective Case Study

Principal Investigator: Daniel Santisteban, Ph.D.
Student Researcher: Virginia Alfonso, Ed.M.

This document describes a study in which you and your child are being asked to take part. Please read the information and ask any questions that you have. At the end, you will be asked if you agree to take part and allow your child to take part.

PURPOSE OF STUDY:

The purpose of this study is to understand the separation and reunion process in migrant families. We want to learn about how separations affected your family.

PROCEDURES:

Each family member will be asked to complete a 60-90-minute interview. You and your child will be asked questions separately. The interview will be audio recorded. You will be asked questions about your relationship with your family and how coming to the United States affected you and your family.

If you agree to participate you will meet with the interviewer twice. In the first meeting the interviewer will ask you questions and create a family tree. We will also give your child a digital camera to take home and instructions on how to take pictures of things that remind them of their experience in coming to the United States. During the second meeting the interviewer will talk to your child about the pictures and ask them questions. With your permission, your child may keep the camera at the end of the study.

Interviews can take place at a community center or at your home and be done in English or Spanish. If you feel you need any type of counseling services, we can give you a list of community resources.

After we review the information we will call you to make sure that the way we are describing your experience is accurate.
**RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS:**

You or your child may get tired or stressed from answering questions, some of which are personal. You or your child can take a break at any time. Also, you or your child do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. Your child may also choose not to discuss the photos they take. We do not think there are any additional risks to you, your child, or family members from participating in this study.

During the interview we will check in with you to make sure the discussion is not too stressful. If it is, please feel free to let the interviewer know.

If we learn that you or your child are in danger or if it is shared that there is physical and/or sexual abuse the appropriate agencies would be contacted to make sure that you and/or your child are safe.

**BENEFITS:**

We cannot promise you or your child any benefit from participation in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand the separation and reunion process in migrant families.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Your family’s privacy is kept safe by storing all the information collected in a secure electronic database and in locked cabinets. Only the researchers will be allowed access to this information.

Participation in this study does require your permission to audio-record interviews. Direct quotes from the interview may be used in the presentation of the study’s findings. The researcher will not use your family's real names. When sharing the findings of the study we will create a fake name to better protect your identity.

**COMPENSATION:**

A $50 gift card will be given to you, the parent, after the researcher has reviewed the photos and completed the interviews.

**RIGHT TO DECLINE OR WITHDRAW:**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You and your child can decide to stop participating at any time.
CONTACT INFORMATION:

The study’s Principal Investigator, Dr. Daniel Santisteban, will gladly answer any questions you may have about the purpose, procedures, and outcome of this project and may be reached at (305) 284-9511. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Miami, at (305) 243-3195.

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT:

You will receive a copy of this signed informed consent form.

I have read this consent form. This study has been explained to me and all my questions about the study have been answered. Based on this information, I voluntarily agree for my child and my family to take part in this study and agree to have interviews audiotaped. By signing this consent form, I have not given up any of my legal rights.

________________________
Child Name (print)

________________________
Parent/Guardian Name (print)

________________________  ____________________
Parent/Guardian Signature      Date

________________________  ____________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent   Date
Universidad de Miami

CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN UN ESTUDIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Separaciones de Padres e Hijos y el Proceso de Reunificación en Familias Hispanas Transnacionales: Un Estudio de Caso Colectivo

Investigador principal: Daniel Santisteban, Ph.D.
Estudiante Investigadora: Virginia Alfonso, Ed.M.S

Este documento describe un estudio en el que se le pide a usted y a su hija/o que participen. Por favor lea la información y haga cualquier pregunta que tenga. Al final, se le preguntará si acepta participar y permitir que su hija/o participe.

PROPÓSITO DEL ESTUDIO:

El propósito de este estudio es comprender el proceso de separación y reunificación en las familias migrantes. Queremos aprender acerca de cómo las separaciones afectaron a su familia.

PROCEDIMIENTOS:

Se le pedirá a cada miembro de la familia que complete una entrevista de 60 a 90 minutos. A usted y su hija/o se les harán preguntas por separado. La entrevista será grabada en audio. Se le harán preguntas sobre su relación con su familia y cómo el hecho de venir a los Estados Unidos lo afectó a usted y a su familia.

Si acepta participar, se reunirá con la investigadora dos veces. En la primera reunión, la investigadora le hará preguntas y creará un árbol familiar. También le daremos a su hija/o una cámara digital para llevar a casa e instrucciones sobre cómo tomar fotografías de cosas que les recuerden de su experiencia al venir a los Estados Unidos. Durante la segunda reunión, la investigadora hablará con su hija/o sobre las fotos y le hará preguntas. Con su permiso, su hija/o puede quedarse con la cámara al final del estudio.

Las entrevistas pueden tomar lugar en un centro comunitario o en su hogar y se pueden hacer en inglés o español. Si considera que necesita algún tipo de servicios, podemos darle una lista de recursos en la comunidad.

Después de que revisemos la información, la investigadora te llamara para asegurarnos de que la manera en que describimos su experiencia sea correcta.
RIESGOS:

Es posible que usted o su hijo/a se puedan cansar o estresar al contestar preguntas, algunas de las cuales son personales. En cualquier momento durante la entrevista, usted o su hijo/a pueden tomar un descanso. Además, usted o su hija/o no están obligados a responder a ninguna pregunta que no quieran responder. Su hija/o también puede optar no discutir las fotos que tomaron. No hemos identificado otro riesgo adicional para usted, su hija/o o sus familiares por participar en este estudio.

Durante la entrevista nos comunicaremos con usted para asegurarnos de que la discusión no sea demasiado estresante. Si es así, no dude en avisar la investigadora.

Si nos enteramos de que usted o su hija/o están en peligro o si se comparte que hay abuso físico y/o sexual, se contactará a las agencias apropiadas para asegurarnos de que usted y/o su hija/o estén a salvo.

BENEFICIOS:

No podemos prometerle a usted ni a su hija/o ningún beneficio de participar en este estudio. El propósito de este estudio es comprender el proceso de separación y reunión en las familias migrantes.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD:

La privacidad de su familia se mantiene segura. Toda la información será colectada en una base de datos electrónica segura y en gabinetes cerrados con llave. Solo los investigadores tendrán acceso a esta información.

La participación en este estudio requiere su permiso para grabar grabaciones de audio. Se pueden usar citas directas de la entrevista en la presentación de los resultados del estudio. La investigadora no usará los nombres reales de su familia. Cuando comuniquemos los resultados del estudio, crearemos un nombre falso para mejor proteger su identidad.

COMPENSACIÓN:

Se le dará una tarjeta de regalo de $50 a usted, el padre/madre, después de que la investigadora haya revisado las fotos y completado las entrevistas.

DERECHO A DECLINAR O RETIRAR:

La participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. Usted y su hija/o pueden decidir dejar de participar en cualquier momento.
INFORMACIÓN DEL CONTACTO:

El Investigador Principal del estudio, el Dr. Daniel Santisteban, responderá con gusto cualquier pregunta que pueda tener sobre el propósito, los procedimientos y el resultado de este proyecto y se puede contactar al (305) 284-9511. Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como sujeto de investigación, puede comunicarse con la Oficina de Investigación de Asuntos Humanos en la Universidad de Miami al (305) 243-3195.

ACUERDO DE PARTICIPANTE:

Recibí una copia de este formulario de consentimiento informado firmado. He leído este formulario de consentimiento. Este estudio me ha sido explicado y todas mis preguntas sobre el estudio han sido respondidas. **Basándome en esta información, acepto voluntariamente que mi hija/o y mi familia participen en este estudio y acepto que las entrevistas sean grabadas.** Al firmar este formulario de consentimiento, no he renunciado a ninguno de mis derechos legales.

______________________________
Nombre del niño (letra de imprenta)

______________________________
Nombre del padre/madre (letra de imprenta)

______________________________  ____________________
Firma del padre/madre                                      Fecha

______________________________  ____________________
Firma de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento                                      Fecha
Appendix IV
Assent Form (English and Spanish versions)

University of Miami

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Parent-Child Separations and the Process of Reunification in Transnational Hispanic Families: A Collective Case Study

Principal Investigator: Daniel Santisteban, Ph.D.
Student Researcher: Virginia Alfonso, Ed.M.

A research study is a way to learn more about people and how they feel about things that happen to them. We are doing a research study about how parents and their children feel after being separated and then reunited with the family after coming to the United States.

You will be asked to talk about your thoughts and feelings about how moving to the U.S has impacted you and your family. You will be asked the questions without your parents. The questions will take about an hour to complete.

You will also be given a digital camera to take pictures of places and/or things that represent your experience of reuniting with your parent(s). You will be given rules on the types of pictures you can take. You will have a few days to take pictures and afterward we will meet to discuss the pictures you took and we can talk about your own experience. With your parent(s) permission you may keep the camera at the end of the study.

The interviews will be audio recorded so that the researcher can go back and remember what you said. All the interviews and pictures will be kept in a secure place. The researcher will not use your family's real names. When sharing the findings of the study we will create a fake name to better protect your identity.

We do not think this study puts you at risk of any harm. If you decide to participate and feel uncomfortable for whatever reason you can ask to take a break or stop participating at any time. You may also say no to answer any question the researcher asks.

Do you have any questions?
If you decide you want to be in this study, please sign your name.

I agree ______ I do not agree ______ to participate in this study which I have read or which has been explained to me by ____________________

___________________________________  _______________
(Sign your name here)    (Date)

___________________________________  _______________
(Signature of Person Obtaining Assent)  (Date)
Un estudio de investigación es una forma de aprender más sobre las personas y cómo se sienten acerca de las cosas que les suceden. Estamos haciendo un estudio de investigación sobre cómo se sienten los padres y sus hijos después de estar separados y luego reunirse con la familia después de venir a los Estados Unidos.

Se le pedirá que hable sobre sus pensamientos y sentimientos acerca de cómo el traslado a los Estados Unidos ha afectado a usted y a su familia. Se le harán las preguntas sin sus padres. Las preguntas tomarán aproximadamente una hora para completar.

También se le entregará una cámara digital para tomar fotos de lugares y/o cosas que representan su experiencia de reunirse con sus padres. Se le darán reglas sobre los tipos de fotos que puede tomar. Tendrá unos días para tomar fotos y luego nos reuniremos para discutir las fotos que tomó y hablaremos de su experiencia. Con el permiso de sus padre(s), puede quedarse con la cámara al final del estudio.

Las entrevistas se grabarán en audio para que la investigadora pueda recordar lo que dijo. Todas las entrevistas y fotos serán guardadas en un lugar seguro. La investigadora no usará los nombres reales de su familia. Cuando compartimos los resultados del estudio, crearemos un nombre falso para proteger mejor su identidad.

No creemos que este estudio lo ponga en riesgo de sufrir daños. Si decide participar y se siente incómodo por cualquier motivo, puede pedir por un descanso o dejar de participar en cualquier momento. También puede decir "no" para responder a cualquier pregunta que la investigadora le haga.

¿Tiene usted alguna pregunta?

Si decide que quiere participar en este estudio, firme su nombre.

Estoy de acuerdo con __________ No estoy de acuerdo con _______________ participar en este estudio, el cual he leído o me ha sido explicado por _________________
(Firme su nombre aquí) __________________________________ (Fecha)

(Firma de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento) ____________________________ (Fecha)