MEXICAN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES AND THEIR EXPERIENCES:
THE IMPACT ON A PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

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By

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores how transnational families manage the separation of family from one country to another. There is ample amount of research done with immigrant family members but less is known about transnational families and their social suffering. In many cases, children are left behind with extended family because both parents have immigrated but regardless if it’s one or both parents the separation can be painful and bring many consequences to the relationship. For that reason, this study explores the parent-child relationship and the impact this separation brings to the family. According to the literature review separation can bring, many consequences and children can be affected in many ways. Parents are mainly focused on the opportunities they have in the U.S. and the change it will bring to their family.

This study is based on qualitative interviews with 7 Mexican transnational families (14 individuals) living in the United States and in Mexico and includes the perspectives of mothers, fathers and minor children.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the Department of Homeland Security, an estimated 500,000 undocumented immigrants have entered the United States per year since 2000. In addition, it is estimated that in 2004, 57 percent arriving in the United States were from Mexico (Homeland Security, 2012). As transnational parenting is likely to be greatly affected by immigrants’ legal status, any estimates must include undocumented Mexicans. For one, a study of immigrant children in Boston found that among Mexicans, 42 percent were separated from mothers and 82 percent from fathers prior to migration (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie, 2002).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how transnational families maintain a relationship from a distance. How are families communicating and staying in contact even when they are miles away from each other? Children grow up apart from one or both parents, as the parent is forced to migrate and seek work outside the country in order to send their children to school, give them adequate health care, or in many cases just provide them with adequate food. Recently there has been more research on the topic of transnational families, including studying parent-child dynamics, (Schmalzbauer, 2004; Debry, 2007; Parreñas, 2005; Nobles, 2011). This study will examine the impact of distance on the intergenerational relationships between the parent and the child. Through qualitative interviews, we will have more knowledge on how families adapt.
Statement of Problem

Children might benefit from remittances while suffering emotionally from prolonged separation (Borraz; Dreby; Heymann et al., 2009). Many parents view transnational migration as an opportunity to better the life of their children and families. On the other hand, Battistella and Conaco (1998) state that children may feel neglected or abandoned by their parents which can cause a change of behavior both at home and in school. Parreñas (2010) reported that children often suffer more when the mother is the one who leaves their home town because she is the one caring and nurturing them the majority of their upbringing. There are important consequences and it affects the lives of both the parents and the children.

What are children and spouses experiencing when a loved one is in another country working hard for them? What are their lives like, while separated, is it different, what has changed? This research will examine how these families live and how they manage life while physically separated.

Family Studies and Transnational Families

Why is it important to study transnational families? Many professionals in the field of family studies work with a very diverse population and it is important to learn about transnational families. Professionals (e.g., instructors, counselors, and therapists) in the field of family studies can gain more knowledge about transnational families since this topic is relatively new and use their knowledge to help families, teach students or others and advise those in transnational families.
Definitions

The following definitions will assist in the operationalization of variables, concepts, and terms used throughout the thesis.

Transnational family - Persons with ties to more than one country. Transnational families are by definition, spread across geographical and legal borders, and transnationalism has been conceptualized as “a set of long-distance, border-crossing connection” (Vertovec, 2004, p.3). Transnational families, nuclear or extended, are dispersed across international borders, and are comprised of family members who spend time in one country or another, depending on a variety of factors such as work, education, legal requirements for residence permit and care and support for other family members.

Immigrant - A person who leaves his or her country to settle permanently in another country. In U.S. immigration law, immigrant refers to all aliens in the United States who have not been admitted under one of the law's nonimmigrant categories. In this report, "immigrant" is the general term used to describe persons born abroad who have come to settle in the United States, regardless of their immigration status or whether they have become U.S. citizens (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012).

Acculturation - The process through which immigrants are expected to learn the cultural patterns of the country of immigration, for example its language, cultural values, and practices. Some observers criticize the concept for assuming that the receiving society is culturally homogenous and that immigrants must relinquish their own ethnic group culture to integrate successfully. The defining attributes include interaction between two cultures, change, learning, adaptation, and sociocultural context (Siatkowski, 2007). Most generally, biculturalism represents comfort and proficiency
with both one's heritage culture and the culture of the country or region in which one has settled. It is applicable not only to immigrants who have come from other countries, but also to children of immigrants who – although they are born and raised in the receiving society – are likely deeply embedded in the heritage culture at home with their families (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006).

*Migrant* - In our study “migrant “is used as a person who leaves his/her country of origin to seek residence in another country.

*Left behind* - When a person is left behind in their country of origin and a family member immigrates without them.

*Undocumented immigrant* - A person residing in the United States without legal immigration status. This includes both persons who entered without inspection and those who entered with a legal visa that is no longer valid. Also referred to as unauthorized or undocumented immigrants, we prefer the word undocumented because it’s less offensive (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012).

**Conceptual Framework**

The following section presents the conceptual framework which influences the researcher’s approach. Specifically, outlining the family systems theory.

*Family Systems Theory*

Family Systems Theory conceptualizes families as systems with their own norms and expectations which help shape individuals. Some of the assumptions of the theory as presented by White and Klein (2002) help illustrate the utility of using this theory in the present study. The first assumption of the theory is that all parts of the system are interconnected. For example, if we were to apply this assumption to a Mexican
transnational family system, we can say that if a parent migrates to the United States, the family system will change and influence the parents, children, siblings, and extended family; all members of a whole family system. Basically, all parts of the family system are interconnected and affect each other. The second assumption of the family systems theory is that understanding is only possible by viewing the whole family. In this case, a family therapist discovers that a Mexican immigrant in the U.S has anxiety symptoms over a family member in Mexico; the therapist can very well understand him because he/she understands the concept of (transnational) family systems and in helping the client, the therapist must examine family dynamics across countries. Lastly, the third assumption of the theory is a system’s behavior affects its environment, and in turn the environment affects the system. Based on the system’s feedback they are able to make or not to make changes with their own system. For example, if the parents that immigrated and left their children behind call their children, and express them their love and attention, then the child will feel a greater connection with his or her family which will lead to better behavior in school and disclosure of more information or feelings while being separated.

*Ambiguous Loss*

Kanaiaupuni (2000) and Salgado de Snyder (1993) emphasized similar emotional and psychological costs of separation that accompany the emigration of fathers to the United States, as well as concern that fathers will find new families. According to studies in family psychiatry, a child’s experience of parental migration is akin to suffering an ambiguous loss. Boss’s Ambiguous Loss Theory describes that ambiguous loss is one in
which a loved one is either physically present but psychologically absent or one who is physically absent but psychologically present (Boss, 1972).

If we apply ambiguous loss to this study, then family members that migrated to the U.S. will be physically absent but psychologically present in the lives of their family members that stayed back in Mexico. The basic theoretical premise is that ambiguous loss is the most stressful loss because it defies resolution and creates confused perceptions about who is in or out of a particular family (Boss, 2004). According to Boss (2004), ambiguous loss is a problem structurally when it leads to boundary ambiguity; for example, parenting roles are ignored, decisions are put on hold, daily tasks are undone and rituals and celebrations are canceled even though they are the glue to family life.

This study focuses on the parent-child relationship on transnational families. Qualitative interviews explore how families manage to maintain relationships when separated by a national border. Perspectives from parents and children are included.

**Research Questions**

1. How does transnational separation impact parent/child family relations?
2. What qualities or coping mechanisms do transnational families use to help them adjust to transnational separation?

**Assumptions**

*The persons who participated in the study did so under the following assumptions:*

- Participants participated in the research without pressure and agreed to volunteer to be part of the study.
- Participants answered the questions during the interviews completely and honestly.
• The sample size for this study was sufficient.

Limitations

Certain limitation to this study exists.

• We primary talked to parents and not the children that were also part of the study.
• This sample is limited to individuals who resided in California and Mexico; we do not know whether it would be relevant to other transnational families.
• The population who participated in the study was limited to only Mexicans.
• We had a hard time defining “family”; we needed to expand our definition, as some participants defined themselves as family, despite how outsiders might view them.
• We had a small sample that consisted of 7 families.
• In the sample, all of the fathers were separated from their children; none of the mothers were separated from their children.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Save the Children and UNICEF approximately 25% of children in selected migrant sending countries have at least one parent abroad. This estimate appears sufficiently large to justify further research on transnational families and the well-being of children (Muzzucato & Schans, 2011). Many researchers have focused on transnational families through qualitative case studies. In the last decade, studies on transnational families have emerged in which scholars from different disciplines have engaged with family members who live across national borders and the effects of such transnational living arrangements on children (Borraz, 2005; Debry, 2007; Parreñas, 2005; Schmalmzbauer, 2008). Researchers are starting to show more interest in transnational families and the impact of families when parents and children separate.

The impact on separation can vary, but it is difficult for both the children and the parents when both parents have to immigrate. In this case, children that stay with extended family can have negative consequences. Parreñas (2001) examines the effects that migrating has on the well-being (defined as psychological, educational and health outcomes) of children who are left in the country of origin. The study is based primarily on open-ended interviews that she collected with female domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles: forty-six in Rome and twenty-six in Los Angeles. Most women were married and had children and with a mean age of fifty-two years old. She found that children experience more emotional problems when their mother migrates compared to when their father migrates because of traditional gender norms related to care. Children often times feel abandoned by their parents. This is usually more common when the
parent leaves for a long period of time such as five years and more. Such feeling can cause the child to feel unwanted and put them at risk for behavioral and academic problems.

*Transnational Families Across The World*

Fresnoza-Flot (2009) conducted in-depth interviews and observations of Filipino migrant mothers working in the domestic service sector in and around Paris. The consequences of migration include the prolongation of a planned stay in France, emotional difficulties due to family separation, and distant mother–child relationships. Transnational family life appears more complicated and difficult to manage for undocumented migrant mothers since they cannot easily visit their family back home, which they try to compensate by resorting to more intense transnational communication and gift-giving practices. Furthermore, researchers indicate that undocumented immigrant mothers in France and Canada face challenges in their role as transnational mothers because of their migration status. They are not able to see their children or bring them to visit them; they have to deal with separation for unexpected length. As a result, the mothers feel guilt and tension. Unfortunately, mothers that entered undocumented have to deal with separation longer than mothers that come with permits or visas to enter the country.

Graham and Jordan (2011) address the comparison on psychological well-being of children left behind in four countries in Southeast Asia. Data were drawn from the Child Health and Migrant Parents in South-East Asia (CHAMPSEA) study. Caregiver reports from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) were used to examine differences among children under age 12 by the migration status of their household (N =
Their findings show that although children of migrant fathers in Indonesia and Thailand are more likely to have poor psychological health compared to children in nonimmigrant households, this is not the case for children in the Philippines or Vietnam. These findings emphasize the point that context must be taken into account when comparing the effects of migration on child well-being around the globe.

Parreñas (2005) spent 18 non-continuous months in the field conducting research at a city located in an area of the central Philippines. She conducted 1-3 hours of in depth and open-ended tape-recorded interviews with 69 young adults who grew up in transnational migrant households. Thirty children had migrant mothers and 26 children had migrant fathers and 13 had both parents who migrated. According to her book, research on transnational fathering in the Philippines echoed this sentiment; fathers emphasize their breadwinning role at the expense of a more fluid parenting style that recognizes the emotional needs of children in sending homes. Although many parents migrate to improve the lives of their children, they still understand that the separation can cause many changes. As a result, they try to stay connected to avoid any negative changes. Parents find communication as their main source to keep them together even from far, with today’s technology it makes it easier to communicate and be in touch with their love ones.

Transnational families from Mexico and other Latin Countries

Parent-Child Separation

Transnational families live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely “family hood”, even across national borders (Bryceson & Vuorela,
The majority of studies on the well-being of children who are left behind have focused on one particular stream of migration; from Latin American (especially Mexico) to the United States. Nobles (2011) used nationally representative data from the 2005 Mexican Family Life Survey to model variation in the interaction between 739 children in Mexico and their nonresident fathers. She demonstrated that, from the perspective of sending households, parental migration and parental divorce are substantively distinct experiences.

Nobles found that despite considerable geographic separation, Mexican children have significantly more interaction with migrating fathers than they do with fathers who have left their homes following divorce. Further, ties with migrant fathers are positively correlated with schooling outcomes, which potentially mitigates the observed education costs of family separation. Although parent-child separation has long been a central theme in family research, it has typically been framed in terms of divorce rather than as a consequence of international migration. Nobles overcomes this gap in the literature by using representative data to compare the effects of father-child separation caused by divorce to that caused by migration. He finds that these forms of separation are experienced distantly by children. Nobles finds that levels of interaction with nonresident fathers are higher when separation is caused by migration instead of divorce. Studies show that although parents are in another country and far away from their children, they seem to be more involved and interact more with their children than fathers who are separated by divorce. This shows that distance does not impede a parent from being a mother or father to their children.
Mexican families divided by borders are both ordinary and extraordinary. Parents who live in the U.S while their children remain in Mexico experience many of the difficulties faced by all families in meeting productive and consumptive needs. Family members struggle to balance pressure at work with those at home.

Dreby (2010) conducted a large study for four years. She interviewed 140 participants in Mexico and the U.S., 12 interviews were in depth, and she traveled to Mexico to interview the children of the families. She also interviewed an independent sample of 35 children of migrant and 27 of their caregivers in Mexico, Oaxaca. Discipline and parental authority are prominent sources of conflict (Dreby, 2010, & Schmalzbauer, 2005). When mothers and fathers are separated from children during international migration, conflict and accommodation are again prominent themes. Separation causes strains and conflicts in families, while strong norms of intergenerational reciprocity sustain parent-child relationships across international borders (Foner & Dreby, 2011). She describes that the immigrant parent may try to relate to their children in a less authoritarian way, recognizing the difficulty of disciplining children from a distance. When one of the parents is absent, it makes it difficult for the parent that stays behind to discipline the children alone. The parent left in their country now has new responsibilities and roles and can be quite difficult to be consistent with the child’s discipline.

Interestingly, children describe a lack of discipline as one of the negative consequences of family separation contributing to their feelings of loss while parents are away (Dreby, 2010; Coe, 2008; Parreñas, 2005). Another area that relates to intergenerational conflict in transnational families is children’s schooling. One of
parents’ rationales for living apart from children is that this strategy will contribute to their children’s academic success and thus the overall upward mobility of the family (Dreby, 2010). Education is one of the main reasons why parents immigrate to another country. Parents sacrifice themselves and work very hard to send money back home for their children’s education. Children are too young to understand the parents’ sacrifice and may not always be taking advantage of their opportunity to learn.

The emotional repercussions of being separated from parents help to account for negative educational outcomes. Non-migrant children in the country of origin express feelings of loss during periods of parent-child separation, resentment at not having been able to migrate with their parents, and at times physical symptoms of the stresses of separation (Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Coe, 2008; Parreñas, 2005; Pribilsky, 2001). Feelings of estrangement from parents often have a long-term impact on parent-child relationships well into adulthood and even after parents and children are reunited. Indeed, researchers have found that immigrant children in the United States who were separated from parents before they migrated had more trouble doing well in school than children who migrated with their parents (Grindling & Poggio, 2008; Suarez-Orozco et al. 2002). Although many children communicate with their parents on a regular basis, children still encounter mixed feelings towards their parents and their separation. Children feel most emotional and struggle with separation during special occasions, for example, birthdays, graduations, holidays and any other traditional gathering.

Children are not the only ones who experience emotional problems. Parents also experience feelings of loss during periods of separation that create tensions in relationships with the children with whom they do not live. Having left their children,
migrant mothers commonly experience feelings of guilt, which are exacerbated by the expectation of children and others that mothers be the family caregivers and source of emotional support (Dreby, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2001). Even when parents know they are providing for their child that doesn’t always make things better because they know they are both suffering emotionally.

The most common way both mothers and fathers maintain contact with their child in Mexico is by telephone. While almost all parents have somewhere they can call to, whether a home phone, a neighbor’s home or more often a local *caseta*, not all have easy access to a phone in the United States. Many call from cell phones and others public pay phones. Nearly all use calling cards, which offer the best rates to Mexico (Dreby, 2010). Many parents continue to play disciplinary roles with their children, monitor their homework and school progress, and provide orientation and advice to children over the phone. In short, new possibilities for parent-child relationships in transnational family life are facilitated by new technologies (Dreby, 2010).

Frequent communication can, of course, provide points of contact that spark or aggravate conflict, but it also can ameliorate the tensions parents and children experience while living apart. Parents with greater access to economic resources are not only better able to meet children’s requests but can communicate regularly with their children via technologies such as cell phones, text messages, email, online chats, and even webcams (Baldassar et al. 2007; Wilding, 2006). Unfortunately, not all parents are able to afford all these technology devices to have a closer relationship with their children but they still use whatever is within their reach and it’s usually just a cell phone.
Transnational families are marked not just by tension but also by togetherness and commitment. Parents make significant efforts to accommodate children’s needs during periods of separation and are often hyper attentive to these needs. Migrant parents may also strive to meet all of children’s material requests, depriving themselves of daily comforts, including regular meals, in order to do so (Abrego, 2009; Coe, 2008; Parreñas, 2001; Schmalzbauer, 2005). Children are sometimes too young to see their parent’s arduous work and sacrifice to meet their needs and may feel resentment towards them or that they don’t love them the same.

*Couples Across Borders*

While the migration of a loved one provided hope and future through monetary remittance, their hope was simultaneously dampened by fears, insecurity and instability. Couples pay a steep price to achieve their goals (McGuire, 2007). Couples built a strong relationship and bond throughout their separation but others do not run with the same luck and may be the last time they ever see their partners.

According to Boehm (2011), much of the suffering in transnational partnerships and families comes from the separation immigrant’s experience, periods of time that can range from months to, more typically, many years. While both women and men convey a longing or desire to live together, as well as the pain that comes from living apart, these emotions are often conveyed in gendered ways. Among women, emotional expressions of *dolores*—as apprehension or anxiety— are likely to focus on partners’ potential or actual infidelities. The constraints posed by scarce financial resources and undocumented U.S. immigration status require couples and families to structure their lives in ways that result in this profound emotional ambivalence, a constellation of transnational “gendered woes”
(Parreñas, 2005) and struggles. Transnational couples can benefit from migration, the sending person can provide a better life for those left behind, yet that can also come with consequences. Studies show that couples break up or separate due to the distance. Couples may not always be aware that the time apart can also result in permanent separation or be unfaithful to one another.

*Fathers in Transnational Families*

*Fathers abroad*

The literature found in transnational families is primarily focused on fathers immigrating to the U.S. and little literature on fathers that stay back in Mexico with their children. It is common that fathers are the ones who leave and seek for work in other countries because they are the ones who support and provide for the family. In many cases, fathers immigrated first and then plan for their wife or children to immigrate after. For undocumented workers who leave children in Mexico to work north of the border, separation is directly related to parents’ economic successes and ability to save enough money to return to Mexico or arrange for the undocumented crossing of minor children (Boehm, 2008, Dreby, 2010).

One study of immigrant children in the United States found that more than 80% had been separated from parents prior to migration and that separation from fathers was most common (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2002). When fathers are unable to send money home, they may be embarrassed by their lack of economic success as migrants and subsequently avoid regular communications, further aggravating children’s sense of loss (Dreby, 2006). Fathers in this case believe that by avoiding communication they will get away from the problem, not knowing that the child suffers more because of the lack of
communication with their father than the fact that he’s not sending money. Children can feel neglected by their father or simply think that their fathers don’t really care and the situation can worsen.

The national border does not always impede these fathers’ from having a close relationship with their children. Nobles (2009) conducted a study of immigrant fathers and children’s education in Mexico. The study examines the father’s involvement in the child’s life while residing in the United States. At the national level, 1 in 25 children has a father in the United States and 1 in 11 is expected to experience migration by the age of 15 (Nobles, 2010). Although many families eventually reunite, father-child separations typically last for years (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). The data for this study came from the Mexican Family Life Survey, a longitudinal, in-person survey of households in Mexico. The questions asked were about the fathers and their children. The sample included 10,649 children younger than age 15. The results indicated that fathers in the United States appear to stay connected to children in sending homes across several dimensions. More than half the children with fathers in the United States are visited annually and speak over the phone with their fathers weekly (Noble, 2009).

Although immigrant fathers are most likely to make economic contributions to children, more than half engage in other types of parenting efforts, such as phone calls, visits, and attendance at school activities when in town (Nobles, 2009). Many of the fathers have significantly more interaction with their children than father’s who left their home due to divorce. Kanaiaupuni (2000) described the efforts of mothers to create the presence of migrating fathers in the lives of their children by referencing them throughout the day. For migrating fathers, geographic separation presents a nontrivial barrier to
interacting with children (Nobles, 2009). Technological advances have made phone and Internet communication more feasible (e.g., Mahler, 2001); nevertheless, the separation hinders visits and attendance at school, sporting, and other family-related events. For undocumented immigrants, the cost of crossing the border make return trips for such events prohibitively expensive and unrealistic (Dreby, 2010; Massey et al., 2002). Researchers mention that the trip to return to Mexico is expensive but it’s also very dangerous. Parents returning to the United States after visiting their family may face serious problems when crossing the border. In many cases, many do not even make it because they either got returned back by border patrols or because they suffer an accident when crossing.

Kanaiaupuni (2000) documented how frequent contact in the forms of calls or letters reduces the anxiety of women and children in sending homes. Dreby (2010) also described the importance of phone conversations and visits to the maintenance of relationships between fathers and children. Eighty-five percent of children who migrate from Mexico are separated from parents at some point during the transition; a third of children who ultimately reunite with fathers are separated from them for at least 5 years. Communication is the most important thing that keeps children in contact and together with their father abroad.

*Fathers in Mexico*

It is less common and also less studied when fathers are left behind while the mother immigrated to the U.S. to work. According to young adult children of migrant mothers, fathers do not perform much childcare or household maintenance in the family, nor do they increase the amount of household responsibilities in spite of the greater
economic contributions of migrant women to the family. Men in the absence of women cannot always avoid female-gendered care work (Parreñas, 2010). Furthermore, fathers might not be as nurturing like their mother but they still have to do perform all tasks including the ones that evolve children. This includes grocery shopping, attending school meetings, taking them to school and the doctors when needed and doing various activities with the children.

*Mothers in Transnational Families*

*Mothers abroad*

There is both literature in transnational mothers who come to U.S. and mothers who stay in Mexico. Moreover, when women leave children to join their husbands or other family members in the United States, they join the many mothers around the world who leave their children in the care of others. Being a mother was not just about being a nurturing, loving person, but also about fulfilling your child’s needs. Mothering responsibilities included protecting children, buying things for children, being involved in children’s education and extracurricular activities, being a disciplinarian, meeting basic needs (e.g., food, shelter), shaping morality, giving advice, and providing entertainment. In a nutshell, a mother does “everything” for her children, and is “there full time” (McGuire, 2007). This is not the case for mothers that leave their children behind to seek for a better future in other countries. In the eyes of others, a mother who leaves their children behind is a bad mother but this is not the same for fathers.

Children often judge their mothers more harshly for leaving than they do their fathers (Dreby, 2010, Menjivar & Abrego, 2009; Parreñas, 2005). Children feel more resentment when the mother immigrates than when father immigrates. The reason,
mothers are the care providers and spend more time with them than fathers since the father is the one working to support the family. It is uncommon in Mexico for the mother to immigrate without their children but we are starting to see an increase of women immigrating alone. Transnational mothers differ because by undertaking physical separation from their children for months and years at a time, as opposed to several hours in a workday, they cannot make up for lost time in the evenings and weekends (Dreby, 2010).

McGuire (2007) conducted a study of women who were either immigrants themselves or a family member of transnational immigrant. The study emphasized the experiences and perspective of these women. According to McGuire (2007), indigenous women represent a substantial proportion of new Oaxaca immigrants, and are arriving in increasing numbers. As anthropologist Cohen noted, Oaxaca immigrants are fathers and mothers struggling to balance the demands of their families against their own wishes for the future, they migrate to support the family. Decision to immigrate among parents of young children are most difficult, yet are often undertaken by the desire to improve life prospects for those children. Separation can be painful for each of the pair as well as for the children. For the women in this study, separation from children was especially grueling and hovered like a specter over their daily lives (McGuire, 2007). Furthermore, McGuire found that many of the women experienced global anxiety, sadness or depression and were all related to separation from children. Although some women recognize the value of learning English to move ahead many employed this strategy to distract themselves from thinking of their children.
Some women who obtain work visas or have family networks facilitating their own migration, leave husbands and children behind so that they can work in the United States (George, 2005; Parreñas, 2001). Single, divorced, or widowed mothers unable to find adequate employment opportunities in their countries of origin may leave to support children who remain in the home community (Chavez, 1992; Dreby, 2006, 2010). Many women come to the United States in a step or chain-migration pattern; they join husbands in the United States, leaving children until they can send for them or return home (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, Smith et al. 2004, Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Although mothers appear to be migrating without their children at higher rates than in times past, separation of children from migrant fathers continues to be widespread.

Transnational mothering seems to force rearrangement of gender roles because it not only removes mothers from the confines of the home, but it also redefines traditional mothering. It is believed that women’s work outside the home should not interfere with their proper duties of nurturing children. A similar study on transnational families in Mexico found that women’s migration only marginally transformed gender traditions, as men did not do more childcare as a result of women’s migration. When women migrate to work, whether alone or to join husbands, their relationships to men change. As such, it would seem likely that when mothers migrate, mothering, as a cultural construct would be challenged (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). After all, from a distance, mother’s direct involvement in the daily care of children is drastically reduced, undermining their ability to fulfill care giving duties.

Parreñas (2010) argues that mothers are known to be the nurturing and loving and take care of the children’s emotional needs; women who migrate call their children often
to keep that bond even from far. Sensationalist reports on the well-being of children in transnational families fuels the vilification of migrant mothers, whose migration is equated with the abandonment and consequent emotional and psychological difficulties suffered by their children (Parreñas, 2010). According to seventeen year old, Marinel Clemente wishes her mother would come back home, she states “my mother’s love was not enough. I would have wanted her next to me, so that I could feel her love. I feel it, but only a little bit. I know she loves me because she is working hard over there. She is working hard so that we could have everything we want and everything we need. Even when she is sick, she continues to work. I want her to be with me here every day. It’s because since I was small it was only my grandparents showing me love; she was not there” (Parreñas, 2010, p. 4).

*Mothers in Mexico*

Mother’s guide their children, even if it is very expensive to talk over the phone, but to them it is very important to hear from their mothers, to give them advise or just to hear her voice because it is necessary to uplift their children. Some authors have observed that women left behind by migrant spouses achieve greater independence as they assume traditionally male tasks as farming, discipline and handling the budget (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2005), in the United States, 42 percent of adult, foreign-born Latinos, some six million people, regularly send remittances to family members in their countries of origin. At the simplest level, these studies underscore the fact that remittances are the expression of profound emotional bonds between relatives separated by geography and borders, and they are the manifestation of a profound and
constant interaction among these relatives regardless of the distances between them. Moreover, though most of the money goes for food and rent, anywhere from a quarter and a third of remittance recipients report putting some of it into savings, educational expenses or small investments. In all of the surveys, clear majorities of remittance receivers said they used the funds to pay for common expenses such as food, housing and utilities.

Paradoxically, while the migration of a family member often provided remaining women with new hope for the future through monetary remittances, their hope was simultaneously dampened by fears, insecurity, and instability (McGuire, 2007). Many women that stay behind rely on their husband’s income. They might be in a better place financially but they are still faced with hardships while the father is gone. For example, these women suffer from family fracturing. Some women left behind not only have sole caretaking, they often must take care of plots of land growing. They also have the responsibility of caring for their children’s discipline, education, emotional needs and everything in the household.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In order to qualify for the current study, individuals had to be from transnational families with nuclear family members living in both Mexico and the United States. In most cases, a minimum of two individuals per family were interviewed. In order to participate in the study, individuals were at least 9 years of age. The study was open to both male and female participants. Participants and minor participants were from vulnerable populations due to their migration status. In order to protect participants no identifiable information (e.g. names, social security number, driver license, and home address) was collected from any participant living in the U.S. The research protocol was approved by the IRB board at CSUN (see Appendix A).

Families were recruited through a community partner, a park in South Los Angeles. The majority of the population that visits the park are Hispanics and mainly from Mexico. Employees, (including the author), at the community park helped with recruitment. At the time of the interviews all participants were undocumented. Adults gave verbal consent for themselves and their eligible children before the interviews. After the interviews, the U.S. participant provided a contact telephone number of their family member living in Mexico. Participants living in Mexico were interviewed by telephone. They gave verbal consent for their participation. In order to protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms will be used for this work.

Sample

A total of 7 transnational families were interviewed. Family 1 consisted of a father living in the U.S. (Ramon) and mother living in Mexico (Martha). Family 2
consisted of a mother (Adriana), a son (Jerry) living in the U.S. and father living in Mexico (Angel). Family 3 consisted of a father living in the U.S. (Jorge) and a mother living in Mexico (Laura). Family 4 consisted of a mother living in the U.S. (Violeta) and her partner living in Mexico who was not interviewed. Family 5 consisted of a father living in the U.S. (Marcos) and his adult daughter living in Mexico (Patty). Family 6 consisted of a father living in the U.S. (Julio) and his wife living in Mexico (Gloria). And family 7 consisted of a father living in the U.S. (Fabian) and his wife living in Mexico (Mariana). On average the length of family separation was 4.5 years. Reasons for separation includes (Families 1, 5, 6, & 7) moved to U.S. for job, (Families 2 & 4) deportation, and visited family in Mexico and could not return (Family 3). See Table 1.

*Procedure*

Participants came to the park on the scheduled time and date. The researcher built rapport and built trust by having an informal conversation. Participants then provided verbal consent. Then open ended qualitative interviews were conducted. All interviews were audio taped. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes each. After the interviews, participants were debriefed and the researchers made sure that the participant did not voice any psychological discomfort from their participation in the interview. During the debriefing the researcher also scheduled an interview with the participant’s family member. All of the interviews with the children were in private without the presence of the parent. A contact telephone number or email address was collected in order to interview the participant living in Mexico. The participants living in Mexico followed a similar protocol; except the interview occurred by telephone. Participants
received forty dollars in return for their participation in the study. Compensation for Mexican participants was given to their family member living in the U.S.

**Qualitative Interviews**

An interview script, developed for this study, was used as a guide (See Appendix B) when interviewing participants. A project investigator conducted all the interviews in Spanish. During the interviews participants were asked questions about their life in Mexico, their daily routines, work routines and arrangements, and the management and care of the children. Furthermore, we wanted to know their reasons for migrating, the length of separation from their spouses and children and what changes and barriers they have encountered since the separation.

For the current study mostly questions 3 and 5 of the script, which ask about their parenting life, were used. I examined closely the parent-child relationship and all topics related to parenting. These are some of the questions asked: How did you spend your free time with your family when you lived in Mexico with your family? How happy or satisfied were you with your parenting role when you were together? How do you manage issues with the education of the children and the children’s care? How happy or satisfied are you with your parenting life or role now that you are separated? How long do you have that you don’t see your children? What can you say is the best thing you have given your children while being here in the U.S.? Can you be a parent from distance?

**The Role of the Researcher**

My interest in transnational families came about when I observed the negative impacts that immigration had on my husband and his family. Working as a research
assistant provided me with opportunities to work with individuals that are family members of transnational families. Through their experiences, I gained compassion for individuals who are separated from their families for long periods of time because learning to adapt to a new country alone can be challenging.

My personal experiences with my husband’s family have created certain biases on this study. In an effort to minimize my biases, I made every attempt to keep personal experiences and conversations out of the interviewing process to allow the interviewees to tell their stories as they see it, without influencing any of my own biases.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Analyses of Data

For the current study, I analyzed the qualitative data using content analysis. All interviews were transcribed in Spanish and translated in English by two research assistants. I used conventional content analysis as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) to code the data. The following four steps were followed; I first read the data repeatedly to get a sense of the whole. Then, I read word by word to derive codes by highlighting the exact text from the data. Furthermore, codes were sorted into categories to organize and then group in meaningful clusters. See Table 2.

This study is based on qualitative interviews with 7 Mexican transnational families (14 individuals) living in the United States and Mexico and includes the perspectives of mothers, fathers and children. I explore how parents maintain relationships with their spouse and children. All of the seven families in this study had family living in Mexico yet in all of the families the father was separated from their children. Adriana and Violeta were the only two females living in the U.S with their children. Table 1 describes the families in more detail. Most of the families we interviewed said they came to the U.S for economic reasons. Some families had to separate because their economic situation declined to the point where they were unable to meet their basic needs. Only one family came because of legal issues.

Impact of Parent/Child Transnational Separation

Some families were separated by choice; others by forces beyond their control. The length of separation varied by family but the average years of separation was 4.5 years.
Mothers’ Perspective

Mothers interviewed expressed family impact in the following way. From the coding method the following themes emerged; 1) an impact on childrens academic performance and their social life; 2) capital aspect for mothers in the U.S and in Mexico; and 3) positive outcomes of separation. Mothers living in Mexico noticed a drastic change in their children. In Laura’s case, she said that her children refused to study. Her children’s academic performance was declining because they miss their father and their country of origin, the U.S. All three of her children had a different issue; the smallest child misbehaved and bothered other children including family members. Her discipline was not enough; the fathers’ role was missing.

The oldest daughter had become quieter and remained isolated from others most of the time, she believed her daughter was going through depression. Furthermore, Laura (36) shared the following, “I miss my husband and my children miss him too. They ask if their father is coming soon, they all miss him and need him”. Mariana (36), similar to Laura (36), shared with us a change in the family and the children. “I believe the separation has affected my children because they ask me for their father and they don’t understand reasons they are still young, they ask me, why is their father over there and we are here, I try to explain to them, however they miss their father.”

Most of the mothers reported being satisfied with the role as a mother but not with the fact that they were unable to provide for them financially. Mothers in Mexico relied on their spouse’s remittance yet mothers in the U.S. did not receive any help from their spouse. Both of the mothers in the study living in the U.S. received government
assistance. In addition, neither one of them worked so their economic status was definitely more difficult than the men living in the U.S.

Most of the mothers that were left behind saw a great benefit in having their husband away. The reason being is because they have been able to accomplish many things that were almost impossible in Mexico. According to Martha, “we had a small damaged house and more or less we were able to fix it, it’s our pride and joy now”. She believes it wasn’t easy for her husband it took him years. He had to work arduously in order to provide for them and give them a place to live. Furthermore, Mariana also mentions another benefit of their separation, she mentions that her children don’t lack anything, they have everything they need. She thinks that it has been worth the sacrifice to be separated from her husband because she believes it’s only going to be temporarily. Some of the men in the study said that their initial plan was to come for a year to pay off things or do what they desired to do, but years have passed and they are still here.

Surprisingly, Adriana was the only participant who said her life has been better and more peaceful without her husband. His drinking problem was a big issue in the family. Adriana said “life is better now in a way because we are calm; we are not concerned with his drinking problem. He was too aggressive when he drank and my children remember that. My children are better now because they are worry free, but at the same time they miss their father too.”

Fathers’ Perspective

The following themes emerged from the fathers interviews; 1) fathers missed their children and felt lonesome without them; 2) fathers providing for their family; 3) strain on marriage impacted relationships with children. Five of the seven families interviewed
were fathers living in the U.S. All of the fathers in the study were separated from their children so the impact on the relationship was different from the mothers. Most of the men mentioned that they felt very lonely here in the U.S. even though they had extended family living here too. Jorge (36) shared, “It is very different now, I see children in church and I get sad, I do everything alone, it’s just not the same anymore.”

Although they missed their children, they felt an obligation to provide for their family because they know it is their role as the man of the house. In addition, all of the fathers wanted a better life and future for their spouse so unfortunately they all had to separate to accomplish their goal. Most of the fathers in the study said they were satisfied with their role as a father because they were able to provide their children with the basic needs, but most important with education and health care because in Mexico high quality education and health care is the very expensive. Ramon (48) states, “the best that I have given my children would be education. I am fortunate to dress them better, feed them adequate food and send them to school.” He also said he was able to provide medical attention to his son that is constantly sick.

Surprisingly, Julio (54) was the only father who said he was not satisfied with his role as a father but now that he is separated from most of his children that changed. He reported being very shy and unable to communicate with his children when he was in Mexico but the separation and his aging has changed his perspective. He feels he has more courage now and has lived enough to advise his children even from abroad.

Marcos (32) said that the relationship with his children changed because he separated from his wife. His wife got tired of waiting for his return and decided to move on without him. Marcos still tries to stay in contact with his children even though he
admits it is harder because he has no communication with the mother. This is another consequence of separation in a transnational family and unfortunately children are also affected. Communication with his children is not the same anymore but he does not give up. Marcos states, “I will continue supporting my children. I will always take care of them even if the mother wants to start a new life.”

Children’s Perspective

Three children (1 adult, 2 children) were included in the interviews and the following two themes emerged: 1) children missed their father and 2) father’s remittance help. All of the children interviewed reported missing their father. Patty (13) lives in Mexico. She has been separated from her father for six years. As a result, she does not quite remember much of him but she did say she loved him and missed him greatly. She remembered that her father Marcos was the only person who helped her with her homework. At that time, she was younger and she missed that from him. Jerry (14) resides in the U.S, he has the least time separated from his father, he has two years without seeing him; he is aware that their separation can be long term due to his father’s deportation. Jerry misses his dad; he says that now that his dad is not there he feels responsible for his family since he is the oldest. Jerry sometimes feels like crying but he avoids venting out like that because he is afraid his brothers will see him and question him.

Gloria (25), on the other hand is older and remembers things more clearly, she shared with us that she was emotionally affected by her father’s absence. She said that it was difficult when her father was missing in special events and celebrations. As a result, she found it harder for her to cope and felt depressed. She felt abandoned by her father
and not important enough to return to Mexico. It wasn’t until she grew older and started to understand and reason things more. She still feels heartbroken that her father was not with her when her children were born or when they celebrated birthdays. “Holidays like Christmas were definitely not the same without my father”. Although they have frequent communication, she says it has been 10 long years without her father. Furthermore, she also reported to feel closer to her father by sending constant text messages and sending him messages through social networks on a regular basis.

Although they all miss their father, they know that the separation also helps the family financially. Patty said her dad was in the U.S. to help her go to school and provide for what she needed. She said her father still sends her stuff. Gloria also mentioned her fathers’ contribution to the family. She said her father had to immigrate to give them a better life and that is exactly what he did and continues doing.

_Coping Mechanisms that Help Transnational Families Adjust_

The following themes emerged as family coping mechanisms: 1) communication; 2) focusing on the benefits of separation; and 3) fathers working arduously. Despite the distance, families express that they try very hard to maintain a relationship from abroad. Families in the U.S. reported being in constant communication with their families in Mexico and found this to be a coping mechanism. Families used different forms of communication to stay in touch and manage the stress while separated. When feeling down they find it helpful to hear their parent/child’s voice and to know that everything is fine. Julio (54) says, “I thank God for cell phones. I have called my family in the middle of the night because I couldn’t sleep and after I talked to my wife I felt better and went back to sleep.”

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Another coping mechanism these transnational families used was to think of the benefit their separation will bring to the family. Seven out of the ten parents said that their children were their strength and anchor to overcome all obstacles. While others said that love and family support helped them cope and stay strong. Laura (36), “I think the love that we have towards each other, the constant communication, our children and god is what keeps us together and united”.

Most of the fathers worked overtime and had an excessive work schedule. They mostly talk to their families on the weekend because they were too busy working overtime hours to send money back home. They indicated that they coped with their depression by working as much as they could, work kept their minds occupied and made the days go by faster. Jorge (36), “Right now that my family is not here, I try to work overtime so time can go by faster and think less about them.”
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of transnational families and how they managed to stay together as a family when separated by a national border. Many of the children in the study grew apart from their fathers for long periods of time. Parents were primarily forced to migrate due to their financial struggles in Mexico. Interviews from mothers, fathers and children were included from Mexico and U.S.

Discussion of Findings

The following themes emerged from the mothers’ perspective; 1) the impact on children’s academic performance and their social life; 2) capital aspect for mothers in the U.S and in Mexico; and 3) positive outcomes of separation. In addition, since fathers were separated from both spouse and children, the themes differ; 1) fathers missed their children and felt lonesome without their children; 2) father provided for their family; and 3) strain on marriage impacted relationships with children. Lastly, the children’s themes were the following; 1) children missing their father; and 2) fathers’ remittance help.

Through the qualitative interviews, the primary finding on parent-child relationship was that children were affected by the absence of their father. Although most of the families communicated on a regular basis, children had many problems coping with their father’s absence.

The main findings on how these families coped and adjusted while separated was communication, many families shared the need to hear their family members and share their strength. The other main finding in coping was fathers working overtime and
excessive hours so time can pass quicker faster and they can better avoid thinking about their family back home.

This study examined the important impacts on parent-child relationship in transnational families in particular. Findings from this study were quite different from the literature review because we were not limited to interviewing only the fathers or mothers; we also had the perspective of the children. We interviewed mothers, fathers and children both living in the U.S and in Mexico. In other studies, Graham and Jordan (2012) were among the first scholars to have collected data on the well-being of children who are left behind in their country of origin. The data that I collected included children both left behind in Mexico and in the U.S. On the other hand, Donato and Duncan (2011) compared outcomes from migrant children and children who are left behind with non-migrant children to be able to make more rigorous claims about the effects of transnational life. These studies mainly concentrate on the children and not on the relationship with parents.

Dreby (2010) conducted a large study where she explores the lives of transnational mothers, fathers, and children, as well as the caregiver who takes over when parents leave. Her study was the most related to this study because she also conducted interviews in Mexico and the U.S. Most of her studies include interviews from the perspective of the fathers, mothers and the children. In this study, she examines the relationship on transnational families and their effects while being separated. Dreby found that when mothers and fathers are separated from children during international migration, conflict and accommodation are again prominent themes. Furthermore, separation causes strains and conflicts in families, while strong norms of
intergenerational reciprocity sustain parent-child relationships across international borders. Similar to the current study, mothers interviewed in Mexico also said that the separation caused conflict among their children. Our results also indicated that children refused to attend school, encountered behavioral and academic problems, and lacked discipline.

She also found that parents continue their discipline roles, homework monitoring, and school progress and advise children by the facilitation of new technologies like cell phones. Our study also showed significant impact on communication; both children and parents said that communication was one of the most important ways they stayed in touch and shared their life experiences while separated. In addition, Parreñas (2001) examined the effects that migrating has on the well-being (defined as psychological, educational and health outcomes) of children who are left in the country of origin. Debry found that children in the country of origin express feelings of loss during periods of parent-child separation and resentment at not having been able to migrate with their parents. The results from our study also showed children being affected in school, their behavior, and their health. Some of the parents reported that their children had signs of isolation and depression, especially in older children. Mothers in Mexico especially said that they experienced conflict in behavior due to their fathers’ absence.

Kanaiaupuni (2000) documented how frequent contact in the forms of calls or letters reduces the anxiety of women and children in sending homes. Dreby (2010) also described the importance of phone conversations and visits to the maintenance of relationships between fathers and children. Notably, the results from our study showed that all families, including the children, maintained a relationship and felt better when
communicating with their family members. Parreñas (2010) describes mothers who are forced to rearrange their gender roles because it not only removes mothers from the confines of the home, but it also redefines traditional mothering. In this study, all of the mothers lived with their children, yet they still had to rearrange their role and take on their husband’s role as well. Last, Suarez-Orozco (2002) found that father’s separation was most common in transnational families. The majority of the fathers in this study were men in the U.S separated from their children; however, my research also shows that the experiences of migrating mothers and fathers are quite different; they tend to live different after separation.

**Implications**

This study primarily focuses on the impact of the parent-child relationship and the way transnational families manage to cope with the separation and maintain themselves as family. Further research should elaborate more on the couple’s relationship because it also impacts the children. For example, in Marcos’ case, physical separation caused the couple to break up. As a result, Marcos’ communication with his children was affected. Therefore, the relationship with his children declined and impacted his children too.

Even though it was a small segment of the study, it is also important to address the positive outcomes of separation. In Adriana’s case, her husband’s drinking problem was a strain on the relationship when they were together. During their separation, Adriana expressed feeling much better because she no longer had to deal with his drinking problem. It would be interesting if researchers can find other positive outcomes.

To improve research on transnational families and broaden our understanding, further research on single parents also needs to be addressed. We took a look at those
children with both their parents but it is necessary to include children being raised by a single parent and the impact migration has on this family form. For example, how would children feel if their mother was abroad due to deportation? Would they feel closer to their extended family after a long period of time? What consequences can they expect?

**Conclusion**

This study examined the relationship between parents and children while separated by an international border. The findings demonstrated that Mexican transnational families are faced with many difficulties and sacrifices. These families migrate to improve their economic circumstances, but may be unaware of the cost of leaving loved ones. This study focused on understanding family system dynamics in undocumented Mexican families and the changes that parents and adolescents experience after immigration.

The family systems theory suggests that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as a part of their family. Maintaining the same pattern of behaviors within a system may lead to balance in the family system, but also to dysfunction. A change in one person's functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others (Bowen, 1978). The results in this study showed that after the parent migrated to the U.S., the family system changed. Children and parents were affected by the separation. Children experienced behavioral and emotional problems as well as poor academic performance due to the separation, and parents discussed feelings of loneliness and isolation. This work suggests that migration impacts the entire family in one way or another. The consequences experienced by transnational families are real.
Reference


Table 1. *Descriptive Information of Transnational Families Interviewed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Reside Now</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Length of Separation</th>
<th>Frequency of Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ramon</td>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>U.S</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Mex</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Adriana</td>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>U.S</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Not much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Mex</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Not much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>U.S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>U.S</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mex</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Violeta</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>U.S</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>Not much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Marcos</td>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>U.S</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Not much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mex</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Julio</td>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>U.S</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fabian</td>
<td>Mariana</td>
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<td>U.S</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mex</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2. Coding Categories from Participants Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life in Mexico</td>
<td>7- Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Calmed but stressed amount debts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 - Very united/close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Don’t remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Loved and respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Quality Time</td>
<td>1 - Cook together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 - Eat together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 - Visit family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 - Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Watch Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 - Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 - Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrangement with Children</td>
<td>7 - Mother was mostly in charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 - Both equal, we both worked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - We no longer have communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - my extended family helps me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother/Father Role</td>
<td>8 - Very happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 - Very attentive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Close to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Good relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Fought for my children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Partner helped me because of my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers/Fathers Satisfaction</td>
<td>10 - very satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Life After Separation</td>
<td>1 - They miss me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Affected the children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Misbehave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 - Very difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of Separation</td>
<td>10 - yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Maintaining Family Together | 7-Communication  
1-Family support  
1-My children  
1-Love  
1-Trust |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Communication Methods      | 10-Over the phone  
2-Messages  
1-Social networks |
| Benefits of Separation      | 4-Children’s education  
1-Children health  
4-Provide for my children and family  
3-Own a home  
2-Nothing  
1-Resources |
| Parenting from a Distance   | 8-Yes  
2-no |
| Close relationship with Father | 13-Yes |
| Biggest Strengths           | 7-My children  
4-Love  
1-Trust  
2-God  
1-Faith  
1-Patience  
1-Hope  
2-Family support  
2-communication |
Appendix A

Subject: IRB Modification
Date: Thursday, January 24, 2013 2:43:46 PM PT
From: Lucero-Liu, Ana A
To: Selkem, Suzanne G
CC: Moreno, Gladys

HI Suzanne,

Attached, please find a modification to my study “Psychological Health of Mexican Transnational Families”. The modification consists of adding the name of a CSUN graduate student, Gladys Moreno, to the study as an assistant researcher. Gladys will be using data collected from this study for her Graduate Thesis.

I'm attaching the following:
- the original approval letter
- an updated Protocol Approval Form with additions highlighted in yellow
- an updated Project Information Form with additions highlighted in yellow and
- a certificate from the US Department of Health and Human Services received by Gladys for completing an online Human Subjects Protection Training.

Thank you,
Ana Lucero-Liu

Ana Lucero-Liu, PhD
Assistant Professor
Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
California State University-Northridge
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
818.677.4693
ana.luceroliu@csun.edu

Revised protocol approved through 5/24/13.

Jennifer Hopack, Chair, Human Subjects Committee
July 20, 2012

Ana Lucero-Liu
Family Consumer Science
California State University, Northridge

Re: "Psychological Health of Mexican Transnational Families" Research Protocol

Dear Dr. Lucero-Liu:

Enclosed for your records is a copy of the cover sheet of your approved Human Subjects Protocol Form. Please note that approval for this project will expire on 5/21/13. If your project will extend beyond this date, you must contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects at least one month prior to the expiration.

If you have any questions, call this office at 818/677-2901.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Suzanne Selker, Compliance Officer
On Behalf of
The Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects

enclosure
Appendix B

*Interview Script for Adult Participants*

1. What is your first name and age? Are you married? We understand that part of your immediate family is here in the U.S. with you and another part is in Mexico, is that true? Who is here with you? Who is in Mexico? How long have you lived apart? For what reasons did you come?

2. What was your family life like when you were all living together? What type of things did you like to do together as a family? What family routines did you have.. such as work routines? How did you spend your free time? What aspects of family life were better when you were together? What aspects were not as good? When you had hard times, or someone had a problem or someone didn’t feel well, how did you manage the situation when you were together?

3. How was life with your partner when your family was together? How did you manage among yourselves couple issues, such as managing money, household chores and parenting children? How did you get along with your partner in a romantic sense or as friends? How happy or satisfied were your romantic life? How happy or satisfied were you with your parenting life or role when you were together?

4. How has life been since the moment you had to separate? What are your family routines, such as work routines or how you spend your free time? What aspects for your life are better now, what aspects are not as good now that you are not together? When someone in your family has problems or doesn’t feel well, how do you manage the situation now that you are not together?
5. And what is life like with your partner now that your family is no longer physically together? How do you manage issues around money, the daily household routines, the education of the children and the children’s care? What is your love life like or your friendship with your partner like? How happy or satisfied are you with your partner? How happy or satisfied are you with your parenting life or role?

6. What do you think family life is like for those who aren’t with you? How do you maintain closeness with those who aren’t with you? How do you maintain your family roles with those who are living apart from you?

*Interview Script for Minor Participants (9 to 17 years of age)*

1. What is your first name and age? With which family members do you live with here in the United States? Which of your family members live in Mexico? How long have you lived apart?

2. Do you remember when your family lived all together? What type of things did your family like to do together? What things did you have to do when everyone lived together, like household chores or helping in another way? How did you get along with your mom and dad? How did you get along with your brothers or sisters? What things or aspects of your life were better when everyone was together? What things or aspects of your life were not good?

3. When your family lived together, what things did you do outside of your home, for example, going to school, with your friends, or with your boyfriend/girlfriend? How did you feel in your school or with your friends/boyfriend or girlfriend?

4. When your family lived together and you had problems or didn’t feel well, what would you do? Did you have someone to help you, or someone you could trust? Who was it?
5. Since your family moved to the U.S., what types of things do you like to do with your family here in the United States? What routines do you have? For example, in your house or helping in other ways? How do you get along with your family members who live here with you? What is the best thing of living here, even though you are not all together? What is the worst thing about living here apart from those who live in Mexico?

6. What type of things do you do here? For example, do you go to school or work? How do you get along with your friends or boyfriend/girlfriend?

7. When you have problems or you aren’t feeling well, what do you do? Do you have someone to help you, or someone you can trust? Who is that?

8. What do you think life is like for your family members who live in Mexico? How do you get along with those who don’t live with you? (Prompt about those who don’t live with child e.g. mother, father, and sibling). Even though they are apart, what type of things do they do for you? Or say to you? What do you do to stay close to them?