

Long-Term Parent–Child Separation Through Serial Migration: Effects of a Post-Reunion Intervention

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Abstract

The goal of this project was to reduce parent–child conflict and promote intergenerational harmony among Central American families who had experienced long-term parent–child separations in the immigration process. Through combining intensive case study of six families with experimental design, we show how a series of four workshops for immigrant parents and their recently immigrated adolescent children could reduce parent–child conflict and emotional distance by scaffolding intergenerational communication. Families were randomly assigned to one of three groups: (1) both parents and adolescent children attended workshops (full experimental group); (2) only adolescent children attended workshops (partial experimental group); and (3) no-treatment control group. The full experimental group achieved the greatest changes in communication patterns: In the posttest, parents and children in this group were more able to express negative aspects of separation and reunion; they also showed more understanding of each other’s perspective.

Key Words: family separation, serial migration, Latino immigrant adolescents, immigrating families, cultural values, communication, parent–child reunion

Introduction

The process of immigration and of adaptation in the United States (U.S.) is often complex, multidimensional, and stressful for families (e.g., Portes, 1997). Among children who are left behind when their parents migrate to the U.S., they first experience a life-changing disruption to familial attachments: separation from parents. Legal obstacles often prevent parental visits to the children they left behind (Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012). When parents are able to bring them to the U.S., the children experience a second disruption of familial attachments: separation from caregivers, most often grandparents, in their country of origin. This separation is the most stressful aspect of the reunion process for many adolescents (Patel et al., 2016). Upon reunification, adolescents must integrate into a new family system in the U.S. This integration is complicated by the fact that children who have spent years separated from their parents are likely to experience weakened attachment to parents, a significant risk factor for mental health problems in this population (Lu et al., 2018; Venta et al., 2019). Adolescents' integration can also be made difficult by the fact that some parents have created a new family with new siblings in the U.S., and these siblings, unlike the immigrant adolescents, are U.S. citizens.

Indeed, repeated separations and disrupted attachments engendered by serial migration can cause anxiety, depression, and academic problems in the children who remained in the country of origin (Rusch & Reyes, 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). An important factor in these effects is that parental migration is often experienced as abandonment (Dreby, 2007; Givaudan & Pick, 2013; Parreñas, 2001; Zhao et al., 2018). One focus of the intervention described in this article is feelings of abandonment on the part of adolescents who were left behind in Central America.

In a study examining separation and reunification among 385 youth immigrants from Central America, China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico, Suárez-Orozco and colleagues (2002) found that Haitian and Central American families were more likely than other immigrant families to experience a family disruption within the nuclear family during the process of migration to the U.S. Moreover, separation from both parents occurred most commonly among the Central American families such that 80% of the Central American youth in the sample experienced a separation from their mother and father. It is therefore evident that, although studies examining Latino family immigration have largely focused on the experiences of Mexican families, there is clearly a need for more studies and interventions to focus on the immigration experiences of Central American families. Our study begins to fill this gap.

In the current study, an intervention program was implemented with the goal of increasing intergenerational harmony and reducing intergenerational conflict between immigrant Latino adolescents and their parents or guardians. In these participating families, the parents came to the U.S. first, leaving their children behind in their countries of origin. Thus, there were long-term separations between parents and children before they were reunited in the U.S. Zhao et al. (2018) indicate that when children “migrate to rejoin their parents, the enduring effects of the experience of prolonged separation from their parents are often overlooked in research and clinical practice” (para. 3). Two documented interventions for left-behind children have been conducted—one in China (Zhao et al., 2017) and one in Mexico (Givaudan & Pick, 2013). However, to our knowledge, the present study is the first intervention that addresses the reunification process between parents and children.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical orientation guiding the design of the intervention is the theory of social change and human development (Greenfield, 2009). Based on the German sociologist, Tönnies (1887/1957), the theory contrasts two very different ecologies: *Gemeinschaft*, usually translated as “community,” and *Gesellschaft*, usually translated as “society.” The prototypical *Gemeinschaft* environment is a small, isolated agricultural village with limited material resources, simple technology, and informal education at home. The prototypical *Gesellschaft* environment is a large, interconnected commercial city with extensive material resources, complex technology, and widespread opportunity for formal education. The theory makes predictions concerning the impact on socialization and development of global social changes from small-scale, rural, low technology, relatively poor communities with little contact with the outside world and high in-person communication (*Gemeinschaft*) to larger-scale, urban, high tech, and richer societies with extensive contact with the outside world and more technologically mediated communication (*Gesellschaft*). That is, there are socialization practices and resulting developmental pathways that arise in response to each of these environments because such practices tend to be better adapted to that particular environment. Overall, worldwide social change and migration patterns move environments in the *Gesellschaft* direction. Based on a contrast in national wealth and availability of formal education, we can say that our participating families have immigrated from more *Gemeinschaft* environments in Central America to more *Gesellschaft* environments in the U.S.

From Implicit to Explicit Communication

One important distinction between the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* environments that has been observed is the reliance on implicit versus explicit communication modes, respectively. That is, inhabitants of a *Gemeinschaft* environment share so many experiences and knowledge, they can and do rely on this shared experience in their communication processes, which therefore can be implicit rather than explicit. However, in the situation for parents and children separated in serial migration, there is a drastic reduction in shared experience. This reduction creates a necessity for explicit communication, a mode that is adapted and fostered in a *Gesellschaft* ecology. The development of explicit parent–child communication turned out to be the primary focus of our intervention.

From Interdependent to Independent Behaviors

A second focus of our intervention was the harmonizing of expectations for interdependent vs. independent behaviors. Familial interdependence is valued in a *Gemeinschaft* ecology, whereas individual independence is more valued in a *Gesellschaft* ecology (Greenfield, 2009). However, young people's assumption of adult roles declined in the U.S. as *Gesellschaft* factors, especially formal education, became increasingly strong; young people's informal education for adult roles declined as a result (La Belle, 1981). Twenge and Campbell (2018) have documented the delay in assuming adult roles in the U.S. in recent decades as emerging adulthood is now a developmental stage before reaching adulthood. Hence, when adolescents from rural Central American environments immigrate, they may have already filled adult economic roles in their home country and therefore may be accustomed to the accompanying independence and responsibility that these roles both require and permit. It can therefore be surprising to be treated as a dependent child upon reunification in the U.S. This conflict between adolescents' expectation of independence and their parents' expectation of dependence is an issue that emerged in the intervention.

From Harmony Maintenance and Respect for Elders to Self-Expression and Egalitarianism

The third focus of the intervention was the clash between respect for authority, functional in small agrarian communities, and egalitarianism, more functional and valued in *Gesellschaft* environments. In a *Gemeinschaft* world, respect is based on care (Greenfield et al., 2003), but that is exactly what these parents had not provided. Thus, children may have lost the developmental foundation for respect, while the parents still expected the same respect that

they would have received in their home country. This clash of expectations sets the stage for another cultural conflict between parents and their newly reunited adolescent children.

The value of harmony maintenance is functional in a small, relatively isolated population where everyone shares a similar perspective. However, negotiation of differences is expected to be more adaptive to the availability of varied perspectives in a more complex *Gesellschaft* environment. A value that contributes to the maintenance of harmony is respect for elders. This is functional in agricultural *Gemeinschaft* environments where resources are controlled by the older generation, and, more important in the present situation, respect is justified by the security and closeness provided by parents.

In contrast, in a postmodern, urban world, self-expression, self-assertion, and egalitarianism are valued. In order to foster these skills, children are encouraged to voice their opinions “and to negotiate their points of view in order to optimize individual interests and desires” (Keller, 2012, p. 15). Parents carry on extensive conversations, even with infants, that “mirror and explain the inner world... (e.g., intention: “What do you want?; emotion: “Do you like this?; and cognition: “You know so much!)” (Keller, 2012, p. 15). Such conversations could be considered the developmental origins of egalitarian relations between the generations, a value orientation that results from social change in the *Gesellschaft* direction (Manago, 2012). Hence, it was not surprising that adolescent children, recently reunited with their parents, might not show the same filial respect their parents had shown as children and now expected from their own progeny.

From Collectivism to Individualism

A collectivistic value system is a hallmark of adaptation to a more *Gemeinschaft* environment. In contrast, a more individualistic value system is a hallmark of adaptation to a more *Gesellschaft* environment (Greenfield, 2009). The primary collectivity in a *Gemeinschaft* world is the family. One aspect of the transition from family-oriented collectivism to individualism is a movement from being family centered to being child centered (Greenfield, 2013; Keller, 2012). Another way in which the value of the individual is expressed in a *Gesellschaft* environment is through an emphasis on personal thoughts, inner states, and self-expression (Greenfield & Bruner, 1966; Keller, 2012). These characteristics can be summarized as psychological mindedness or, in the words of Keller (2012), “psychological autonomy with a focus on the inner world” (p. 14). Two components of a *Gesellschaft* environment, formal education and media, are particularly influential in developing this type of psychological autonomy (Greenfield & Bruner, 1966; Keller, 2012; Lerner, 1958).

Significance of Study

What happens to communication, harmony, respect, interdependence, and the collectivistic perspective when families separate for long periods of time and move from more *Gemeinschaft* to more *Gesellschaft* environments in the immigration process? As global trends make long-term separation more and more frequent (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002), this question becomes increasingly important.

When families immigrate together, the usual situation is for children to acculturate faster to the host society, often leading to high levels of conflict and reduced harmony between parents and children (e.g., Perreira et al., 2006). However, in situations of long-term familial separation in which parents immigrate to the U.S. first and send for their children years after immigrating themselves, the situation can be initially reversed. Thus, our central goal was to develop an intervention with reunited parents and their adolescent children to reduce parent–child conflict stemming from this long-term separation in the immigration process and promote intergenerational harmony. Via workshops led by a school psychologist, we aimed to scaffold intergenerational communication into a more explicit verbal form. In order to test effectiveness of a full (parents and adolescent children) versus partial intervention (adolescent children only), three intervention conditions were run (the third group was a no intervention control group).

Method

Participants

The study was conducted through a partnership between the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Recruitment of participants took place through the cooperation of the Emergency Immigrant Education Program and a high school in South Central Los Angeles where the program was carried out. Announcements were sent out via the high school and were followed up with calls made by bilingual and bicultural members of the research team. The parents and their children were invited to attend an introductory meeting. Once parents had attended and taken the pretest, phone calls were made to maximize follow-up.

The total number of parents and adolescents who gave their consent to participate and attended at least one workshop was 21 (across 8 families), including 11 adolescents and 10 parents and/or guardians. The participation of families in the intervention was not confined to include only a parent–child

dyad; the composition for families in our intervention was diverse. We accepted any adult family member or members who came to the workshops.

Given the focus of the current study on long-term separation and reunification, from the eight families who gave their consent, we rely on the experiences of six of those families who fulfilled two criteria for inclusion in the analysis: (1) the children experienced long-term separation, and (2) the families were present for the pretest and posttest. In the case of one of these families, a mother was in the study; however, the long-term separation occurred not between her and her teenage son, Wilbert, but between father and son. In another case, the separation occurred between the mother and her adolescent son, but it was the adolescent, Jorge, and his uncle who participated in the intervention. (All names are pseudonyms.)

The six families in the final sample were from El Salvador and Guatemala. Among the participating families, the average period of parent–child separation was 7.8 years (with a large range from 1–15 years). Descriptive data at the family level is presented in Table 1. Most of the families had rural origins, one of the important characteristics of a *Gemeinschaft* ecology. Because the countries of origin, Guatemala and El Salvador, are much poorer than the U.S., even the families of urban origin had migrated into a more *Gesellschaft* world.

Table 1. Descriptive Information of Families Who Experienced Long-Term Separation

Group Condition	Participants	Student Pseudonym & Age	Country of Origin	Separation Length	Student Time in U.S.
Control	Mother, uncle, 2 female adolescents	Elizabeth (14) India (18)	El Salvador (rural)	7 years	24 months
Control	Uncle, 1 male adolescent	Jorge (16)	El Salvador (rural)	1 year	4 months
Partial Experimental	Mother, 2 female adolescents	Griselda (18) Mariana (17)	Guatemala (rural)	10 years	9 months
Partial Experimental	Mother, 1 male adolescent	Wilbert (15)	El Salvador (urban)	8 years	12 months
Full Experimental	Mother, father, 1 female adolescent	Maria Elisa (17)	Guatemala (rural)	15 years	3 months
Full Experimental	Mother, 1 male adolescent	Omar (17)	El Salvador (urban)	4 years	36 months

Our program was carried out as part of the Emergency Immigrant Education Program of LAUSD. The program had as a criterion for participation that students had to have immigrated to the U.S. no more than three years earlier. The children had been in the U.S. between 3 months and 3 years, with an average length of time in the U.S. of 15 months. All of the adolescents were in the ninth or tenth grade of high school at the time of the intervention. However, due to differences in schooling in Central America compared to the U.S. and due to the fact that weak English skills force many students to enter the U.S. schooling system at a lower level, the age range of the adolescents ranged from 14–18 years old.

The Researchers

The workshop groups were led by author Maritza Monterroza-Brugger, a school psychologist with LAUSD. She had been working with the Emergency Immigrant Education Program for 12 years at the time we began our study. More importantly, she shared life experiences with newly arrived adolescents and also had insight into what their parents were going through. Maritza writes, “I came to this country in 1980 as a 15-year-old....My younger brother and I came with my grandmother to join my mother who had been in the U.S. for 3 years. My personal experiences were indeed very similar to the students we served. The whole breakdown in communication between myself and my mother was also familiar to me, and so you can say that I had the hindsight experience of this as well, and...the understanding of how important it is to try and bridge the gap between parents and teens.”

Monterroza-Brugger made her commonality with the participating families known in the first session, which was the pretest discussion between adult family members and children. A key part of the introduction is given below. In order to give a more personal sense of the communication, this introduction is presented in Spanish as it was at the workshop; the English translation is also provided:

Yo voy a empezar, y luego siguen ustedes. Mi nombre es Maritza Monterroza. Nací en El Salvador y vine a este país hace 27 años. La razón por la que vine a este país es porque cuando yo tenía 14 años en mi país había una guerra civil. Las cosas eran muy peligrosas y mi papa decidió mandarnos a los Estados Unidos a reunirnos con mi mama que ya tenía tres años de estar aquí. Usted? [I am going to begin, and then you will follow. My name is Maritza Monterroza. I was born in El Salvador and came to this country 27 years ago. The reason why I came to this country is because, when I was 14 years old, there was a civil war in my country. Things were very dangerous, and my father decided to send us to the

United States to reunite us with my mother who had already spent three years here. You?]

Other researchers shared general immigrant and linguistic background with the participants, as well as extensive research experience with Latino populations. Author Espinoza, a developmental psychologist, is Mexican American and grew up speaking Spanish at home. Her parents immigrated to California from Mexico. As a researcher, she has been studying the experiences of Latino youth and their parents for 15 years.

Author Ruedas-Gracia, an educational psychologist, is Mexican American and was born in Southern California. Her father immigrated from north-central Mexico, and her mother was born and raised in border towns between California and Mexico. Her first language is Spanish. The city she grew up in is heavily immigrant Latino (i.e., 75% Latino and almost half of its residents are foreign-born). Thus, she grew up familiar with immigration experiences and parent–child relationships within the context of immigration. As a researcher, she has studied the experiences of Latino first generation college students and immigrant-origin community college students.

Authors Greenfield and Manago, both cultural developmental psychologists, have spent many years carrying out research on social change and human development in Chiapas, Mexico; they speak Spanish as a second or third language. Author Greenfield has also been doing research on cross-cultural value conflict in the Latino community in Southern California since the 1990s. She is one of the founders of the Bridging Cultures Project, which has yielded a number of publications, including articles in this journal (e.g., Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). All of the research assistants on the project had grown up in Spanish-speaking homes in California.

Design

This small-scale intervention study combined case-study methodology with an experimental design, including random assignment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three “treatment groups” with a pretest–posttest design. In the “full experimental group,” both parents and their adolescent children were given the intervention workshops. In the “partial experimental group” only the adolescents were given the experience of the intervention workshops. The third group was a control group in which neither parents nor children were exposed to the intervention. All members across the three groups received English language instruction from school district English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers when they were not engaged in a workshop. All groups participated in a pretest and posttest session. Because it is often difficult

to involve parents of teenagers in school-based activities and programs (Eccles & Harold, 1996), showing a positive effect of the workshops on parent–child relations by intervening only with the adolescent children might be particularly beneficial for future intervention work, hence the inclusion of the partial experimental group.

Procedure

Every Saturday morning for seven consecutive weeks (with the exception of one week when the campus was closed for a holiday), we met in the teachers' cafeteria of a high school located in the South Central Los Angeles area. The first session served as an introduction to the project for the families. All sessions were conducted in Spanish, given that this was the first language for all of the adolescents and parents. As previously noted, the group leader was school psychologist and author Maritza Monterroza-Brugger.

During the informational meeting, the purpose of the workshops was described and a brief overview of some of the topics that would be discussed during the workshops was given. Parents and adolescents were also informed that not all individuals who agreed to participate in the study would receive all the workshops. They were reassured that they would all receive free English classes; these classes proved to be a great incentive for the participants. After the informational meeting, native Spanish-speaking members of the research team met individually with families to verbally explain the information presented in the consent forms and answer any remaining questions. Families were then given time to privately discuss their decision of whether or not to enroll in the study. We then randomly assigned the participants to one of the three groups that constituted the experimental design. Breakfast and lunch were served at all meetings. Babysitting by undergraduate Latino research assistants was provided for younger siblings (or they could stay with their parents).

Pretest

The second session functioned as the pretest. During the second session, Monterroza-Brugger carried out in succession three parent–child group discussions, one for each group: full experimental, partial experimental, and control. Change in the nature of the parent–child interaction and communication between pretest and posttest was the focus of our analysis.

First, sociodemographic data were elicited from parents and adolescents. You have read the conversational prompt earlier (in “The Researchers” section above). Sociodemographic data such as participants' country of origin, age of arrival in the U.S., motivation for immigration, and level of education were collected in an oral group fashion because individual questionnaires can be threatening and anxiety-provoking to immigrant parents due to illiteracy or

unfamiliarity with questionnaires. Moreover, it was expected that implementing a group discussion format during all the workshop sessions would serve as a valued cultural modality (Delgado-Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997; Quiroz et al., 1999/2003).

Scenarios

The main focus of the discussion groups was to discuss scenarios designed to elicit parent–child conflict arising from intergenerational differences in exposure to host and ancestral culture. Some of the conflict scenarios were modified from previous Bridging Cultures projects (Greenfield & Quiroz, 2013; Raeff et al., 2000/2003) to accommodate an adolescent population; others were developed through ethnographic interviews with young people who were members of Latino immigrant families. The goal was to construct scenarios that replicated the real-world conflicts of young people in Latino immigrant homes. One of the scenarios developed through our ethnographic process went as follows (Note: We present the scenarios in English, but they were presented to the participants in Spanish.):

Maricela wants to go to the 15th birthday celebration (quinceañera) of her friend on Saturday, but her parents say that she cannot go because the same day she has to go with the family to her cousin's baptism. Maricela does not think that it is fair that she has to miss her friend's 15th birthday celebration.

The group leader then asked the group: “Have you ever faced this kind of situation? How did you handle it? Were you able to resolve this conflict? If yes, how? If no, can anyone think of a way to resolve such a conflict?”

Workshops 1–4

For the third through the sixth session, we conducted workshop discussions with adolescents and parents separately: two adolescent discussion groups (from the full and partial experimental groups), and one parent group (from the full experimental group). In the first workshop, we asked participants to think about the differences in daily life between their home country and the U.S. by making two lists, one describing life in their home country and the other describing life in the U.S. Group facilitator Monterroza-Brugger then explained in Spanish collectivistic and individualistic cultural value patterns using the following script:

Okay, experts have observed that some cultures follow norms that today we are going to call collectivistic and other cultures follow ways called individualistic. In collectivistic cultures there are more values to be together with the family, and family is the priority. However, in individualistic

cultures the priority is for people to have independence and autonomy in order to achieve much in their lives. In individualistic culture, much value is placed on people being able to take care of themselves, following their own ideas and desires, and making decisions according to their own goals. Both cultures have good things and bad things; neither is better than the other. There is just a difference in daily life between the two cultures, and as a result, there are different perspectives and morals about the individual and the family. Okay, now we are going to put a “C” in front of things on our list that are collectivistic and an “I” in front of individualistic [things].

The group participants then identified examples in their two lists, with more collectivistic values appearing in their list describing their home country and more individualistic values appearing in their list describing the U.S.

By the conclusion of this session it was becoming clear that the issue of separation, when parents and children immigrated to the U.S. years apart, was not only pervasive among the sample, but was also having profound effects on parent–child relationships. Thus, the remaining three workshops focused on facilitating explicit communication about the experience of separation. These workshops included discussions about how they felt during the experience of separation, asking parents and children to imagine themselves in the other’s shoes, to think about strategies for listening and communicating with one another, and to discuss the kinds of problems that have arisen due to the pain they experienced being separated from their families. For example, the script for Workshop 3 included the following prompt (translated from the Spanish):

It is important that we do not ignore problems caused by separation then, because these can be like thorns that are never taken out. They remain stuck there to infect things on the inside. Today we are going to explore ways to diminish the negative effects of separation.

Apart from the years of separation, here we have that daily distancing, because, as you told me, here everyone works a lot and it is more difficult to share. So we are going to think about the effect of both types of separation - the separation of years and the separation of hours which is repeated almost every day of the week. Due to these two types of separation, parents and children do not share much of each other’s world as they used to before they immigrated to the U.S. That is why we asked you to do this last task, in order that you learn a little more from each one. Who would like to begin with what you have discovered?

For the parent group: Do you feel that there have been negative effects on your children due to separation?

For the adolescent groups: Do you feel that there have been negative effects on your parents due to separation? What are those effects? And how about positive effects? What are they?

In order to encourage more explicit communication in the home, we also asked participants to do homework between sessions. For example, after Workshop 3, we asked students to ask their parents what has been the most difficult difference between the two countries and why. We also asked parents to ask this same question to their children.

Posttest

The posttest was similar to the pretest; parents and adolescents met together for the session and discussed three scenarios that highlighted similar themes (e.g., time spent with family versus friends; boy–girl relationships) as those of the first session but with slight variations. Thus, the corresponding scenario to the quinceañera–baptism scenario presented in the pretest went as follows:

Lucia, who is a high school student, has made a date to go out with her friends to the movies on Saturday afternoon. Her parents decide to visit her grandmother at that same time and want her to come with them. Lucia says that she already has a commitment to be with her friends. But her parents insist.

The group leader then asked the group the same set of questions as in the pretest. The posttest finished with new questions on parent–child communication:

1. What do you think is the best way that parents can make their children understand what they want?
2. What do you think is the best way that children can make their parents understand what they want?
3. What can parents do so that their children do the right thing when they or other family members are not present?
4. What do you believe is the best way to struggle with long-term separation?
5. If you realize that a father or mother has to separate from his or her children for reasons that cannot be avoided, what would you advise this person?

Answers to these questions were a focus of the analysis presented here.

Data Recording

All the intervention workshops, as well as the pretest and posttest, were videotaped. Transcription of the Spanish discussions of the workshop sessions, pretest, and posttest was done by bilingual student research assistants whose maternal language is Spanish. For transcription we used the video analysis software Inqscribe.

Analysis and Presentation of Data

Our qualitative analysis utilizes discourse analysis of video records, with a focus on nonverbal as well as verbal communication (e.g., Goodwin, 2000). Anticipating our results, we found that only those parents and adolescents who participated in the workshops learned to communicate with explicit, verbal communication in a more egalitarian way. In order to provide insight into the process of change, we present a case study of one family in the full experimental group: 17-year-old Maria Elisa and her parents. The case study is organized chronologically from pretest, through the workshops, to the posttest.

Interpretation of the Video Data

Authors Greenfield, Espinoza, Monterroza-Brugger, and Manago spent a day reviewing together the pretest and posttest video data presented in this article; they were joined by Adriana Galván. They reached consensus on the interpretations presented here. Note too that author Monterroza-Brugger had led all the videotaped sessions, so she also contributed an experiential memory of what had gone on. Running notes were made during the video analysis session. This document is the backbone of the nonverbal and verbal behaviors that led to interpretations of the pretest and posttest presented in the Results.

Subsequent to the video analysis session, the videos were transcribed by three undergraduate research assistants who had served as babysitters for younger siblings during the workshops. Author Ruedas-Gracia then joined the project. She independently went through all the pretest and posttest videos, extracting quotes and nonverbal behaviors to substantiate the interpretations presented here. Ruedas-Gracia also analyzed the video data for all parent and adolescent workshops in order to document the change process for Maria Elisa and her parents in the full experimental group; her analysis, contained in an extensive written report, included Spanish quotes to substantiate interpretations. This report was utilized in this article to substantiate a number of points with specific quotes.

We begin the results section by analyzing the difficult parent–child issues that arose in the pretest. We continue with our detailed case study of the change process. We conclude by summarizing the process in the other five dyads, organized according to treatment group. Although the workshops took place in Spanish, we present only the English translations, unless there is reason to focus on a particular Spanish expression, in which case it will be presented in both languages.

Results

Pretest: Issues of Most Importance to Participants

A point of discussion that was planned for the initial session was the topic of intergenerational value differences. However, a different topic persistently arose among the parents and adolescents during the initial sessions: the topic of separation. Virtually all the children, when asked in the survey instrument why the separation had occurred, were very clear on the answer: To get ahead. Although the perceived motive was positive, it was clear that the separations caused great emotional difficulty on both sides.

During the pretest session, the participants were asked about the length of their separation and the reason why the separation occurred. Martina, a mother in the full experimental group, talks about the separation she had with her son Omar. As she talks about the time spent apart, Omar “looks very uncomfortable and sad” (notes from researchers’ video analysis session). Omar had stayed in El Salvador for four years, separated from his mother.

Also, during the pretest in the partial experimental group, a mother, Cruz, begins to cry as she describes her motives for leaving her two daughters Griselda and Mariana in Guatemala for 10 years; “the reason I am here is to give a better life to my kids. That was my dream, and thank God I have achieved it.” Interestingly, one of her daughters, Mariana tells the group that the reason she came to the U.S. was “to get to know my mom” *a conocer a mi mama*. Mariana’s use of the word *conocer* highlights a process that other researchers (e.g., Forman, 1993) have described in which children and parents who experienced a prolonged separation report that upon reunification they feel like they are meeting a stranger.

Case Study of Change in the Full Experimental Group (intervention workshops for both parents and their adolescent children)

Background

Just three months before the start of this project, Maria Elisa moved to the U.S. to reunite with her mother and father after a 15-year separation. In the years before migrating to the U.S., she was living in a rural area of Guatemala with her grandmother. She completed the eighth grade in Guatemala and pursued a degree in cosmetology. Her father lived in a rural part of Guatemala and, after working in Guatemala for 10 years in the army as a truck driver, moved to the U.S. When Maria Elisa was a child, her mother, who grew up in an urban area, made a living in Guatemala buying and selling coffee. She left Maria Elisa and her two older daughters to join her husband in the U.S. when

Maria Elisa was two years of age. The parents' reason for immigrating to the U.S. was to provide a better life for their children by sending remittances back to Guatemala and setting up an avenue for eventually bringing the children to the U.S. Maria Elisa's reason for coming to the U.S. was "to be with my parents and to get ahead."

Pretest Discussion

In the pretest, Maria Elisa explains that she has come to the U.S. to get ahead. Like her father, she believes the U.S. provides that opportunity to get ahead. Although the intention behind immigration was to benefit the children and the family, the emotional disturbance that this separation caused for the family was significant. During the preintervention discussion, Maria Elisa's mother broke down in tears as soon as she spoke about leaving her children to move to the U.S. Maria Elisa's mother describes how difficult it was to leave her children behind, "I left my kids when they were very little and, well, what can I tell you, I came here also to get them ahead...the situation for us also has been very hard." While Maria Elisa's mother is speaking, Maria Elisa's father clears his throat and looks down, also fidgeting a bit like Maria Elisa. Her father holds back tears as he describes leaving her behind in Guatemala for about 15 years.

During the pretest, Maria Elisa's mother reiterates how the separation caused both her and her husband emotional turmoil by explaining that, "what has made us the saddest are our kids." Maria Elisa's dad repeatedly clears his throat and shakes his leg while he speaks quietly about why he came to the U.S., explaining why he initially left his family. His demeanor while discussing this topic is different from his demeanor when discussing other issues; this difference shows the level of discomfort he feels about initiating separation. Throughout this preintervention session, Maria Elisa is extremely quiet. She speaks only when spoken to, and provides only quick, short answers. In terms of physical space, Maria Elisa and her mother are sitting about two feet away from each other, while Maria Elisa's father sits a bit off to the side, about five feet away from his daughter. The family does not smile at each other and rarely look at one another as they speak. Overall, their postures are very rigid and stiff.

For most of the scenario discussions, Maria Elisa's answers are simply reiterations of her mother's answers or minimal responses to the leader's questions about the scenario. For example, she reiterates her mother's response to the third scenario where families are asked what they would do in a situation where a child wants to attend a school field trip to Washington D.C., where both male and female students will be spending the night in the same hotel. Maria

Elisa's mother responds by stating that the children cannot be trusted on the trip. Prompted to answer the same question by the psychologist, Maria Elisa responds, "the parents are right [to not trust the child on the trip]."

Throughout the preintervention session, Maria Elisa's mother often sides with the children in the scenarios. Yet her responses also reveal defensiveness about her authoritarian parenting decisions and a lack of acknowledgement of the importance of collaborative problem solving with adolescents. For example, after hearing the pretest scenario about a conflict between attending to a friend's quinceañera and a family baptism, Mary Elisa's mother agrees with her father that the daughter has a right to go to the quinceañera party. However, her daughter calls them out on this, saying that her parents do not let her go. Her mother then justifies her practice by saying that she doesn't let her go out because she is new to this country and is too young to ruin her life. When Maria Elisa is asked directly about her opinion on this scenario, she starts to cry.

As another example, in presenting the second scenario, the psychologist asks if the child should take classes to help him go to college or if he should help out in the family business instead. Maria Elisa's mother expresses that,

to me, academics is the priority because business in this crisis can go under, and the child? What will happen? He will get stuck doing what we [the parents] do to work, doing any job that is in front of us to earn money for our children to be prepared, and for me, that is the important thing. That they prepare so that then later in the future they know how to lead their life in a better position.

Although she sides with the child, she looks at it from the point of view of the parents. Moreover, she focuses on the struggles the parents have had to go through, perhaps as a way to justify the difficult choices that she herself made. Also, she does not acknowledge the desires of the child in this situation.

Although she acknowledges Maria Elisa's maturity, she still shows doubt about Maria Elisa's decisions. For example, she explains that she trusts Maria Elisa but still requires a note from school if she is to do something school-related. "She should go...but she must turn in the note they give from the school. If she tells me she has to stay [at school] an hour? Ok, bring me the note from the school, and I will sign."

When her mother speaks about their relationship, Maria Elisa can be seen pursing her lips. However, she does not speak.

Workshop 1: Adolescent Workshop

For the first workshop, the psychologist explains that they will focus on the differences between life in their country of origin compared with the U.S. During this initial workshop where parents are not present, Maria Elisa tells

the psychologist that here in the U.S. there is no liberty. Her parents are very strict, and she can't go anywhere without taking her younger brothers with her.

To me, there is no freedom here because I have nothing, and over there [Guatemala] I did....Here, [I don't have any freedom] because I am with my mother, and if I go out, I have to go out with my brothers. So I just don't go out. And, no, I don't have any freedom.

The strictness of Maria Elisa's mother is a product of the parent's feeling that the U.S. is a dangerous place for a child. This is expressed by her comment, below, during Parent Workshop 1.

Workshop 1: Parent Workshop

From the start, there are comments by Maria Elisa's mother that show how she is still defensive and parent-oriented. She reiterates her purpose for coming by saying, "we came to give a better opportunity to our children, what we didn't have." She attributes her family's well-being to her parents' good child-rearing. She tells the psychologist, "We are a healthy family...thanks to our father who, well, I send blessings from here, and my mother who knew how to educate us." To Maria Elisa's father, the U.S. offers an opportunity to succeed and grow. This is an opportunity he feels is not available in Guatemala. Maria Elisa's mother, however, is very negative in her perception of a child's life in the U.S. She believes there are a lot of dangers everywhere, "in every corner." She exclaims, "We want to save our children...I want to save my children from all the bad that exists."

In the parents' first workshop, one can see the perceptions and opinions of the parents and the way in which it is directly affecting Maria Elisa. Maria Elisa is not seen as a mature, independent, capable 17-year-old. Instead, her mother's fear translates into not trusting her daughter and not trusting the outside environment in which they live. Maria Elisa's mother applies the same rules to her 17-year-old daughter that she applies to her six- and eight-year-old younger sons. Because the parents were not with Maria Elisa, their oldest child, during most of her adolescence, we can conclude that they are likely unfamiliar with parenting an adolescent. (Note: The family did not attend the second workshop. Hence, we skip to Workshop 3.)

Workshop 3: Adolescent Workshop

Maria Elisa seems a little more relaxed in Workshop 3. She elaborates when prompted by the psychologist, in contrast with her previous method of giving short, truncated answers. Her body language is more relaxed. She is more slouched and no longer repeatedly brushes her clothes. While the psychologist and other students are speaking, Maria Elisa smiles with the group. She jokes and smiles at the girl next to her.

This workshop focused mostly on the topic of separation. The psychologist reflected with the adolescents on how the time spent apart from their parents may have caused problems with communication. The adolescents were asked to reflect not only on the long-term separation they had experienced but also on the day-to-day separation they still experience due to their parents' work schedule. The psychologist asked the group, "Have there been negative effects of the separation?" Maria Elisa responds, "I feel like if I were with a person... yes, I love her very much, but no. I feel something in my heart that doesn't let me be well." When the psychologist asks if Maria Elisa would have liked to stay in Guatemala and have her mother help her there, Maria Elisa tells the psychologist that she would have liked to, but that her mother "...doesn't like talking about that." We can then see that Maria Elisa perceives barriers to honest communication.

Workshop 3: Parent Workshop

Although they are in separate workshops, the parents, like Maria Elisa, show less rigidity in their physical demeanor during this workshop. In the parent workshop, the mother can be seen looking down and leaning back in her seat, contrasted with the rigid and stiff posture observed in the pretest video.

However, a great disparity in the family's perceptions of the separation is also evident as the parent workshop unfolds. At the start of the workshop, the psychologist asks if there were any negative effects of the separation. Maria Elisa's mother says, "No, because our relationship is very beautiful." Her father says, "No, we feel very good. We didn't feel any changes." Concerning Maria Elisa's reactions to leaving Guatemala, her father says, "She didn't feel a change. She feels happy." Thus, the parents believe (or are unwilling to admit the contrary) that Maria Elisa has coped well with both her separation from parents and the move from Guatemala and that they have a great relationship. As we have seen, Maria Elisa feels very differently.

As the workshop continues, the psychologist gives the parents a little insight into what Maria Elisa and immigrant adolescents in general may be feeling when they are adjusting to a new way of life. At this point, we see the parents, especially the mother, paying close attention to the psychologist and seeming to process the information. The psychologist tells the parents that "talking is very important in this country. Especially because we don't have that same way of life that we had in our countries, we must talk." She also goes on to tell the group that, "when we talk with our children, it is important that they not feel attacked."

The impact of this advice can be seen later when the psychologist asks how the parents can help the adolescent make the right decisions. Maria Elisa's mother answers, "Look, it's by talking. By talking about how one may

understand, how the child will understand.” Soon after, Maria Elisa’s mother specifically asks the psychologist, “But what is the best way to talk with an older child?” The psychologist responds: “It is very important to listen, so that the adolescent can trust talking to you. Sometimes, we must let some things pass. They should feel more freedom and trust in bringing friends.” The fact that Maria Elisa’s mother asked this question shows that she is becoming aware not only that there should be more communication, but that she can and should develop specific communication skills in order for the conversation to be more effective. Equally important, Maria Elisa’s mother is reflecting on her own in-experience in rearing an adolescent versus a child.

The psychologist goes on to explain how immigrant children in the U.S. are acculturating differently. She says, “We Latinos communicate with actions.... Here, your children are exposed to another form of communication. They are exposed to communication with words. Therefore, it is important to find words to help communicate with our children.”

Workshop 4: Adolescent Workshop

In Workshop 4, Maria Elisa’s ongoing resentment towards her parents is evident. She has not done the assigned homework of asking her parents what has been the most difficult difference between the two countries because her parents “never tell me anything....They send me to go do something.” The psychologist tells the group that they must be proactive in communicating with their parents. This advice has an impact on Maria Elisa. As the workshop comes to a close, the psychologist asks the group what they would like to see in a next workshop series if there were to be one. Maria Elisa speaks out and says she would like to learn “how to communicate better with our parents, so that they can understand.”

Workshop 4: Parent Workshop

In this workshop, Maria Elisa’s parents are realizing the importance of reciprocal verbal communication. In Workshop 3, Maria Elisa’s parents talked about speaking to their children about what people to associate with and call friends. However, they did not take their daughter’s thoughts and feelings into consideration. Maria Elisa’s mother now expresses that she can help her daughter not only by talking to her, but also by letting Maria Elisa communicate freely. When the psychologist asks Maria Elisa’s mother how she could help her daughter deal with the separation that immigration caused, she states that it is by “...talking, talking, letting her speak so that she can let everything that she is feeling out. When she has nothing left to say, then her heart will be happy.”

Maria Elisa’s father stresses communication as Maria Elisa’s mother is speaking. He reiterates that, “Communication is very important....” When the

psychologist thanks the group for participating in the intervention, Maria Elisa's father tells her that, although it was out of their way and an effort to attend, it was "very important." Maria Elisa's mother acknowledges that her daughter has had to deal with many issues as she tells the psychologist that "She has led a very different life." In other words, the distance and serial migration has created multiple perspectives that she is now beginning to understand.

Posttest Discussion

By the postintervention discussion, in which parents and children are once more together, Maria Elisa is able to look at her parents and disagree with their opinions in a more straightforward, less passive-aggressive manner. During the first scenario of the postintervention discussion, Maria Elisa voices her opinion that the child should be allowed to go to the movies, even though her parents still believe that the child can't be trusted with so much freedom. Voicing her opinion contrasts with her silence in the pretest. She fidgets much less and smiles much more. She even laughs with her mother during part of the discussion. This sign of a positive relationship with her mother is a sharp contrast to crying in the pretest when she is asked her opinion on the parallel scenario or to pursing her lips when her mother talks about their relationship.

Maria Elisa's mother notes that there has been more talk at home, saying that she and her daughter were having long conversations. The mother valorizes explicit verbal communication and egalitarian relations between the generations when she says, "We need to talk to them so that our kids can trust us and talk to us" and "through talking everything can be understood." Maria Elisa's father continues in the same vein: "They need to talk about their problem or what it is that they want and what it is that they like, what it is that they don't like in us." At the start of the workshop, Maria Elisa's father actually moves his chair closer to his daughter, something that he did not attempt to do in the pretest. Both parents smile at Maria Elisa and nod in agreement when she answers.

The mother also explicitly acknowledges the difficulty that children face when they are separated from their parents, as well as the difficulty of the second separation from caregivers in their country of origin. She now sees that it is the responsibility of the parents to realize that they all need to adjust to a new way of life. She even reports giving her daughter the option of returning to Guatemala—an indication of a new willingness to grant Maria Elisa greater autonomy. A closely related development is that Maria Elisa's mother starts to recognize the need for children to develop their conscience or their own inner compass. She explains that parents cannot just tell their kids what to do and watch their every move, but rather that teens need to become aware and conscious of their own actions. This attitude contrasts sharply with the pretest during which the mother was very controlling.

Maria Elisa also recognizes the need for more child autonomy and how this contrasts with parents as role models and authority figures; she says, “We’re also not going to follow their example, because if they are doing bad things, I am not going to do the same thing because I know that it is wrong, I have to do what’s best.” She also shows an explicit understanding of her parents’ perspective on separation during the posttest discussion. She says, “It’s not easy to separate from your children.” She goes on to acknowledge that she is not a parent, but that this is how she thinks it is.

Summary of Processes Occurring in the Other Five Families

As in the prior case study, there is a shift towards child self-expression and parent–child equality in the family where both parent and child participated in the workshops. In the partial experimental group (children were given workshops; parents were given classes in English as a second language), adolescents in the two families are able to express feelings of abandonment by their parents in the posttest, something that did not occur in the pretest. In one of the two families, this leads to the son experiencing improved intergenerational understanding and communication. In the other family, the adolescents’ newfound ability to express negative feelings does not improve parent–child relationships because the parents, who have not been in the workshops, do not know how to respond. In the control group (both parents and children were given classes in English as a second language), communication in the posttest is essentially similar to that in the pretest: the adolescents do not express their own feelings, but echo the views of the older generation.

Full Experimental Group: Omar and His Mother

This is the other family in which both parents and children experienced the workshops. Omar is 17 years old. He is from an urban area in El Salvador. Omar has lived in the U.S. for three years and was separated from his mother for four years. He tells the psychologist that he came to the U.S. “to be with my parents and have a better future.”

During the pretest, Omar strives to maintain harmony when talking about the different scenarios presented. For example, the psychologist asks Omar for his opinion about the work versus college scenario, where there is a son who would like to continue his education, but his parents want him to work with his father. Omar suggests there can be a peaceful solution that may benefit both. He says, “The son [is right] because if he wants to work or wants to study, that’s his future. However, during vacation, he can help his father.” Not only does he suggest this arrangement, but his mother tells the group that he does this in reality: “He [Omar] is one of those. He had two months off. He said he wasn’t going to summer school, but was going to work.”

Martina, Omar’s mother, came to the U.S. seven years before the start of this project in order to “build a better future for my children.” She tells the psychologist that it was very hard leaving her children, but that they thankfully were reunited in the U.S. three years before the start of the project. She explains that the family is now all reunited in the U.S., including her husband.

During the pretest, Martina establishes her authority when giving her opinion regarding the scenarios in the way she frames her answers. For example, when asked whether she would let her daughter go on a trip to Washington, she ends her response with, “I would not let her go.” Additionally, when asked whether she would let her son study on the computer or take him to the park with the family, she responded, “I would get him up and take him to the park.” She also states that at home, she gives “him [Omar] one to one and a half hours on the computer, and then we turn it off.” Through her responses, Martina establishes her authority as a parent and her control over her 17-year-old son. However, during the posttest Martina manifests a more developmental perspective: “Sometimes we lose, how to say it, seeing their growth.”

By the posttest Martina and her son Omar also show a newfound ability to disagree and negotiate different perspectives. There is realistic recognition of problems, rather than glossing over problems to achieve harmony. Perhaps most dramatic is the ability of an adolescent in this group to recognize and express the negative effect of parent–child separations, even if it is difficult for his mother to hear. Omar says, “When we are left alone we get accustomed to our life with the people we were living with [in the home country], and we like those people more than our own parents because we say that they left us just like that.”

The preceding examples make it clear that this pair, the only other family in which parents and children both experienced the workshops, have learned how to communicate, with the adolescent fully expressing himself and the parent responding by negotiating differences. They are equals in the conversation.

Partial Experimental Group: Wilbert and His Family

In the partial experimental group, only the adolescent participated in workshops. Instead of workshops, parents in this group were given classes in English as a second language. Wilbert is 15 years old and has been in the U.S. for one year. His father came to the U.S. when Wilbert was seven years old. Wilbert explains that he came to the U.S. to “get to know my father.” He attended the workshops with his mother, who accompanied him on his journey to the U.S.

Although there was no discussion of Wilbert’s feelings toward his father during the pretest, a noteworthy exchange prompted the investigators to look toward the intervention workshops for further information. When the

psychologist asks Wilbert's mother why she moved to the U.S., she explained that she made the journey with her son and daughter in order to reunite with her husband. Although her husband made yearly visits back to El Salvador and provided for them, she continues, saying, "there were always a few traumas here and there." She then turns to look at her son and nervously chuckles.

During the intervention workshops, Wilbert expressed his resentment towards his father, who had left for the U.S. without saying goodbye. At the time he had, understandably, felt abandoned by his father. However, in the posttest, Wilbert reported having a more positive image of his father, as well as improved father-son communication. Wilbert now understood why his father had not said goodbye when he left for the U.S.—it was because his father was in so much pain. Yet, Wilbert explains that a parent should always explain their motive for leaving and say goodbye so that then the child, "although they will feel bad because they [the parent] are leaving, at least they are going to say, 'my mom said goodbye to me, and I won't hold resentment towards her because of that.'" This is an example in which it was possible for the son to achieve an experience of improved communication between father and son, even though the father was not part of the Bridging Cultures program and even though his mother did not receive an intervention.

Partial Experimental Group: Mariana, Griselda, and Their Mother

Mariana is 17 years old; her sister Griselda is 18. The sisters emigrated from Guatemala to the U.S. nine months before the start of the project. Their father had left the family in Guatemala when Mariana was two and Griselda three. They attended the workshop with their mother, who had left both of them in Guatemala and immigrated to the U.S. when Mariana was seven years old and Griselda eight. Mariana explained that she came to the U.S. to get to know her mother; Griselda had a closely related motive: to reunite with her mother.

During the pretest, Mariana and Griselda agreed with their mother on all the scenarios. For example, one of the scenarios was regarding a daughter who wanted to go to her friend's quinceañera. However, her parents wanted her to attend a family baptism. When the psychologist asked Mariana who she thought was right, Mariana responded, "Well, I say the parents because there can be alcohol at the quinceañera. In contrast, the baptism is more, well there won't be any alcohol, just the baptism." When the psychologist asked Mariana's mother whom she thought was right, the parents or the daughter, Mariana's mother responded, "the parents."

During the posttest, Griselda gives opinions that are not necessarily aligned with her mother's. She does not explicitly disagree with her, but instead compromises. For example, the psychologist offers a scenario where a daughter has

to practice for her folklórico (folklore) group, but her mother wants her to help her prepare dinner. Griselda offers the option of helping her mother prepare dinner, then “continue practicing her folklórico dance after dinner.”

During the posttest Mariana expressed dismay that their mother or father did not say goodbye or tell them the truth about leaving. Mariana explains that her father left her, “at the age of two...he didn’t even give me an explanation, he didn’t even...I don’t know.” During this discussion, the mother nervously takes a drink of water, looks away and starts crying as her daughter expresses her pain about the separation. She seeks comfort from another mother in the group who gives her a hug. She cries and her daughters continue to describe the separation and how it affected the relationship with their father. Mariana goes on to say that they invited her father to her quinceañera, but he did not come. She says that she wishes he could have given her an explanation of why he did not come, but all he could say (and he communicated this through her grandfather) was that he had gone to work. Once again, the mother, Cruz, (who did not have the experience of the intervention workshops) is unable to respond to her daughter, she simply cries and cannot look at her.

Mariana describes the separation from her mother, and as she does, she too begins to cry. She says, “my mom did tell me she was leaving to the [ranch]... and I told her to take me with her...but a year after she left me, my grandma told me that really she had come over here [to the U.S.] to have a good education.” Thus, Mariana and her sister were left by their father without an explanation and were also left by their mother who lied about where she was heading. The mother never turns to her daughters during this final workshop to offer any reasoning or encouragement to them, nor is she able to verbally take the perspective of her daughters.

In sum, Griselda, who has participated in the workshops, has the idea of negotiating compromise with parents rather than simply accepting parental authority. Mariana, who has also participated in the workshops, is able to express herself, even though she is clearly upsetting her mother. However, her mother, who has not participated in the workshops, does not display the ability to respond.

Control Group: Elizabeth, India, and Their Family

Elizabeth is 14 years old; her sister India is 18. They emigrated from a rural area in El Salvador two years earlier. The sisters attended the workshops with their uncle and mother. Their mother left for the U.S. when Elizabeth was 7 years old and India was 11. Elizabeth explained that she came to the U.S. to study and get to know her mother; India’s motive was to “get to know my mother.”

During the pretest, the psychologist describes the quinceañera scenario to the group and asks the group to express whether they think the girl is right in wanting to go to the quinceañera or if they think the parents are right in wanting her to go to the baptism. First, India responded by saying she believed the girl is right. Her uncle quickly interrupts her by asking India, “but how old is she?!” India then changes her mind and says, “well, as long as she is respectful. If not, then no, she shouldn’t go.” During the posttest India continues to acknowledge the authority the parents have over the children. When faced with the scenario about visiting grandma, India tells the psychologist, “the parents are right [in wanting their daughter to visit grandma instead of friends].” She then gestures toward her mother and uncle.

Throughout the majority of the pretest, Elizabeth can be seen looking toward her uncle and mother after offering her opinion on the scenarios. Additionally, there are a few instances when Elizabeth disagrees with her family but implicitly rather than explicitly expresses her disagreement. For example, while listening to her parents respond to one of the scenarios presented by the psychologist, Elizabeth can be seen freezing and looking up as if in disagreement. Although it is clear she does not agree with what her family members were saying at the time, she does not explicitly express this in the pretest. During another scenario, Elizabeth’s sister India attempts to counter what her mother and uncle are saying. Elizabeth nods her head in agreement with her sister, but does not speak up or express her agreement with her sister.

During the posttest, the adults in the family place the responsibility for understanding parents on the children, whereas the children want the adults to take responsibility for understanding them. For example, Uncle Rogelio (uncle to Elizabeth and India) says that children should understand their parents and, across the scenarios and questions, discusses what adolescents can do to understand and help their parents. When the school psychologist asks about the best way to deal with separations in families, he explains that, “once you get to the maturity level that an adolescent has, then they need to reflect on things in the right manner and see the situations and know that it is not good for them to live with a deep resentment.” Elizabeth interrupts and says, “no, both have to do their part, and why should only I try to talk to him, and he doesn’t want to.” She also describes that it is slightly more of the father’s responsibility. The uncle says that he agrees but that it is the adolescent who has to adjust and that finding a way to reconcile with the parents will make adolescents better people. As the uncle speaks, Elizabeth simply shakes her head no. She was still unable to explicitly express her opinions or thoughts.

Elizabeth, India, and their family were in the control group where neither party received the workshop interventions. The evidence demonstrated that,

in the domain of family communication, there was no change from pre- to posttest.

Control Group: Jorge and His Uncle

Also in the control group where neither adolescent nor family members participate in workshops but instead have English as a second language classes, Jorge is 16 years old. He emigrated from a rural area of El Salvador to the U.S. four months before the start of the project. He was separated from his mother for eight years. Jorge attended the intervention with his uncle; his father was not in the picture. He explained that his reason for coming to the U.S. was to study.

During the pretest, Jorge is very quiet and only speaks when spoken to. He allows his uncle to answer questions posed by the psychologist and only offers his opinion when the psychologist solicits it from him. When Jorge does express his opinions, he appeals to harmony maintenance by stating that the parents are right in most of the scenarios. For example, in the quinceañera scenario described above, the psychologist asks Jorge if he believes the parent or the daughter is right. He simply answers, “the parents.”

During the posttest, Jorge is again quiet and only speaks when spoken to. The psychologist presents the grandma vs. friends example, where a daughter wants to go with her friends, but her parents want her to accompany them in visiting her grandma. Jorge’s uncle tells the psychologist that the parents are right. When the psychologist asks Jorge for his opinion, he hesitates, but ultimately says, “yes, go to grandma’s.”

Discussion

The current study demonstrates that when parents who were accustomed to sharing a more *Gemeinschaft* world with their children change to a situation in which they are far from their children and their home country, the old ways of communicating implicitly and nonverbally are no longer adaptive and *Gesellschaft* modes of explicit communication become adaptive. Moving from monocultural to bicultural communication patterns in which explicit verbal communication complements implicit nonverbal communication becomes necessary for intergenerational harmony (Hwang, 2006). However, because the parents and their recently immigrated children have grown up in a *Gemeinschaft* community, they do not have the skills of explicit verbal communication. This appears to lead to maladaptive patterns of parent–child communication in the *Gesellschaft* environment, which magnifies the negative emotional impacts of long-term separation.

More specifically, this communication pattern magnifies the issue of abandonment. The ability to talk about feelings of abandonment on the part of the children and the ability to listen to these feelings on the part of the parents was probably the most profound effect of the full experimental condition. We leave it to future research to see whether addressing the abandonment issue in a therapeutic intervention also reduces anxiety, depression, and school problems for adolescents who have experienced long-term separation from their parents (Rusch & Reyes, 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Similarly, harmony can be much less natural after a long-term separation in which parents and children have had different experiences. Respect for elders does not have either a cultural basis in the more egalitarian value system of the U.S. nor a developmental basis in reciprocity for parental care and closeness. Similarly, obedience to parents is complicated when parents have left their children from a young age and have not been monitoring their day-to-day behaviors and another adult figure disciplined them. Finally, in a large heterogeneous city with many fleeting relationships and few external controls (especially because parents often have to work long hours or two jobs), the establishment of children's inner moral compass becomes an adaptive necessity.

Through our pretest–posttest design, we demonstrated effectiveness of workshops in alleviating communication problems when both the caregiver and the child participate (full experimental group). Because communication is a two-way street, our intervention was most powerful when both parties experienced it. The partial experimental group also showed the effect of the intervention on the adolescents who participated in the intervention. However, the lack of dialogical response by a parent could be very discouraging for the child, who might therefore give up their newfound skills. However, in one case, we saw an indirect effect—improving the experience of communicating with a parent who was not in our Bridging Cultures project. The issue is how to get parents of adolescents to participate. As others have observed (Eccles & Harold, 1996), parental participation in school activities declines with adolescent children; this may be one reason why our sample was small. However, the small sample size did lend itself to in-depth case studies.

In every case, we found parent–child difficulties came from immigration into a more *Gesellschaft* world. The most basic difficulty was the inability to communicate verbally about the impending separation and continued difficulty after reunification, perhaps because of a priority for group harmony over inner states and self-expression. This was greatly alleviated in the full experimental group. After the intervention, Maria Elisa's parents were willing to communicate in a more egalitarian, less hierarchical fashion. Most important, Maria Elisa's mother was willing to acknowledge the difficulties of long-term

separation for the children. Indeed, both families in the full experimental condition expressed a new willingness to acknowledge different perspectives. Reciprocally, the adolescent participants in the full experimental group, Maria Elisa and Omar, showed more ability to express their own views, including, in Omar's case, feelings about separation from parents in the immigration process. Closely related, we saw both Mary Elisa's and Omar's mother express increased child-centered, developmental perspectives. Last but not least, we saw in Maria Elisa's mother a new understanding that, in the Gesellschaft environment of Los Angeles, parents could not rely on external controls for their adolescent children's behavior; it was necessary for adolescent children to develop their own internal moral compass.

The results of our Bridging Cultures intervention are promising. In terms of future research, they can inform a larger scale quantitative test of our intervention process and model. Future research might consider seeking out sites that are already frequented by Latino immigrant parents, as well as their adolescent children—perhaps a church—making it easier to enroll both in communication workshops.

Recently the focus in the news and in recent scholarship (Humphreys, 2019) has been on forcibly separated families from Central America at the southern border of the U.S. However, families around the world—not only from Central America and Mexico—are undergoing voluntary separation in the process of serial migration (Moskal & Tyrrell, 2016; Zhao et al., 2018). We must not forget the developmental needs of these families. We hope that our study can provide school counselors, school psychologists (Frisby & Jimerson, 2016), and researchers with useful ideas about how best to serve them.

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