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My Heart Was Over There with You and I Was Here: Exploring the Immigration  
Narratives of Families Separated During the Course of Migration

By

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## Abstract

This study explores the immigration-related family separation and reunification experiences of 7 Mexican and Central American families. The data collection methods included participant observation and in-depth interviews with teenagers and their mothers. The study also incorporated longitudinal data collected on participants as part of the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation study (LISA). These longitudinal data included participant observation notes, semi-structured interviews with children and their parents, and schooling outcome data. Data were synthesized to create 7 detailed case studies that bring to life the experiences of immigrant families as they manage complex reunifications during a span that averages 8 years. While reunifications posed a number of challenges for all families, many families were able to manage these events over time. For some families, however, the challenges posed by difficult reunifications were insurmountable and resulted in strained mother-child relationships and maladaptive behaviors in children. The use of case study methodology allowed the inclusion of contextual factors generally overlooked in studies on immigration-related family separations and were found to have a significant impact on how these events are experienced. The longitudinal perspective highlighted the importance of examining reunification processes over time because reunification outcomes can change over the course of time as families adjust to these events and to their host environment. Furthermore, by exploring these events both contextually and longitudinally, this study addresses existing gaps in the literature and moves beyond current frameworks.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to two of the most important men in my life, my father Alfredo Lopez and my late husband Mohamed Diop. Their absence from my life has not only made real the pain of separations but has also helped me understand the poignancy of this work.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	1
Background and Significance	2
Theoretical Framework: Attachment Theory	5
Attachment Theory and Immigration-Related	
Family Separations	10
The Current Study	24
<b>Methods</b>	25
Study Design	26
Participants	27
Procedures	27
Confidentiality and Ethical Concerns	29
Analysis of data	30
Validity and Biases	32
<b>Results</b>	33
Integrated Families: Resourced and Resilient	36
Ambivalent Reunifications: Gains and Loses	48
Disintegrated Families: Difficult Reunifications	109
<b>Discussion</b>	150
Pre-separation Factors	154
Separation Factors	156
Reunification Factors	158
Limitations	160
Implications	161
<b>References</b>	162
<b>Appendices</b>	169

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Participant characteristics, child	26
Table 2: Participant characteristics, mother	27
Table 3: Post-reunification domains of adjustment	34-35

## **My Heart Was Over There with You and I Was Here: Exploring the Immigration Narratives of Families Separated During the Course of Migration**

Immigration is a social process that is slowly changing the face of the American family. According to the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey the foreign-born population in the United States is 38.1 million, nearly 12.6% percent of the total US population. It is also estimated that about 47 percent of this population is of Latin American origin, with Mexicans and Central Americans accounting for over three-fourths of the total Latin American immigrant population in the United States (Grieco, 2009). Moreover, US households headed by non-citizens have been found to be significantly more likely to contain children than households headed by citizens (Schmidley, 2001; Fix, Zimmerman, and Passel, 2001). In 2007, 23 percent of children living in the United States were children of immigrants, and just over half of them were of Hispanic origin (Chaudry & Fortuny, 2010). While the majority of children of immigrants are native born (83%) a significant percentage (17%) are immigrants themselves (Children of Immigrants data tool, 2009). These startling statistics raise some very poignant questions related to the particular welfare and needs of Latino immigrant families in the United States and about the effects that immigration has on the immigrant family's structure and adaptation to the larger society.

According to Suarez Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (2001), immigration is a transformative process with profound implications for the family. The primary task faced by many immigrants and their children upon arrival to a new country is to adapt to the host culture, a task that entails changing behavior, values, attitudes, and identity. But even prior to an immigrant's arrival, there are many difficulties that he must overcome. According to Falicov (1998) for Latinos, immigration has tremendous psychological consequences because it precipitates multiple losses of deep attachments to family and supportive networks. In a culture that stresses cooperation, collectiveness, and strong intergenerational family ties, the pain of separation caused by immigration may be especially acute (Smart & Smart, 1995). Furthermore, "migration is not an experience that belongs solely to the immigrant, nor does an immigrant move in isolation from the attitudes and influences of family and friends" (Falicov, 1998, p. 58). In fact, as Falicov points out, immigration has implications for several groups: those who leave, those who stay behind, those who are already waiting in the new country, and the people of the host culture.

Immigration-related family separations and reunifications are common occurrences in the lives of immigrant families. Yet, little is known about how family members experience these events or about how they are managed. Most of what we know derives from clinical reports of immigrant Caribbean youth with adjustment difficulties and from families trying to manage difficult reunifications. While this literature is useful in identifying some of the issues relevant to separations, it tends to pathologize reunification outcomes. If separations are normative in the migratory journey, as Suarez-Orozco, Bang, and Kim (2010) suggest, to what extent if any, must reunification or adjustment difficulties be normative in the reunification process of immigrant families? The purpose of this study was therefore to explore the separation experiences and



reunification outcomes of Mexican and Central American families. The unique contribution of this study lies not only in its inclusion of mother and child perspectives of these events but also in its longitudinal perspective, whereby immigrant families were followed for a span of seven years.

## **Background and Significance**

Families that migrate usually do so in a “step wise” fashion (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie, 2002). Particularly for Latinos, a common pattern involves the separation of one or more children from their parents and siblings during the process of migration (Falicov, 1998). Economic constraints, immigration laws, and concerns related to the danger of illegal migration (for immigrants who lack visas) are often the factors influencing these particular migration patterns. Traditionally, the father migrates first, becomes established, and then sends for the rest of the family (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). More recently, however, the US demand for female service workers has resulted in more Latinas joining their husbands in their journey, and in some cases, it has prompted single Latina mothers to initiate family migrations alone (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2002; Horton, 2009). These emerging patterns of migration have elicited a number of changes in the way children experience family separations. For instance, whereas in the past children may have been separated only from their fathers, they are now increasingly being separated from both parents. Family separations are viewed by parents as a necessary evil and are usually intended to be short term (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Rousseau, Mekki-Berrada, and Moreau, 2001; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Job constraints, financial hurdles, and legal-status barriers, however, prevent parents from sending for their children right away. Consequently, family separations, initially framed as short term, become protracted.

According to Falicov (1998) in the migration drama, those left behind may suffer with greater intensity than those who leave and become busy adapting to a new way of life. This may be true for children who are left behind by their parents. According to Dreby (2007) however, the effects of these separations can vary based on the child’s age and their developmental needs. Feelings of abandonment, powerlessness, resentment, and depression are not uncommon in children who experience family separations (Dreby, 2007; Pottinger, 2005; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Poor educational outcomes have also been linked to family separations for children in Mexico and the United States (Dreby, 2007; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Pottinger, 2005; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010).

For immigrant mothers, family separations are particularly painful. Feelings of guilt, powerlessness, and depression are not uncommon (Dreby, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). In addition to these feelings, mothers had to confront a number of challenges related to their migration. These included language barriers, cultural differences, long working hours, low wages, and limited social support (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). In short for both mothers and children, separations were difficult events.

Families that have been separated during the migration process eventually reunite. According to the Urban Institute (Fix et al., 2001), family sponsored immigrants account for nearly 75% of all legal entrants into the United States. In 1998 alone,

approximately 80 percent of legal immigrants entering the United States did so in order to join other family members already here. Transnational family reunifications are unique in that they not only signify a family's move towards permanency, but also mark the end of long and painful separations and the commencement of a new phase in the life of the family. For children, family reunifications can precipitate conflicting feelings of happiness and profound sadness. Children may feel happy about the prospect of reuniting with their parents, while at the same time, feel sad about leaving their caregivers, family members, and friends behind. Therefore, even in the best of circumstances, reunifications can be tainted by the pain of loss (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). While these ruptures in significant attachment relationships are important events in the lives of immigrant children little is known about their effects.

For Latino immigrant children, family reunifications are particularly stressful because they require multiple adjustments (Sciarra, 1999). First, children must become accustomed to life with adults they may not have known as parents (in cases in which separations were protracted or initiated when children were very young) while at the same time, coping with the loss of their surrogate caregivers, relatives, friends, and things familiar (Falicov, 2007; Sciarra, 1999). In cases in which changes in the family structure may have taken place, immigrant children must accomplish the task of incorporating themselves into an existing family structure, a challenge that may elicit feelings of alienation and insecurity. Additionally, children are expected to adapt to life in a new social environment (with a different set of values, educational system, and language) that may cause them to lose their sense of social competency and self-esteem (Artico, 2003). Moreover, children must confront stressors associated with integration into a marginalized minority group, including poverty, discrimination, and social marginalization (Falicov, 2007; Smart & Smart, 1995; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). What makes accomplishing all of these tasks particularly difficult for newly-reunified immigrant children, is the absence of a social support network of friends and family. Furthermore, because children may feel unable to rely on their parents for support and guidance, they may consequently feel overwhelmed and overburdened. The lack of parental support for Latino immigrant children upon reunification complicates their ability to overcome post-immigration and reunification adjustment difficulties (Artico, 2003; Falicov, 2007; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Sciarra, 1999; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). In short, much like family separations, family reunifications are also complex social events that merit close scrutiny.

Little is currently known about how families experience immigration related separations and reunifications. What is known however, is that these events are common in the immigrant experience, and that they can be difficult and sometimes traumatic for all involved. In order to begin to understand how immigration-related reunifications affect children and their families an in-depth exploration of how separations are experienced is necessary. Such an exploration would not only advance our understanding of how separations occur and are experienced by children, but would also help identify the factors that either facilitate or hinder the reunification process. It was the purpose of this study to explore how separations and reunifications are experienced by immigrant mothers and children and to identify factors that play a role in how families manage reunifications as well as reconstruct and give meaning to these experiences.

The exploration of immigration-related family separations is important not only because separations are common to the Latino immigrant experience, but because they can result in negative outcomes for both children and their families. In a study conducted by Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila (1997) a high incidence of Latino mothers in the United States with children in their countries of origin was reported. The study, a nonrandom survey of 153 Latina immigrant domestic workers, found that approximately 75 percent of respondents were mothers and of those, 40 percent had at least one child still living “back home”. In their longitudinal study of 385 immigrant children from China, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Central America, and Mexico, Suarez-Orozco et al., (2002) reported a high incidence of family separations among their entire sample. The study found that approximately 86 percent of study participants had experienced some form of family separation during the process of migration, and that Latinos as a group, had some of the highest incidences of family separations.

A host of negative outcomes have been associated with immigration-related family separations. Suarez-Orozco et al., (2002) reported that recently arrived<sup>1</sup> immigrant children who had been separated from their parents during the course of migration were more likely to report depressive symptoms than children who had migrated along with their parents. Because important information about the children’s separations experiences, including age at the time of the separation and quality of substitute care in their countries of origin, was not reported, it is difficult to determine what factors specific to immigration-related family separation may have resulted in a higher incidence of depressive symptomatology. Other negative consequences attributed to these separations include behavioral problems and family conflict upon reunification (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Pottinger, 2005; Pribilsky, 2001; Sciarra, 1999; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002; Suarez Orozco et al., 2010). Behavioral problems are seen as stemming from feelings of rejection and abandonment that prompt children to respond to separations by “acting out” in ways that are unconstructive (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Pottinger, 2005). Complications in family dynamics are also frequently reported (Falicov, 1998; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). It has been suggested that family conflict during the process of reunification may be a result of attachment difficulties that hinder the process of bonding between parents and children. Feelings of estrangement may also complicate this process (Artico, 2003; Glasgow and Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Sciarra, 1999; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Another factor contributing to family conflict is parents’ inability to understand the adjustment difficulties experienced by their children. This lack of understanding has been found to produce patterns of behavior that result in emotional distress for children and that compromise their ability to rely on parents for support with post-immigration adjustment problems (Artico, 2003; Baptiste et al., 1997; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Sciarra, 1999). Given the prevalence of these types of separations and the negative consequences associated with them, a deeper exploration of how the lives of Latino immigrant children are affected by these events is necessary.

Much can be learned from the way in which children and their families are able to overcome the difficulties that immigration-related separations and reunifications engender. An in depth study of separations may reveal that these events may not always be problematic or necessarily result in negative outcomes. The separation

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<sup>1</sup> The study defined recently arrived as having been in the United States for less than three years.

literature tells us that when parental separations are carefully thought out and planned, when the provision of substitute care is adequately negotiated, and when accompanying losses are minimized, children are likely to experience less adjustment difficulties. Can this be also said of immigration related reunifications? Are there protective factors that mitigate the negative effects of immigration related separations? These are some of the questions this exploration of immigration-related family separations and reunifications attempted to answer.

### **Theoretical Framework: Attachment Theory**

The literature on immigration-related family separations suggests that negative reunification outcomes are a result of disruptions in the process of bonding and attachment between parents and children (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Sciarra; 1999). Therefore, a discussion of the nature of parent-child attachment and the consequences that derive from disruptions of these bonds may contribute to our understanding of the impact of these events on immigrant children. In the next section, an overview of attachment theory is presented, followed by a discussion of the theory's most basic principles, including the monotropy hypothesis, secure dependence, attachment patterns, and internal working models. Lastly, the applicability of attachment theory to the study of Latinos and to the problem of immigration-related family separations is also addressed.

Attachment theory provides us with a useful framework with which to begin exploring the importance of parent-child relationships and the negative effects that result from disruptions of these primary affective bonds. The theory was originally developed by John Bowlby to explain the enduring and affective attachment bonds between children and their mothers. It postulates that primary bonds between mothers and infants are biologically determined and intended to ensure the survival of the human species. Thus, the need for infant-adult attachment developed in response to infants' vulnerability and need for an adult provider of nourishment, protection, and warmth. It relies on the existence of "pre-wired" dispositions on the part of both infants and adults to behave in ways that increase the likelihood of attachment. An infant's tendency to seek and maintain proximity to an attachment figure and the tendency of the attachment figure to respond to the child's signals are examples of these evolutionary tendencies (Goldberg, 2000).

Attachment is thought to be mediated through a set of behaviors or instinctual responses of the child that make the availability and responsiveness of an attachment figure more likely. Behaviors such as sucking, clinging and crying for example, ensure the likelihood that the parental figure will always respond to and remain accessible to meet the child's need. These behaviors as well as caregiver responses to them comprise what is referred to as the Attachment Behavioral System. This system is goal-corrected and acts flexibly to attain the goal of contact or proximity. Therefore, if a particular behavior fails to ensure the desired response from the attachment figure, a different behavior is attempted until the goal of proximity and/or contact is hopefully attained.

## Secure Dependence

According to attachment theory, early relational experiences constitute the basis of children's notions about themselves, others, and about human relationships as a whole (Goldberg, 2000). Therefore, disruptions in parent-child relational bonds, like those precipitated by immigration-related family separations, can hold disastrous for children's sense of self worth and belief in the dependability and trustworthiness of others. The concept of Secure Dependence best illustrates this point. Secure dependence refers to the infant's ability to use the attachment figure for two distinct purposes: 1) as a secure base for the exploration of the environment, and 2) as a safety heaven to which to return for reassurance. How effectively children are in developing secure dependence depends largely on the quality of the attachment relationship, in particular, the attachment figure's sensitivity and responsiveness to their signals. Responsive mothering helps babies experience and develop a sense of confidence in themselves (as effective in eliciting love and nurturance) and in the dependability of their attachment figures (as providers of love and nurturance) that allows them to develop physically and emotionally (Ainsworth, 1983). Disruptions in the mothering functions of the attachment figure can damage the child's sense of security, safety, and reliability in his environment. According to Bowlby (1973) it is this failed sense of security that causes children to believe that nobody is to be relied upon in this world, a response with serious consequences for their development of a self-identity and relational ties to those around them.

## Infant Attachment Classifications

According to attachment theory, the consequences stemming from disruptions in the mother-child relationship can have an impact on children's future behaviors and attachments. Infants develop patterns of attachment behavior that reflect the quality of their attachment relationships. These patterns are not necessarily deterministic of future behavior, yet are considered to initiate developmental trends that make the achievement of later optimal functioning more or less difficult (Harwood et al., 1995). There are four main attachment patterns or classifications: Secure, Insecure-Avoidant, Insecure-Resistant, and Disorganized-Disoriented. Ainsworth (1983) believed that children's attachment experiences were largely responsible for the qualitative differences in their attachment behaviors, such that behaviors that children developed were adaptations to the parenting behaviors of their attachment figures. Attachment theory would postulate that children separated from their mothers during the course of migration would be at a higher risk of acquiring maladaptive patterns of attachment that could consequently compromise their development.

**Secure attachment.** Securely attached children are confident in their mothers' ability to provide security and comfort because they have learned that their signals of distress will elicit a maternal response that is likely to reduce stress. Hence, attachment behaviors are consistent with the organization and adaptive function of the secure base concept. They are able to explore their environment away from their attachment figure (while monitoring her accessibility) and, in the face of threat or uncertainty, to seek her

protection and comfort. Moreover, secure dependence enables them to become involved more attentively and for longer periods of time in exploration and learning. Consequently, they learn and are able to increase their socio-emotional, cognitive, and behavioral repertoire more rapidly than insecurely attached children (Colin, 1996). Security also enables them to develop more adaptive socio-emotional skills and behaviors, including ego resilience, social competence, positive affect, empathy, persistence, and compliance (Ainsworth, 1983; Bowlby, 1982; Colin, 1996; Goldberg, 2000). When mothers migrate, children's sense of security may be compromised as well as their ability to gain the skills necessary for optimal development. If left in caring environments however, separations may not be as harmful.

**Insecure attachment.** Insecure infants (avoidant, resistant, or disorganized-disoriented) are characterized by their inability to use their attachment figure as a secure base. This is because they have learned, from their interactions with their attachment figures, that their signs of distress are unlikely to elicit a consistent and satisfactory response. In home observations, mothers of avoidant children were rejecting, slow to respond to infant distress, and uncomfortable with close bodily contact (Ainsworth, et al., 1978). Some mothers were openly hostile to their children, while others were withdrawn and unresponsive (Colin, 1996). In response to their caregiving experiences, avoidant infants develop maladaptive strategies to alleviate their stress (Colin, 1996; Goldberg, 2000). They learn to suppress or deactivate their attachment needs (in order to avoid maternal rejection) and to systematically exclude from awareness attachment related information. Gradually, they begin to develop strategies for restricting awareness and expression, not only of attachment but also of negative affect in general (hiding anger or pain behind bright affect) in situations and interactions where it is maladaptive. Avoidant patterns of attachment have been associated with emotional insulation, lack of empathy, and antisocial behavior (Colin, 1996; Freeman & Brown, 1999). The risk for children who are separated during the course of migration of developing insecure attachment patterns is amplified when they are left with caregivers who are neglectful or abusive. For these children, maladaptive attachment behaviors, emotional problems, and poor social skills may be the inevitable cost of these separations.

Resistant infants hyper-activate or exaggerate their attachment behaviors and emotions as a means of eliciting the attention and response of an insensitive and inconsistent caregiver (Colin, 1996; Goldberg, 2000). They alternate dramatic displays of affect (anger or coy behavior) in order to force the caregiver to comply with their needs for attention and nurturance. Anger is used to ensure maternal compliance; coy behavior (fear and neediness) is used to disarm any aggression from the attachment figure and to elicit her nurturance. Resistant strategies create a cycle of angry and soothing interactions that rarely meet the child's need for an attentive, accessible secure base. Consequently, children remain angry, unlikely to develop self-reliance, and important cognitive, behavioral, and social skills. Resistant patterns of attachment at infancy have been associated with less ego control (impulsivity), lack of self reliance, and less desirable social behavior in school-age children (Colin, 1996).

According to Main & Solomon (1990), disoriented/disorganized infants are characterized by their lack of an attachment strategy or behavioral pattern. In

observations of parent-child separations and reunions, they exhibit disorganized and disoriented behaviors, such as freezing, fear and apprehension at the sight of the attachment figure, and dazed, disoriented, affect-less, or depressed facial expressions (Colin, 1996). Crittenden (1994) argues that rather than disorganized, these responses are disturbed adaptations to disturbed or abusive patterns of caregiving. Thus, freezing may be a strategy adopted by infants to assess their mothers' mood and behavioral responses before seeking contact and proximity. When their facial expressions alert them that she is not in the mood to provide comfort, children may opt not to approach their mothers. In the likelihood that comfort may be provided, children will not want to miss the opportunity to receive it. Disorganized/disoriented patterns have been found to occur in high frequency among maltreated infants and those with depressed mothers; they have also been associated with a number of negative outcomes, including behavioral problems in school, psychopathology, and dissociative symptomatology in adolescence (Carlson, 1998; Goldberg, 2000). According to attachment theory, we would expect children who have experienced parental separations and inadequate care to exhibit insecure patterns of attachment that may compromise their optimal development. For Latino children who are left in the care of extended families, these risks may be minimized by the availability of secondary attachment figure that is reliable and attentive to the child's needs and by a supportive caregiving environment.

### **Attachment Classifications Beyond Infancy**

Beyond infancy, attachment is assessed at the representational level. The most widely used instrument is the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), which assesses individuals' "state of mind" or attitude toward attachment (George et al., 1985). The interview focuses mainly on the subjects' early attachment experiences and on their current thoughts about attachment. Four attachment patterns or classifications are derived from the AAI: Secure/Autonomous, Dismissing, Preoccupied, and Unresolved. Security is reflected in the subject's ability to organize attachment related memories and emotions into a coherent narrative discourse. An incoherent organization of attachment related information is characteristic of most insecure patterns (dismissing, preoccupied, and unresolved). This is of particular relevance to the current study as reunited children may have distinct attitudes towards their parents and peers that may have been shaped by their experiences during the parental separation.

Secure/Autonomous individuals have positive representations of attachment (Colin, 1996; Goldberg, 2000). They value intimate relationships and acknowledge the importance and influence of these relationships in their own lives and personality development. Dismissing individuals understate the importance of attachment experiences in their lives, and the need for attachment relationships (Goldberg, 2000). Like avoidant infants, they use deactivating strategies of either restricting their recall (claiming not to remember anything from their childhood) or reporting semantic and episodic memories about their parents that contradict each other (they may idealize their parents and yet describe instances of rejection and neglect that contradict their idealization) (Main, 1991). Preoccupied individuals have enmeshed attitudes towards attachment relationships. They have access to childhood memories but have difficulty integrating them into a coherent model of relationships (Main & Goldwyn, 1985). Their current relationships with their parents are marked by active anger or passivity. Lastly,

individuals with unresolved attachment patterns have not succeeded in reorganizing their attachment behavior and report attachment related trauma (of loss and/or abuse) that has not been reconciled (Colin, 1996; Goldberg, 2000). Therefore their attachment narratives tend to be incoherent and disoriented when describing their trauma and its effects.

According to Allen et al., (1998) the ability to process emotion and memories around attachment experiences is a developmental capacity integrally linked to numerous aspects of psychosocial functioning. Hence secure patterns of attachment beyond infancy are more adaptive and reflect an optimal level of functioning whereas insecure patterns tend to reflect poor functioning. In a number of studies, autonomous attachment has been associated with self-confidence, social competence and acceptability, and willingness to seek support from others (Allen et al., 1998; Colin, 1996; Goldberg, 2000; Freeman & Brown, 2001; Kaleita, 1990; Mitchell, 1990). Non autonomous attachment patterns have been associated with less social competence, alienation, and higher levels of internalizing (depression and anxiety), externalizing (anger, hostility), and deviant behaviors (Allen et al., 1998; Kaleita, 1990; Mitchell, 1990). We would therefore expect children who have been separated from their parents to exhibit poor psychosocial functioning during the reunification. We would also expect them to have difficulties discussing their separation experiences and to have unresolved attachment related trauma. Furthermore, we would expect children's inability to engage in relationships with their parents to result in difficult reunifications.

### **Internal Working Models**

Central to attachment theory and to our understanding of how children experience immigration-related family separations are internal working models. As Bowlby (1973) conceptualized them, internal working models are cognitive and affective maps of the self, others, and relationships that include feelings, beliefs, expectations, behavioral strategies, as well as rules for directing attention, interpreting information, and organizing memories (Colin, 1996). These working models begin to take shape early in a child's life and are influenced by early attachment experiences. Each child's internal working model includes concepts of the self, the attachment figure, and expectations of the relationship. The self is conceptualized in terms of its adequacy, ability to elicit love, worthiness, and competence. Internal working models of attachment figures include information about their accessibility and emotional responsiveness (Colin, 1996). Bowlby used the term "working model" to indicate that these representations are not static, but rather are subject to change as new experiences accumulate (Goldberg, 2000). The manner into which new information is added to or integrated into the model, however, is shaped by its existing nature. So that the effects of early attachment experiences are carried forward in these models, even as they undergo change.

Internal working models predispose individuals to certain patterns of affect, cognition, behavior, and ways of relating to others. Individuals with positive internal representations are more likely to be confident, flexible, and open in their interactions with others. Individuals with negative representational models are more likely to perceive themselves as unlovable, unworthy, and incompetent. They are also likely to



see others (e.g., their parents) as untrustworthy and unreliable and may expect to be treated poorly. Consequently, they may develop interpersonal strategies that are constrained, inflexible, and maladaptive. Their lack of flexibility and general distrust for others is likely to complicate their ability to build, experience, and sustain loving relationships (Bowlby, 1973). Children who have experienced parental separation may be at risk of developing negative internal working models especially if they perceive the separation as abandonment. In such cases, they may perceive their parents as untrustworthy and themselves as unworthy. Such representations may have dire consequences on their development of a sense of self and result in difficult parent-child reunifications.

### **The Limitations of Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory not only highlights the importance of parent-child relationships during the early years of life, but also points to the developmental challenges that derive from disruptions of these attachment bonds. Based on this theory, we would expect parent-child separations resulting from parental migration to compromise children's healthy development. Unfortunately however, there are no studies evaluating the effects of immigration-related family separations on the developmental outcomes of immigrant Latino children. Moreover, attachment is a theory primarily focused on the mother-child dyad, therefore, the inclusion of extended family constellations that are more common among Latinos in the study of attachment has been limited. This limitation makes it difficult to ascertain how parent-child separations may be managed in these collective caregiving environments (Harwood et al., 1995; Mitchell, 1990; Posada et al., 1999). Studies of infants in collective caregiving environments suggest that the availability of multiple caregivers may serve as a protective factor that buffers children from the negative effects of parental deprivation (Morelli & Tronick, 1991). Therefore, if the child rearing in Latino families is a collective effort, as the value of familismo would suggest, children's outcomes may not be negative. More research exploring the child rearing practices of Latino extended families may provide insights about the effectiveness of these collective caregiving systems in safeguarding children from the harmful effects of parental absence. Additionally, studies that focus on the effects of migration on the attachment relationships of separated families may add to our understanding of how these relationships are redefined, sustained, and/or negotiated by geographical separation.

### **Attachment Theory and Immigration Related-Family Separations**

Attachment theory suggests that parent-child separations place children at risk of developing insecure attachment patterns and internal working models shaped by feelings of ambivalence towards the self and poor expectations of attachment figures and relationships. This may be especially true for children who are left behind at a young age and for those who in their parents' absence experience a lack of consistent and adequate care. To date, few studies have explored the effects of attachment disruptions on Latino immigrant children. What the existing literature on immigration-related family separations suggests is that factors specific to the separation and

reunification experiences of children, including age, quality of the parent-child relationship, quality of substitute care, and length of the separation may have much to do with how they eventually fare once families are reunited (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Pottinger, 2005; Sciarra, 1999; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). According to Artico (2003), these factors not only influence children's notions of themselves and their parents (their internal working models), but also their predisposition to reunifications and their ability to cope with the stresses of migration. Hence, if children's separation and reunification experiences result in negative feelings about themselves and their parents, then reunifications outcomes are likely to be problematic. If experiences reinforce positive representations of themselves and their parents, then children are less likely to feel ambivalent about the reunification and to experience less adjustment problems.

In this section, the factors influencing the separation and reunification experiences of Latino immigrant children are examined. The discussion will be informed by attachment theory and by the literature on immigration-related family separations. First, the influence of pre-separation factors, including context of parental migration, age, and quality of parent-child relationship, on children's adjustment to parent-child separations will be explored. Secondly, an examination of how separation factors, including the quality of substitute care and parent-child relationship, can reinforce or negate children's beliefs regarding the parental migration (as parental abandonment or sacrifice) and their predisposition to family reunifications. Lastly, factors particular to the reunification experiences of Latino immigrant children, including length of the separation, age, and quality of the parent-child relationship, can influence their post-immigration and reunification adjustment outcomes are discussed.

## **Pre-Separation Factors**

**Context leading to parental migration.** The literature on immigration-related family separations suggests that separations that occur within the context of adversity, such as war, political persecution, domestic violence, and divorce are particularly stressful for children (Perez-Foster, 2001; Rousseau et al., 1997; Rousseau et al., 2001; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). In cases in which the parental migration is precipitated by war or political persecution, trauma associated with the parental migration may alter or complicate children's responses to the separation (Rousseau et al., 1997; Rousseau et al., 2001; Santa-Maria and Cornille, 2007). Similarly, in cases in which the demise of the marital relationship occurs in conjunction to or prior to the migration, children must cope with the dissolution of the family unit in addition to the parent-child separation (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Furthermore, when the migrating parent is the child's primary caretaker (the mother) separations are more difficult than when the migrating parent is the one who is more distant (Artico, 2003; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002)

The context leading to the parental migration can also influence children's understanding of the separation experience, as either parental sacrifice or abandonment, and consequently, shape the nature of their internal working models (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995). Therefore, if the parental migration is perceived as an act of sacrifice, children are likely to internalize positive representations of the self (as lovable) and of their parents (as self-sacrificing, dependable, and

trustworthy). Conversely, if the parental migration is perceived as an act of abandonment, children are likely to develop negative internal representations of themselves, their parents, and attachment relationships. According to Artico (2003) it is easier for children to internalize the migration as parental sacrifice when the reasons behind it are external (e.g., when parents are fleeing war, political persecution, and/or economic hardship). In such cases, children may come to view their parents as victims of external forces and with little choice in their decision to migrate. For children who believe that their parents migrated to the United States to seek a better economic life for the family, tangible proof of their parents' sacrifice (e.g., a new house, improvement in their quality of life) may facilitate their acceptance of the migration as sacrifice. Moreover, if children are old enough to remember how poor the family was before their parents' departure, it may be easier for them to internalize the belief that their parents left in order to rescue them from poverty and hardship. In contrast, children who have no point of reference, do not experience poverty, or an improvement in their quality of life during the parental absence, may be confused by their parents' decision to migrate and may develop feelings of rejection and abandonment that color their separation and reunification experiences (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

Internal reasons for parental migration, including divorce, family conflict, and abuse were found to be more difficult for children to accept and internalize as parental sacrifice because they were considered less heroic (Artico, 2003). According to Artico, fleeing from domestic violence, divorce, or family conflict presented a greater source of conflict and anxiety for children because in such cases the factor propelling the parental migration came from within the family, from people children loved and wanted to be close to. Family conflict in particular, resulted in additional stress for children who found themselves forced to take sides or choose between family members. Furthermore, if the migration of the parent was viewed by family members in a negative light, children were unable to openly grieve their loss (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Disparaging comments about the absent parents and the meaning behind their "abandonment" also affected how children internalized the separation experience (Artico, 2003; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

**Age at the time of separation.** Bowlby's monotropy hypotheses would predict that immigrant children who are left behind as infants may be less affected by parental migration than older children because they have not yet developed an attachment to their parents (Bowlby, 1973; Morelli & Tronick, 1991). In a number of studies, less severe responses to parent-child separations have been observed in young infants (6 to 12 months old) when compared to older children (Bowlby, 1973; Chisholm et al., 1995; Chisholm, 1998; Goldberg, 2000; Morelli & Tronick, 1991; Stovall & Dozier, 2000). The lack of problematic responses to separations in young infants has been attributed to the absence of an attachment hierarchy. Therefore, younger children show fewer signs of distress after separations and are easily soothed by substitute caregivers because they have not developed a preference for their parents (mothers) as primary attachment figures. Older children, who have developed this preference, have more severe reactions to parent-child separations; they show intense and prolonged behavioral distress, search persistently for their mothers, and resist other's attempts to comfort

them (Bowlby, 1973; Bates & Dozier, 2002). These findings suggest that Latino immigrant children who are separated from their parents may find separations more stressful if these occur after an attachment preference (for the emigrating parent) has been established. If separations occur before an attachment hierarchy has been developed or if children's preferred attachment figure is not the emigrating parent, separation reactions may not be severe.

According to the immigration-related separations literature, age is also a factor that can determine how a child comes to understand and make meaning of the separation experience (Artico, 2003; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Children, who are old enough to remember their parents' migration and to understand the reasons behind it, may be less conflicted about the separation than children who are too young to understand the reasons behind the separation. For these children, separations are likely to remain a source of confusion and ambiguity. Moreover, they may need to rely on their surrogate caregivers for explanations and interpretations regarding the parental absence. When substitute caregivers are not straightforward or accurate in their explanations, children may be more likely to perceive the parental migration as an act of rejection and abandonment. Furthermore, these untruths or half-truths may consequently shape children's representations of adults, who may be perceived as untrustworthy and unreliable. Once children are reunited with their parents, negative representations of adults may hinder their ability to establish a healthy and trusting relationship with them. According to Artico (2003) the combination of half-truths and poor communication between children and their surrogate caregivers can also contribute to children feeling not only a sense of doubt in how they perceive reality, but also a general distrust of adults and their ability to help them understand that reality.

**Quality of the parent-child relationship.** It has been suggested that the quality of the parent child relationship may be a reflection of the quality of parent-child attachment and, that children's responses or reactions to parent-child separations reflect attachment behaviors (adaptive vs. maladaptive) that they have adopted in response to their previous caregiving experiences (Bates & Dozier, 2002; Bowlby, 1973; Carlson, 1998; Chisholm, 1998; Goldberg, 2000; Kaleita, 1990; Stovall & Dozier, 2000). Therefore, immigrant children's negative feelings about the separation (including feelings of rejection or abandonment) may also be a direct result of poor attachment. Immigrant children who have developed insecure attachment may be unable to internalize their parents' migration as an act of sacrifice, because their early relational experiences may have taught them that adults are undependable and untrustworthy (Colin, 1996; Goldberg, 2000). These attachment experiences may also contribute to the development of internal working models of the self as incompetent and unworthy of their parent's love and the internalization of the parental migration as a rejection of them (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Goldberg, 2000). Children who have developed secure attachment representations of themselves and their attachment figures are more likely to internalize the parental migration as an act of sacrifice; their prior caregiving experiences have taught them that their parents are dependable and trustworthy individuals and that they are worthy of their love (Artico, 2003; Bowlby, 1973; Goldberg, 2000; Pottinger, 2005).

The quality of the parent-child attachment relationship prior to the separation

cannot only influence children's understanding of the separation event but also their adjustment to the separation, including their ability to establish secure attachment relationships with their substitute caregivers (Bates & Dozier, 2002; Bowlby, 1973; Chisholm et al., 1995; Chisholm, 1998; Goldberg, 2000; Stovall & Dozier, 2000). In a study of foster care placement, children with insecure attachment behaviors were reported as experiencing more adjustment difficulties than children displaying secure attachment behaviors (Stovall & Dozier, 2000). It was hypothesized that because these children were entrenched in insecure modes of relating, that they had developed defensive behaviors unfavorable to the establishment of secure attachment relationships. They were also more likely to display a greater amount of attachment related difficulties (crying, prolonged behavioral distress), less secure behaviors (e.g., acting like they did not need or want the care of their foster or adoptive parents), and to form insecure attachments with their substitute caregivers. Similar findings were reported in a longitudinal study of Romanian orphans where it was found that extended periods of neglect and social deprivation prior to adoption contributed to the development of insecure attachment behaviors that hindered their adoptive parents' ability to respond to them in ways adequate for the development of secure attachment (Chisholm et al., 1995; Chisholm, 1998). Studies of American orphans placed in foster and adoptive homes also reported a link between maternal deprivation and insecure attachment behaviors which resulted in children's inability to establish secure attachment relationships with their foster/adoptive parents (Bowlby, 1973).

Attachment theory would predict that immigrant children who experience maternal deprivation or neglect prior to the separation may lack the sense of security (secure dependence) necessary for their healthy socio-emotional development (Bowlby, 1973; Goldberg, 2000). For Latino children living within the context of an extended family constellation, however, it is likely that the parent-child relationship is not the only factor contributing to their socio-emotional development. In fact, Latino children may have the opportunity to establish several attachment relationships early on. And it is likely, as the research on Hausa and Efe children suggests, that these relationships may safeguard them against the negative effects of parental absence or neglect, particularly, if these secondary attachment relationships are secure and provide them with the consistent care and emotional responsiveness necessary for their healthy socio-emotional development.

## **Separation Factors**

**Quality of substitute care.** Attachment theory would predict that the quality of substitute care that immigrant children experience during the separation can influence their attachment patterns (secure vs. insecure) as well as their socio-emotional development (Bates & Dozier, 2002; Carlson, 1998; Goldberg, 2000; Moran-Taylor, 2008). When surrogate caregivers provide consistent care and emotional responsiveness (necessary for the development of attachment) children are more likely to develop positive attachment representations, which consequently lead to positive developmental outcomes. Findings from a study of foster child placement support this assumption. In their study, Bates & Dozier (2002) found that foster mothers who were responsive (responded promptly and consistently to infant signs of distress) and

emotionally available were more likely to have children who developed secure patterns of attachment. Moreover, because these caregivers had positive feelings regarding the importance of attachment relationships (classified as autonomous), they were more willing and better equipped to provide their children with sensitive caregiving. Based on these findings, we can expect immigrant children placed in these types of substitute caregiving environments to develop security and the socio-emotional skills (e.g., self-esteem, flexibility, competency, and resiliency) necessary for successful adaptation to parent-child separations.

In contrast, children placed in less adequate caregiving environments may have less emotional support and fewer skills to help them manage separations. In their study, Bates & Dozier (2002) found that foster mothers with nonautonomous attachment representations, who tended to undervalue attachment relationships, were less responsive and less willing to invest emotionally in their children. As a result, they were more likely to raise children with disorganized patterns of attachment. Because disorganized attachment has been found to place children at risk of developing behavioral problems psychological disturbances later in life (Carlson, 1998; Goldberg, 2000) findings from this study raise important concerns regarding the welfare of immigrant children who are placed in the care of unresponsive and insensitive caregivers. For these children, rejecting, inconsistent, and hostile surrogates may contribute to the development of insecure patterns of attachment, negative internal representations, and socio-emotional difficulties that may hinder their ability to manage separations (Bates & Dozier, 2002; Carlson, 1998; Chisholm et al., 1995; Chisholm, 1998; Radke-Yarrow et al., 1995; Scharf, 2001). Moreover, their insecurity may predispose them to behave in ways that may complicate their reunification outcomes.

The negative effects of inadequate substitute care can be long lasting and can influence the attachment patterns that children develop during adolescence (Kaleita, 1990; Mitchell, 1990; Scharf, 2001). Scharf (2001), found that adolescents who had experienced prolonged separations from their parents and inadequate substitute care (when children were distressed at night, they were not responded to promptly) were more likely to develop insecure patterns of attachment (nonautonomous attachment patterns). Moreover, it was suggested that the recurrent frustration of attachment needs may have caused children to develop negative representations of attachment figures as unavailable and unreliable, and that these negative representations may have permanently impaired their ability to cope with stressful situations (imagined separations). Findings from this study also suggest the possibility that inadequate caregiving contexts may produce in immigrant children attachment difficulties that may adversely affect their ability to manage reunifications successfully.

According to the separations literature, substitute caregivers are instrumental in shaping Latino children's separation experiences and their understanding of separation events (Artico, 2003; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002; Rousseau et al., 2001). By reminding children of their parents' reasons for migrating, substitute caregivers are the keepers of the image of the absent parents. Whether positive or disparaging, their messages are internalized by children and used to construct their own narrative accounts of the separation event. When coherent, these separation narratives help them make sense of their separation experiences and preserve the representations of their absent parents (as dependable and self-sacrificing or rejecting and unreliable). When children are

provided (by their parents and caregivers) conflicting messages about the separation, children may feel confused and may find it difficult to construct a coherent separation narrative. As a result they may feel ambivalent about the separation and about their parents' reasons for migrating. This ambivalence, may consequently give rise to feelings of abandonment. When messages about their parents are positive and consistent, children may find it easier to internalize their migration as an act of love and to feel secure in their attachment to them.

Artico (2003) suggests that although positive messages about their parents may help children frame their separation experiences in a positive light, they can also become an additional source of stress. Such that, when children are constantly reminded of their parents' sacrifice, they may feel pressured to demonstrate their gratefulness by suppressing their negative or ambivalent feelings about the separation. When children's feelings become suppressed, their grief becomes disenfranchised (Doka, 1989; Boss, 1999). Additional hardship is experienced when children are expressly denied the permission to grieve or discouraged from talking about their absent parents or about the feelings associated with the separation. Moreover, the lack of factors that facilitate grieving, including rituals, formal acknowledgments, and support from family members, can further complicate their adjustment process. Hence, being constantly reminded of their parents' sacrifice may help them internalize positive representations of them, however, it may hinder their ability to cope with their absence, making the adjustment process more difficult. (Artico, 2003; Sciarra, 1999; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

Within the Latino immigrant experience, reliance on extended family members as care providers for children left behind is a practice commonly reported (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2002). Reliance on grandmothers for shared mothering in particular, is a well established practice within the Latino culture that signifies a more collectivistic, shared approach to mothering (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1997). It is therefore important to examine the influence that these caregiving practices have on children's adjustment to separation events. If prior to their parents' departure Latino children have established an attachment relationship to their grandmothers, then this bond may have the potential of mitigating the negative effects of parental absence (Colin, 1996; Goldberg, 2000; Morelli & Tronick, 1991). Furthermore, if the grandmothers have been involved in the care of the children since birth, then it is likely that the continuity of care following their parents' departure may contribute to their adjustment to the separation. Moreover, within a shared caregiving environment, it is possible that Latino children's preferred attachment figures may not be their migrating parents, but rather their grandmothers (Colin, 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Marvin et al., 1977). In such cases, the parental migration may not be experienced as traumatic by children.

As attachment theorists have pointed out, it is not so much the physical presence of the mother per se that is important for healthy development, but rather the quality of care and nurturance that children receive. Hence, if in their parents' absence children are cared for by loving relatives, separations may not be detrimental. According to Bowlby (1973) the presence of attachment figures able to provide the nurturance needed for healthy development may guarantee a propitious outcome for children who are separated from their mothers. What attachment theory suggests is that the

availability of an extended family network with multiple attachment figures may be a protective factor for Latino immigrant children affected by parental migration (Bowlby, 1973; Colin, 1996; Goldberg, 2000; Marvin et al., 1977).

**Quality of the parent-child relationship.** Another factor important in shaping children's separation and reunification outcomes is the quality of the parent-child relationship during the separation (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). According to Artico (2003) frequent contact with children, through phone calls, letters, gifts, and remittances, is essential for maintaining a transnational parent-child connection and for validating the belief that parents migrated for the benefit of the family. Therefore, children's feelings of abandonment can be minimized when they experience their parents as good providers and perceive that their migration has resulted in tangible improvements in their quality of life (Artico, 2003). If children's lives do not improve or if parents fail to provide them with the resources that justify their absence, children may feel abandoned by them and may be unable to trust their reasons for migrating. This lack of trust consequently hinders children's ability to trust their parents' ability to be dependable and trustworthy once they are reunited (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

The separation literature points to the important role that gifts and remittances play in the maintenance of transnational parent-child relationships (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Lashley, 2000; Moran-Taylor, 2008). According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (2002) remittances and other gifts serve as an emotional link that connects children with their absent parents and lessens the stresses associated with separations. Similar to transitional objects, these transnational goods provide children with a tangible connection to their absent parents as well as proof of their parents' commitment. Gifts and remittances, however, can be poor substitutes for parental love and can contribute to the materialization of the parent-child relationship (Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). In which case, children may come to believe that material provision is an act of love that makes up for years of neglect and abandonment. When gifts and financial support from their parents is absent or inconsistent, children may come to believe that they are unloved by their parents (Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995). Although of symbolic and emotional importance, remittances and gifts can place undue pressure on parents to continuously gratify their children with material goods (Artico, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Olwig, 1999). When parents and children are eventually reunited, and parents are no longer able to spoil them with gifts, children may feel deprived and may come to believe that their parents deceived them about their economic reality and that in reality they never loved them (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995).

## **Reunification Factors**

**Length of the separation.** The separation literature suggests that longer separations result in more difficult reunifications because during their time apart, both parents and children are subject to different socialization pressures that eventually cause them to "grow apart" (Falicov, 2002; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Sciarra



(1999); Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Parents may establish new relationships with new partners, marriages may dissolve, and children may become attached to their surrogate caregivers (Falicov, 2002; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). According to Sciarra (1999), this estrangement is inevitable, despite the efforts of immigrant parents to maintain a fair degree of emotional involvement in the lives of their children (through phone calls, letters, and in some cases visits). Therefore, when parents and children are reunited, children may perceive their parents as strangers, and for parents, children may remain frozen at an earlier age (Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Lashley, 2000; Sciarra, 1999; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). According to Sciarra (1999) another difficulty encountered by recently reunited parent-child dyads concerns the difference in their acculturation rates. As newcomers, children may find it difficult to adjust to a new way of life and may experience acculturative stress (Smart & Smart, 1995). Immigrant parents, having already acclimated to the host environment, may find it difficult to relate to the difficulties experienced by their children. When they are insensitive to their children's adjustment difficulties, overly critical of them, or hold expectations that they are unable to meet, children's sense of self is damaged (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995). For children with insecure attachment representations, parental insensitivity not only validates the negative feelings they harbor about themselves (negative self-concept), but also the negative representation they have of others (as undependable, untrustworthy, and rejecting).

When separations are protracted, children inevitably form deep attachments to their substitute caregivers; because of the deep seeded nature of these attachments, reunifications can be painful events and may be experienced more intensely than parent-child separations (Artico, 2003; Baptiste, 1997; Falicov, 2002; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). For children, the prospect of separating from their surrogate caregivers can create a profound sense of loss and alienation (Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Lashley, 2000; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). According to Falicov (2000), protracted parent-child separations may also place families at risk of boundary ambiguities and concomitant individual and relational problems. Children may become confused as to who their real parents are, and this confusion can result in relational problems between surrogates and natural parents (who is entitled to the love of the child, who is the real parent), as well as between children and their parents (children's inability or refusal of their love and authority).

Longer parent-child separations are particularly problematic for children who in their parents' absence are left in substitute caregiving environments that are inadequate and unresponsive to their attachment needs (Artico, 2003; Bowlby, 1973; Colin, 1996; Goldberg, 2000). In studies of children adopted from orphanages where the opportunity to establish attachment relationships was unavailable (due partly to an extremely high child/caregiver ratio), it was reported that longer stays in these environments placed children at a greater risk of developing insecure attachment and internal working models shaped by feelings of mistrust in the self and others (Bowlby, 1973; Chisholm, et al., 1995; Chisholm, 1998; Goldberg, 2000). These children displayed a number of maladaptive behaviors that made the eventual establishment of secure attachment relationships with their adoptive parents difficult. Findings from these studies suggest that immigrant children who experience prolonged stays in inadequate substitute caregiving environments (neglectful and not conducive to the establishment of

attachment) may be at risk of developing insecure attachment and maladaptive behaviors (excessive self-reliance, reluctance to seek intimacy, social withdrawal) that may consequently affect their ability to establish secure attachment relationships with their parents once reunited (Allen et al., 1998; Carlson, 1998; Freeman & Brown, 2001; Kaleita, 1990). Maladaptive behaviors in immigrant children can not only affect their parents' ability or desire to respond to their emotional needs, but can also give rise to a pattern of rejection and counter-rejection that has the potential of complicating children's post-immigration adjustment process (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Sciarra, 1999; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002).

**Age at the time of the reunification.** The literature on immigration-related family separations asserts that reunifications that take place when children are adolescents can compromise the process of separation and individuation (Artico, 2003; Baptiste et al., 1997; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). According to Artico (2003), for adolescents who have endured prolonged parent-child separations this process is complicated by the fact that they may not have parental representations from which to disengage. Moreover, immigrant parents may be further complicating this developmental process by attempting to re-engage adolescents rather than supporting their efforts to individuate. Latino parents in particular, may perceive their children's attempt to individuate as a sign of ungratefulness or as a rejection of them and of their culture. In addition to parental demands to remain loyal to the culture of origin, Latino adolescents may also be experiencing increased pressure from the host culture (peers and schools) to acculturate (Artico, 2003; Sciarra, 1999). These dual demands may be difficult for adolescents to reconcile and may cause ruptures in the parent-child relationship (Sciarra, 1999). The reception that immigrant adolescents receive from the host environment can also complicate their ability to establish a positive self identity (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). When the reception is negative and saturated with disparaging messages, it may be extremely difficult for immigrant adolescents to maintain an unblemished sense of self-worth.

Adolescence is also the stage of development when peer relations are of utmost importance. Therefore, leaving friends and romantic partners behind may be particularly difficult for immigrant adolescents and may provoke in them feelings of loss and resentment towards their parents (Artico, 2003; Baptiste et al., 1997; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Reunifications at this stage of development are also complicated by the fact that children are not only attempting to establish positive and stable identities, but are doing so in a different cultural environment, within a new peer hierarchy, and with diminished social support (Artico, 2003; Baptiste, 1990; Baptiste et al., 1997). The stress of adapting to a new social status or pecking order may be particularly taxing for immigrant adolescents, who in addition to feelings associated with cultural displacement (feelings of loss and alienation) may be struggling with decreased social and academic competency and with limited English language proficiency.

As noted earlier, patterns of attachment can also influence the reunification process of immigrant adolescents. Immigrant children with negative representations may lack the skills necessary for overcoming the challenges that migration and reunifications engender. Moreover, the stress associated with these events, as well as the pressure of accomplishing their developmental tasks may bring to the fore deep

seated fears and inadequacies. Thus, they may be less willing to engage in social relations, fearing rejection, and may be less willing to enlist the help of attachment figures during their adjustment process because they distrust the ability of others to adequately meet their needs. Further, because their attachment issues remain unresolved, insecure adolescents may engage in behaviors that make the establishment of a healthy parent-child relationship difficult. They may refuse to accept their parents' authority and support and may choose to isolate themselves with their problems (Freeman & Brown, 2001). In contrast, secure adolescents are better equipped to cope with reunifications and post-immigration adjustment because they have gained the skills necessary to deal with stressful situations (Kaleita, 1990; Schraf, 2001). They are motivated to engage in social relationships (essential for building new social networks), have flexible personalities (and can adapt to different social situations), possess a sense of competency, and a willingness to enlist the assistance of attachment figures or adults throughout their adjustment process. These skills make their social adjustment to family reunifications and cultural dislocation more likely (Freeman & Brown, 2001; Goldberg, 2000).

**Parent-child relationship.** Upon reunification, immigrant children's internal working models undergo further revision as they are reshaped by their experiences with their parents (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Sciarra, 1999; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). When these experiences are positive, children are more likely to feel supported (secure dependence) and to cope with the stresses that reunifications engender in more constructive ways (e.g., establishing new social support networks and seeking support and assistance from their attachment figures). Positive experiences also confirm what children expected from their self-sacrificing parents and reinforce the narratives of their separation experiences. When the parent-child relationship is strained and experiences are negative, children may come to feel rejected by their parents. Further, their narrative accounts may become dissonant, no longer reflecting the reality they had come to expect. As a result, these children may have to reconstruct their separation narratives incorporating these negative experiences and the internal representations of themselves and their parents that derive from them (Niemeyer, 2000). For children with insecure attachment representations, negative reunification experiences further validate their feelings of worthlessness and their belief that they were never loved by their parents; they also justify their general distrust for adults.

The separations literature suggests that problems related to the stresses of immigrant life can also affect the quality of the parent-child relationship once families are reunited (Glasgow-Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). The opportunity to spend time together is essential to helping parents and children bond, yet time is a commodity that few immigrant parents can spare (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Therefore, overworked and overburdened parents may not have the time and energy to help their children with their adjustment difficulties or to establish an attachment relationship. Children may feel rejected by their parents' absence and emotional unavailability. When feelings of rejection and abandonment are recreated, it becomes difficult for children to trust their parents' commitment and to believe that they were ever loved by them (Artico, 2003;

Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Criticism from parents is another source of stress and ego injury for children that affects their ability to develop trust and a sense of competence in their new social environment, and that validates their feelings of low self-worth (Artico, 2003; Sciarra, 1999; Smart & Smart, 1995).

Children's reunification outcomes are also complicated by their parents' lack of knowledge and understanding of their separation experiences (Sciarra, 1999). Because separations are rarely discussed among families, parents often ignore the emotional toll that separations and reunifications exact. They may not understand their children's reactions to cultural dislocation (including grief, loneliness, and alienation) or the difficulty associated with adjusting to life with adults they may not have known as parents. Consequently, they may interpret children's signs of distress as signs of ungratefulness. Children, in turn, may interpret their parents' negative reactions to their grief and their general unavailability as a sign of "not caring" and may consequently behave in ways that confirm their parents' perceptions of them (Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995). According to Sciarra (1999), if natural parents are insecure in their relationship to their children and/or if the relationship between parents and surrogates is strained, they may feel threatened by children's grief reactions and may be unable to tolerate them. Parents who are secure in their relationships to their children, and who have maintained a relationship of mutual respect and admiration with their substitute caregivers, may not feel threatened by their children's grief reactions, and may be in a better position to support them through their grieving process.

Another factor identified as influencing the parent-child relationship is the presence of new family constellations upon their arrival (Lashley, 2000; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). In cases of protracted separations, when marital ties may have dissolved, new marriages or unions formed, or new children born, immigrant children must negotiate entrance into existing family systems. This can be a difficult task that can add an additional source of stress for both the newcomers and their families (Adams, 2000; Partida, 1996; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). As Partida (1996) suggests, children who have recently rejoined an established family system may feel excluded and may find the roles within the family difficult to define. Moreover, if the new family members are unresponsive or unsympathetic to their needs for acceptance and belonging, children may come to feel rejected or unwanted. Children who become alienated from their families may seek security and acceptance elsewhere. For insecure youth, who are prone to establishing less harmonious and fewer reciprocated relationships, the search for attachment figures outside of the family may place them at a greater risk for delinquency or abuse (Freeman & Brown, 2001).

For children who have experienced neglectful or abusive substitute caregiving in their countries of origin, the quality of the parent-child relationship may be crucial in determining their post-reunification adjustment (Bates & Dozier, 2002; Chisholm, 1998; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995). If children's parents are supportive and sensitive to their attachment needs, the adverse effects of neglectful caregiving environments may be reversed and children may be able to form secure attachment relationships to their parents (Weinfield et al., 2000). In such cases, children may have the opportunity to develop, through modeling, constructive and adaptive ways of coping with problematic or stressful situations, skills that will enhance their ability to deal with the stresses of immigrant life. More importantly, they will have the confidence and willingness to rely

on their parents for support with their emotional and relational problems (Kaleita, 1990). If parents are not supportive or receptive to the establishment of an attachment relationship, children's insecure behaviors may compromise their ability to cope with the stresses of migration. In their new environments, these children may become detached or withdrawn, compulsively independent, angry, unable to form satisfactory relationships with significant attachment figures, and at a greater risk for socio-emotional disturbances (Allen et al., 1998; Carlson, 1998; Kaleita, 1990; Mitchell, 1990; Gratz et al., 2002).

When reunifications become problematic, parents may threaten their children with a return home (Baptiste et al., 1997; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Orellana et al., 2001; Sciarra, 1999; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). There is no sense of how common or effective this form of transnational disciplining is among Latino families. The literature does suggest however, that it is an important strategy that immigrant parents utilize to control their children's negative behaviors. This form of transnational disciplining, however, can elicit a number of painful and conflicting feelings in children who have experienced family separations. Children may experience conflictual feelings of wanting to return to their country of origin and the pain associated with experiencing yet another rejection from their natural parents. As Sciarra (1999) suggests the threat of replicating early separation trauma in these families is very real, and it is at this point that they usually present for counseling. Additionally, in cases in which children may have endured abuse by their substitute caregivers in their country of origin, the possibility of a return home may be a source of immeasurable distress (Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995).

## **Conclusion**

The attachment and immigration-related separations literature suggest that parent-child separations can be detrimental for children's emotional development and that factors that either prolong or complicate these separations may result in greater psychological distress for children (Artico, 1999; Bowlby, 1973; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002; Sciarra, 1999). There exist, however, protective factors that can mitigate the negative effects of these attachment disruptions (Perez-Foster, 2001; Baptiste, 1997; Lashley, 2000; Glasgow and Goose-Sheese, 1995). The quality of the parent-child relationship before, during, and after the separation has been identified as an important predictor of adaptive coping with separations and reunifications. Therefore, parental practices that minimize the negative effects of separations serve as protective factors that ease children's adjustment to these events. Consistent and dependable transnational parenting, including provision of gifts and remittances, frequent contact through phone calls, letters, and visits are some ways in which absent parents can maintain emotional ties to their children. These demonstrations of parental devotion also serve to validate the belief that the parental migration was necessary in order to ensure the wellbeing of the family. They also help children construct a coherent narrative of their separation experiences in which they are loved and cared for by dependable and trustworthy parents. A secure parent-child relationship is also instrumental in ensuring that children develop healthy personalities and that they are better able to cope with the stresses that separations and

reunifications engender. When the parent-child relationship is insecure, children develop negative representations (of self and others) that ultimately compromise their healthy socio-emotional development and ability to cope successfully with these stressful events (Allen et al., 1998; Carlson, 1998; Gratz et.al, 2002; Kaleita, 1990; Mitchell, 1990).

Latino children raised within a collective caregiving environment with more than one primary attachment figure may be safeguarded against the negative effects of maternal deprivation. The availability of an extended family network may also buffer children against the negative effects of parental absence. Attachment theory and its narrow focus on the mother-child dyad, however, has not addressed the role of the extended family members on children's emotional development. Nor has it addressed the nature of these relationships and the effects that disruptions in these bonds may have on children. This may be of particular importance for the study of immigration-related family separations as children who are left behind by their parents often form lasting emotional bonds with their relative caregivers from whom they must endure painful separations in order to be reunited with their parents.

How children make meaning of their separation experiences (their perceptions of why their parents left and when they will be reunited) plays a critical role in how they eventually fare (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Children who ignore the reason behind their parents' migration or who simply disagree with the move may be left feeling ambivalent about the separation (Artico, 2003; Glasgow & Gouse-Sheese, 1995). Consequently, they may develop feelings of rejection and abandonment that not only influence their adjustment to the separation but that also damage their sense of self and ability to trust others. According to Suarez-Orozco et al. (2002), when separations are carefully planned and framed as temporary and necessary, undertaken for the benefit of the family, feelings of rejection and abandonment may be dispelled. Careful planning can also involve choosing sensitive and responsive substitute caregivers who are supportive of the parents' decision to migrate and can communicate positive messages that reinforce the belief that parents left in order to provide better opportunities for the family.

Another important factor influencing reunification outcomes is the quality of substitute care. Children placed in substitute caregiving environments that do not meet their physical and emotional needs are more likely develop behavioral and emotional problems that may stand in the way of successfully managed reunifications. There are, however, several ways in which parents can ensure that the quality of substitute care that children receive is adequate. According to Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) transnational parents need to maintain a smoothly functioning relationship with children's substitute caregivers by engaging in "emotion work", or demonstrations of gratitude, as well as by providing adequate financial compensation for child care services. Parent can also increase the likelihood that children will receive adequate substitute care by entrusting the care of their children to family members. Reliance on grandmothers for substitute care is a well established practice among Latino families that ensures continuity of care, especially if the grandmother has been involved in the care of the child since birth.

Upon reunification, there are a host of factors that can potentially complicate the reunification outcomes of children. Immigrant parents, however, can facilitate their

process of adaptation by adequately preparing for the reunification. Giving children ample time to prepare for the move seems essential, especially when children must part from surrogate caregivers they may have become deeply attached to. Sciarra (1999) points to the need for parents to become knowledgeable about the difficulty that these separations may present for children so that they can be sensitive to their grief reactions and prepared to facilitate their adjustment process. Immigrant parents can also facilitate their children's post-reunification adjustment by remaining physically and emotionally available to them. When children perceive their parents as present and accessible, lingering feelings of abandonment can be dispelled.

## **The Current Study**

As noted earlier, most of what we know regarding immigration-related family separations derives from clinical observations of immigrant families in therapy. As a result, the tendency has been to overpathologize these events (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). It is the purpose of this study to elucidate how problematic immigration-related family separations actually are. Because longitudinal studies are non-existent, it is difficult to determine how long reunifications remain problematic for families. The following longitudinal look at the process of family reunifications may help us understand how parents and children are able to negotiate these events over time. As some of the literature suggest, it is possible that with the passing of time and with increased maturity, children may be able to overcome feelings of abandonment and resentment towards their parents and begin rebuilding their relationships anew (Artico, 2003; Suarez-Orozco et al., in press).

To this end, this study examined the separation and reunifications experiences of seven immigrant Mexican and Central American families. The questions guiding this study were:

- (1) What are the separation and reunification experiences of Latino immigrant families?
- (2) What role do substitute caregivers play in the separation and reunification experiences of immigrant children?
- (3) How are children prepared for separations and reunifications?
- (4) What factors influence the separation and reunification outcomes of immigrant families?

## Methods

### Study Design

The current study primarily employed case study methodology to explore the immigration-related family separation and reunification experiences of immigrant families. Data collection methods also included participant observation in addition to in-depth interviews with Mexican and Central American children and their mothers who were separated during the course of migration. This study also incorporated longitudinal data collected on participants as part of the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation study (LISA). These longitudinal data included participant observation notes, semi-structured interviews with children and their parents, and schooling outcome data.

According to Berg (1998) qualitative research allows the researcher to share in the understanding and perception of others and to explore how people give structure and meaning to their lives. Through case study methodology, the researcher therefore reconstructs and interprets a major episode in a person's life with the intent of providing an in-depth understanding of it (Bromley, 1983). The case study method is particularly well suited to the exploration of complex processes and events that require the inclusion of multiple variables and various types of data; it can also penetrate situations in ways that are not always accessible to quantitative analysis (Cohen et al., 2007; Yin, 2008). Because case studies can elucidate the complex interaction between contemporary phenomena and the contexts in which these take place, they are well suited for the study of immigration-related family separations and reunifications, which are events that are embedded within transnational contexts (Yin, 1981; Yin, 2008).

Case studies involve systematically gathering enough information about a particular person so as to permit the researcher to effectively understand individual experiences (Berg, 1998). Data can come from different sources and converge in a triangulated fashion to allow the exploration of multiple perspectives of a single event (Yin, 2008). In this particular study, both the perspective of the parent and the child are explored and converged in a narrative that explains how separations and reunifications were experienced by those affected. Additionally, data from the LISA study was used to provide the context in which reunifications took place as well as a longitudinal account of the process reunification. Participant observation notes and schooling outcome data provided an additional perspective on the family's reunification adjustment. The convergence of these data permitted the exploration of reunifications as continuous and dynamic processes. Case studies not only provided the flexibility to discuss individual experiences contextually but also provided a "causal analysis" that aimed to explain how particular separation experiences may result in specific reunification outcomes (Bromley, 1986).

While case studies may not be generalizable to a larger population of immigrants, they bring to life unique aspects of their experiences that have a tendency to be obscured in the more typical aggregated quantitative analyses (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008; Yin 2008). Case studies are also of particular scientific value because they open the way for new discoveries and may serve as the breeding ground for insights and even hypotheses that can be pursued by subsequent studies (Berg, 1998; Bromley, 1983; Yin, 2008).



## Participants

The study employed a convenience sample of seven Central American and Mexican mother/child dyads that were separated during the course of migration. Study participants were recruited from the LISA study. The high incidence of family separations in this population was identified and reported by Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001). Subsequent findings from a study focused specifically on family separations revealed that a high percentage of Central American and Mexican LISA study participants had been separated from their mothers during the process of migration (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). Central American and Mexican LISA study participants were recruited from the San Francisco Bay area and were therefore geographically accessible to the researcher. Access to this population was made possible by virtue of her role as research assistant for the LISA project.

As a research assistant with the LISA study from 1999 to 2002, the researcher maintained a caseload of 22 immigrant children from Mexico and Central America. During the course of her work, she not only interviewed and observed these children, but also met and interviewed their mothers. As a result, she was able to establish a close relationship with these families and to gain their trust and acceptance. From her LISA caseload she identified ten families who had been separated during the process of migration. An attempt was made to recruit all ten families, but only seven agreed to participate in the study. One of the principal barriers to recruitment was the inability to reach families who had changed residence and contact information after the LISA study had ended, another barrier was lack of interest in participation.

As can be seen in Table 1, child participants ranged from 17 to 19 years old. There were three males and four females. Four of the participant families were from Mexico and three were from Central America.

Table 1  
*Participant characteristics, children*

Child/ Age	Country of Origin	Age at separation	Age at reunification	Length of separation (mother)	Caretaker in country of origin	Family composition	Immigration status
Laura, 19	Mexico	11 years old	12 years old	1 year	Friends/ nunnery	Intact	Undocumented
Andres, 18	Mexico	6 years old	12 years old	6 years	Maternal grandparents	Blended	Undocumented
David, 19	Guatemala	1 year old	13 years old	12 years	Maternal grandmother	Blended	Documented
Yolanda, 19	Guatemala	2 years old	11 years old	9 years	Paternal grandparents	Intact	Documented
Jimmy, 18	El Salvador	5 years old	11 years old	6 years	Maternal aunt and paternal uncle	Intact	Documented
Sarah, 18	Mexico	6 years old	12 years old	6 years	Maternal grandmother	Blended	Undocumented
Edwin, 17	Mexico	10 years old	11 years old	11 months	Maternal grandmother	Blended	Undocumented

The four Mexican families in the study were of mixed immigration status. They had

family members who were both documented and undocumented. The Mexican child participants were undocumented while their US born siblings were documented. All the Central American families had achieved legal status through labor certification programs or Temporary Protected Status. Four children came from single parent families and were separated only from their mothers, while three came from 2 parent households and were separated from both parents. These families are referred to as blended families. The lengths of separation also varied from child to child. Some children endured long separations while others experienced relatively short separations.

As presented in Table 2, the mothers in the study also presented a wide range of experiences.

Table 2  
*Participant characteristics, mothers*

Name	Country of Origin	Education in years	Occupation in country of origin	Occupation in US	Marital status (separation)	Marital status (reunification)	Children born in the US
Luisa Rosas	Mexico	11	Studio photographer	House cleaning services	Married	Married	None
Anna Garcia	Mexico	8	Factory worker	Homemaker	Single	Married	1
Dora Gutierrez	Guatemala	9	Pharmacy clerk	House cleaner	Single	Married	1
Esperanza Ramirez	Guatemala	4	Homemaker	House cleaner	Married	Married	None
Alicia Colon	El Salvador	2	Store clerk	House cleaner	Married	Married	None
Blanca Castillo	Mexico	5	Store clerk	Child care provider	Single	Separated	2
Alicia Sanchez	Mexico	9	Stylist/beautician	Works in dry cleaners	Single	Married	1

At the time of the separation, four participant mothers were single. By the time of the reunification, all single mothers had either married or acquired a live-in partner. Mothers also varied in terms of their educational level and occupational status. Four mother participants had completed 9 or more years of formal education, while the rest had received 5 years or less. Five of the seven mothers worked outside of the home. Four worked in the house cleaning business as independent contractors and one worked in a dry cleaning business. One mother was a homemaker and the other took care of children in her home. The seven families recruited presented a wide range of separation and reunification circumstances. This particular breakdown in the study population ensured that a variety of separation and reunification experiences were represented.

## Procedures

Access to the study population was secured by way of the researcher's involvement in the LISA study as a research assistant. During the last year of the study, the researcher was granted permission to invite families who had experienced a

mother-child separation during the course of migration, to participate in the current study. Their contact information was also collected and formal recruitment began in June, 2002. The seven children and mother dyads were contacted over the phone and asked to participate in the study. An interview was then scheduled at the participant's home or another place of their choosing. Consent was secured from parents and children before each interview. Subjects were provided with a consent form that outlined the project, the procedures, and their rights as research participants. It was explained to them that their participation was entirely voluntary and that their responses would remain confidential. After securing consent, participants were interviewed.

All participants were recruited from cities in the San Francisco Bay Area. The San Francisco Bay Area provided a unique setting in which to study this population because of its demographic makeup and because of the social realities it illustrates. The names of the cities have been changed in order to protect the identities of study participants. San Marino is one of the largest and fastest growing cities in Randall County. San Marino's most recent population growth has been concentrated in Laguna, its largest neighborhood. Out of all of the neighborhoods in San Marino, Laguna is the poorest and the least familiar. Many immigrant families settle in this densely populated area because of it is the most affordable. Nearly all of the study population lives or has lived in the Laguna neighborhood at one point in their lives.

Rancho Verde offered a very different research setting in which to explore the lives of immigrant families. Like San Marino, Rancho Verde is demographically diverse and rapidly growing. Unlike San Marino, however, the demographic makeup of Rancho Verde reflects a different social reality. The differences between these cities is most evident when comparing their schools. Most of the students attending Rancho Verde high school were either Black or Hispanic. Many came from low income families. Rancho Verde schools had few resources devoted to student learning. Schools in San Marino excelled and had adequate resources devoted to students and learning. The student body was less diverse and primarily White. Pentrose, another city from which participants were recruited was similar to San Marino and experiences of children there mirrored those of children in San Marino.

Ethnographic participant observation was employed during this study. Ethnographic notes were recorded after visits to participants' homes and schools as well as after informal interactions with participants over the phone or family events to which the researcher was invited. Participant observation not only served to inform data collection at every step but also contributed to the production of the rich case studies presented here. (See appendix A for field note guides)

In order to understand how immigrant children and mothers experienced separations and reunifications, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with each study participant. These interviews focused on separation and reunification experiences. Most of the questions were open-ended and standardized for both children and mothers. (See appendix B and C for interview guides).

**Child separation interviews.** The purpose of the child interviews was to gather as much information about the separation and reunification experiences of Latino children. The questions were open-ended, allowing children to tell their stories. The interview guides served the purpose of mapping the course of the interview and of

organizing the child's account of the events. Unscheduled probing further facilitated the research goal by clarifying the information provided by the informants and by tactfully eliciting the feelings or meanings associated with the events described. The child interviews took from 1 1/2 to 2 hours and were mostly conducted in Spanish. They were conducted in the child's home or in a public place of their choosing. Children were compensated with a small stipend of \$20 to \$50. The amount of the stipend was determined by the availability of funding. Towards the end of the study, more funds became available for stipends so the amounts of these increased. Participants interviewed after this increase in funding, received a larger stipends.

**Parent separation interviews.** One of the principal aims of the parent interviews was to learn about how mothers experience immigration-related separations and reunifications. The second aim was to gather as much information as possible about the context surrounding the separation and reunification. These were details that children often omitted or had limited knowledge of, depending on their age. Parent separation interviews also provided another perspective from which to understand separations and reunifications. Moreover, because mothers were asked some of the same questions as their children, the researcher was able to clarify and verify the accuracy of the information or details provided by their children. The parent interviews, therefore, not only complemented the child interviews but also helped me consider alternative interpretations of the data. Parent interviews were open-ended and conducted in the interviewee's home or a public place of their choosing. Interviews took from 1 1/2 hours to 3 hours and were conducted in Spanish. Mothers were compensated with a stipend of \$30 to \$50 depending on funds available.

### **Confidentiality and Ethical Concerns**

Each participant was given a brief description of the study. Both children and their mothers signed a consent form indicating that their participation in the study was voluntary, that their responses were confidential, and that they could discontinue participation in the study at any time. In order to help insure confidentiality, codes instead of names were used on interviews, interview transcripts, and ethnographic observation notes. A document linking names to codes was recorded in a sheet of paper and later destroyed after all data was collected and after pseudonyms were assigned. Although the researcher did not ask participants for documentation status, this was information that was volunteered during the separation interviews. To protect the identity of these subjects, pseudonyms were used for all participants and their families. The names of the cities and schools were also changed. Subjects were also assured that all data collected would be destroyed after the completion of the study.

It has been observed that children and parents can often be resistant to talking about the experience of separation, even in the context of an established long-term relationship with a sensitive interviewer. Children and parents interviewed about separations tended to respond briefly, often spoke of having forgotten about the details of the separation, and not infrequently became tearful (Suarez-Orozco, personal communication, March 15, 2003). While the researcher did not expect separation interviews to evoke painful feelings in all of the informants, the task of interviewing was

approached with sensitivity and caution. Further, the researcher strove to provide a safe environment for all informants and remained alert to any signs of discomfort or distress. The researcher also informed all participants of their right to refuse to answer any question and reminded them that participation in the study was entirely voluntary.

During the course of the LISA study, confidentiality during a student interview was breached when a student reported an instance of physical abuse at home. At the time, the researcher was working as a research assistant and had conducted an interview with the student in the school. The student was encouraged to speak to a school official about the incident during the interview and accompanied to the office of a counselor to further discuss what had happened. After discussing the incident with the school official, a report was filed with a child protective services agency and a home visit was conducted. While this incident caused a strain between the subject and the researcher, it was only temporary. Both the researcher and the subject were able to address the subject during subsequent interviews. The incident was discussed with the principal investigators of the LISA project. No such incident occurred during the current study.

## **Analysis of Data**

Essential to the process of data analysis was the reliance on a theoretical framework to help inform the initial understanding of the data, generate hypotheses, and discover existing relationships. The literature on immigration-related family separations and attachment theory provided a starting point from which to begin the research and build the framework from which data collection methods were designed, codes were generated, and data were analyzed. This literature was instrumental in the development of the interview guides which focused on specific factors identified in the literature as important, such as age of the child at the time of the separation and reunification, length of the separation, and relationship of child with substitute caregiver. These guides also addressed some of the research questions that emerged from the review of the literature. For example, questions explored the participants' separation and reunification experiences in detail. The assumption was that these details would elicit a better understanding of these events. Other important categories or themes that emerged from the literature and that were used in the coding of the data were child understanding of the separation and reasons for the parental migration, nature of the caregiving environment before and after the separation, nature of the relationship between the parent and the surrogate, and nature of the parent-child relationship before the separation, during the separation, and after the reunification.

While there was a general structure and underlying hypothesis driving the study, there was also an ongoing generation of theory that emerged from the data itself. During the process of data collection, it became evident that attachment theory provided a narrow interpretation of the data. There were many complexities to each family's experience that other explanations or hypotheses seemed necessary. As data was examined and organized, new relationships and themes began to emerge. According to Glasser et al (1967) emergent relationships might not be clear at first, but as the research develops, categories and properties emerge, develop in abstraction, and finally become related. It has also been postulated that the compilation of relationships

will come to form an integrated central theoretical framework or the core of the emerging theory. This core becomes the theoretical guide to the further collection and analysis of the data. In essence, grounded theory was generated from the findings and further developed as the research progressed and served to guide the decisions made throughout the process of data analysis.

**Data analysis procedures.** Semi-structured interviews conducted with children and mothers were audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. Field notes were also recorded after each of the interviews in order to provide a context for the data. With the data from the interviews and interview field notes, the researcher began to construct a loose narrative of the separation and reunifications experiences of families. These narratives included both parent and child perspectives and were organized in chronological order beginning with the pre-separation period and ending with the reunification. Parent interviews were compared to child interviews with special attention to the similarities and differences in their experiences. Longitudinal data from the LISA study organized by study participant. These data provided important contextual information about the participant families that was weaved into their narratives. Participant observation notes were systematically recorded and organized by study participant. Field notes not only complemented other data sources but also helped develop theories about how separation and reunifications were experienced by particular study participants. They also assisted in the generation of themes relevant to the research goal and served as a tool for documenting the researcher's reflections and thoughts as the research progressed. Data were converged and triangulated to provide a comprehensive and relatively subjective account of the separation and reunification experiences of each family. Within these narratives, themes, patterns, and theories about how separations and reunifications were experienced began to emerge. Important elements that emerged from the early analysis of the data were further developed and refined as the data collection and analysis process progressed. The elaboration of detailed case studies was made possible thanks to these numerous data sources.

Codes were generated from the attachment and immigration-related family separations literature. A "start list" of tentative codes was generated to guide me through the initial phases of data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1894). Interviews were coded using these codes. Codes were also borrowed from previous studies (Suarez Orozco et.al., 2004; Artico, 2003) and generated from the research questions. Codes from the research questions included those used to identify reunification outcomes, like *good parent-child relationship*, *problematic parent-child relationship*, *separation as worthwhile parent*, and *separation as worthwhile, child*. Codes were also inductively generated using the "grounded" theory approach (Glaser et al., 1967) and emerged from the participants' descriptions of their experiences. The code *mamá dinero* [mommy money] came from a parent's description of her relationship to her son, which had become materialized. This code was then used to identify other mother-child relationships that had become materialized or data which alluded to this particular phenomenon. As the research progressed and as codes began to emerge from the data, the list was edited and refined. All interviews and participant observations were reread specifically for these new codes. Excel was used in order to facilitate the

organization and management of some of these data as well as to help me in the generation of emergent codes.

Once the data collection process began, coded matrices were constructed in order to provide a visual representation of the data (see Appendix D and F). These matrices were organized by participant and organized chronologically to map their trajectory throughout these events. The inclusion of important themes helped identify trends and patterns and make comparisons across cases. Further questions and routes of inquiry were devised to answer the questions that emerged from these visual constructs. Matrices were also used to check the validity of hypotheses and emerging themes. Throughout the research project, the researcher also kept an analytical journal in order to develop thoughts, discern themes, patterns, and to record possible biases. Some of the content of these memos was shared with some of the dissertation committee members or discussed during meetings with the dissertation chair.

Seven case studies were constructed from data gathered from all sources. Matrices and analytical memos created during the process of data analysis also informed the content and organization of the each case study and eventually assisted in cross case comparisons. The principal aim of these case studies was to describe in depth the separation and reunification experiences of each family within the context of their own life circumstances.

## **Validity and Biases**

Validation of data was achieved through the triangulation of methods and theory (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Stake, 1995; Berg, 1998). I compared the perspectives of children with those of their mothers in order to observe changes in how experiences and facts were related from different viewpoints. Longitudinal data gathered as part of the LISA study along with participant observation and interview field notes also served the purpose of checking for discrepant evidence between the different data collected. This process allowed the researcher to consider a different interpretation of the data and to control for validity threats and also to assess changes in perceptions and situations over time.

In order to minimize research biases, detailed field notes that included reflections of the researcher's own subjectivity were recorded (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). The researcher also minimized misrepresentation and misunderstanding by sharing and having her interpretations critiqued by colleagues and dissertation committee members. Further validation was achieved by discussing the analyses and conclusions with the dissertation committee chair and Dr. Carola Suarez-Orozco, who was not only a committee member but also one of the principal investigators of the original LISA project.

## Results

Family separations and reunifications are complex journeys for children and their parents, made up of dreams, hopes, heartache, and unmet expectations. For some families, separations are temporarily painful while reunifications are relatively smooth. In some cases separations are relatively painless for children though difficult for the parents. For some families, the reunification process often proves to be surprisingly difficult initially, but over time the family adjusts. In other cases both the separation phase and the reunification phase are complicated and neither the children nor the parents adjust well to these difficult events. In the following cases, the complex journeys of seven families over the course of several years are examined. The separation and reunification stages are examined separately considering precipitating events, the caretaking arrangement, and how communication is maintained throughout the separation. Also examined is the reunification phase, taking into consideration both socio-emotional functioning and academic outcomes (See Table 3). Both the parents' point of view and the adolescent's point of view are considered in this long-term longitudinal perspective that spans for some families up to 8 years. Through this exploration, a unique perspective emerges on a number of factors that contributed to the varying trajectories of adaptation and that are illustrated here.



Table 3. *Post-reunification domains of adjustment*

	Laura	Andres	David	Yolanda	Jimmy	Sarah	Edwin
<b>General adjustment</b>	Adjusts well to the reunification. Sees no significant change in family relations or in quality of life post-reunification. Laura reports being happy about being finally reunited with her family.	Andres is ambivalent about migrating. He has a difficult time adjusting to his new environment. He joins a gang and is placed in juvenile hall. After a difficult transition, he finishes school, finds employment and begins to see a future for himself in the United States.	David is ambivalent about migrating. At first, he is not overly impressed with the United states and with his new living situation, but sees opportunities for advancement. He eventually adjusts well, attends college and is glad his mother decided to migrate.	Yolanda was ambivalent about migrating and upon arrival was homesick. She experienced adjustment difficulties and felt lonely and estranged from her parents. Yolanda eventually adapts to life in the United States and begins planning a career in nursing.	Jimmy adjusted well to the reunification even though he was initially ambivalent about migrating. Jimmy felt that the United States offered him better opportunities and quality of life. In spite of his positive outlook, he does poorly in school and begins to engage in risky behaviors	Sarah adjusted adequately before a problematic relationship with her mother resulted in acting out behaviors. She was sent back to Mexico and later returned with a more positive attitude. Although optimistic about her prospects, Sarah felt that her relationship with her mother could not be saved.	Ambivalent about migrating at first. Had adjustment difficulties and began engaging in risky behaviors, including drug use, gang involvement, and sexual promiscuity.
<b>Family relations</b>	Good. Family continues to engage in family rituals established pre-separation (outings, church attendance)	Good. Both Andres and his mother report having a loving and supportive family.	Strained at first, then good. There is tension between David and his stepfather and brother, between his grandmother and his stepfather, and between his mother and stepfather. At the time of the separation interview, family relations have improved dramatically.	Strained at first, then good. Child protective agencies were involved after Yolanda's sister reported abuse from father. Mother reported father's excessive drinking and domestic violence. Family relations improved after family became involved in the church.	Relations between Jimmy's parents were strained before the separation and continued to be strained throughout the separation. Jimmy had a good relationship with his mother but a contentious relationship to his father. Domestic violence was an issue the family battled with privately.	The relationship between Sarah and her mother became strained shortly after her mother remarried. Tensions in the dyad escalate and her mother decides to send Sarah back to Mexico. After she returns, relations improve but eventually turned sour. Sarah wants to move out .	Family relations are problematic from the beginning. Edwin's mother is ambivalent about her marriage and her migration. Marital problems escalate into domestic abuse. Edwin and his mother, who had once been close, eventually drift apart. Edwin eventually moves out.

Table 3 continued. *Post-reunification domains of adjustment*

	Laura	Andres	David	Yolanda	Jimmy	Sarah	Edwin
<b>Academic performance</b>	Successful student. After Laura graduates from high school she enrolls in a state university.	Struggling student. Andres is qualified as bright by his teachers but fails to live to his potential. After his expulsion, he enrolls in an independent study program and finishes high school.	Successful student. David is a motivated student who enrolls in honor courses in high school and graduates with good grades. He studies engineering at a state university.	Struggling student. Yolanda struggled in high school but is able to graduate. After high school she enrolls in a community college and plans to pursue a career in nursing.	Struggling student. Jimmy had a difficult time with course work throughout his academic career. Although his behavior in class was good, his skills and motivation were poor. Hopes to graduate from high school.	Struggling student. Sarah had a difficult time adjusting to school and learning the language. Upon her return from Mexico, however, things changed. She not only became fluent in English but was able to finish high school.	Struggling student. Edwin's struggles in school and is diagnosed with a learning disability in high school. He is placed in special education classes that help him learn class material and improve his grades and skills. At the time of the separation interview he hopes to graduate from high school.
<b>Social relations</b>	Positive.	Problematic. Related to risky behaviors that resulted in expulsion from school and detention in Juvenile Hall.	Positive.	Positive. In high school she relies mostly on her sister for support and company. In community college, Yolanda interacts with her peers and finds stimulation in her relationships with them.	Problematic. Related to risky behaviors that result in problems with the police and probation.	Problematic. Related to risky behaviors.	Problematic. Related to risky behaviors that resulted in gang involvement, academic problems, and problems with the police. Edwin has one friend who is a positive influence on him.

### **Integrated Family: Resourced and Resilient**

The following case study exemplifies how separation and reunifications can be well managed and relatively painless. Throughout the data analysis process, it has become apparent that despite the precautions that parents take when making the decision to migrate and to separate from their children, separations and reunifications remain difficult at best. Therefore, most families experience some degree of stress during the reunification period. For the following family, however, the stress of the reunification was mitigated by the presence of certain factors that caused these transitions to be less disruptive, like a pattern of short work-related parental absences prior to the separation. Further, the family's resiliency, or ability to cope with the stress of these events, proved pivotal in ensuring a pain-free reunification. There are other factors in place that may be unique to this particular family but that nonetheless provide clues as to how the disruptive effects of these events may be minimized.

## **Laura Rosas: Mexico and the United States is All the Same**

Laura's parents came to the United States for what was supposed to be a short visit. Laura and her two siblings were left behind in Mexico in the care of family and friends. After a brief separation of one year, Laura came to United States to be reunited with her parents. She was 12 years old. Laura and her family currently reside in Pentrose, California where her family has purchased a home. Laura has graduated from High School and is attending a local State University. Laura and her parents seem to have been little affected by their separation. The family has adapted well to life in the United States and Laura enjoys a close relationship with both of her parents.

### **Family composition and socioeconomic circumstances**

Laura's family is composed of her father Mateo, her mother Luisa, her sister Liliana, and her brother Mario. At the time of her arrival, Laura's family was sharing an apartment with another family. This crowded living situation was only temporary and soon the family secured an apartment of their own in a nicer part of San Marino where the family felt safe. Although small, the Rosas family lived in this residence for almost 5 years. In 2005, at the time of the student separation interview, Laura and her family had moved to Pentrose, California to a charming house they have recently purchased. The family kept their apartment in San Marino and used this residence occasionally as it was close to the children's schools and their jobs. The apartment was rent free since Mr. Rosas was the apartment manager there.

In Mexico, Laura's parents worked as photographers and video producers. Laura's father also worked as a carpenter and as a karate instructor. Her mother assisted her father in the photography studio and had her own restaurant. According to her parents, their economic situation in Mexico was comfortable although they were always in search of opportunities to improve their financial situation. Both Mr. and Mrs. Rosas received their formal education in Mexico; Mr. Rosas completed High school in Mexico while Mrs. Rosas only completed 11 years of formal education. In the United States, Mr. Rosas has worked as a janitor, construction worker, bus boy, and painter. In 2002, Mr. Rosas was laid off from his construction job but with his carpentry skills was able to secure another job in a company that restores old houses. He was also working as a Karate instructor in the Laguna area of San Marino and was hoping that this opportunity would become something more permanent. At the time of the separation interview, Mr. Rosas was also an apartment manager and was working regularly. Mrs. Rosas worked in the house cleaning business. At first, she cleaned houses; thereafter, she began driving the other housecleaners to job sites. She worked a total of 30 hours weekly. In 2001, the family's estimated yearly income was approximately \$36,000.

### **The pre-separation period: Looking for adventure and better opportunities**

According to Mr. Rosas, his motivation to migrate was not economic. In fact, he first came to the United States in 1996 looking for adventure. He had received an invitation from two female friends to accompanied them to the United States. The young women

were traveling alone and without visas, so they requested the company of Mr. Rosas as a safety measure. Upon his arrival to the United States, Mr. Rosas realized that opportunities to improve his family's financial situation were ample. Equally available were educational opportunities for his children. He considered a longer stay for himself and the possibility of bringing the rest of his family to the United States. It was six months later that he decided to return to Mexico for his wife. At first, Mrs. Rosas was hesitant about migrating. She had a negative perception of the United States as a place with much discrimination; but with time she began to like the idea of migrating.

***La decisión, no la pensamos mucho... mucha gente viene aquí, muchos jóvenes se vienen por trabajo porque no hay mucho trabajo allá. Siempre veíamos muchas casas nuevas hechas por gente que allá no las hubieran hecho. El dijo que nos íbamos a ir, pero no estaba esa seguridad. No era tanto la necesidad de ir, mas la invitación de venir a conocer y luego nos gusto. [The decision, we did not think about it much... a lot of people come here, a lot of young people come for work, because there isn't a lot of work over there. We always saw a lot of new houses being built by people that over there would not have been able to build them. He said that we were going, but there wasn't that certainty. It wasn't so much the need to go, but rather the invitation to see something new, and then we liked it.]***

Prior to leaving Mexico, Mr. and Mrs. Rosas set out to find a place for their children. Their intention was to leave for six months and then return. They decided to leave Laura and her sister in a boarding school that was administered by a group of nuns that were friends of the family. Her youngest son was left in the care of a family friend who had agreed to look after him in their home. Mrs. Rosas felt certain that her children would be well taken care of and did not consider bringing them along on the trip. She also felt that the move would only be temporary and she and her husband would be back in Mexico in no time.

***Primero de que tenían un buen lugar en donde estar. Las monjas eran, las conocíamos bien, convivíamos con ellas, iban a la casa a comer, nosotros íbamos al internado. Entonces sabíamos que iba a ser un lugar en donde iban a estar bien. Y como era solamente por un tiempo, era por solamente seis meses. [First of all, they had a good place to stay. The nuns were, we knew them well, we socialized with them, they would come to our home to eat and we would go to the boarding school. So it was like we knew that it was a place where they would be well. And because it was only for a short time, it was only for six months.]***

Laura was accustomed to staying with the nuns when her parents went out of town for business. But, she had never spent the night away from home and from her parents. According to her, however, her parent's departure did not provoke in her any anxiety or worry because it had been framed as a short-term separation and because she was used to getting along without them when they left for business. Saying goodbye to them was like saying goodbye to them on a typical morning before leaving for school.

According to Laura, it was not a big deal.

***No sé; o sea, no sentí así como que, Oh my God! Se van a ir, se van sin mí y no fui. Como que no, no fue mucho así de que, Oh my God! Se van a ir mis papás. Como que no le tomé mucha... importancia pero, o sea, como no era por mucho tiempo y dijeron en veces “Voy por un poco tiempo” y dije: ¡Ah! Okay. [I don’t know; I mean, I didn’t feel like, Oh my God! They are leaving, they are leaving without me, and I didn’t go. It wasn’t like that; it wasn’t like, Oh my God! My parents are leaving. It was like I didn’t give it a lot of importance, I mean, it wasn’t like it was for a long time and they told us a few times “we are going for a little while” and I said, oh Okay.]***

The day of her parents’ departure, Laura went to school, as she did on any typical day. After school, both her and her sister went to the boarding school where the nuns were waiting for them. At the time she did not feel abandoned by her parents; she was more or less resigned to accept her parent’s decision to leave her behind. She had not realized how much she would miss them. The certainty that the separation was only temporary was key in making the situation manageable for her.

### **The separation period: Life in the convent**

For Laura, life with the nuns was very different from life with her family at home. Both Laura and her sister had to become accustomed to the rigorous schedule of the boarding school that included getting up early to perform prayers and being responsible for household chores, including cleaning, helping in the kitchen, and doing their own laundry.

***Ajá, tuve que aprender a hacer todo lo de mi ropa, a barrer, a trapear, a ayudar en la cocina porque a alguien le tocaba cada semana ayudar en la cocina. Porque yo no hacía nada de eso en mi casa. [Yes, I had to learn how to do everything, my laundry, to sweep, to mop, and help in the kitchen, because every week it would be someone’s turn to help in the kitchen. Because I never had to do any of those things at home.]***

In addition to the new tasks and chores, Laura and her sister had to share a room with the other students who attended the boarding school. This was not an unwelcomed arrangement as it allowed them to enjoy the company of other girls who were also without their parents. When students went home on weekends and during school breaks, however, they were left alone with the nuns and would become bored and a little homesick. Overall, Laura’s stay with the nuns was enjoyable as she was treated with kindness and always made to feel at home. Still however, it was not her home and she missed the company of her parents and the comfort of being in her own environment. During special events such as her birthday, her graduation, and other school functions in which parents were invited, their absence was deeply felt.

***Creo que como estábamos acostumbrados a estar juntos, a veces sí se***

***extrañaba mucho. Luego, o sea, había reuniones de papás y yo no tenía quien iba, o en la graduación no estaban ellos. En mi cumpleaños no estuvieron ellos y así como ya... [I think that because we were used to being together, I missed them a lot sometimes. And then, when they had parent meetings, I didn't have anybody to go, or during the graduation they weren't there. During my birthday there weren't there, and that is how it was...]***

In her interview, Laura did not express any kind of resentment towards her parents for leaving. At the time of their departure, she had not realized how much she would miss them. When their absence was deeply felt or when she became homesick, she felt like “just going home”, but she never questioned their decision to leave, much less express her feelings of sadness when they called her on the phone. Her parents did not provide her with an explanation for their migration, and she never sought to ask them why they had chosen to leave. To her knowledge, her parents’ decision to leave Mexico was a matter for speculation. She assumed they wanted to experience something different for a while, and that this desire for adventure had fueled their migration.

For Mrs. Rosas the separation was not difficult as she had resolved for it to be fairly short-term. She did not make much of what effect their absence would have on her children. In fact, she rationalized that they would be fine because they enjoyed the company of the nuns and because it was to be a short separation. She did not make a big deal out of the separation.

***Solamente les dije que íbamos a venir por poco tiempo, que iban a estar ahí. y como ellos iban al internado, les gustaba y no es lo mismo vivir que ir de visita pero no sintieron, no hubo problema... No fue tan difícil porque fue como ir a la escuela, fue en la mañana. Se levantaron normal, van para la escuela y cuando salen de la escuela con el director del internado...O sea, entraban después, no tenían escuela allí mismo. [I only told them that we were coming for a short time, that they were going to stay there, and because they were going to the boarding school/convent, they liked it, it wasn't the same as visiting but they did not feel bad, there wasn't a problem...It wasn't that difficult because it was like going to school, it was in the morning. They got up like normal, left for school and when they got out of school went to the director of the boarding school...That is, they went there afterwards, they didn't have their school there.]***

Mrs. Rosas did not feel that her children had a problem with their decision to leave them behind. She was certain that they would accept their decision without a protest. After all, they were used to staying with the nuns after school when they were away on business trips.

***Estaban dispuestos a nuestro ritmo de vida que teníamos, de que nos manteníamos trabajando. Vivíamos en la misma casa donde teníamos nuestros trabajos pero había que proveer materiales. Teníamos que salir cada semana o dos veces por semana, o en temporadas de trabajo fuerte***

***más tiempo, y sabían que era de ir y regresar, y que nos veíamos hasta en la noche. [They were used to our way of life, our constant work. We lived in the same house where we worked, but we had to procure supplies. We had to leave either weekly or twice a week, or when we had more work, more frequently, and they knew that we would go and come back, and that we would see each other again in the evening.]***

In short, it was Mrs. Rosas perception that her children would be able to manage the separation without much difficulty because their absences were something they were used to, and more importantly because they were confident that they would return for them. It was as if these short separations had prepared them for the more lengthy separation that resulted from their migration. She also felt confident that there would be enough support for her children in the community, as it was not unusual for Laura and her siblings to receive invitations for dinner or short trips from family friends.

Mr. and Mrs. Rosas' adjustment to the United States was relatively easy as they were able to find work right away. They liked their new environment and quickly began to see the many opportunities that were available for them. They were very optimistic. They not only focused on work but also took the opportunity to enjoy themselves in their spare time. Still, however, there was a sense of guilt.

***Veníamos y al poco tiempo, yo empecé a estudiar el inglés, trabajo en unos días. Nunca se nos dificultó que no tuviéramos trabajo. Cuando yo llegué, a los ocho días que yo salí de la casa ya estaba trabajando aquí. Fue muy fácil, aparentemente las dificultades que se ven con otras familias, otras personas, para nosotros fue fácil. Y yendo a tantos lugares los fines de semana pues salíamos, conocíamos, entonces dijimos, por qué los niños no van a poder aprovechar. Que se vengan un tiempo, aprendan otro idioma, estudien, y nos regresamos. Pero fue más que nada por darles la oportunidad a ellos de conocer algo diferente. Algo, otra cultura otro... pues más otro idioma que lo aprendieran para quizás en poco tiempo regresar y ellos tuvieran más oportunidades allá. [We came and shortly thereafter I began to study English, worked in a few days. We never had the difficulty of not having work. When I first arrived, eight days after leaving home, I was already working here. It was very easy, apparently, the difficulties that other families have, other people, for us it was easy. And going to so many places during the weekends, because we would go out and sightsee, so then we said, why can't the children also benefit? Let them come for a while, learn a new language, study, and then we can return. It was so that we could give them the opportunity of knowing something different. Something, another culture, another...well more another language, that they learn it so that when we returned they could have more opportunities over there.]***

In an earlier parent interview, Laura's dad had also expressed a sense of guilt over leaving the rest of the family behind. This sense of guilt was his prime motivation for bringing his wife here and consequently, for bringing the children to the United States.



**Parent and child relationship during the separation.** Laura's parents called Laura every Sunday to ask how they were doing. Her memories of those conversations are vague but she recalls longing for their return every time she talked to them. However, she never told her parents how she felt. Her parents tried to call her every week to see how she was doing, but sometimes the rigorous schedule of the boarding school did not permit frequent calls.

***Y los horarios de ellos también, a veces que ya cuando salíamos de trabajar era, ¡ay!, ya están cenando. Voy a espera que terminen... O sea, porque las monjas tienen sus horarios, tenían que ir a la escuela, lavar su ropa, la hora del rosario. O sea, había horas que no podíamos llamar porque sabíamos que ellas estaban en sus actividades, pero sí hablamos con ellas, platicábamos ... Y en la casa que estaba el niño hablábamos más seguido, y desde el primer día que salimos fue de llamar. ¿Cómo está todo?, ¿están bien?, ¿cómo se siente? Y todo en el viaje todos los días estuve llamando, si estaba bien, para saber que estaban bien y para que ellos oyeran de nosotros también. [And their schedules too, sometimes when we got off work it was like, oh no, they are already eating dinner. I will wait until they finish... I mean, because the nuns have their schedules, they had to go to school, wash their clothes; there is time for the rosary. It's like, there were times when we could not call because we knew that they were in their scheduled activities, but we did talk with them, we talked ...In the house where our son was we called more frequently and from the first day we left it was like calling. How is everything? Are you ok? How do you feel? During the whole trip I was calling asking if they were ok, to know if they were ok and so that they could hear that we were too.]***

The concern that Mrs. Rosas had for her children was made evident to them by her frequent and consistent calling through which they were more or less kept abreast of their parents' new life in the United States. The weekly updates contained praises of the weather, the cleanliness, and the orderly way of life in the United States. Her parents tried to spare her some of the unsavory aspects of life in the new country focusing mostly on the good aspects. Overall their experience had been positive so this was what was conveyed to Laura.

When Laura's parents decided to stay in the United States permanently they made the necessary arrangements to bring their children. They had to travel without visas but this did not overly concern their parents, who ensured the safest passage with adult relatives. Because Laura's brother was the youngest, he was brought first accompanied by his uncle. About two months later, Mr. Rosas travelled back to Mexico with the intention of bringing Laura and her sister back with him. Laura was surprised to see her dad because she had not expected him so soon. She had an idea of what the plan was but had not been consulted about the details. She wasn't sure if the move would be temporary or permanent and did not care. Her only concern was being reunited with her parents.

***Había veces que a la mejor sí nos íbamos a quedar. No le puse mucha atención, o sea, no fue tanto de que ¡Ah! Me voy a quedar allá! sino nada más como que, ¡oh!, ya los voy a ver, y ya después sí, como que ¡ah sí! A lo mejor sí nos quedamos. [There were times when I would think that perhaps we were going to stay. I didn't give it too much importance, I mean, it wasn't like oh my God, I am going to stay over there! It was more like, oh, I am going to see them again and afterwards yes, it was like Oh, yes, I think we may stay here.]***

More than anything, Laura wanted to be with her parents. She did not think much about what the migration would mean for her at the time, nor did she have any ties that bounded her to Mexico. Her family did not frequent relatives much so she was not close to any particular family member there. Leaving for her was not difficult.

The trip north was smooth. She crossed the border with the help of a smuggler. Neither Laura nor her mother provided many details about the trip itself and both characterized it as not a big deal. Once in the United States Laura, her sister, and her father boarded a plane for Santa Juana. There, they were picked up at the airport and driven to San Marino. Laura was very happy to see her mother again but reported being unfazed by her new environment. She was just happy about being reunited with her family.

### **The reunification: Here is the same as there**

**Initial adjustment.** Laura was able to adjust to life in the United States pretty easily. Upon arrival she was enrolled in school and soon enough she had adapted to her parents' new way of life. While some things in her life remained the same, there were some noticeable differences. For instance, in the United States, her parents worked outside of the home and for longer hours so when she came home from school the house was empty. According to Laura, however, the separation had served to prepare her for her parents' new routine and she was able to adjust pretty well to the change.

***Eso sí, de que trabajaban mucho, y en México siempre estaban en la casa; llegando de la escuela estaban en la casa, todo el tiempo estaban en la casa. Y aquí ahora sí no había nadie en la casa, y llegaban ya tarde y tenían que trabajar, irse temprano, y eso sí, como que... O sea, como que estaba acostumbrada a que ya no estaban todo el tiempo y que llegaba y no estaban. Pero me acostumbré rápido. [Oh yeah, they worked a lot and in Mexico they were always home; returning from school and they were home, they were home all the time. And here, now there is no one home, and they get home late and have to work, leave early, and yes, it's like I was already used to that they were no longer around and coming home and having them not there. But I got used to it quickly.]***

On weekends, the family took trips together. This was something Laura was used to doing back in Mexico and that helped her feel as though not much had been lost in

terms of family traditions. During those weekend trips, Laura felt as though nothing had really changed.

Out of all of the things in the United States, it was her school that Laura liked best. In Mexico, she had attended a private school where she felt like she did not fit in. In the United States, however, her school was larger and more diverse, and she felt more at ease. The diversity opened up all types of opportunities for her, from studying different subjects to associating with different types of people.

***Y luego, la última escuela que estuve allá no me gustaba, so, cuando vine acá yo estaba como qué, esta sí me gustó. Porque la otra escuela era una escuela privada y era una clase, nada más mi clase, mi grado; eran 27 alumnos nada más en toda la escuela, y era... no era como aquí que porque ya también ya entras a la secundaria y cambias de salones y todo. En México era un sólo salón. [And then, I didn't like the last school I attended over there, so, when I came here I was like, I like this one. Because the other school was private and it was just one class, only my class, my grade; there were 27 students in the whole school, and it wasn't like here because here how you go to middle school and you have different classrooms and everything. In Mexico it was just one classroom.]***

Laura saw the opportunity of being exposed to different people and different things as a positive result of her migration. In a small town, she felt that the opportunities for having different experiences were limited. Still however, there was the sense that if her family had stayed behind not much would have changed.

***Yo creo que los dos lugares no hubieran hecho mucha diferencia. Porque allá también tenemos la casa y tenían trabajo y todo. O sea, si venir acá también, o sea, no está mucho así de que, oh my God! ¿Qué estamos haciendo aquí?... Pues estamos casi igual. [I think in both places it would not have made much of a difference. Because over there we had a house and they had work and everything. It's like coming here wasn't like, oh my God! What are we doing here? I think we are about the same here.]***

In her narrative, it appears as though Laura is a little ambivalent about her family's migration. While she sees the positive aspects, she questions whether there have been any substantial gains. This ambivalence may be explained by her parents' lack of explanation about why they migrated in the first place. Although, in Laura's account we find traces of their narrative intertwined. We see this exemplified, when Laura talks about the opportunities of being exposed to different experiences and of having access to better educational opportunities. As she thinks about the gains she muses that perhaps the separation has taught her useful independent skills

***O sea, no sé... o sea, yo creo que sea algo bueno en unas partes porque como en el internado aprendí a hacer cosas por mí misma, o sea, no tenía a nadie que me estuviera haciendo las cosas, y aquí también mi mamá no estaba ahí para hacerme las cosas, so, cuando llegué ya sabía hacer las***

***cosas. Era más fácil que si hubiera llegado luego; y yo digo que ¡Ay!, ¿cómo voy a hacer? [It's like, I think there was something good in a way. In the boarding school, I learned to do things by myself, like, I didn't have anybody doing things for me, and here my mom is not there to do things for me either, so, when I got here, I already knew how to do things. It was easier than if I had just come; and it had been like, oh my God, how do I do this?]***

With the nuns, Laura learned to be self reliant, a trait valued by her family and essential to her survival in her new environment. In this sense the gains acquired through the whole separation and reunification experience go far beyond any financial and educational gains.

**Family relations.** According to both Laura and her parents, their relationship has undergone many changes in the United States, all of which they view as positive. They are closer than they were in Mexico, partly because they now spend more time together. As Laura has gotten older, she is also better able to engage in adult conversations and to relate to her parents in different ways. According to Laura, her relationship with her parents has improved as they have become more acculturated and adapted to the American way of life.

***No, yo creo que nos llevamos bien. O sea, echamos muchos relajos juntos, todos juntos. Y mi mamá siempre... o sea, se lleva con nosotros... no es como una mamá de que toda sería, no, sino siempre esta bromeando y siempre está jugando y haciendo travesuras y cosas así...pero antes era más seria; a mí se me hacía más seria porque no... no sé, se me hacía como más seria. [No, I think we got along well. Like, we would joke around all of us. And my mom always ... like, she get's along with us... she is not like a mom who is really serious, no she is always joking, playing, or being mischievous and stuff like that... but before she seemed more serious to me because, I don't know, she just seemed more serious to me.]***

During the first few years after the reunification, Laura felt like her parents were too strict. They disagreed about many things including her ability to have male friends, where she could and could not go, and about when she should be allowed to have a boyfriend. With time, however, they became more lenient. But for a while, Laura resorted to lying to her parents from time to time about her friends, her boyfriend, and about her whereabouts. It was around this time that Laura's grades began to decline. It is unclear what measures her parents took in order to help her improve her academic performance. What seemed apparent from the next visit to their home was a more relaxed family environment.

At the time of the separation interview, Laura had just graduated from high school. She had a boyfriend whom her parents accepted and liked. She had also been accepted to a state university far from her home. She was preparing for the move and had her parents' full support.

**School performance.** Laura was always a good student. Because she was shy and compliant for the most part she went unnoticed by her teachers and her classmates. In middle school she performed average in her English Development Program classes. Her teachers rated her as an average student. They also commented that her English skills needed improvement and that she did not always ask for clarification or help when she did not understand the class material. Aside from these comments, her teachers did not feel that Laura had any academic issues or problems that needed to be discussed with her parents. Teacher evaluations of Laura, pretty much reflected her grades in school. Her grade point average at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade was 3.0.

In high school, Laura improved her language skills significantly. She attended summer school prior to starting 9<sup>th</sup> grade, where she enrolled in two English classes that allowed her to be mainstreamed as a freshman. She attended summer school again the following year and enrolled in a photography class at UC Berkeley. Laura's high school teachers felt that although shy and not always willing to participate in classroom discussions, she was a good student. According to one of her 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, Laura had "perfect behavior" and a "good attitude". Towards the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Laura had been turning in her assignments late but this had not affected her grades significantly, her grade point average was still 3.3. As a sophomore, Laura's performance in her English class declined. Her teacher commented that she was a pleasant student, but that she was not motivated to improve her written language skills. Her overall performance was poor compared to earlier years. According to her English teacher Laura seldom paid attention in class, lacked motivation and effort, and exhibited poor behavior.

Laura took part in extra-curricular activities throughout middle school and high school. In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, her school organized a trip to Washington D.C. and Laura was one of the few immigrant students to attend. Her parents, who had an avid interest in exposing their children to as many experiences as possible, especially if these were scholastic, were supportive of her activities. She also participated in an educational program for high school students at UC Berkeley where she took a photography class.

Laura did not have clear academic aspirations. She wasn't sure what she wanted to do after high school but suspected that her parents would insist that she attend college. At one point she wanted to study interior design, but worried that she may not be able to afford any of the private colleges she was considering. At the time of the separation interview she had enrolled in a state university where she intended to major in psychology. Her parents were very proud of her.

**Social Relations.** Laura had a couple of good friends in middle school with whom she socialized during the lunch break. In the classroom, she was quiet, attentive to the teacher, and did not socialize much. Much of her social life revolved around the church. Religion was a very important part of the life of the Rosas family so her parents encouraged friendships and activities sponsored by their church. Laura's parents were also very involved in their congregation. They conducted a group for couples and participated in other church activities. Laura and her siblings attended church more than once a week with their parents. Laura was involved in church youth groups and attended retreats as well as other youth centered activities.

As a freshman in high school, Laura began associating with older students. She still had friends in her class but spent most of her time with seniors. She accompanied them off campus for lunch and socialized with them after school, without the knowledge of her parents. During one student interview, she admitted that they pressured her into cutting class. Cutting was very uncharacteristic of Laura, who had never considered cutting class in middle school. These escapades had a measurable effect on her academics and her life at home. But since there was a gap between the end of the LISA study and the current study, it is unclear how these difficulties may have been addressed by her parents.

In high school, Laura met her boyfriend. They began dating in secret until she was old enough and secure enough to introduce him to her parents. At the time of the separation interview, Laura had just graduated from high school and her boyfriend was a welcomed visitor into the Rosas home. He was attending college.

### **Conclusions for Laura and family**

Laura Rosas presents an atypical family separation scenario where the child was left under the care of family friends in a boarding school, instead of the more common grandmother or relative caregiver. Whereas for other children this arrangement may have been stressful, for Laura it was not. Her parents had not made their decision to leave her in the boarding school haphazardly. They had an established relationship with the nuns and had complete trust on their ability to take care of their daughter. Because they were very close to the church, this perhaps seemed like the best option available to them, one that would not only provide basic care but also spiritual and moral guidance. Furthermore, her parents did not seem to have close contact with relatives in Mexico, so in essence this was their most viable option. Their profession also demanded short absences from home which gave them the opportunity to give this caregiving arrangement a sort of "trial run". Laura's mother never doubted that her daughter would adjust well to life in the boarding school; after all, she had been left in the care of the nuns before. For her part, Laura felt safe in her environment and never voiced any kind of resentment towards her parents for leaving her. She also never expressed any feelings of abandonment. Whether she felt she could voice her feelings or concerns is another question. Her narrative suggests that she may have kept many of her feelings to herself. Nonetheless, she trusted her parents and accepted their decisions without reproach. After all, this is what was expected of her.

The reunification process was eased by the family's commitment to reunite and by her parents' ability to maintain a stable home environment where, as Laura stated, little seemed to have changed. What did change, mainly were her parents' work schedules, which was not terribly upsetting for Laura, as she had gotten used to being without her parents and had become more self sufficient.

### **Ambivalent Reunifications: Gains and Losses**

The following case studies illustrate what may be a more common scenario among families separated during the course of migration, which are ambivalent reunifications in which the outcomes are difficult to define. Here we see families that endured difficult reunifications that were marked by problematic family relations or adjustment difficulties for children. In some cases, the parent-child relationship is preserved; in others, it remains marked by ambivalence. In the first case study, the reunification is complicated by the child's struggle to adjust to the host society, which he perceives as hostile. At play are also his lack of a positive social support system outside of his immediate family and positive role models. In the second case study, the reunification process is complicated by a prolonged separation, a blended family constellation, and by the presence of the surrogate parent, who is not always welcomed by all family members. In another case study, the reunification process is complicated by a prolonged separation, domestic violence issues, and the father's alcohol abuse. Finally, in the last case study, marital problems create a difficult environment in the home and create strife between children and their father. The mother-child relationship survives but the child remains disengaged from school and on the road to an uncertain future. In all four cases, families are able to resolve some of their differences and problems, but there is extreme hardship along the way and a deep sense of loss.

## **Andres: A Change of Circumstance Brings About a Change in Perspective**

Andres is a young man from Mexico City whose mother, Anna, migrated to the United States in 1992, when he was 6 years old. During the separation he and his younger sister Nicky, lived with their maternal grandparents and aunts. In 1998, nearly 6 years after their initial separation, both Andres and his sister were reunited with their mother in the United States. Although Andres' relationship with his family has been good, his life has been far from conflict free. Shortly after having arrived in the United States, Andres joined a gang and began engaging in destructive behaviors that resulted in several expulsions from school as well as a short stay in a juvenile detention center. With time, hard work, and with the relentless support of his family, Andres gave his life a turnaround. His new perspective on life gave way to a more fulfilling experience where the painful family separation once seen as unjustified, began to seem as a worthwhile sacrifice. Andres was interviewed twice about his separation and reunification experiences. The first separation interview was conducted in 2002 and the second interview was conducted in 2005.

### **Family composition and socioeconomic circumstances**

Andres' family is composed of his mother Anna, his stepfather Gustavo, and his sisters Nicky and Anita. In Mexico City, Andres lived with his mother and her family. His father left his mother before he was born and he never established any kind of relationship with him. His sister Nicky was fathered by another man, who also left Mrs. Garcia before her birth. Nicky does not know her father and he never sought to establish a relationship with her either. Andres' younger sister was born in the United States shortly after Andres' arrival. The family currently resides in Pentrose, a city adjacent to San Marino with cheaper rents and where many Latino families from San Marino have been relocating.

Prior to migrating to the United States, Mrs. Garcia worked in a factory in Mexico City where she earned very little. She received an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education, which was more than either one of her parents had achieved, but which was not enough to land her a better paying job. When she first arrived in the United States, Mrs. Garcia worked as a house cleaner earning a modest income. After she became pregnant with her youngest child, however, she stopped working and became a homemaker. Her husband worked as a housepainter and the family relied on his income exclusively. At the time of the parent separation interview, Mrs. Garcia was eager to begin working again and had begun to take her youngest child to daycare. She was worried that Andres' legal problems were causing too much of a financial burden on her husband and wanted to assume some of those expenses. Further, the house painting business was slow and her husband was worried that he may lose some of his income. When I interviewed Andres in 2005, he was working in a paint store mixing paint. Because he was still enrolled in school, he was not able to work as much as he would have liked, but his income provided a welcomed help to his family who by then was living comfortably in an apartment in Pentrose, California.



### **Pre-separation period: It was too painful to say goodbye**

According to Mrs. Garcia her reasons for migrating were purely economic. After having been laid off from her factory job, she began searching for employment in factories around Mexico City. She found that employers always preferred younger girls and that at 29 she was already considered too old. With two young children to support and with no financial assistance from their fathers, she had to find a way to make ends meet. Her brother, who lived in the United States, had promised to help her should she decide to make the trip north. She had a vague knowledge of life in the United States but knew from the remittances that her brother sent her family, that in the United States she had the possibility of earning a decent living. Her desire to provide a better life for her children was something that motivated her to consider migrating. But leaving Andres and Nicky behind would be difficult, and Mrs. Garcia struggled with that decision. What made the thought of a separation bearable was the certainty that her children would be well taken care of by her parents.

***Pues que sabía que los dejaba en buenas manos...pero hacerlo fue bien fuerte. Era la decisión de darles lo mejor. [Well, I know that I was leaving them in good hands ...but doing it was very hard. It was the decision of giving them the best.]***

The pressures of single parenthood along with the economic pressures of a shrinking job market finally forced Mrs. Garcia to find better opportunities in the United States. Her parents were reluctant at first to let her migrate, worried about her safety. With time however, they came to understand that her financial needs and responsibilities were great and her choices were limited. In Mexico employment opportunities were few; in the United States, Mrs. Garcia would have far better opportunities for getting ahead.

***Pues al principio no querían. Ya después como vieron la crisis más difícil, se acabó mucho trabajo, a muchas personas nos descansaron de las fábricas, porque allí son injustos... Entonces yo... ¿Como iba a hacerle para mis niños? Porque yo siempre fui responsable con ellos. [Well, at first they did not approve. Afterwards, when they began to see how difficult the crisis was becoming, a lot of the work was gone, many of us were laid off from the factories, because they were really unjust....So then... how was I going to do for the children? Because I was always responsible with them.]***

Mrs. Garcia saw the migration as her motherly duty, a sacrifice she would have to make in order to provide sustenance for her children. Without a father, her children relied solely on her for sustenance. Her parents understood this and had no choice but to give her their blessing.

Mrs. Garcia told her children that she was leaving to find work and that once working, she would be able to buy them all the toys that they wanted. The children were also left under the impression that the separation would be temporary and that their mother would return once she had saved enough money. This was Mrs. Garcia's

initial intention but she still saw the necessity to sugarcoat the sad reality. The need to deceive the children was born out of her desire to minimize their pain.

***Si, no más les dije que me iba a venir un tiempo y que les iba a mandar juguetes...engañándolos así...Les dije que me iba a venir lejos pero que yo no quería que les pasara nada. Y siempre jugando...les voy a traer muchas cosas, les voy a mandar...Y ellos se ponían tristes, pero les daba alegría que les iba a mandar cositas. Si, ese es el interés. [Yes, I only told them that I was coming for a while and that I would send them toys...deceiving them like that...I told them that I coming far but that I did not want anything to happen to them. And always playing...I will bring you lots of things, I will send you...And they became sad, but then would be happy because I was going to send them things. That is interest]***

Andres does not remember his mother explaining to him the reason for her departure. He barely remembers her walking out the door. On that particular day, Mrs. Garcia left very early in the morning, while Andres and Nicky were still asleep. She kissed them goodbye and left.

***Ah, muy triste...Porque fue en la mañana, nos fuimos a la cinco y media, y estaban dormidos. Yo les eché su bendición, les di su besito. Y también en la noche estuve platicando con ellos, y fue muy triste...Aunque mi corazón siempre estaba con ellos. [It was very sad...because it was in the morning, we left at five thirty and they were asleep. I gave them their blessing and their kiss. And also at night I was talking to them, and it was very sad...even though my heart was always with them.]***

Andres has another recollection of his mother's departure, one that was given during the last separation interview. In this other recollection both he and his sister had to be restrained after his mother waited for a taxi. Their pain was too great to allow for them to be consoled, and according to Andres, in order to spare them that pain, the next time his mother left, she decided to leave while they were still asleep. Because his mother returned to Mexico a couple of times before they were reunited in the United States, it is possible that his recollections of the event may have merged together. What appears salient, however, is the remembrance of the pain that the loss of his mother elicited and the recognition of his mother's attempts to minimize that pain both for he and his sister.

***Ah bueno, chille. Empezábamos mucho a chillar, pero pues ella se tenía que venir en la mañana en la mera madrugada cuando estábamos dormidos para que no sintiéramos feo. Porque la primera vez, si vimos como se iba a ir, y sentimos bien feo porque vimos como estaba esperando un taxi para que la llevara al aeropuerto...nos dieron juguetes pero no los queríamos... y entonces nos tuvieron que tener agarrados hasta que se fuera ella, nos quedamos chillando nosotros. [Well, I cried. We started to cry a lot, but well she had to leave in the morning, at the break of dawn when we were asleep so that we would not feel bad.]***

***Because the first time, we did see when she left and we felt really bad because we saw her waiting for a taxi to take her to the airport...they gave us toys but we did not want them... and then they had us restrained until she left, we stayed crying.]***

Andres was told by his relatives that his mother was moving to the United States to work so that he and his sister could have a better life. The separation was framed as temporary and Andres expected his mother to return to Mexico after a short while. During the separation interview, it is evident that Andres understands his mother's motivations for leaving. He mentions the economic hardship she experienced in Mexico and her desire to earn more money for the family. He also understands that his mother left him behind because he was too young and because she wanted to spare him the danger of an illegal border crossing. At the time of her departure however, he had a very limited understanding of her migration. The understanding came later with the explanations that his relatives were able to provide him and the conversations that he would have with his mother over the phone.

Mrs. Garcia left Mexico in 1992. She was accompanied by one of her sisters. They, along with a group of aspiring migrants crossed the border with the help of a *coyote*. Prior to crossing the border, however, she spent a week and a half in Tijuana with family friends. From there, she called home to check on the children and was glad to find that they were doing well. With that peace of mind she crossed the border and eventually settled in San Marino, California where two of her siblings were already established.

### **The separation period: My heart was with you over there, and I was here**

Andres and his sister, stayed behind with their maternal grandparents, aunts, and uncles. They had always lived with them, in the same house that his grandfather had built. For Mrs. Garcia, the thought that they would remain in their own home was comforting. This way, her absence would not be accompanied by the additional stress of moving to a different residence or living with a different set of relatives in an unfamiliar environment. For Andres this turned out to be a perfect arrangement as his recollections of home in Mexico are almost idyllic. In his separation interviews, he describes his grandparents' house as huge with lots of rooms and his general surroundings as wonderful and exciting. In these recollections, San Marino paled in comparison to the Mexico he left behind. He was spoiled by his aunts who took him to arcades and parks and bought him video games. Andres also remembers the level of attention his family showered on him and the daily rituals that showed him that they cared. He felt loved and cared for in every way.

***Me llevaba bien con ellos, eran muy buena gente, nos cuidaban mucho. Nunca nos maltrataban o decían que no nos querían, que éramos un estorbo. Siempre nos quisieron mucho. Nosotros tuvimos mucha suerte de que nos cuidaran [I got along with them, they were good people, they took care of us well. They never mistreated us or told us that they did not want us, that we were a burden. They always loved us. We were very lucky***

***that they took care of us.]***

Of particular importance was his aunt Marcela, with whom he was very close. Out of all of his relatives, she was the one that Andres missed the most. She took care of him on a daily basis; she fed him, ironed his clothes, and took him on recreational excursions. Leaving her was difficult for Andres, as she came to be like a mother to him. He even called her mom on occasion.

Mrs. Garcia enjoyed a good relationship with her parents and siblings. It was the quality of this relationship that made her decision to migrate bearable. In their hands, Mrs. Garcia felt certain that her children would be loved and well taken care of. The only worry that Mrs. Garcia had was that her relatives were not always open about the general wellbeing of her children. As she recalls, whenever she called Mexico, her sisters would tell her that the children were doing fine. But, Mrs. Garcia was not entirely at ease with their responses as she sensed that they routinely omitted information so as not to cause her worry. In this sense, the separation was difficult for her as her worries about the wellbeing of her children were incessant and her ability to keep abreast of their health and development was compromised.

***Pues, pensaba en como estarán, estarán enfermos, porque mis papas nunca me decían. “Están bien,” todo el tiempo “están bien”, por no preocupar. Me decían, solo tienen un poquito de gripa, porque ellos se enfermaron varias veces... Si, ya después, hasta después me enteraba que estuvo bien enfermo, que le dio quien sabe qué...cuando llegue les decía, porque nunca me dijeron? ‘Pues para qué? No te queríamos preocupar...’ así, tuvimos comunicación. [Well, I thought about how they were, were they sick, because my parents never told me anything. “They’re well” all the time “they are well”, so as not to worry me. They would tell me, they just have a little cold, because they would get sick often ... Yes, later on, only later I would find out that he was very sick, that he had I don’t know what... when I returned I asked them why they didn’t tell me. “What for? We didn’t want to worry you”...that is how our communication was.]***

Aside for caring for him, Andres’ relatives constantly reinforced his mothers’ reasons for migrating. He and his sister were always told that their mother had to leave in order to find work so that they could have all the things they needed and wanted. By buying them toys and clothes with the money their mother sent, this message was further reinforced. At first, however, Mrs. Garcia was not able to send money. Thus, her relatives took it upon themselves to buy them small toys and treats so that they would not feel abandoned.

***Engaños dicen, “los llevamos a las tiendas comprándoles cosas pequeñas”, y si les mentían de que yo les mandaba dinero muy pronto, pero no se podía porque hay que pagarles aquí todo... Yo ni compraba ropa para mí, yo iba donde al alberge, pues de San Marino, y yo prefería ahorrarles para mandarles a ellos. Si pero ya después, yo me acuerdo que la primera carta que hice para mandarles me puso bien triste. [Lies they***

**said, “we took them to the stores to buy them small things”, and yes, they did lie to them, that I sent them Money right away, but I couldn’t because here you have to pay them everything...I didn’t even buy clothes for me, I would go to the shelter, in San Marino, and I preferred to save so that I could send to them, But later on, I remember the first letter that I wrote them to send them , it made me very sad.]**

During their phone conversations, Mrs. Garcia frequently explained to her children the reasons for her prolonged absence. She talked to them about the difficulties of making ends meet in Mexico and about her desire to provide for them a better life. By sending remittances and gifts, she ensured that her message sunk in.

***Pues que venía a trabajar, hablándoles todo, siempre. Porque yo venía acá porque ya allá no había trabajo, y que venía aquí a buscar porque aquí había mucho trabajo. Y les mandaba juguetes, dinero para que les compraran allá cositas. [Well, that I came here to work, always talking to them about everything. That I came here because over there, there was no work, and that I had to come here because there was lots of work here. And I sent them toys, money so that they could buy them things.]***

In the separation interview, Andres’ talks in detail about the many gifts he received from his mother and about the things that his aunts bought him with the money his mother sent. It is evident from his recollection that he did not feel abandoned and that he was able to benefit from his mother’s migration. He admits having been spoiled, but the material things were not a substitute for his mother and did not always provide him with solace. When I asked Andres about how he felt about his mother leaving he answered that he was sad but that with videogames he was able to forget everything.

For Mrs. Garcia the separation was very painful. In her separation interview she recalled life with them in Mexico. She described herself as a very attentive mother who continuously showered her children with affection. For Mrs. Garcia, it was the day to day routines that she missed the most. She also worried about the effect that the separation would have on their relationship, fearing that they would stop loving her, that she would lose their affection. In order to cope with her sadness, she called them weekly to see how they were doing. She asked them about school and about how they were behaving at home. After some time, the calls were less frequent; she called them once or twice a month. She returned to Mexico on two occasions to see them. The first trip home was only 6 months after having migrated. According to Mrs. Garcia, living without her children was too difficult and her desire to be with them was so great that she felt that she had to return and make things work in Mexico. She did not intend to return to the United States but the happiness of being reunited with her family was soon dampened by the realization that she had to return to the United States because in Mexico, she could no longer provide financially for her children. She had also become accustomed to life in the US.

***Me sentía triste porque aquí se gana bien, y decía, hijole, lo que gane allá va a hacer más difícil, porque según yo, ya no pensaba regresar. Ese era***

***mi plan, llevar dinero y estar allá, pero ya no se puede. Es la emoción más bonita de ver a los papas, a los niños cuando me fueron a recibir. Sentí feo cuando me fui de aquí por qué aquí me gusto bastante. Al regresar allá, la diferencia de lugar. Eso fue una emoción tan bonita a la vez, ver a mis chiquitos. [I felt sad because here you earn a good living, and I would say to myself, what I earn there it will be more difficult, because I did not intend to return. That was my plan, to take my money and stay there, but that wasn't possible. That was the most beautiful feeling, to see my parents, the kids when they went to meet me. I felt bad when I left here because I liked it a lot. When I returned there, what a difference. That was a beautiful feeling to see my little ones.]***

Leaving her children for a second time was very difficult for Mrs. Garcia. She talked to them before leaving and talked to them about how difficult it was for her to provide for them in Mexico. To lessen the impact of her decision, she promised again to send them toys.

***Volví a hablar con ellos, y les dije que voy a venir otra vez por qué no se puede vivir así, especialmente cuando no tenemos parejas. Entonces ya fue cuando les dije que me iba volver a venir. Y dijeron que sí. “Sí mami, ¿nos vas a traer muchas cosas otra vez?” Sí, les voy a traer muchos juguetes. A ella le emociona mucho los juguetes. Sí, les voy a mandar cuando venga alguien. [I talked to them again and I told them that I was coming again because we couldn't live like this, especially when we don't have partners. So that was when I told them I was coming back. They said, “yes mom, you are going to bring us a lot of things again?” Yes, I am going to bring you lots of toys. She was very excited about the toys. Yes, I will send you some when somebody comes back.]***

After a year in Mexico, Mrs. Garcia returned to the United States. She continued to call her children regularly and to send remittances. She remained in the United States for about a year before making a second trip to Mexico. By this second trip home, she had already met Gustavo with whom she had established a tentative relationship. Mrs. Garcia was uncertain how this relationship would develop since she had two children from two previous relationships. She was unsure if he would commit both to her and to her children since she had no intention of leaving them permanently in Mexico. As she recalls, while in Mexico, Gustavo called her and told her that he accepted both her and her children. Mrs. Garcia was delighted and decided to return to the United States in order to resume her relationship with Gustavo and to plan for the arrival of the children. She was convinced that Gustavo would make a good father and with her parents' failing health she saw that there was really no other alternative than to bring her children permanently to the United States.

***Cuando vi que mi mamá se enfermaba mucho, tiene diabetes, se cayó, se lastimo las costillas y porque vi que estaban creciendo, quería aprovechar que allá no podía darles el estudio más avanzado. Pues aquí se me hace***

***más fácil. [When I saw that my mom was getting sick a lot, she has diabetes, she fell, she hurt her ribs and because I saw that they were growing and I wanted to take advantage that over there I could not provide them with higher education. Here it was easier for me.]***

Her parents were not particularly happy with her decision but accepted the fact that the children had to be with their mother. They told her that she should get settled first, and that after that if she wanted to send for them, she could. After two months in Mexico Mrs. Garcia returned to the United States. Mrs. Garcia felt bad about taking the children away from her parents. After all, they had always taken care of them and were very much attached to them.

**Mother and child relationship during the separation.** Andres and his mother enjoyed a good relationship prior to and during their separation. Andres respected his mother and was thankful for the sacrifices that she made for him. Their relationship was maintained through phone calls and letters. During the time that they were separated they spoke on the phone frequently. Their usual topics were school and their general health and wellbeing. Mrs. Garcia made sure that they communicated frequently. She feared that her children would soon forget her or think that she had abandoned them. She also worried about the possibility of becoming estranged and wanted to keep their relationship as close as she possibly could from abroad. To this end she made sure they were always provided for. She never failed to send gifts or money especially during special occasions.

***Era bastante dinero. Cuando no era nuestro cumpleaños no más nos mandaba como cien pesos o poco nos mandaba. No mandaba tanto, pero nuestros cumpleaños nos mandaba mil. Mi hermana en veces, como le mandaba más dinero, le compraban unos vestidos, su estéreo, no me acuerdo que más le compraron. A mí me compraron también un montón de juegos, a mí me gustan un chingo los juegos de video. Me compraron un chingo de juegos, como no querían que pusiera los juegos en la tele de mi abuelita compraron una tele para mí. [It was a lot of money. When it was not our birthday she would only send about one hundred pesos or send us just a little. She did not send much, but for our birthday she would send one thousand. My sister, because she would send her more money, they would buy her dresses, her stereo, I don't remember what else they bought her. They bought me a bunch of videogames; I liked videogames a whole lot. They bought me a bunch of videogames, and because they did not want me to play them on my grandma's TV, they bought me my own TV.]***

Andres was certain of his mother's devotion and cognizant of the fact that the perks he enjoyed were possible thanks to her labor abroad. He missed her, but understood why she had left. When his mother would call, he would ask her to return, her response was always the same. She could not return, but she wanted him to come to her. During their conversations, his mother talked to him about life in the United States, always with

the intention of luring him to come and live with her.

***Convenciéndome para venirme para acá. Me decía que estaba bien bonito y no sé que tanto...Que estaba muy bonito, que habían un montón de cosas muy bonitas y no sé qué tanto, y si habían un montón de cosas bien chidas pero no como en México. Me emocionaba pero no quería venirme, no quería venirme para acá yo. [Trying to convince me to come. She would say that everything was pretty and I don't know what else...That it was very pretty, that there were a bunch of pretty things and I don't know what else, and yes, there were many cool things here, but not like in Mexico. I would get excited but I didn't want to come, I didn't want to come here.]***

At first Andres and his mother spoke frequently, with time however, their conversations were less frequent. Andres knew that his mother worried about them and that they were in her mind constantly. In his narrative of the separation period, there is a sense that he never felt forgotten or abandoned.

In addition to gifts, money, and phone calls, Mrs. Garcia made sure that her presence would be felt in her children's life, despite her absence. To this end, she left pictures of herself in Mexico so that her children could look at her every day. During our separation interview, Andres recalled a particular picture of his mother that hung outside of his bedroom. He liked having this reminder of her close to him.

***Tenemos una foto nosotros allá, una foto, un cuadro grande con la foto de ella y ella se la tomo para que nosotros siempre tuviéramos en mente como era ella. La teníamos nosotros cerca del cuarto donde dormíamos Nicky y yo. Y todas la mañanas la veíamos...me gustaba muchísimo a mí que nosotros la tuviéramos para recordarla a ella como era. [We have a picture over there, a picture, a big picture frame with her picture, and she took the picture so that we would always have in mind how she was. We had it close to the room where Nicky and I slept. And every morning we would see it...I loved the fact that we had it so that we could remember how she was.]***

Mrs. Garcia's return visits to Mexico also helped to keep their relationship alive. During her visits, Mrs. Garcia made sure that the time spent with her children was special.

After his mother's second visit, it became clear to Andres that a reunification in the United States was imminent. For Mrs. Garcia, her new relationship provided her with the help and support she needed to bring her children to the United States. When Andres learned that his mother was dating, he became upset. He had never known his father and was not interested in acquiring a new one. But, upon perceiving his mother's sadness, he decided to accept her relationship.

***Que ya estaba junta con otro vato. Y fue cuando me vine. Porque ya la primera vez que me dijo me enoje, dije que ya no quería tener otro papá y ya. Porque nunca conocí al que tuve yo. Pero le dije que no quería tener a otro. Y ella se puso triste estaba llorando ella cuando le dije así. Ya fue***



***casi cuando me iba a venir para acá. Y le dije... pues si está feliz que tenga otro vato y ya. [That she was together with another guy. And that was when I came. Because the first time she told me I became upset, I told her that I did not want another father and that's that. Because I never met the one I had. But I told her that I did not want another one. And she became sad and started to cry when I told her that. That was around the time I was coming here. I told her...If you are happy, have another guy and that is that.]***

According to Mrs. Garcia, her children took a liking to Gustavo right away. While in Mexico, they communicated with him over the phone and slowly began to feel comfortable with him. This was a relief for Mrs. Garcia who could not focus on the details to make the reunification possible. First she would have to convince them to leave Mexico.

According to Andres, he never wanted to leave Mexico. When his mother asked him to come, he told her that he did not want to leave his grandparents. After his mother's second visit however, the possibility of his own migration became more tangible. He told his mother that he did not want to leave before finishing elementary school, but the trip had been arranged and Andres felt compelled to come, if just for a short while. Andres had mixed feelings about the reunification. He felt a strong desire to be reunited with his mother but at the same time a great sadness because he would have to leave his family behind.

***Pues me sentí mal. En primera parte me sentía como alegre porque iba a ver otra vez a mi mamá. Pero por otra parte sentía muy mal porque iba a dejar a mis abuelitos y a mis tías. O sea, no quería irme. Mi mamá llamo y le dije que no, que mejor me quedaba en México. Me dijo, "vente." No, no me voy a ir. O sea que mis tíos me convencieron de irme. Ya dije, ya, ya pues, ya me voy. [Well, I felt bad. In part, I felt happy because I was going to see my mom again. But in a way, I felt bad because I was going to leave my grandparents and my aunts behind. It was like, I didn't want to go. My mom called me and I say no, that I was going to say in Mexico. She said, "come". No I am not going. It's like my aunts and uncles had to convince me to more. So I finally said, ok I will go.]***

In order to convince Andres to come, Mrs. Garcia and her family painted a wonderful picture of the United States, but this strategy did not have the desired effect. He was still unwilling to migrate. His mother then pleaded with him until he accepted to come, but only with the option of being able to return if he did not like it. The day of his departure, Andres felt strange, almost numb.

***Fue al siguiente día, y me sentía muy raro, no sentía, no tenía ganas de caminar. Afuera de mi casa, ya iba a ser la última vez que iba pisar la casa de mis abuelitos. Era una casa grande ... Y era la última vez que la piso y me salió una lágrima. Entonces fue cuando ya iba como llora y llora y sentía que iba a dejar a mi abuelita. Y ya fue a dejarme al avión y fue***

***cuando me despedí de mis tías, estaban llorando. [It was the next day, and I felt very strange, I could not feel, I didn't feel like walking. Outside of my house, it was going to be the last time that I was going to set foot in my grandparents' house. It was a big house... It was the last time that I set foot in it and a tear fell from my eye. It was then when I started to cry and cry, and I felt like I was leaving my grandmother. And then they took me to the plane and that was when I said goodbye to my aunts, they were crying.]***

Mrs. Garcia had arranged for Andres and Nicky to travel to Tijuana and to cross the border at the inspection point using someone else's identity. They were accompanied by three of their cousins and their aunt. According to Andres, they were given a tea so that they would go to sleep, in case they were asked questions. Andres, however, could not sleep. He just pretended to be asleep when they approached the checkpoint. Andres was very nervous. To his relief, they were waived through by the border officer and taken to a safe house in Los Angeles. From there, his mother was contacted over the phone. She arranged for them to be picked up by a relative and driven to San Marino to his aunt's house where his mother and aunts had arranged a welcome party for them.

### **The reunification: Longing to return**

Mrs. Garcia was very excited about having her children finally by her side. She nervously awaited their arrival and prepared for them a special welcoming. Their reunification took place at her sister's house, where they had arranged the living room with decorations, baked a cake, and placed gifts for the children on the table. Andres remembers seeing his aunts, uncles, and other family members there. When he first saw his mother for the first time he was glad but a strange feeling came over him.

***Mi mamá estaba llorando...yo la vi diferente. Como que, no sé cómo me sentía. [My mom was crying...She looked different. It was like I don't know how I was feeling.]***

After greeting everyone, they walked to their own apartment where they were able to shower and change clothes. His mother had taken the day off from work to spend the entire day with them. She took her children to the mall and bought for them clothes and toys. Although his initial impression of the United States was favorable, Andres felt at odds. At the time, his mother was living in the Laguna area of San Marino at the time, where most of the residents were Latino. Andres felt somewhat content in his new environment, but still in his mind, there was no place like Mexico.

***Me la pasaba pensando mucho en México yo me acordaba de cómo iba a la escuela, me acordaba de mis tías y mis primos porque todas las mañanas íbamos a la escuela...íbamos a jugar o nos llevaban a la arena o a los juegos allá a jugar... a la vez me sentía muy triste todavía, no, muy triste. [I would think about Mexico a lot, I remembered how I used to go to school, I remembered my aunts and cousins, because every day we would go to***

***school...we would play or they would take us to the field, or to the videogames to play...at the same time I still felt very sad, very sad.]***

Mrs. Garcia recognized the difficulty the children were experiencing adjusting to their new environment. She realized that they were no longer the small children that she had left behind; they had grown up and become accustomed to life without her. She wanted them to feel at ease and to become acquainted with her once more. She was patient and asked them to give their new home a chance; if it became too difficult for them to adjust, she would send them back to Mexico. With time, however, life in the United States became easier and Andres' relationship with his mother improved. Mrs. Garcia made sure that her children were happy. She spoiled them in every way she could. In a sense she understood that if she wanted them to stay, she would have to ensure that they were happy.

***Si porque ellos no querían dejar a sus abuelitos. Y les dije pues...okay, primero un ratito y si les gusta se van a quedar más tiempo. Y si no, los mando otra vez para allá...y no, ya les gusta. [Yes, because they did not want to leave their grandparents. And so I told them... okay just for a little while, but if you like it, you will stay a little longer. And if you don't, I will send you back... and no, now they like it.]***

In addition to becoming accustomed to living with his mother, Andres had to learn to live with a stepfather he had never met. Because his mother had prepared them for the reunification, this task was not particularly difficult. According to Mrs. Garcia, Gustavo and her children liked each other from the start. The children were also aware of the role that Gustavo had played in their reunification and with time had also realized that he was a good person. It did not take long for them to accept him and for the family to feel whole again.

**Initial adjustment.** As Andres began adjusting to his new environment, he began having problems in school. At first, these problems were purely academic, but with time they escalated in gravity and scope, resulting in suspensions, an expulsion, and in the eventual involvement of the police. Andres also began to change his appearance in order to fit in with other Latino boys at his school. He began to grease his hair back and to wear baggy clothes. His new appearance singled him out as a member of his middle school's *sureño* gang. From the point of view of his teachers, Andres' family seemed unaware, or not to care, about his low academic performance, his membership to a gang, or the many problems his gang membership had caused him at school. Further, Andres seemed intent in keeping his school persona separate from his life at home with his family, to prevent his parents from worrying about him. Andres' stepfather may have been involved in gangs in the past, but his role in influencing Andres' attitudes towards gangs is uncertain. He did, however, have an uncle with gang ties who helped him keep his troubles in school from his parents a secret. When he needed a relative to come to the school, or when he needed someone to bail him out when he was arrested for vandalism, he called on his uncle to help him. At the time, Andres' uncle was a very influential figure in his life, someone he looked up.

Part of the lure of the gang for Andres was the status that members gained within their own click. Andres, who felt at odds in his new environment and discriminated against, seemed to seek in the gang the comfort that his environment denied him. In his student interviews, Andres complained of the discrimination that Latinos faced at his school and about the injustices that they often confronted in society. He repudiated the idea of becoming a victim of discrimination and took pride in standing up to oppression, White students, and school officials. When Andres was transferred from San Marino to his local high school in Pentrose, his feelings of marginalization intensified, mainly because in his new school, Latinos were a smaller minority. He also began to use drugs and to engage in more destructive behaviors that eventually landed him in juvenile hall.

When Andres' parents became aware of his problems they sought help from the school district and Latino advocates, but it was already too late. By then, Andres had been expelled from middle school and placed in an alternative school in San Marino. He was given probation and was required to fulfill a number of requirements including regular meetings with a social worker and other detention aversion programs. During Andres' most difficult times, his family remained by his side. His mother was especially troubled by Andres' behavior but continued to be supportive. Adding to her worries was the fact that the financial burden of Andres' actions was falling almost exclusively on her husband. She began looking for work. It took a couple of years for Andres to turn his life around. During the last separation interview in 2005, Andres was a senior in high school. He had gotten a job at a paint store and was earning a good income. He was no longer attending high school but had enrolled in an independent study program through his school. The independent study option suited him well and he was scheduled to finish all of his requirements and graduate early. After high school, Andres planned to continue working at his current job. He felt appreciated by his employers and coworkers and had earned a reputation for being a skilled worker. Andres was optimistic about his future prospects in the United States and no longer felt the desire to move back permanently to Mexico.

**Family relations.** The Garcia family is a united family. After the initial adjustment difficulties Andres and his mother continued to get along well. It was hard at first for Andres to have the kind of trust that he had once enjoyed with his mother. As he recalls, he did not feel comfortable enough to hug or kiss her and even the most common interactions with her provoked a little discomfort.

***Nos llevamos bien pero a la vez raro porque pues como no le tenía muchísima confianza yo a ella, no le teníamos confianza, bueno yo no le tenía confianza. Si había confianza de contarle cosas pero este, de abrazarla y darle muchos besos no me sentía muy seguro de eso con ella... solo le decíamos, hola ¿cómo estás? y ya, era lo único que le decíamos a ella. [We get along well but at the same time it is weird because I was not very comfortable with her, we didn't have trust, well I trusted her. There was trust enough to tell her things but, to hug and give her lots of kisses, I didn't feel sure enough to do that with her.]***

According to Andres it took about 4 months for him to feel secure in his relationship with his mother. Now things have reached such a level of normalcy that he cannot even imagine having been separated from her. In terms of the separation, he and his mother have broached the subject in the past. Mostly, his mother has reassured him of her devotion and of the necessity of the separation as a means of survival. Now Andres is glad that his mother made the exceptional sacrifice of leaving them.

During the separation interviews, neither Andres nor his mother made any mention of family tension or conflict resulting from the reunification. According to both of them, the family adjusted pretty well to each other. In Mrs. Garcia's eyes, things could not have gone better. She understood that relating to each other would be strange at first, mostly because her children had grown up without her, but she was certain that with time, they would warm up to her.

***Sí, grandes, ya no eran niños chiquitos. Les dije, aquí los voy a meter a estudiar. "No porque, nos vamos a regresar pronto a México". ¿Quieren irse? "No, todavía no"... fue muy bonito. ... Nicky y Andrés se sentían raros de decirme mamá... no era igual a que estuviéramos hablando por teléfono... yo le digo, que paso mi'ja, y "yo me siento rara llamándote mamá", y yo le dije, ay mi chiquita, yo soy tu mamá. Yo me sentí mal, "sí, yo sé, pero me siento rara porque en México, era abuelita, tía, y abuelita y abuelita y nunca mamá, más que por teléfono." [Yes, older, they were no longer little kids. I told them, I will enroll you in school. "No, because we're going back to Mexico soon." Do you want to leave? "No, not yet"...it was beautiful...Nicky and Andres felt weird about calling me mom...it wasn't the same as talking on the phone...I said, what is wrong darling? "I felt weird calling you mom" and I said to her, my little one, I am your mother. I felt bad, "yes, I know, but I feel weird because in Mexico, it was grandma, aunt, and grandma, and grandma, and grandma, and never mom, only on the phone."]***

Part of the process was becoming reacquainted with each other, and to an extent, redefining the roles of mother and child. For the children this was not a simple process as even calling her "mom" seemed foreign to them. Even though, she had been the only "mother" they knew, she had been a distant presence in their lives.

***Y ya fuimos agarrando más confianza. Les dije, ya que están aquí vamos a la cancha, vamos a que les compre algo, se sentían bien felices, muy contentos. Decían "aquí nos estas dando lo que no nos daban allá mis abuelitos". Y les fue gustando más. [And we started to feel more comfortable. I told them, since you are here, let's go to the court, lets go buy you something, they felt happy, very glad. They would say "here you give us what our grandparents couldn't give us over there". And they started liking it more.]***

Mrs. Garcia communicated to her children her feelings regarding the separation highlighting the sadness she felt as a result of their absence. She felt the need to

communicate this to them so that they would understand the reasons behind her actions. She never failed to let her children know how much she missed them when they were apart.

***Y les dije, fíjate que yo me iba a sentar allí, en esa banca me sentaba a llorar, me acordaba mucho de ustedes cuando iba a caminar. “¿De veras mamá?” Sí, hijos. Y mi hija chula me abrazaba, me daba un besito. Les platicaba lo que yo sentía cuando estaba sola. Y no quería regresar porque lo que me pagan aquí comparado a lo que me pagan allá, es mucho más; es más dinero aquí, que yo mando para allá. “Sí, mami”. Ellos veían la necesidad de comprender. Les digo, ¿saben porque no me iba? Por qué no quería que les faltara lo que yo les compraba. Yo quería que ellos también tuvieran, aunque no tuvieran a sus papas. Nunca quise que ellos se sintieran mal. [I told them, you know I used to sit there, in that bench I used to sit and cry, I would think about you a lot when I would go for a walk. “Really mom?” Yes, my children. And my beautiful daughter would hug me and kiss me. I talked to them about what I was feeling when I was alone. And I did not want to return because what they paid me here compared to what they paid me over there is a lot more; it’s more money here that I could sent over there. “Yes mommy.” They saw the need to understand. I say, do you know why I didn’t go back? Because I didn’t want to take away what I could give you. I wanted them to have what they had, even if they didn’t have their parents. I never wanted them to feel bad.]***

Mrs. Garcia’s preoccupation with her children’s feelings and her insistence in talking about their separation helped them feel a new appreciation for her sacrifices. This appreciation was evident in Andres’ sense of duty to his family and to his mother in particular. For instance, although Andres felt ambivalent about being in the United States for some time, he felt an obligation to his mother to stay, at least until he was of age. It appears that he did not disclose to his mother his true feelings. In this sense, he wanted to shield her from the disappointment or sadness that she may have felt. In his interviews, he made known his dislike for the United States, especially when things started to go wrong. Back then, he wished to go back to Mexico. It was the obligation to his mother that made him stay.

***Que tal vez cuando sea mayor de edad, ya que no dependa de mis papas. A lo mejor ya regreso... Pues como ya seré mayor de edad y como ya tiene a mi hermanita chiquita. Pues que disfrute de mi hermanita...Pero yo no, cuando ya tenga los dieciocho a lo mejor a los diecinueve me voy. [Maybe when I am of age, when I no longer depend on my parents, maybe then I will return...Since I will be of age, and since she already has my little sister, she can enjoy my little sister...But not me, when I am eighteen or maybe when I am nineteen I will leave.]***

This sense of obligation or indebtedness also prompted Andres to protect his mother

from the worry and disappointment that his eventual troubles in school would cause her. He tried in earnest to shield her from the troubles until they finally caught up with him. Their relationship however remained strong throughout the reunification period and Andres never reproached his mother for having left. In the end, he came to realize that the sacrifices she had made may have been worthwhile after all.

***Valió mucho la pena que viniera para acá, para que yo viniera acá a estudiar. Y he llegado a tener cosas que allá no hubiera tenido. Yo no hubiera tenido un carro allá, aquí sí. Un trabajo, no creo que hubiera tenido allá y allá no me pagarían como me están pagando ahorita. [it was worth it that she came here, so I could come here and study. And I have come to have things here that over there I would have never had . I wouldn't have had a car over there, but here I do. A job, I don't think I would have had a job over there and they would not pay me what I get paid here now.]***

After Andres reestablished his relationship with his mother, the next task was to become acquainted with his new stepfather. Mrs. Garcia's relationship with Gustavo did not pose an obstacle to a successful family reunification between Andres and his mother. On the contrary, Gustavo was supportive of his wife and her children throughout the whole process. He even helped Mrs. Garcia bring the children to the United States by helping finance their trip. Andres and his sister were aware of the role Gustavo had played in their reunification and were thankful to him for the support they had received. Soon after his arrival, Andres realized that Gustavo was a good person and treated him with the respect he felt he deserved. According to Mrs. Garcia, he became the father they never had. Gustavo earned their love and appreciation with little effort. Andres, who in Mexico had been reluctant to accept a new father, eventually began calling him dad.

***Tomo un tiempo para que dijéramos papá...después cuando llegué aquí lo empezamos a tratar... tomo tiempo para que le dijéramos papá porque nomás le decíamos Gustavo. Gustavo esto, Gustavo aquello... poco a poco se ganó nuestro cariño, se lo ganó, yo y mi hermana entendimos que... que estaba con nosotros siempre a ayudándonos y apoyándonos... él nos decía hijos ya desde antes y se gana nuestro cariño y ya hasta ahorita yo no lo veo como una persona así, lo veo como un papá, le hago caso, me dice y me regaña cuando hago cosas malas. "no hagas eso, no hagas aquello" y le tengo mucho respeto porque me da muchísimo y lo queremos mucho. Lo quiero mucho yo a él. Es una buena persona,... también tiene su carácter cuando estamos haciendo algo malo pero eso es lo que cualquier padre hace. [It took a while for us to call him dad...when I arrived here we started to get to know him...it took a while for us to call him dad because we just called him Gustavo. Gustavo this, Gustavo that...little by little he earned our love, he earned it, and my sister and I understood that he was here with us, always helping us and supporting us...he called us his children since before and he earned our love and until now I don't***

*see him like just a person, I see him like a dad, and I listen to him, he tells me and scolds me when I do bad things. "Don't do this, don't do that" and I have a lot of respect for him because he gives me a lot and because we love him a lot. I love him a lot. He is a good person...He also has his temper when we are doing something wrong, but that is what any parent does.]*

Eventually Andres began to feel like he was part of a family. He never felt alienated or like an outsider. When his mother became pregnant with his younger sister, his family seemed to be more united than ever. Andres welcomed the arrival of the new child, even though it resulted in a slight shift in the family dynamics whereby Andres and his sister Nicky stopped receiving preferential treatment. Andres did not mind not being the primary focus of his mother's attention and felt relieved knowing that with his little sister his mother would never feel lonely, even if he decided to leave. For a time he contemplated the idea of returning to Mexico, but his plans always included the fulfillment of his mother's aspirations for him here in the United States, to graduate from high school.

**School performance.** Although Andres adjusted relatively easily to the family reunification, his adjustment to the greater social environment was difficult. Andres started the sixth grade in the United States with a lot of enthusiasm and potential. His enthusiasm, however, waned as he began encountering difficulties in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. His grade point average at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade was 3.07, by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade it had decreased to 1.95. The more Andres became involved in the gang, the less motivated he became in school. By the eighth grade, he became less consistent about finishing assignments and scored low on tests. His English teacher described Andres as a good student who was extremely bright but who did not apply himself. His math teacher felt that he was not working to his full potential. It was her opinion that Andres was withdrawn or shy about speaking up in class, since most of the students in her advance math class were Anglo. She recognized that the curriculum was challenging to Andres but felt confident about his capabilities to master it. She sensed that he lacked commitment and did not attempt to make any efforts towards improving his skills in spite of her efforts to make herself available to him for tutoring. Neither of these teachers ever called his parents to discuss his academic decline citing the language barrier as the cause.

After Andres was arrested for vandalism, his school began to take measures to curb his behavior. At first, he was told that if his academic performance did not improve, he would be transferred to an alternative school. Andres began to change his attitude towards school and to complete missing assignments in order to avoid the transfer, but any improvement would come too late. Two of his teachers tried in vain to advocate for him, arguing that a transfer would only prove detrimental to him, who had not yet exhibited behavioral problems in the classroom. Andres' parents who had been oblivious to the problems he was facing at school were unable to mobilize their resources in time. In the middle of the academic year, Andres was transferred to an alternative school for troubled youth and received a year and a half of probation. Once he finished the eighth grade, he was given the opportunity to transfer to his local high



school in Pentrose the following year. Something he looked forward to. In spite of his many setbacks, his aspirations for the future remained high. He planned to finish high school and to attend college in order to become a doctor.

Once in high school, however, Andres began to completely disengage from school. He skipped many of his classes and seldom completed his schoolwork. During his freshman year his science teacher commented that Andres “showed great apathy for the majority of the year” and that he suspected that he had been using drugs at school, something he had confronted him about. He also commented that Andres would often show up to his class intoxicated and would spend the entire class period talking to his friend in Spanish. According to this teacher, the drugs and his overall lack of motivation and interest in academics had contributed to his low performance in his class. At the end of his freshman year, his grade point average had plummeted to 1.0 and he had failed all of his classes with the exception of algebra where he earned a B+. In the 10<sup>th</sup> grade Andres was placed in juvenile hall for a few weeks and consequently was placed in probation until the age of 18. He eventually enrolled in the alternative home schooling program so that he could work part time. Every week, he was required to meet with an academic advisor at his school who collected his homework and assigned him work to complete the following week at home. Andres liked this arrangement because it allowed him to work independently and to engage in paid work. By the time of the last separation interview, in March of 2005, Andres had earned enough credits to graduate from high school earlier than scheduled, a fact that he was very proud of. He had no aspirations of continuing his education but planned to work full time at his current job, which he liked.

**Social relations.** Although Andres was a very likeable and polite young man, he had limited social supports outside of his family. From early on he adopted an adversarial stance that deprived him of establishing positive peer relations at school. His friends in middle school were mostly Latino young men affiliated with the local gang that Andres belonged to. These young men were for the most part marginalized from the school experience and from other positive social networks and thus not able to provide Andres with opportunities or avenues for social and academic enrichment. In this sense, Andres’ social contacts were detrimental rather than beneficial to his process of adaptation. In spite of his teacher’s attempts to reach out to him, Andres never sought to establish a relationship with them or any other school staff. He was polite inside and outside of the classroom, but never felt comfortable enough to approach his teachers when he needed help. During his probationary period, he was assigned a probation officer, a social worker, and a counselor. He was required to attend weekly meetings and group therapy sessions at a community center. In spite of the added support, however, Andres never quite engaged in school and continued to be pulled by the gang culture into even more destructive behaviors. In high school, Andres associated with drug dealers, used drugs in school, failed most of his classes, and was placed on probation. His future looked bleak.

At the time of the last separation interview, Andres had undergone a dramatic change following his detention in juvenile hall. He had taken a job at a paint store and within months had become a skilled worker, earning the recognition of his employers and coworkers. The relationships he established at work had a positive impact on his

behavior, his outlook on the future, and his self-esteem. They not only helped him feel accomplished and validated, but gave him the certainty that the future held better things for him, if he worked hard. The appreciation and esteem that his employers and coworkers held for him also gave him a sense of pride and a realization of his potential. These positive gains were reflected in Andres' perception of his mother's migration and his experiences as an immigrant in this country. He no longer felt like leaving his family to return to Mexico and saw the separation from his mother a worthwhile sacrifice. His undocumented status was seen as a disadvantage but not an insurmountable obstacle. He owned a car that he was careful to drive and a job that held prospects despite his undocumented status.

### **Conclusions for Andres and family**

Andres and his family were separated in the best of circumstances. His mother was careful in planning her departure and took the necessary steps to minimize the negative effect that her absence would have on her son. Her departure was explained to him as a necessary sacrifice for the good of the family, and was framed in terms of the economic hardships that drove many Mexicans abroad in search of work. It was easy for Andres to understand his mother's reasons for migrating as he experienced the benefits of her migration as tangible improvements in his quality of life. He never felt abandoned thanks to the efforts of his family members to keep the memory of his mother alive and his mother's own efforts to keep abreast of their lives. Nonetheless the separation from his mother was very painful and his memories of her departure very vivid.

Equally difficult was his separation from his grandparents and relatives, whom he loved dearly. His description of that last goodbye is telling of the sadness that he felt and the ambivalence surrounding his departure. The bond between Andres and his family in Mexico was deep and during his difficult adjustment in the United States, it was the comfort of these relationships that he sought. His longing to return to Mexico was akin to the longing to return to the warmth and comfort that they personified. It took a while for Andres to adjust to life in the United States. It is possible that the lack of connection he found to his environment, and initially to his new family, may have strengthened the lure of the gang.

His mother's decision to marry in the United States may have complicated the reunification had not been for the respect that Andres had for his mother and for the openness with which she was able to discuss the subject with him prior to his migration. In the end, Andres' father proved to be instrumental in making the reunification possible, a fact which contributed to Andres' acceptance of him and to the sense of family unity that developed between them. It was their commitment to each other as family members that helped Andres overcome the difficulties he faced within the larger society. In Andres' case, his adjustment to the larger society was the most problematic aspect of the reunification while his adjustment at home with his family was seemingly uncomplicated.

## **David Gutierrez: A Tale of Two Mothers**

David Gutierrez is a pleasant young man who was separated from his mother Dora, when he was one year old and left in the care of his maternal grandmother Susana in Guatemala. During the separation, David's mother remarried and had another son. She was also able to legalize her immigration status and travel back to Guatemala to visit. David's mother did not want him to travel to the United States illegally so she began the process of applying for his permanent residency based on a family reunification provision. Because the process was long, Mrs. Gutierrez attempted to bring David to the United States with a tourist visa. She made several petitions for a visa but none were successful. After nearly 12 years of separation, David and his mother were finally reunited. By that time he had grown attached to his grandmother who never left his side and ultimately accompanied him to the United States.

### **Family composition and socioeconomic circumstances**

David's family is composed of his mother Dora, his stepfather Carlos, his brother Kevin, and his grandmother Susana. The family rents a tidy three bedroom apartment in a predominately Latino enclave of San Marino. With them lives David's maternal aunt Alicia. David has other relatives in the area, but does not see them often. Mrs. Gutierrez has always disliked her neighborhood and community and has been wanting to move out as soon as she can afford to do so. She sees that gangs are a pressing problem in the community and a threat to the safety of her sons. According to Mrs. Gutierrez, the family would like to purchase a house but with the high cost of housing in San Marino, this is a dream that seems unattainable. Moving to a more affordable city is not an option for them as Mrs. Gutierrez is certain that San Marino has quality schools and she is unwilling to sacrifice a quality education for her children for more space and home ownership. At the time of the separation interview, David was attending a state university and returned to San Marino only during school breaks.

David's family is of modest means and humble beginnings. His mother works part-time as a freelance house cleaner. She completed 9 years of formal education in Guatemala, where she worked as a pharmacy clerk. Her husband Carlos works as a full-time cook in a local restaurant and has an additional part-time job as a gardener. He completed 13 years of formal education and received a teaching credential in Guatemala. David's grandmother works as a babysitter. She only received 4 years of formal education in Guatemala where she worked as a nurse and a seamstress. In 2002, the family was earning a modest income of approximately \$35,000 a year. The family participates in the Healthy Families program which provides health insurance for David and his brother Kevin.

### **The pre-separation period: If I stayed we could have died**

According to Mrs. Gutierrez, the push to migrate was economic. In Guatemala, she was barely making enough money to support her family. David's father left them soon after David's birth and had remained largely absent from their lives. According to Mrs. Gutierrez, he never took any responsibility for David's care in spite of a court

mandate to provide a meager sum of money per month for child support, barely enough to cover David's milk. The family's precarious situation was further exacerbated when David became ill. Because his mother was unable to pay for medical care, he was taken to a "curandero", or healer, in the hopes that he would be able to cure him. According to his mother, the visit to the healer was helpful in relieving David's fever, but the diarrhea had not ceased. Worried, she sought the help of her father, who worked as a farmworker in the United States. With the money he sent, she was finally able to take David to a medical doctor who was able to cure his illness. As she recounts, it was this particular ordeal that made her realize that she would need to take drastic measures in order to ensure a better future for her son. She first considered moving to Guatemala City to search for work, but the scarcity of employment opportunities and higher cost of living there made the capital an unattractive option. What made more financial sense to Mrs. Gutierrez was to migrate to the United States where her father could help her get settled. Her mother, who depended on her financially and who would have to care for David in her absence, tacitly supported her decision.

***No me dijo que me fuera, ni que me quedara. Me dijo que la decisión era mía. Que ella cuidaría a David ya sea si me fuera a trabajar a Guatemala o si me fuera a los Estados Unidos a trabajar. [She did not tell me to go or not to go. She said that the decision was mine to make. She said that no matter what, she would take care of David, whether I stayed and worked in Guatemala or migrate to the United States to work.]***

The decision to separate from her son was extremely painful, even now, remembering this difficult dilemma causes her to become visibly upset. Her saving grace was the certainty that her son would be well cared for by her own mother and that someday they would be reunited. After all, the plan was to return to Guatemala in two years.

Mrs. Gutierrez left Guatemala with the help of an uncle in the United States who sent her money to pay for a *coyote* or smuggler. Mrs. Gutierrez did not talk much about her journey during our interviews but was very adamant about sparing her son the hardship of migrating illegally. Because David was an infant, he has no recollection of his mother's departure or of his relationship with her. He doesn't feel like the separation was traumatic for him. All of his feelings and thoughts about the separation were formed later, when he became aware of the fact that he had a mother in the United States.

### **The separation period: I didn't know I had a mother**

David was a little over a year old when his mother migrated to the United States. During his mother's absence, he was cared for by his grandmother who had been involved in his care since birth. According to David, he was little affected by the absence of his mother during his infancy and childhood because the presence of his grandmother filled the void left by his mother.

***Me dejo tan chiquito que no me recordaba de ella. Entonces me acostumbré a que mi abuela fuera mi mamá. Pues si me faltaba mi abuela,***

***entonces ahí si me hacía falta ella. [She left me when I was so young that I did not remember her. So, I became used to my grandmother being my mom. So, if my grandmother was not there, then I would have really missed her.]***

In David's mind, his grandmother was his mother because she had raised him. She also behaved like a real mother, "me cuidaba, me quería mucho, me llevaba a la escuela y todo" [she took care of me, loved me a lot, took me to school and everything]. David remembers his grandmother's cooking as comforting and her care as consistent. When asked to recount a specific memory of his grandmother and their relationship, he reminisced about the breakfast she would prepare for him, and the coffee that she would serve him but that he would never drink. As he explains, he never became attached to his mother because she left when he was just a baby and because his grandmother was readily available to take her place.

David believes his mother left Guatemala for economic reasons. "En realidad vino porque ... allá no había mucho dinero, era difícil conseguir trabajos. Entonces vino acá para superarse ella misma, y para también ganar, hacer más dinero" [in reality, she came because... over there, there was not much money. It was difficult to find jobs. So she came here to get ahead and also to earn more money]. David had also come to the conclusion that her migration mimicked migration patterns he had observed in Guatemala. In fact, during our separation interview, he placed his mother's migration within a wider context, "mucha gente se estaba viniendo para acá en esa época" [many people were coming here during that time] alluding to the waves of migration that flowed out of Guatemala during the 1980s and 1990s. He reasons that it would have been hard for his mother to bring him to the United States as a baby because of the perilous and arduous nature of the journey and the difficulty of getting settled in a new country.

***Bueno pues, en realidad era algo difícil para mi mamá traerme de bebe, cruzar la frontera y todo eso, porque se cansaría o algo así. Entonces mejor me dejo allá. Y yo creo que fue mejor, porque si me hubiera traído acá se le hubiera hecho mucho más difícil conseguir trabajo y todo. [Well, in reality it was difficult for my mom to bring me here as a baby, to cross the border and all of that, because she would get tired or something like that. That is why she left me. I think it was for the best because if she would have brought me it would have made it difficult for her to find a job and everything.]***

In David's mind, there were just too many unknowns, too much uncertainty. Certainly his mother had made the right decision leaving him in Guatemala with his grandmother. After all, he had a better upbringing than his younger brother, Kevin who had been born in the United States and had been raised by his mother. David perceived Kevin as "childish" because he had been "spoiled" by his mother. He thought his grandmother had done a better job of raising him and was thankful for that.

David's grandmother was instrumental in keeping the memory of his mother alive by constantly reminding him of the sacrifices she had made for them. Because he was an infant when she migrated, the majority of David's ideas about his mother and her

decision to migrate came from his grandmother. There were also concrete improvements in their living standards that resulted from Mrs. Gutierrez's migration. For instance, they were able to move from their smaller provincial town to Guatemala City, where Mrs. Gutierrez had built them a small house. David was also able to attend a private school and to have a relatively easy life. As David recalls, life in Guatemala was good. His memories of home are happy, filled with the presence of friends and loved ones, including uncles, aunts, and cousins with whom he was very close. In his interviews, David mentions the presence of an uncle who was very special to him. This uncle was studious and David wanted very much to emulate him. It is apparent from David's narrative that he had positive influences in his life and these positive figures not only shaped his experiences in Guatemala but would also be instrumental in his development as a young man.

As Mrs. Gutierrez relates, David's life improved significantly as a result of her migration. She was able to send money to pay for his doctor visits when he got sick, and to keep both her mother and son taken care of financially. According to Mrs. Gutierrez, David did not live like a rich kid, but he lacked nothing. With time, she was able to build a house in Guatemala City where David was able to attend a better school. In terms of material compensation, David received special presents for his birthday and Christmas and, if he received good grades in school, his mother would grant him something special. The perks that came with having a mother abroad were not overlooked by David who remembers enjoying and benefiting from them.

Being separated from her son was extremely difficult for Mrs. Gutierrez. She worried incessantly about David and about how he would get along without her. During the separation interview, she related one of her main worries. The house in which David and her mother lived back in Guatemala lacked indoor plumbing, so people had to use latrines. As Mrs. Gutierrez relates these latrines were "big enough for a child to fall into" and accidents like these were not unheard of. She remembers staying up all night thinking about David and worrying about whether her mother would be able to safeguard him from falling into a latrine. She wondered if her mother would be able to hear his cries for help if she was asleep. Being far away and entrusting the care of her son to someone else was difficult, but she had no choice. She was relieved to know that David would be cared for by his grandmother and in spite of her many worries, she felt assured that he would receive adequate care in her absence.

**Mother-child relationship during the separation.** During their separation, Mrs. Gutierrez visited David a total of 3 times. The first visit took place when David was five years old. Mrs. Gutierrez remembers arriving at the airport in Guatemala City searching for David, whom she imagined a little boy. She did not recognize him at first; David immediately recognized her. By the time of her first visit, Mrs. Gutierrez had already remarried and was accompanied by her husband Carlos and by David's brother Kevin. The times spent in Guatemala were special, but leaving was so hard that sometimes, Mrs. Gutierrez did not want to visit that often. She began spacing out her visits because leaving David again took such a toll on her.

David has fond memories of her visits because they always involved gifts and trips to "exotic places". They spoke on the phone about once monthly but according to David, the conversations were short and without much depth.

***Ah...me preguntaba que como estaba...y en realidad, como estaba tan chiquito, no le ponía tanta atención, nada mas quería jugar... yo le preguntaba cuándo iba a venir, y a donde me iba a llevar... Y me preguntaba como estaba, que como estaba la escuela, y todo así, preguntas generales. [Well, she asked me how I was doing... and really, because I was very young, I didn't think much of it, I only wanted to play... I asked her when she was going to come, and where she was going to take me...and she would ask me how I was, how I was doing in school, and general questions.]***

Jokingly, David explains that he thought his mother was “cool and rich” because she always brought him clothes, toys, and chocolates. Mrs. Gutierrez has a different perception of her relationship with her son. She has the impression that instead of considering her his mother, David considered her a source of material comfort, a “*mamá dinero*” as Mrs. Gutierrez puts it. Their relationship however, was good. They enjoyed their time together. When she called him in Guatemala, she seldom got a chance to talk to her mother because David would monopolize the phone. This is a far cry from David’s recollection of their conversations. She also describes him as clingy during her visits. According to David however, he was not attached to his mother because she left him so young. He even recalls rather vaguely when he became aware that he had a mother in the United States. Before that, his grandmother had been his only mother.

***A lo mejor me lo habían dicho pero como que no había puesto mucha atención porque no la vi hasta que tenía cinco años [Maybe they had told me before but perhaps I had not paid much attention because I did not see her until I was five years old.]***

In retrospect it appears that Mrs. Gutierrez was deeply affected by the separation. While David seems less sure that there was any negative effect from her prolonged absence. As Mrs. Gutierrez recalls these difficult moments in her life, she seems unsure as to how David may have been impacted by them. She wonders if perhaps, he did not need her and if the resentment he harbors towards her for leaving is justified. She feels extremely guilty for leaving him, even though the sacrifice she made was for his welfare.

In 1988 Mrs. Gutierrez was able to legalize her status through the Simpson-Rodino bill that granted legal residence to agricultural workers. She had worked in agriculture for a short while, but since her employer remembered her, she was able to write her a letter stating that she had completed the minimum amount of time required for legalization. She was given legal residence and within a year, she was able to begin the process of bringing David to the United States. The process however would be long because Mrs. Gutierrez was not a US citizen. She attempted several times to bring David to the United States with a visitor visa but to no avail. In fact, David remembers how every year, he and his grandmother would make the trip to the US Embassy in Guatemala City. They would wait in line at the break of dawn and were always denied. As soon as she became eligible, Mrs. Gutierrez became a US citizen and as soon as

she had been sworn in, David's application for residency became expedited and finally granted. According to Mrs. Gutierrez, when David's appointment at the US Embassy arrived, she was not prepared. She had thought that the process would take longer and that they would not be able to reunite until his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Once the appointment was set, however, Mrs. Gutierrez scrambled all of the resources at her disposal in order to make the trip and the adjustment as smooth as possible. David arrived in the United States within a month of this appointment.

Mrs. Gutierrez had strong feelings about the risks involved in crossing the border illegally. This was something that she did not want to endure ever again and something that she wanted to spare her son. This was the primary reason for waiting so long to bring him to the United States. She wanted him to migrate legally without any risk to his wellbeing.

### **The reunification period: A house divided**

David was 13 years old when he left Guatemala. Initially, he was apprehensive about migrating. When his mother asked him if he wanted to come and live with her, he told her that he was not really interested in living in the United States. But in reality, he was more concerned about leaving his grandmother than about reuniting with his biological mother. When his grandmother would tell him that he would someday be reunited with his mother in the United States, he would ask her if she would come along too. From the get go, he made it clear that he would not leave Guatemala without her. So, when his mother tried to convince him, she had to agree to bring his grandmother along with him.

***Sí, me trataba de convencer, me decía, si vente por acá, aquí es muy bonito, y no sé qué...aquí podemos estar juntos. Entonces yo le decía, se iría mi mamá conmigo? O sea mi abuela. Entonces me decía, 'Si, si quieres, se puede venir.' Ah, le decía, entonces tal vez. [Yeah, she would try to convince me, she would say, come here it is very beautiful, and I don't know what else...here we can be together. So I would say to her, would my mom come with me? You know, my grandmother. So she would say, 'if you want she can come'. So I would tell her, well then maybe.]***

David's migration journey was relatively easy. He found out he was migrating two weeks before the trip had been arranged. He knew that his mother intended to bring him to the United States but had no idea when the arrangements would be finalized; after all they had been waiting for many years. Once his residency application was approved, his departure became more tangible. When the news came to him, he felt sad because he would have to leave his relatives behind. He was nervous because he had no idea what to expect in the United States. He was overcome with contradictory feelings. On the one hand he did not want to leave, yet he looked forward to being with his mother, visiting a new country, and studying in the United States. David left Guatemala very upset, he cried all the way to the United States. As he recalls, his grandmother was also crying and seeing her upset was difficult. They traveled by plane and without much difficulty arrived at the airport where his mother, stepfather, and



brother welcomed them. Initially, David planned to stay in the United States only to finish his studies, and then he planned to return to Guatemala. With time, however, his stay became more permanent.

**Initial adjustment.** David experienced many changes and challenges throughout the reunification period but was able to adjust remarkably well to his new life. Many of the challenges were encountered at home were family conflict and divided loyalties threatened to tear his family apart. A resolution of these problems required that the entire Gutierrez family make adjustments and compromises. It would be long before the family reached a satisfactory resolution.

**Family relations.** The arrival of David and his grandmother was a joyous event for Mrs. Gutierrez. It was a change that required all family members to make necessary adjustments and concessions so that they could get to know each other and live together as a family. This was more difficult than Mrs. Gutierrez had foreseen. For one, the role of David's grandmother as 'surrogate' had to be renegotiated now that David's mother assumed her role as bona fide parent. This was not easy and the tension between them over their role as 'David's mother' made family relations difficult at best. According to Mrs. Gutierrez, the initial objective was for her mother to come for a year in order to help with David's transition. But, because she ended up staying, her presence became a cause for conflict between her and her husband and eventually between David and the rest of the family. David's ability and willingness to accept Mrs. Gutierrez as his mother was also compromised by his grandmother's presence. For David however, having her there with him facilitated the adjustment, as he did not feel as vulnerable and marginal as he might have felt if he had been alone. He was also able to share his feelings of vulnerability and marginalization with her, something that made their bond stronger.

The alliances between different family members in the household became a source of conflict and stress for the family. For instance, when arguments ensued between David and Kevin, their grandmother would take David's side which in turn, compelled Mrs. Gutierrez to defend Kevin. These battles not only contributed to the strained relationship between David and his brother but also served to reinforce David's detachment from the rest of the family, including his mother. The relationship between Mrs. Gutierrez and her husband was also compromised by the grandmother's presence. According to Mrs. Gutierrez, if it had just been David, the adjustment to the reunification would have been easier, but it was the presence of her mother that seemed most problematic for her husband. They often fought about their living situation and being in such a small living space made matters worse. In the end, her husband and mother avoided each other and rarely spoke. David took this arrangement as a rejection not only of his grandmother but also as a rejection of him.

***It was like he didn't want us to be there... He would come home and then lock himself in his room and when he would come out he would not event talk to us.***

This was a complete change from the friendly stepfather David had met in Guatemala.

Often he wished he could move away, if only he had somewhere to go.

Mrs. Gutierrez described the first few years as being particularly difficult for her because she felt like she was in the middle of a family war. She did not want to take sides and had almost given up hope of ever having a happy family. Tensions eventually eased, however, and relations between family members improved. In the end, David, his stepfather, and his brother began to get along wonderfully.

***Me acuerdo que antes, cuando quería que fuéramos al cine era, “no, yo me quedo con mi abuelita”. Ahora eso ya no es un problema. Me acuerdo que durante su senior year en high school él tenía un juego de soccer y le dije que lo iba ir a ver. No le dije que iba a traer a su padrastro y hermano, y yo pensando que se iba a enojar conmigo. Pero no, estaba contento de que los hubiera traído. [I remember before if I wanted us four to go to the movies it was like no, I will stay home with grandma. Now this is not a problem. I remember that during his senior year in high school he had a soccer game and I told him I would come. I brought along his stepfather and Kevin with me, thinking the whole time that he would become upset at me for doing so. Well it turns out that he was glad that I did.]***

During the separation interview David admitted that he has come to appreciate his brother Kevin. They no longer quarrel and spend time together every time he comes home to visit from college. Kevin has now taken the place of his high school friends, who now David rarely sees. The relationship between David and his stepfather has also undergone a dramatic change. Both are now appreciative of each other and spend time together. David is also particularly fond of his stepfather's culinary skills, and according to his mother, he now prefers his stepfather's cooking to that of his grandmother's.

With time, David's relationship to his mother has also changed. At first, David used to complain that his mother was too possessive and controlling. Now, she is no longer able to exert too much control over him. Mrs. Gutierrez believes that David will never love her in the same way he loves his grandmother and believes that he only sees her as a provider of material goods; something that she believes marked their relation during the separation.

***Pensaba que para él era como ‘mamá dinero’, así era como me veía, como la mamá que le mandaba dinero. Yo se que él está resentido porque me fui. Cuando se enoja conmigo siempre me dice que lo deje. Pero cuando uno está sentido uno dice muchas cosas. Es difícil. Se lo he explicado varias veces, que si no me hubiera ido, Dios sabe lo que nos hubiera pasado. Nos pudiéramos haber muerto. No fue una decisión que yo quise tomar, más bien que se me forzó. Le digo que si no me hubiera preocupado por él, lo hubiera olvidado y me hubiera divertido yo sola, comprarme muchas cosas...pero no. Lo hice por él. [I used to think that for him I was ‘money mom’, that is how he saw me, as the mother who sent him money. I know that he resents the fact that I left. When he is upset at me he always tells me that I left him. But, when you are upset you say***

***many things. It is hard. I have explained it to him many times, that if I had not left, God know what would have become of us. We may have died. It was not a choice I wanted to make, but a choice that was forced upon me. I tell him that if I would not have cared I would have forgotten about him and had fun on my own, buy me lots of things... but no? I did it for him, so he could have a good life. I always tell him that I did it for him.]***

Now that David is in college, his mother continues to support him financially and caters to him in any way she can. She still feels guilty about having left David for so long but feels justified in her decision to migrate. She understands David's resentment and knows that it is something that he may never be able to shake. In spite of any kind of resentment David may feel towards his mother, he continues to consider her a very important figure in his life, a person he can count on and that is supportive of him in ways that his grandmother cannot be. He also understands the reason for her migration and believes that it may have been the best thing his mother could have done for him. When asked how his life would have been different if he had not been separated from his mother, he imagines a life with endless material rewards, "entonces a lo mejor si hubiera estado acá, mi mamá hubiera trabajado y hubiera tenido más dinero para comprar cosas y me hubiera comprador todo lo que quería" [then maybe if I would have been here, my mom would have worked and would have had more money to buy things and she would have bought me everything I wanted]. This alternative scenario seems idyllic to David only for a second. After thinking about it David, ponders if having all of the material benefits of his mother's hard work may have spoiled him, like his brother Kevin. He then responds that his mother may have made the right decision leaving him behind with his grandmother.

With time, the relationship between David and his grandmother also changed. During the first few years, David remained close to his grandmother. They had a strong filial bond that became intensified with their experience as outsiders in an inhospitable home. As David became more accustomed to life in the United States and as relations with his other family members improved, he began to separate from his grandmother. According to his mother, he became less attentive to her needs to the point of almost forgetting about her.

***Si, yo creo que se ha vuelto más independiente de ella. Me acuerdo que cuando recién saco su licencia decía que iba a poder sacar a su abuelita a pasear. Pero no mas compro su carro se olvido de ella. [Yes I think he has become a lot more independent from her. I remember that when he first got his license he kept saying that he would soon be able to drive his grandmother around. As soon as he got his car, he forgot all about her.]***

In David's eyes however, his grandmother remains an important figure. In our interviews, David describes his relationship to his grandmother as very good. Now that he has moved away from home, he says that out of his entire family, she is the one that he misses the most. He often calls home hoping that she will answer the phone but she never does. When he does reach her on the phone, to his disappointment, she does not say much.

**School performance.** David's academic journey has been characterized by an exceptional drive and unrelenting diligence. Within a relatively short time David was able to transition from the English Language Development program to a mainstream academic program, and during his last two years in high school to an accelerated college preparatory program. Even though his hard work has contributed greatly to his academic success, there were other factors that helped him maintain his high level of academic engagement. The support that he received from his mother, who valued education very highly, was particularly important as was her insistence that he earn high marks in all of his classes. A second factor was the academically enriching environment that his school provided. A third factor was David's ability to establish and maintain the social relationships that eventually helped him achieve his academic objective, to attend college.

David's mother, for instance, was a constant source of emotional and academic support. Her support was manifest in the kind of decisions she made regarding David's education. For example, after graduating from middle school, all eight graders at David's school were given the choice of attending one of two high schools in their home town. The high school closest to David's home had a fairly diverse student body (approximately 40% Latino) and many programs and services geared towards Latino students and their parents. The other school, which was furthest from David's home, was considered by many to be the better school. It was, however, less ethnically diverse (only 15 to 20 percent Latino) and had no support services for Latino students or their parents. To attend this school, David would have to be driven there or board two buses to get there himself. When faced with the decision of where to send her son to school, Mrs. Gutierrez did not hesitate to choose the better school, even if this meant having to drive David there and back every day. David was happy with his mother's decision and liked the fact that this school had better academic opportunities and was less associated with gang members and problematic student behaviors in general.

Undoubtedly, David's mother has been instrumental in his academic success. David feels supported by her but sometimes feels that her expectations are too high and that she does not understand the pressures of academic life. According to David, because his mother does not understand the difference between the English Development Program and the more challenging academic track he was able to transition to, she expected him "to keep getting As". This made David frustrated, but at the same time it kept him on his toes. It was perhaps his mother's high expectations that have kept David engaged in school. His sense of family responsibility also fuels his drive to do well, as he would like to help his family have a better life and sees academic achievement as a means to achieve this end.

David adapted well to his school environment. He was liked by his teachers and peers and was able to maintain good grades throughout his middle school and high school career. David was mainstreamed into all English classes during the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He had not been challenged in the English sheltered classes which were specifically designed for English Language Learners and advocated quite insistently for a change. Once mainstreamed, however, he found the work and keeping up with his classmates difficult. While his mother was not always able to provide him with concrete academic support, she was supportive of academics in other ways. She purchased a computer

for him and made sure that he had no other responsibilities at home aside from school. She also maintained residence in San Marino so that David could attend better schools. By his last year in high school, David had been placed in honors courses. This was a subject of pride for David. In addition to academics, David took an avid interest in extracurricular activities. He played soccer for his school, was active in his church, and took part in other enrichment programs. At the time of the student separation interview, David had finished his first semester in college. He found college life liberating and challenging and hoped to study engineering.

**Social relations.** Aside from his two best friends in school, David derived most of his social support from the church. During his first few years in the United States, the church figured prominently in his life. He joined the church band and attended church functions and youth retreats regularly. As he became older, however, he began to attend church events less frequently. God was still very important in David's life and he derived a great deal of support from this relationship, but he had also expanded his social network. He was also engaged in many extracurricular activities and had a busy schedule.

It was David's mother who made David attend church and who favored David's church relations over those from school. When David was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade he began using the church as an alibi when he wanted to go out with his school friends, something his mother disapproved of. He would tell his mother he was going out with his friends from church when in fact he was going out with his friends from school. This was a strategy that he used regularly during his last two years of high school, when his mother still exerted some control over his comings and goings.

David also started dating in high school, but kept his relationship from his mother, fearing her intervention. Once he left for college, he complained that his friends never had time to hang out with him during his visits home. Fortunately for him, his brother Kevin spent time with him and their relationship improved tremendously as a result.

### **Conclusions for David and family**

Although David and his mother endured a long separation and a difficult reunification, they have managed to establish a good relationship. David respects her and appreciates the opportunities that she has made available to him by migrating. He admires her and can relate to her in many ways. Their relationship, however, lacks emotional depth mainly because of their prolonged separation and because of his attachment to his grandmother. For David's mother, losing the love of her son to her own mother has put her sacrifice into perspective. Even though she sees the opportunities that she has been able to provide her son, she sees herself as the real loser in this separation and reunification scenario. Mrs. Gutierrez gave up her claim to her son early on, understanding that David needed to have a meaningful relationship to her mother. She resigned herself to her role of provider and disciplinarian. This may have taken the pressure off David to choose between his two mothers and may have kept the roles of each mother distinct so that David could presumably have two mothers each with her own function. But from his mother's standpoint, not having the unconditional love of her son was much too painful. Towards the end of the study,

David and his mother managed to build a strong relationship. As David became more acculturated, his needs changed and the presence of his mother began to gain more relevance. She could understand him better than his grandmother and could support him in ways that his grandmother could not. Unfortunately, however, David's mother seems not to have been able to get over the guilt of leaving David and is not fully able to enjoy the relationship that she now has with her son.

The advantage of having two mothers is perhaps obscured at first when the presence of David's grandmother was a source of family tension. It was her presence, however, that saved David from the negative effects of a separation, which may have been more damaging to him than the initial separation from his mother. Her presence also allowed him solace during those difficult few months in which he felt unwanted and out of place. It is difficult to say if David's relationship with his mother may have benefited or been complicated by her presence. It is possible that David would have been resentful of his mother had she not agreed to bring his grandmother, or that his adaptation to the United States may have been more difficult. In the end, the presence of David's grandmother may have been a blessing in disguise, as without her, the family cohesion that later developed may not have been possible.

## **Yolanda Ramirez: Making a Sacrifice for the Children**

Yolanda is a young woman from Guatemala who was separated from both of her parents during the process of migration. Yolanda's father was a migrant farmworker in Guatemala and was often absent for extended periods of time. When he migrated to the United States, Yolanda was barely one year old. At the time, Yolanda's mother was pregnant with her little sister Elsa. Mrs. Ramirez left Guatemala to be reunited with her husband a year and a half later, when Yolanda was 2 ½ years old. She and her 4 siblings were left in the care of their paternal grandparents with whom they were very close. Yolanda was finally reunited with her parents 9 years later; she was 12 years old. Yolanda and her family enjoyed a short period of peace before family relations became fraught with problems. Thanks to the perseverance of Yolanda's mother and the support that they received from their church, family relations improved. At the time of the separation interview, Yolanda was a freshman attending a community college in Randall County.

### **Family composition and socioeconomic circumstances**

The Ramirez family is composed of Yolanda, her mother Esperanza, her father Francisco, and her 4 siblings Bruce, Victor, Oscar, and Elsa. The family lives in an economically deprived neighborhood in Rancho Verde, California where the family purchased a house with a small unit in the back. Yolanda and her sister Elsa reside in the front house with their parents, while Oscar, his wife, and their son reside in the back house. Yolanda's older brothers live in separate residences with their respective families.

Yolanda's family is of humble beginnings. In Guatemala, her father worked as a migrant farmworker. Because his work took him to the coast, he was absent most of the time and would return home for only 3 days out of the month. His earnings were meager and at times there was not enough money to purchase food. Mrs. Ramirez did not work so that she could stay home with the children. Both Mr. Ramirez and Mrs. Ramirez completed 4 years of formal education in Guatemala. In the United States, the Ramirez family has come to enjoy more economic prosperity. Mr. Ramirez manages a newspaper delivery service in San Marino while Mrs. Ramirez cleans houses and provides childcare for a living. Together, the family earns a decent income. In 2001, their estimated yearly income was approximately \$48,000. The Ramirez family owns their own house in Rancho Verde and several properties in Guatemala. They are also the main source of financial support for Mr. Ramirez' parents to whom they continue to send money every month.

### **Pre-separation period: Leaving for the sake of the marriage**

The migration narrative of the Ramirez family began with the migration of Mr. Ramirez in 1987. His primary motivation for migrating was economic. His job as a migrant farm worker in Guatemala did not provide the necessary resources to support his family and it also required prolonged absences from home. He also was responsible for providing support for his parents therefore the pressure to search for alternative

ways of earning money was great. From his point of view, migrating to the United States seemed like the best alternative. He decided that his departure would be temporary and that he would return to Guatemala as soon as he was able to save some money. In her interview, Mrs. Ramirez recounted the hardship her family endured in Guatemala. They shared a one room house with her husband's parents and often had no money for food. Her adoptive mother had never approved of her marriage so she had never offered her any assistance. Had it not been for her adoptive father, who would sneak food out of his wife's store to give to her, the family would not have been able to survive.

After her husband's departure, Mrs. Ramirez was left in charge of their 5 children. As her husband began to work, he began to send her money. She was then able to buy food and clothes for the children. According to Mrs. Ramirez, jealous neighbors began to rumor that she had taken in a lover. When townsfolk confronted her publicly with this rumor (during a basketball game), Mrs. Ramirez fainted. Her mother-in-law, with whom she was very close, was convinced of her innocence because she had been in charge of keeping an eye on her. She advised her to migrate to the United States to be reunited with her husband. Mr. Ramirez was also in agreement with this plan, and arrangements were made so that Mrs. Ramirez could leave Guatemala. The children were left in the care of her in-laws.

Leaving the children was one of the most difficult decisions that Mrs. Ramirez had ever had to make, especially because her children were so young. At the same time she knew that she had to maintain the stability of her marriage and she had to prove to her husband that the rumors were indeed untrue.

***Y mis suegros ya dijeron que era mentira, que me habían dado el visto malo y en eso una señora que estaba allí me grito que usted es una sinvergüenza y yo le dije que porque me había visto la cara mala, pero ante toda la gente, yo me fui con el corazón así y me desmaye. Y mi esposo, a los ocho días, me dijo “¿te venís?” Pero yo no quería dejar a mis hijos, ¿usted cree? Porque a un esposo, a un hombre, uno lo quiere con todo su corazón, pero no como el amor de un hijo. Porque a un esposo uno lo puede mandar afuera, pero el amor de un hijo ya no lo vuelve a conseguir uno, es lo más lindo que Dios le puede dar a uno, entonces yo dije, ¿que hago? [And my in-laws said that it was lie, that they had it in for me, so then a lady that was there called me shameless and I asked her why she had it against me like that, in front of everybody and I felt that my heart was doing this and then fainted. So then my husband, eight days later, said to me “Do you want to come?” But I didn't want to leave my children. Can you believe it? Because a husband, a man, one can love him with all one's heart, but it is not like the love for a child. Because a husband one can throw him out, but the love of a son, once lost you can never recover it and it's the most beautiful thing that God can give you. So I said to myself, what do I do?]***

In the end, she decided that it was best to leave the children behind in order to ensure a good future for them and a stable family environment. In her home town things had



turned hostile towards her and she could not stay. She also believed that if she separated from her husband, she would be throwing away any kind of future they may have been able to build for them. After all, she and her husband had big plans; they wanted to save enough money to build a big house for their family. They wanted a better future. If they separated, that dream would be lost and her children would have nothing but poverty. She thought about bringing her children along with her but this was not an option. The trip in itself was costly. Her husband had amassed a debt to the smuggler that he still had not paid in full. She thought about asking her mother for help, but she was sure she would not support her decision. So she tried to gather money by selling anything of value she possessed.

***Tenia que dejarlos, no podía traerlos porque, como por el dinero claramente, porque fui a empeñar todos mis aretes, todas mis cosas de oro que tenia cuando era soltera. Tenía muchas cosas de oro porque mi mamá siempre me compraba. Fui a mi casa para ver que otras cosas teníamos para que me dieran el dinero y no le pedí a mi madre porque ella no me hubiera dejado ir. [I had to leave them because I could not bring them, mainly because of the money, clearly. I went to hock my earrings and all of my gold jewelry that I had from when I was single. I had a lot of gold because my mom always would buy it for me. I went home to see what else I had so that I could get some more money. I didn't ask my mother because she wouldn't have let me go.]***

The day before her departure, she sat the children down and told them that she was leaving to be reunited with their dad and that she would send dolls and toys for them when she got there. Excited, the children told her to go. Her son Victor, who was the second from the oldest, was the only one that woke up at five o'clock in the morning the next day to say goodbye to her. Mrs. Ramirez becomes emotional as she remembers saying goodbye to him.

***Víctor, el fue el único que se levanto a las cinco de la mañana que oyó que yo me iba a ir. Y cuando se levanto me dijo "mamá que Dios vaya con usted. Y no quiero mamá, que vaya a regresar. Váyase con mi papá para que nos mande dinero para comer mas mejor." Eso a mí nunca se me olvida fíjese. Y es como que es algo, que se me mueve en mi corazón, que eso fue lo que él me dijo. Y le di un beso en la frente y lo abrace. Y cuando iba en el camión, yo miraba para mi casa y vi un trapo que se hacia así, y era mi hijo que me estaba diciendo adiós. Y eso fue lo mas fuerte para mi. Pero los otros se quedaron contentos que les iba a mandar juguetes. [Victor was the only one that woke up at 5 o'clock in the morning when he heard that I was leaving. When he got up he said to me "mom, may God be with you. And I don't want you to return mom. Go and be with my dad so that you can send us money so that we can eat better." That I have never forgotten you know. It's like something that stirs in my heart. That is what he said. And I gave him a kiss on his forehead and I hugged him. And when I was in the bus, I would look towards my house and I saw a piece of***

***cloth that was going like this, and it was my son saying goodbye. And that was the hardest thing for me. But the other ones I left, they were happy because I was going to send them toys.]***

After saying goodbye to her son and her in-laws Mrs. Ramirez boarded the bus and left. She was accompanied by four other people from her home town whose full name she still remembers. The journey north lasted a whole week. She travelled by land through Mexico and crossed the border with the help of a smuggler. The trip was not particularly difficult as they had the resources to make the journey as pleasant as was possible. Still however, when she finally arrived, she was tired. Her husband picked her up in Los Angeles.

Yolanda was too young to have any recollection of life with her mother or about her departure. Her understanding of her parent's migration comes from communications she had with her grandparents in Guatemala and from conversations with her parents here in the United States. Yolanda's grandparents explained to her that her parents had left to find work, so that they could have a better future. When Yolanda asked her parents why she had been left behind, they told her that it was because they had come to the United States illegally.

***Que porque ellos se vinieron así de inmigrantes, de mojados pues, y no querían traernos porque no querían que nosotros sufriéramos si les iba mal a ellos en el camino, no querían que nosotros pasáramos eso. [That because they came like that as immigrants, as illegal, and they did not want to bring us because they didn't want us to suffer if things went wrong on the way. They didn't want us to go through that.]***

In general, Yolanda understood her parent's reasons for migrating and never reproached them for leaving her behind. She felt that if her parents had not migrated, she may have never had the opportunities and financial gains she was now enjoying. Her bond with her grandparents was also very strong because they had practically raised her, so she did not feel abandoned or felt that she had experienced a significant loss.

***Yo me sentía bien, porque estaban mis abuelitos y para mi eran como mis papas y todo. [I felt good because my grandparents were there and for me, they were like my parents and everything.]***

Because she was very young at the time of their departure, she had no clear memories of them and could not really recall what life was like with them. In this sense, her grandparents were her real parents, the ones that had raised her and the ones that had always been there for her.

### **The separation: A time of hardship and recompense**

At the time of Mrs. Ramirez's migration, her husband was working in San Agustino as a farm worker. He was able to secure her a job which eventually allowed

both of them to earn money to send to Guatemala. His work as a farm worker allowed him to gain permanent legal residency through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Act. Because Mrs. Ramirez had arrived after the deadline for the program had expired, she was not able to apply for legal residency but was included in her husband's application along with the children. The process of legalization for Mr. Ramirez was quick, which allowed him to return to Guatemala for visits. For Mrs. Ramirez and the children, the process was much longer and Mrs. Ramirez was able to receive a work permit and to live in the United States legally, but she was not able to travel.

A year after working in San Agustino, the couple decided to move to San Marino. On top of having the responsibility of supporting a large family they still owed money to the smugglers that had brought them to the United States from Guatemala. The salaries they earned as farm workers in San Agustino were not enough to cover all of their expenses and their debts; therefore, they had to look for better employment opportunities elsewhere.

***Allá vivimos un año pero el trabajo no estaba bueno allá y cuando uno se viene, deja deudas verdad. Yo había dejado deudas y cinco hijos, imagínese. Y pagar a la muchacha que se quedaba ayudando a mi suegra con mis cinco hijos. Teníamos que tratar la manera de buscar trabajo para mandarles. [We lived there for a year but the work was not so good there, and when you come here you leave a lot of debt, you know. I had left debts and five children, imagine, and had to pay a girl there to help my mother in law with the kids. We had to find the way to find a job to send them.]***

Once in San Marino, they began to look for work. Mr. Ramirez found a job and began working right away but spent much of his earnings on alcohol. According to Mrs. Ramirez, her husband was drinking heavily and frequently and she had no choice but to find a way to earn money. At first she was earning \$60 a week. Then she began to collect cans and bottles for recycling.

***Yo no me avergüenzo de decir esto, que yo ganaba más metiéndome a los basureros sacando botes, apachurrándolos y yendo a vender. Sacaba 4 bolsas diarias y con eso yo hacía buen dinero porque allá pagaban bien la venta de botes. Y me metía a sacar fíjese. Y a veces el me veía metida y decía que le daba lastima. ¿Pero yo decía, como le hago para ganar dinero? Fíjese, porque trabajo no había, y si había querían papeles. Entonces yo me metía a los basureros, me ponía un pantalón y sacaba botes y los apachurraba y los echaba a la troka. Y así yo ganaba con mi sueldito y todo \$1200. Decía yo, \$300 para Guatemala, \$300 para los gastos, y \$600 para pagar la deuda de los dos, y así fuimos saliendo. [I am not ashamed to say this but I earned more money getting into dumpsters taking out cans, flattening them and selling them. I would take out 4 bags a day, and with that, I made some pretty good money because there they paid pretty good money for the cans. And I would get in to take some out you know. And sometimes he would see me in there and say that he would feel sorry for me. I would say, what can I do to make more money? See,***

***because there wasn't any work, and if there was work, they wanted papers. So, I would get into the dumpsters, I would put on some pants and take out the cans, flatten them, and throw them into the truck. Like that, I would earn a salary of \$1200. I would say to myself, \$300 for Guatemala, \$300 for our expenses, and \$600 to pay for both of our debts, and like that we began to get ahead.]***

According to Mrs. Ramirez, to this day, her husband is in awe at her determination and is very proud of all that she has been able to accomplish. He deeply regrets ever having treated her poorly, because for a long while he was physically abusive. Mrs. Ramirez never called the police on him but endured the abuse in private hoping that God would help her overcome the difficulties.

The abuse began soon after her arrival. The rumors about her infidelity that had started in Guatemala had travelled north and had reached her husband's ears. Mrs. Ramirez noticed that her relationship with her husband had changed. He became jealous and she became convinced that he had believed the rumors. He hit her repeatedly. She endured the abuse silently, and in spite of the bruises and injuries, she never called the police. Those who noticed her suffering often asked her why she endured the ill treatment.

***Yo sufrí, yo sufrí, todos decían, que me miraban sufriendo, que porque me dejaba yo que mi esposo me pegara, que me hiciera eso que me estaba haciendo, que no me dejara. Yo decía ¿que hago yo, nos separábamos? Si no teníamos nada, no hubiéramos tenido hijos que nos reclamen, ¿que mi papi 'onsta? ¿Que mi mami 'onsta?... yo aguante y aguante. [I suffered, I suffered, everybody said, those who would see me suffering, why do you let your husband hit you, let him do what he was doing to me, that I shouldn't take it. I used to say, what do I do, do we separate? If we didn't have anything, if we hadn't had kids that would demand where is our daddy? Where is our mommy?...I endured and endured.]***

Mrs. Ramirez was not ashamed to admit to the abuse, she knew it was wrong, but thought about it in broader terms. Mostly she was worried about her children. What would they think of her if she just left, or if she got their father thrown in jail? These were her concerns, not the bruises or the injuries. The abuse lasted for a number of years; Mrs. Ramirez kept it secret from her family members, especially the children. The only child that witnessed the abuse was her son Bruce, and it was the fear that he would be left traumatized that gave her the strength to consider leaving her husband.

***Bruce fue el que se dio cuenta, Bruce se dio cuenta tres veces que me pego él. Y una vez que me pego, le dije que me había caído, no le dije que me había pegado porque veía que se estaba traumando. Entonces fue cuando yo le dije, sabes, me voy a ir con mi hijo a San Francisco, allá tengo amigos y te quedas. Le dije, porque mis hijos van a ver esto y Bruce se va a traumatizar. Ni te quiero dejar en la cárcel, ni te quiero quitar tus papeles. [Bruce was the one that noticed. Bruce saw that he hit me three***

***times. And one time that he hit me, I told him I had fell, I didn't tell him that he had hit me because I was seeing that he was becoming traumatized. That was when I said, you know what, I am going to leave with my son to San Francisco, over there I have friends and you stay. I told him, because my kids are going to see this and Bruce is going to be traumatized. I neither want you in jail nor do I want them to take away your papers.]***

Mrs. Ramirez felt that by putting up with the abuse she was setting an example of perseverance and commitment for her children. She believed that if she had left, or if she had called the police, that she would not be able to teach them how to deal with difficult situations with dignity and patience.

***Yo le dije, yo no me agarraba de la mano del 911, yo me agarraba de la mano de Dios para me diera fuerza para poder soportarlo. Y eso es lo que le digo a ellas, a mis hijas. Y el mayor también les dice a mis hijos "Yo me acuerdo cuando mi papá le pegaba a mi mamá, que yo lloraba y que me iba pa' dentro. Pero mamá allá esta miren. ¿Como no vamos a adorar a nuestra madre, si ella fue una madre de ejemplo para nosotros?" así les dice. [I said, I didn't hold on by the hand of 911, I held God's hand so that he would give me strength to be able to put up with him. And that is what I tell them, my daughters. And the oldest one also tells my kids, "I remember when my dad would hit my mom, and I would cry and go inside. But look, mom is there. How can we not adore our mother when she was a good example for us?" that is what he says.]***

It was her belief and trust in God that gave Mrs. Ramirez the strength to endure the abuse and the hope that the difficulties would eventually subside. And things did improve. That day, when she finally threatened to leave with Bruce, her husband broke down and apologized to her; he also vowed never to hit her again. As she recalls, that day, they prayed to God for strength.

***No, me dijo te prometo que ya nunca lo voy a volver hacer. Que se me quiten estos celos ingratos que tengo, dijo. Entonces nos agarramos los tres de la mano y nos pusimos a pedirle a Dios que nos ayudara, que si era la promesa de él, que nos ayudara. Y así fue, que salimos adelante. Pero fue difícil. [No, he said I promise I will never do it again. That this fruitless jealousy that I have disappear, he said. Then we held hands, the three of us and we began to ask God to help us that if it was his will, to help us. And that is how it was that we overcame. But it was difficult.]***

To this day, Mrs. Ramirez believes she did the right thing enduring the abuse. Now that she and her husband are conflict free, she believes that all the suffering was worthwhile. She does not regret anything and feels blessed by God for the rewards that she has received for all of her patience.

**Mother-child relationship during the separation.** Because Yolanda's mother

left Guatemala when she was barely a toddler, she had very little recollection of her. When she imagined her mother in the United States she imagined a pretty lady with blonde hair. But in spite of this vague and unrealistic image of her mother, her presence in her everyday life was very real. In her house in Guatemala, Yolanda had a large picture of her parents on the wall. Pointing to it, her grandmother used to remind her of the sacrifices that her parents were making for her.

***Mi abuelita siempre nos dijo, teníamos una foto de mi papá y mi mamá y nos decía “ellos te quieren mucho, te mandan cartas, te mandan dinero, ropa, juguetes”, y siempre me enseñaron que ellos eran mis papas y los tenía que querer y respetar y todo...Cuando era chica me decían, “te va a regañar tu papá” y yo, okay. Cuando eres chica te lo crees todo. [My grandma always told us, we had a picture of our dad and mom and she would tell us “they love you a lot, send you letters, send you money, clothes, and toys”, and they always taught me that they were my parents and that I had to love and respect them and stuff...when I was young they would say, “your dad is going to scold you” and I was like okay. But when you are young, you believe everything.]***

In this sense, they were never absent from their lives. The frequent reminders from her grandparents and the consistent communications with them via telephone and letters kept their relationship, although distant, very much alive.

Mrs. Ramirez, for her part, kept in constant contact with her in-laws and children via phone and letters. Because the children did not have a phone in their house, they used a public phone, at the local telephone company to call their parents collect. They would call her at 5 o'clock in the morning before their mother left for work. The calls were frequent but short; sometimes they called her three times a week, sometimes they called twice a week. During their conversations she asked them how they were and would promise to send them money so that they could have the things that they liked.

***Que se portaran bien porque ahora no iban a tener pena... que iban a comer carne de pollo, que un día iban a comer pollo guisado, pollo dorado y así, y cositas mas bonitas porque su mamá les iba a enviar dinero... cuando les mande la primera vez, un doce de febrero llegue y a fines de marzo ya les había mandado quinientos dólares. [That they should behave because they were not going to have to worry...that they were going to eat beef and chicken, that one day they would eat braised chicken, fried chicken and like that. Nice things because their mom was going to send them money...when I sent it the first time, it was a February 12 that I came and by the end of March I had already sent them 500 dollars.]***

She and her husband took turns paying the substantial phone bill. No expense was too great for the rewards that came from short conversations with their children. These conversations also kept them abreast of their adjustment and to the changes they were experiencing as they were growing. The children were constantly made aware of the sacrifices their parents were making for them and these messages were reinforced by

the remittances and gifts that their mother sent them. Mrs. Ramirez sent five hundred dollars monthly without fail. She also sent letters, greeting cards, clothes, and toys through a private parcel service to Guatemala.

***Mi esposo me decía, ¿que como gastamos \$450 por todo esto? yo le decía porque eran tres cajas de \$150. Una caja iba llena de juguetes para ellos, otra caja solo sabanas y ropa para cama y todo lo que es para la casa, cortinas, manteles, y mucha ropa para ellos y para mis suegros, y para los que no tuvieran nada allá. Como empecé a limpiar casas me regalaban mucha ropa y la guardaba en una caja y ya las mandaba. Se las repartían allá y \$150 que gastaba aquí, y allá ¿cuantas sonrisas no voy a recibir de la gente por las cositas que uno les manda? [My husband said, why did we spend \$450 for all of this? I would say to him, because there were 3 boxes, \$150 each. One box was full of toys for them, another with just sheets and bed linens, and everything for the home, curtains, tablecloths, and lots of clothes for them and for my in laws, and for those who had nothing over there. Because I started cleaning houses, they would give me lots of clothes and I would put them away in a box and then I would send them. Over there they would hand them out and the \$150 that you would spend here, over there how many smiles did I get from people for the little things that one would send?]***

These packages cost a fortune to send, but Mrs. Ramirez did not mind paying. The smiles that she received from the recipients of the packages were worth more than the money she spent on shipping. Further, since many of the things she sent were given to her by her employers, she felt that the cost of shipping was not an unreasonable expense for her to bear. She was able to send several things to her family this way.

With time, Yolanda began to see improvement in her quality of life. Her parents were able to buy some land and to build them a big two story house so that they would be more comfortable. According to her mother, during their phone conversations, Yolanda always asked her for a big house with lots of rooms and bathrooms. She felt good about being able to grant her daughter's wish for a big house but still worried that they may be lacking enough food or money. Fortunately she had a friend that would keep her abreast of how the children were doing.

***“No, tus hijos están rebién”, me dijo. “Tienen de todo. Hasta un piano les han comprado, hasta una mesa de futillo les han comprado. Todo les han comprado, de todo lo que tu mandas a pedir.” Porque yo mandaba \$500 para el gasto y mandaba otros \$300 para que les compraran lo que yo quería, “de todo lo que tú has dicho allí esta.” [No, your children are doing really well” she said. “They have everything. They even bought them a piano, even a foosball table they bought them. They have bought them everything, everything that you ask them”. Because I would send \$500 for their expenses and then an additional \$300 to buy them what I wanted them to have. All of the things that you asked for are there”.]***

When her oldest son asked her for a car she did not hesitate to send them one. She also bought a big truck so that they could earn some money transporting people and goods with it. Everything that she could buy and send, she did.

Mr. Ramirez received his permanent residency within years of living in the United States and was therefore able to make frequent visits to Guatemala. Because of this Yolanda was able to establish a good relationship with her father during the separation period. Yolanda remembers that his visits caused a lot of excitement in her house. Not only, were they an excuse for a family gathering but they brought with them a lot of perks, mainly toys, outings to interesting places, and good food.

***¡Ay! Era como que nos poníamos felices, nos llevaba cosas y comida. Hacíamos una comida toda la familia, divertido...El llegaba, cuando estábamos chicas nos sacaba a comer, al parque, a lugares bonitos y todo. [My, it was like we would get really happy, he would bring us things and food. We would have a big meal the whole family, fun...he would arrive, when we were little he would take us out to eat, to the park, and to nice places and everything.]***

Yolanda remembers the feelings of elation and excitement that the toys from her parents elicited from her friends. She felt very proud to have parents who could buy her things and appreciated every gift she received. In particular, she remembers a doll that her mother sent her. It had blond hair, pink lips, and rosy cheeks. She cherished this doll above all other toys and kept in its box, on top of an armoire that she had in her room. That is where she left it when she came to the United States.

**The caregiving triangle.** Mrs. Ramirez had a very close relationship with her in-laws. They were like her real parents because they treated her more like a daughter than her own adoptive mother. They had always helped her with the children, so caring for them was not a burden for them. For this reason, Mrs. Ramirez remains extremely grateful to her in-laws. She also appreciated the fact that they never let her children forget that she was their mother.

***Los recibí sanos y con la idea de que su madre era yo y que estaba trabajando para ellos. Pero hay otros que dicen “no es nuestra madre”. Querían conocer a su madre, porque fíjese que la mas chiquita, Elsa, cuando me vio, cuando me miro me dice, “¿usted es mi mamá? ¿De veras?” es duro eso, es duro, duro. “¿Usted es mi mamá, de veras?”, me dice. Si, yo soy tu mamá. A mi no se me olvida eso. [I got them healthy and with the idea that I was their mother and that I was working for them. But there are others who say “she is not our mother”. They wanted to meet their mother, because you see, the youngest one, Elsa, when she saw me, when she saw me she said, “Are you my mom? Really?” that is really hard, hard. “Are you my mom, really?” she said. Yes, I am your mother. I will never forget that.]***

To this date, Mrs. Ramirez' relationship to her in-laws is close. She continues to send



them money on a monthly basis for their sustenance. They reside in the house they built for them and enjoy all the comforts that they are able to afford them.

Yolanda and her siblings have an extremely close relationship with their grandparents. They refer to them as *papi* and *mami* [mommy and daddy]. Something that Mrs. Ramirez laments but understands. At times, she feels that their grandmother has taken her place in their hearts, but feels that she cannot change this and is grateful that her children have such devotion for her.

***Para todos, para los cinco, para todos. Yo a veces les digo, ay mijos, yo trabajo, me deberían de ayudar en algo. Pero ellos no, que una cafetera, que una secadora, todo lo quieren mandar para allá. Y le digo, que porque no me lo dan a mí, para aquí para la sala y me dice, “no, para mi mami y para mi papi.” [For all of them, for the five of them, for all. I sometimes tell them, children, I work, you should help me with something. But they don’t, a coffee maker, a dryer, they want to send everything over there. And I say, why don’t you give it to me, for the living room here and they say, “no, for my mommy and my daddy.”]***

For her part, Yolanda always had her parents present in her mind. Her grandmother never allowed her to forget them. Thus, even though Yolanda could not remember her mother, she had the desire to meet her. She imagined her very glamorous, like in the pictures she had sent from the United States. She wondered what she was like and how life with her would be like.

### **The reunification: From honeymoon to hell and back again**

Both of the Ramirez’ oldest sons migrated to the United States soon after their mother. Bruce left Guatemala in the dead of night with a friend who was a smuggler. He left without telling his grandparents, who called Mrs. Ramirez the next day informing her that he had left. Bruce crossed the border illegally and was apprehended. He was later released in the custody of his father. Victor left Guatemala in the same manner as his older brother but called his parents letting them know that he was on his way. Victor was also apprehended and released in the custody of his father. Mrs. Ramirez remembers being sick with worry and upon hearing that he had been detained, she told her husband that if he did not bring her son back right away, she would not let him through the door. Bruce and Victor were able to adjust the immigration status in the United States but the process was complicated and prolonged by their decision to migrate illegally.

The migration process for Yolanda, Elsa, and Oscar was much easier. They received a letter from the US Embassy informing them that their visas had been approved. When the letter arrived, her grandparents called their parents to let them know that they had received an important letter from the embassy. By then, Yolanda was 11 years old. She had been living with her grandparents for nearly 9 years and had never really considered leaving them. After hearing of the letter, her father decided that he would need to travel to the United States to investigate. He prepared for the trip to Guatemala and arrived within a week of receiving the phone call. Once there, he

realized that the visas had been granted and that he would need to pick them up from the Embassy. That was when Yolanda was told that she would be going to the United States.

***Oh! Mi papá llegó así. Llegó a visitarnos así y todo, y fue a inmigración no se que tanto hizo y saco los papeles, y ya luego dijo, bueno ya nos vamos a ir ya la otra semana. Y yo, ah! Fue una despedida tan dura, porque especialmente mis abuelitos, recuerdo de que lloramos porque se quedaron mis abuelitos. Y ya, pero estuvo bonito porque nos fuimos todos. [Oh, my dad came like that. He came to visit us and everything and went to immigration I don't know what exactly he did, he got the papers and then said, okay we will be leaving next week. And I was like, jah! It was such a difficult farewell because of my grandparents; I remember that we cried because our grandparents stayed behind. Like that, but then it was nice because we left together.]***

Yolanda did not have a lot of time to prepare for the trip or to dwell about the prospect of leaving her grandparents behind. She did not pack very much, only the things she was able to fit in a bag her mother had sent her and in a small back pack she carried on her back. She knew that parting from her grandparents would be very difficult. She was ambivalent about leaving and leaving them behind. Yolanda cried all the way to the airport.

***Mi abuelita lloro y todo y lloramos y llorábamos. Me acuerdo que nos fue a recoger mi tío, para que nos llevara al aeropuerto en un carro y cerramos las puertas y las ventanas y estaban negras y nosotros decíamos así, adiós por las ventanas y mi abuelita se quedo llorando y nosotros lloramos mucho por mi abuelita. [My grandma cried and everything and we cried and cried. I remember that he went to get my uncle to drive us to the airport in a car and that we closed the doors and the windows were tinted and we would say goodbye like that from behind the windows and my grandma was left behind crying and we cried a lot for my grandma.]***

Mrs. Ramirez sent toys with her husband so that the children could have some distraction during the trip back and to ease the pain of the separation. They were distracted momentarily, but continued to cry and pine away for their grandparents during the entire trip. Yolanda wondered how her life would be different without her grandparents and was particularly distressed because they were older, and she worried that if something was to happen to them she would not be there with them.

**Initial adjustment.** When Yolanda and her siblings arrived from Guatemala, they were greeted by her mother, uncle and cousins at the airport. Yolanda recognized her mother from the pictures that she had sent her, and upon seeing her, she thought that she looked better in pictures than she did in person. Their mother was so overcome with emotion that she fainted.

***Estaba en el aeropuerto mi mamá esperándonos y entramos y no conocíamos a mi mamá y decíamos quien es mi mamá. Y luego dije, es ella, mi mamá se desmayo de la felicidad. Nosotros, ay mamá. Estaban unos primos con ellos esperándonos y todo. Era mi mamá, mi tío, su esposa y mis dos primitos, mi prima y mi primo, y mis hermanos. Estaban esperándonos y nosotros felices, pero era como incomodo, porque no estábamos acostumbrados a vivir con ellos. [My mom was in the airport waiting for us and we came and didn't recognize her and were wondering who our mom was. Later I said, it's her, my mom fainted from happiness. We were like, ay mommy. Our cousins were there with them waiting for us and everything. It was my mom, my uncle, his wife and my two little cousins, my cousin, my other cousin, and two brothers. They were waiting for us and we were happy, but it was a little uncomfortable because we weren't used to living with them.]***

Mrs. Ramirez had prepared for her children's arrival with much anticipation. She had clothes, pajamas, and toys ready for them. The house had also been decorated with balloons and welcome signs. The atmosphere at home was festive. The children were happy to see everything that their mother had prepared for them. But the separation from their grandparents was very difficult for all of them. According to Mrs. Ramirez, Oscar cried for his grandparents for three months.

The first few weeks in the United States were uncomfortable for Yolanda who felt at odds both at home and in her strange new environment. She was glad to have her brothers helping her navigate her new environment. Because they had been living in the United States for several years, they spoke the language and knew their surroundings. They were also in charge of caring for them while their parents were at work.

***Todo bien incomodo, bien como extraño. Que lugar tan extraño, es diferente que tu país porque allá, comes las tres comidas a la misma hora, aquí también se come, pero a la hora que uno quiera y aquí nos hacia falta eso, y no había nuestro almuerzo. Mi abuelita siempre nos tenia almuerzo, nos decía vénganse a comer. Y acá, mi mamá se iba a trabajar, mi hermano nos cocinaba y todo bien extraño, así como extraño, pero ya nos acostumbramos. [It was all uncomfortable, like really strange. What a strange place, is different than your country because over there you eat the three meals at the same time, here you eat but at whatever time you want and here we missed that and we didn't have our lunch. My grandma always had our lunch and would tell us to come eat. Here my mom would go to work, my brother would cook for us and everything was strange, like strange, but we got used to it.]***

Living in the United States took getting used to because everything was different. Yolanda missed the comfort of her home in Guatemala and the consistency of her routine. Her grandmother had always provided her with some consistency, something that her parents could not because they had to work. The lack of familiarity made

Yolanda uneasy and at times fearful.

***Me sentía como que no era mi casa, como que extraño y decía ¿Ay Dios mío que estoy haciendo acá en lugar de estar con mis abuelitos? Sentía miedo pero a veces sentía miedo de mis propios papas y como no estaba acostumbrada a estar con ellos sentía miedo y todo. Y decía, ¿Y si no son mi papas? Y todo así, tantas cosas que se piensa cuando uno tiene miedo a veces. [I would feel like it was not my house, like how strange and I would say, Oh my God, what am I doing here instead of being with my grandparents? I would feel scared of my own parents and because I wasn't used to being with them I would feel scared and everything. And I would say, and what if they aren't my parents? And everything like that, so many things that you think when you are scared sometimes.]***

Yolanda felt love and admiration for her parents but did not know how to act around them. For instance, when they hugged her, she just stood there not knowing what to do. Part of the reason it was difficult was because she missed her grandparents and could not get used to living without them. That was probably the hardest feeling to get over. It took a while for Yolanda to feel at ease. School, new friends, and the demands of learning a new language helped her forget about her sadness, but not entirely.

***Porque amigos y todo. Y como íbamos a la escuela y ya no extrañábamos. Y siempre que no estábamos en la escuela estábamos pensando en mis abuelitos. Y ya entramos a la escuela y nos tuvimos que enfocar en el Ingles y nuestros amigos y conocer a las personas y poco a poco se nos fue olvidando todo eso. [Because of friends and everything. And because we were going to school and we didn't miss them anymore. And when we were not in school we were thinking about our grandparents. And then we started school and we had to focus on English and our friends and on getting to know people and little by little we began to forget all of that.]***

Yolanda thought about Guatemala often and wished to return to live with her grandparents. With time however, she was able to get over her loss and focus on school and making friends. She liked her school, enjoyed learning English, and was making friends. After a while, she began to feel at home and planned to stay in the United States permanently. Her goal was to study in the United States and earn a degree.

**Family relations.** For Yolanda, living with her parents took a little getting used to. She felt weird about calling her mother, mom because she was used to her grandmother being her mother. She had always called her father dad, so addressing him in this way was not strange. There were positive things about living with her parents again, for one they spoiled her, just as they had in Guatemala. She remembers that they would buy her everything she wanted. After the initial weirdness, relations were good and remained so for the first couple of years after the reunification.

Yolanda missed her grandparents but was glad to live with her parents and felt that it was her duty to respect them and to make them proud by doing well in school. When Yolanda entered high school, problems between her and her parents began to trouble their relationship. According to Mrs. Ramirez her relationship with Yolanda was always good, but when Yolanda began to enter adolescence getting along became more difficult.

***Ella si me costo un poquito porque hasta se arañaba, se quería arañar. Luchamos mucho con ella. [Yes, she was difficult because she would scratch herself, she wanted to scratch herself. We battled a lot with her.]***

When Yolanda was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, she talked about the problems she was having at home with her parents. She confided that her father was physically abusing her mother. The only person she could count on at home was her sister Elsa, who had also told somebody at her school that her father was hitting them. Her disclosure resulted in a report to the Child Protective Services agency and a home visit to investigate the abuse allegations.

Yolanda later admitted that her father had not hit them but that he had called them “whores”. Most of the problems Yolanda and her sister had at home were related to their desire to have boyfriends, something their father was set against. In spite of their father’s disapproval, however, both Yolanda and her sister had boyfriends. Yolanda had also become sexually active and was afraid that her father would find out, which he did eventually. Mrs. Ramirez felt that it was unrealistic for them to expect that their daughters would not have boyfriends or that they would not eventually become sexually active. For her, it was more important to have an honest and open relationship with them and to be able to give them advice and guidance.

***Yo les he dicho, tengan sus novios. No es que sea una mujer alcahueta, ni que sea una madre cualquiera que vayan a creer. Pero aquí es raro pensar que no tenga relaciones una pareja. Es raro. Yo les digo, si ustedes están haciendo eso y no me dicen, y no me tienen confianza, sus problemas hijas. Pero si me tienen confianza cuéntenme, no me tengan desconfianza porque yo no quiero verlas que se vayan a embarazar y ni con una enfermedad, protéjanse de todo. [I have told them, have your boyfriends. It’s not that I encourage it, or that I am a bad mother like that. But here it is rare to think that they won’t have relations with their partners. It’s rare. I tell them, if you are doing that and don’t tell me, and you don’t trust me, it’s your problem girls. But if you trust me tell me, don’t distrust me because I don’t want to see you pregnant or with a disease, protect yourselves from everything.]***

Yolanda took her mother’s advice and frequented a community clinic in her school when she thought she was pregnant. After having her first pelvic exam, she began taking contraceptives. Her mother’s openness was not shared by her father and it took some time before he agreed to allow his daughters to date. Eventually, he was able to accept her boyfriends, much to Yolanda’s delight.

Two separation interviews were conducted with Yolanda. The first interview was conducted when she was 17 years old and a junior in high school. By then, things at home had improved dramatically. Her family had started going to church more regularly and her father had stopped drinking, something that had negatively affected his demeanor and already hot temper. She was now allowed to have a boyfriend and was given a little more freedom. The second interview was conducted over a year later when Yolanda was 19 years old and a freshman in college. She was happy to be living at home and was satisfied with the quality of her relationship with her parents. A testament to their improved relations was the brand new car that she received as a gift from them when she graduated from high school. Her parents were also allowing her to take a trip to Hawaii with her boyfriend.

***De mi parte, váyase. Dese a respetar y váyase, pero bien portada. No vayan a traerme niños por aquí porque si ya esta preparada para criar a un hijo, tráigamelo, si no, no me traiga a un hijo. [For my part, go. Respect yourself and go, but behave yourself. Don't come and bring me kids here because if you are ready to raise a child, bring him, if not, don't bring me a child.]***

Getting her father's consent for the trip took a bit of finesse on the part of Yolanda's mother, who broached the subject delicately with her father and eventually secured his consent. Their blessing was accompanied with a warning for her to comport herself respectfully. She was after all, their daughter and subject to their code of conduct, in spite of her majority of age.

**School performance.** Even though Yolanda expressed a liking to school, her performance did not reflect this. Upon arrival, she was enrolled in a middle school in San Marino even though her family was residing in Rancho Verde. Her parents, who worked in San Marino, had kept a residence there (subleasing to other tenants) so that their daughters could attend the local schools, which had a reputation of excellence. In middle school, Yolanda was placed in the English Language Learner program. Some of her teachers spoke Spanish and her classmates were recent immigrants which allowed Yolanda to fit right in. Her academic performance was about average during her first couple of years in the United States and continued to decline with time. Yolanda started the eighth grade with low academic self esteem. She qualified herself as a bad student because of the low grades she had received during her previous year. She hoped, however, that her performance would improve and had a renewed sense of motivation. Yolanda continued to struggle in school. In the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, she had earned 2 Fs, but by the end of the spring semester was able to bring up her lowest grades, receiving mostly Cs. Her math teacher felt that she was an "okay student" who had good skills and was engaged in the class.

During the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, Yolanda's low grades and poor attitude caused her to be transferred out of her high school and into another high school in Rancho Verde, where she lived. Even though she did not reside in San Marino she had been allowed to attend school there. When her academic performance began to decline, school officials decided that she would no longer be allowed to attend school there. Thus, Yolanda

began attending Rancho Verde High School in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. She disliked her school very much and complained incessantly about her teachers and classes. Many of her classes were conducted in Spanish so she felt like instead of moving forward with her English that she was stepping back. According to Yolanda, Rancho Verde high school was inferior to her old high school in many respects. Still, however, she expressed a desire to continue with her studies and would ask frequently about college. Surprisingly, her academic performance did not reflect her expressed interest in academics. Yolanda was failing most of her classes and by the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade she received 4 Ds and 2 Fs.

Yolanda's teachers voiced concern over her academic performance and lack of motivation. Her history teacher felt that she had an "okay attitude" but that she could perform better if she applied herself. She was not completely disengaged and managed to turn in her homework more than half the time. Her math teacher had a less favorable opinion of Yolanda. In his class, she was quiet and fairly disengaged. Her teacher believed that her skills and her understanding of the class material were poor. Yolanda never asked questions or clarification in his class and turned in her homework occasionally.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, Yolanda performed better in some of her classes but still lagged in others. She received a rave review from her English Language Development teacher, who qualified her as an "excellent student!" In her class, Yolanda always completed her assignments and demonstrated excellent behaviors. In math however, her attitude and behaviors were poor. According to her teacher, Yolanda was disruptive and disrespectful. Her teacher had not only called her home several times complaining about her behaviors and low academic performance, but had also sent her to the principal's office for being disruptive, always tardy, and for being disrespectful to her. Yolanda's motivation and effort, attendance, punctuality, and general behavior in this class were rated as satisfactory. Therefore it was mostly her lack of interest in the class and her poor relations with her teacher that were problematic. One of her teachers, who also knew her sister, felt that both Yolanda and Elsa were perhaps not getting enough love and attention at home since their mother worked long hours. Both Yolanda and her sister were referred to counseling at school on several occasions for behavioral, emotional, and academic problems.

Yolanda's period of low academic engagement coincided with the time she was having problems at home with her parents. Once those were resolved, Yolanda began to improve her attitude towards school and her grades; ultimately she was able to graduate from high school and go on to community college. At the time of the second separation interview, Yolanda was a freshman at a community college in San Marino and was interested in entering the nursing program there. By then, her English had improved dramatically and she was enjoying the college experience. She was especially fond of the relationships she had established with other students there and with the diversity of the student body. Yolanda liked her classes and felt challenged by the coursework. She was motivated and focused on her goal of becoming a nurse.

**Social relations.** Although shy at first, Yolanda is now fairly social. She makes friends easily and enjoys meeting new people. She has met most of her friends at school, although she has also made friends at her church. In the past, she was fairly

active in church events and groups and was able to establish relationships with young people and adults from the congregation. These relationships were of great benefit to her throughout the difficulties she experienced at home. Although Yolanda dislikes religion, she believes in God and feels that the church has helped her family cope with their relational problems and in a sense has “helped them have fewer problems”. Yolanda attends church regularly with her family and the church continues to be a very important source of social support for them. Family events and celebrations, including weddings and *quinceañeras* [fifteen birthday celebrations] are held there. Yolanda’s mother is a very devout woman who relies on God for support and guidance and who has reached out to her church community for help with her marital problems. Yolanda’s father has also benefited from his membership in the church. According to Yolanda, since he began attending church he has stopped drinking.

Yolanda has always been close to her younger sister who is not only her friend but also her confidant. Both of them banded together against their parents’ strict rules and relied on each other for comfort and support. Aside from Elsa and her parents (with whom she is now close), Yolanda’s most beloved people are her grandparents. They figure prominently in her life and although she does not communicate with them as often as she did before, they are important sources of support and inspiration. Also figuring prominently in her network of social relations are her boyfriend and her brother Victor. She also has social supports in her church and a local community center she frequents.

Yolanda had her first boyfriend in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade with whom she became sexually active. She broke up with this boyfriend after he cheated on her. At the time of the separation interview, Yolanda was in a relationship with another young man. They were planning a trip to Hawaii.

### **Conclusions for Yolanda and family**

Yolanda and her family had a rocky reunification process. At play were several factors, mainly age at the time of the separation and length of the separation. Yolanda was separated from her parents at a young age and for a prolonged length of time, which caused her to feel estranged from them. At the time of the reunification, Yolanda did not feel at ease in her new home with her parents. She liked the fact that they were very generous towards her and spoiled her with gifts, but had a difficult time seeing them as her bona fide parents. In her heart, her grandparents were her real parents. With time she began to get accustomed to living with them and to accept them. She felt like she was part of a happy family. This changed during her adolescence when she began to question their authority and their rules. Her parents had undergone difficulties of their own, mainly their marital problems, the domestic violence issues, and her father’s “bad temper” and excessive drinking. During this difficult stage of her life, Yolanda received some support from her mother, who tried to shield her from her father’s rage. But Yolanda viewed her mother as a victim and could not depend on her for help. Therefore, she began to feel alienated from her parents again and felt that, aside from her sister, she had no one to rely on.

At the time of the reunification interview, Yolanda and her parents had reconciled. Yolanda felt that her parents had understood that she needed more freedom and was glad that they had finally conceded and allowed her to date.



Yolanda's mother felt that imposing her own values on her daughter would cause their relationship to break down further. She felt that it was more important for her to see her as an ally rather than an enemy. It took a while for her father to accept that his own traditional values would have to give way to the new and more open values that his daughter was embracing. This acceptance and change helped Yolanda and her parents establish a new and more open relationship. The church also played an important role in easing a lot of the tension in the family. Not only were family members able to find solace in God but they were able to find common ground. Their ties to the church not only helped unite them as a family but also provided them with important sources of support to cope with difficult experiences.

## **Jimmy Colon: A Mother is the Glue that Keeps the Family Together**

Jimmy's family migrated to the United States from El Salvador in a stepwise fashion. His father came first, followed by his mother 3 years later. Jimmy, his older brother and younger sister were left behind in the care of relatives and migrated one by one as their parents' finances allowed. Jimmy arrived in the United States when he was 11 years old after having been separated from his mother for 5 years and from his father for 8 years. Upon arrival, he not only had to establish a relationship with his father, whom he had little recollection of, but also endure his parents' problematic relationship. After 9 years in the United States and a host of domestic problems, Jimmy's family remains together in part because of his mother's struggle to keep them together.

### **Family composition and socioeconomic circumstances**

Jimmy's family is composed of his mother Alicia, his father Carlos, his brother Alex and his sister Elizabeth. The family occupies a small apartment in San Marino that they share with Mrs. Colon's brother. Jimmy has other relatives in the area but does not frequent them on a regular basis. Jimmy's parents had limited schooling. His father received a total of eight years of formal education while his mother was only able to finish the second grade. In terms of employment and earning opportunities, the family has always struggled financially. In El Salvador, Jimmy's father worked as a mason while his mother worked as a clerk in a small neighborhood store. In the United States, Mr. Colon has worked as a busboy in local restaurants and more recently, as a groundskeeper in a golf club course. Currently, Mrs. Colon works as a childcare provider and a house cleaner. Her work is not consistent therefore she struggles financially and her contributions to the household are smaller and fluctuate depending on how much work there is available.

There have been significant changes in the family's financial outlook resulting from a change in their immigration status. Citizens of El Salvador and Honduras were granted Temporary Protective Status in 2001 following the devastating natural disasters that ravaged their homelands. This meant that any citizen of El Salvador was eligible to reside and work in the United States legally for 18 months, although extensions of the program continue to be granted. Jimmy's family migrated to the United States illegally, but was granted Temporary Protective Status (TPS) in 2001. Temporary Protective Status allowed Mr. and Mrs. Colon to seek better employment opportunities and to increase their earning potential; Mr. Colon was able to secure his job as a groundskeeper in a golf course with his work permit. This job not only translated into more income for the family, but provided them with medical and dental insurance. The work permit did not translate into better employment opportunities for Mrs. Colon, who continues in the same line of work.

### **Pre-separation period: Mr. Colon leaves, Mrs. Colon follows**

The migration narrative of the Colon family began with the migration of Mr. Colon in 1991. According to Mrs. Colon, her husband migrated with the intent of providing a

better standard of living for his family. Once in the United States, Mr. Colon sent remittances back home on a regular basis until he became involved with another woman. This was approximately three years after having left El Salvador. Without his remittances, it became difficult for Mrs. Colon to provide for her children. At the time, she was living with relatives and depended on them for assistance. Without any other viable options in El Salvador, Mrs. Colon was forced to migrate to the United States. She did not intend to travel to California where her husband lived. Instead, she planned to settle in Boston where she had relatives that had promised to help pay for her trip.

El Salvador's political and social climate was another factor influencing Mrs. Colon's decision to migrate north. In El Salvador, she constantly feared for her safety and that of her children, as kidnappings, disappearances, and dead bodies in the streets were commonplace. She would often lose sleep, thinking about the dangers that lurked outside of her door. Fresh in her mind were vivid memories of El Salvador at the height of the bloody civil war, when at the sound of gunshots, her father would take her family into the hills to hide from the guerrilla.

***Nunca se me pasaba por mi mente dejar a los niños. Pero fue como en un abrir y cerrar de ojos. Yo no sé cómo tome esa decisión. Me dolió mucho, mucho dejarlos. Y luego con los problemas que habían allá de la guerrilla, de que se rumoraba que de las casas sacaban a la gente y entonces a mi me daba mucho miedo, porque decían, tal vez uno amanecía y decían, “amaneció muerto” y los llegaban a sacar de la casa. [I never once imagined leaving my children. It was in a twinkling of an eye, and I don't know how I was able to make that decision. It was very, very painful leaving them, and then with the problems with the guerrilla, it was rumored that they took people from their houses, so I was very scared because they would say, you would wake up and they would say, they found him dead, and they would take them from their houses.]***

Although more recently, the violence in El Salvador had been motivated by economic desperation and gang wars, the memories of the civil war still haunted Mrs. Colon. Her fear of violence and the lack of economic opportunities were motivation enough for her to leave the children in search of something better. She worried about not being able to send them to school, or of not being able to afford their uniforms or school supplies. So it was the lack of economic opportunities compounded with the climate of violence and fear in El Salvador that fueled her desire to relocate permanently to the United States. In her mind, El Salvador was a place of suffering and she had no plans of returning. She planned to establish herself in the United States and to slowly send for her children and she would do this on her own, without the help or approval of her husband, who was set against her migration.

Prior to her departure, Mrs. Colon arranged for the care of her children. For this she sought the help of her relatives. Once their care had been arranged, she was ready to leave. She took a bus from El Salvador to Guatemala. From there, she traveled to the US-Mexico border where she crossed illegally through the Arizona desert. Even though her trip was difficult and perilous, for Mrs. Colon, the most difficult part of her trip was saying goodbye to her children.

***Lo más difícil fue despedirse de ellos. A ellos solamente los abrace y venia en el camino, en el camión que me iba a traer, porque fue uno para Guatemala, y en todo el camino yo venía llorando a mares. Hasta donde ahí donde yo tenía que tomar el camión, y yo me acuerdo que Elizabeth brinca de contenta, ella contenta de que yo venía por su papá y que yo le iba enviar dinero, Eso era lo único que ella decía. Ella feliz, pero los otros niños si llorando. Pero fue bien difícil despedirse de la familia. [The most difficult part was saying goodbye to them. I only hugged them, and the whole way on the bus that was going to bring me, because there was one to Guatemala, and the whole way, I was crying a river. And just there where I was going to board the bus, I remember that Elizabeth was jumping for joy, happy because I was coming for her dad and because I was going to send her money. That was the only thing she was saying. She was happy, but the other children were crying. It was very difficult saying goodbye to the family.]***

Mrs. Colon told her children that she was leaving for the United States so that she could be reunited with their father, and that little by little, she would send for them. Although this was not initially her intent, this was an explanation they could understand and accept. Alex, who was 7 at the time was not happy but understood what his mother was saying. Jimmy who was barely 4 years old has a vague recollection of his mother's departure. He remembers her leaving and saying goodbye to him, crying. He recalls having been told that his mother had left for the United States at his grandmother's house, after she had already left.

Once Mrs. Colon had arrived in Phoenix, Arizona, she called her relatives in Boston, but they did not answer her calls. Without any money to pay the smugglers, she considered asking her husband for help. She did not intend to call him initially, but the smugglers gave her no choice.

***Porque cuando yo llegue aquí a Arizona, mi familia que me iba a recibir acá, desconectaron el teléfono y no me podía comunicar con nadie entonces yo me encontraba en un hoyo sin salida, no sabía qué hacer. Entonces, el coyote me dijo, "llegue con su esposo y cuando trabaje le paga el dinero y ya. Si quiere estar con él bien, si no, no." [Because when I arrived here in Arizona, the relatives that were going to receive me disconnected the telephone, so I could not communicate with anybody, so I was in a deep hole, I did not know what to do. So then, the coyote told me, "go with your husband and when you start working pay him back, and that's that. If you want to be with him fine, if not, don't."]***

Mrs. Colon did not intend to reestablish a relationship with her husband; she wanted to pay her debt to him but maintain separate households. Once in California, however, he apologized to her and expressed his desire to reestablish their relationship. She accepted his apologies and they moved in together. Together, they planned to save the money necessary to bring the children to the United States. Mrs. Colon soon realized

that being away from her children was extremely difficult. She had never been apart from them, and they were so young that she could not stop worrying about them. She decided to focus on saving the money so that she could bring them here. After all, her decision to migrate had been so that they could have a better life. She knew of other relatives who had migrated and saw how their lives had been affected positively by their migration and wanted the same opportunities for her children. Only this would make her sacrifice worthwhile.

Mrs. Colon's family was supportive of her and her decision to migrate. And even though they were not able to assist her financially, they were able to provide support in other ways.

***Ellos estaban muy tranquilos, mi mamá lo que me dijo fue que si yo lo hacía para el bien de mis hijos que yo tomara la decisión y que por mis hijos, no me preocupara porque de hambre no se iban a morir allá. Y que si yo me quería venir, que lo hiciera. Entonces ellos de esa manera me apoyaron mucho. No me apoyaron con dinero y con otras cosas. Pero me dieron el apoyo de que me dieran ánimos y fuerza para yo poder venirme y decirme que se quedaban en buenas manos allá. En todo eso me ayudaron mucho a mí. [They were very calm, my mom, what she said was that if I was doing it for the good of my children that I should make the decision, that I would not have to worry about my children because they would not die of hunger there. And that if I wanted to come, that I should do it. So, that is how they were supportive. They did not support me with money or other things, but they supported me by giving me the courage and strength to be able to come and by saying that they would be in good hands. In those ways they helped me a lot.]***

Because leaving all of the children together may have posed too much of a burden on her relatives, she separated them. Elizabeth stayed with her maternal grandmother and aunt while Alex and Jimmy, stayed with their aunt and uncle. Jimmy's paternal uncle was married to Mrs. Colon's sister, so the closeness of their relationship helped ease any worries she may have had. They also shared a residence so the disruption in their living situation would not change drastically. In short, Mrs. Colon felt that all her children would be well cared for by her family. Jimmy has fond memories of his relatives and of the time he spent living with them.

***Ellos siempre nos llevaban al parque, al parque infantil. Cada weekend el trataba de llevarnos, take us out para que nosotros nos sintiéramos bien, a la playa, cosas así. So, vivíamos bien, nos alimentaban, no nos pegaban nada. [They always took us to the park, to the children's park. Every weekend he would try to take us out so that we would feel good, to the beach and stuff like that. So, we lived well, they fed us and never hit us.]***

Jimmy was glad to have been left in the care of his aunt and uncle because he was already living with them and used to spending time with them. In this sense, Jimmy felt like little had changed. But after his mother left, he had missed her and had been hit

hard by her absence. According to his relatives, he stopped eating. After a while, however, he got used to being without her. His relatives made certain that he was well cared for and distracted so that he would not feel sad.

### **The separation period: Life without my mother**

Jimmy and his mother kept in touch during the separation by way of letters and phone calls. For his part, Jimmy thought about his mother a lot; he missed her but never thought about leaving El Salvador. The thought of leaving his family members behind kept him from visualizing a reunification in the United States. His brother, on the other hand, found the separation much more difficult. According to Mrs. Colon, he made collect calls to her on a regular basis. When paying the phone bill became too much of a financial burden, Mrs. Colon decided that it was best to send for him.

***El niño más grande el nos llamaba por cobrar, los bills eran de 400 a 500 dólares... el esperaba salir de la escuela y nos llamaba ...A mi me daba escalofríos en el cuerpo porque yo me imaginaba cosas que le habían pasado y cuando contestaba me decía “halo mami... no más que me salí un tantito de la escuela para venir hablar con usted”, pero es que él lo tomaba como una diversión, ... él era el único que se sabía de memoria el número de teléfono y cuando él quería nos estaba llamando... bueno yo no le voy a decir a mi hijo no quiero que me llames que esto y el otro, yo no quería que él se sintiera mal, o que el agarrara las cosas por mal. Lo único que yo hice es hablar con mi esposo y le dije... no, lo que nos queda es traerlo. Traer al niño, ese dinero que gastamos en el teléfono, mejor hay que ahorrar un dinero, mandar a traer al niño y el si quiere venir. [The oldest boy would call us collect, the bills were from 400 to 500 dollars...he would wait to come out of school and call us ... I would get the chills because I would imagine that something had happened and when he would answer he would say “hello mom ...I just came out of school for a little bit to come and talk to you”, but he would take it like a game...he was the only one that knew the phone number by heart and when he wanted, he was calling us ... well, I didn’t want to tell him, son I don’t want you to call me for this reason or another, I didn’t want him to feel bad, or take it the wrong way. The only thing that I did was to talk to my husband. I told him, no, the only thing is to bring him ... that money that we are spending on the phone, is better to save some money and bring the child here, if he wants to come.]***

Mrs. Colon’s ultimate goal was to bring all of her children to the United States. But, because sending for them all at once was not only costly but dangerous, she settled for bringing them one by one. When she was able to save enough money, she sent for Alex. The entire trip from El Salvador to the United States cost her \$5,000. She had to work hard to save this money and knew that it would take a lot more time to be able to save enough money to bring Jimmy and his sister. At the time, Jimmy was not in a hurry to leave El Salvador.

***Not really, they just, you know, like until I came here you know, a year later they were like, they asked us si quiero venir para acá, [do you want to come here?]and I was like 'hell no'...just going to stay over here. I remember that my cousin se vino para acá [came here] and he told me it was cool, so I decided to come.***

Because he was accustomed to living with his relatives, Jimmy was not interested in migrating. It was only after his favorite cousin migrated that he began to consider the possibility of migrating himself. According to Jimmy, after a conversation with his cousin about his wonderful life in the United States, he was ready to assent to his mother. Still however, leaving was hard.

### **The reunification period: Coming to America**

Jimmy was about nine years old when he finally migrated to the United States. Saying goodbye to his relatives was extremely difficult, so much so that he almost changed his mind. After many sad goodbyes, he traveled from El Salvador through Guatemala to Southern Mexico. Mrs. Colon arranged for Jimmy's uncle to travel with him. In Chiapas, Jimmy and his uncle, along with other immigrants, boarded one of many boats that transported people along the coast in order to circumvent immigration checkpoints. During this particular trip, one of the boats overturned causing the death of one of the passengers. According to Jimmy, his migration journey is one experience he will never forget.

***Big-ass boat. Like a lancha. [Like a boat.]Like, I thought I was going to die man, no miraba tierra [I couldn't see land], just water, for hours and hours. I'm like, damn. Like, when we were coming, one of the lanchas [boats], like, se quebro [it broke], so like, no quería estar allí y quería salir [I didn't want to be there and I wanted to get out] a land. In México, estábamos en una casa, como por una semana. Cuando íbamos a caminar ya para pasarnos ya para este lado ya, yo venía con mi tío, y a mi tío, a él lo agarraron, y lo mandaron para allá, pero como yo estaba chiquito me mandaron a un detention center over there en Texas. Pero después que llamaron a la migra me llevaron a un foster home. [In México, we were in a house for like a week. When we were about to walk to cross to this side I was already with my uncle, and they grabbed my uncle and sent him back, but because I was young, they sent me to a detention center over there in Texas. But later they called immigration and they took me to a foster home.]***

After a dangerous trip through Mexico and a difficult border crossing, Jimmy and his uncle were apprehended by the Border Patrol. Jimmy's uncle was sent back to El Salvador, while Jimmy was sent to a foster home or detention center for minors. Once apprehended, immigration authorities contacted Jimmy's parents. Mrs. Colon and her husband contracted an attorney and were able to secure his release and custody. For

Jimmy his stay in the foster home was a time of uncertainty, pain, and worry.

***Yeah...to put kids like...I don't know because, they didn't, I don't know, like then they had to decide if my parents wanted me or not? Because there are some kids, that like, that their parents don't even call to get them back? Los dejaban allí. [They would leave them there.] So I was like, what if they did that to me? I was thinking... I was there for like five days. I like see no call from them. I was like crying and shit. Damn, damn...what? And then nothing, like I didn't get a chance to talk to them.***

After his parents secured his release and custody, Jimmy was put in a plane headed to San Francisco. He remembers relaxing in the plane, arriving at the airport and driving across the golden gate bridge. He was not impressed by his surroundings but felt more at ease now that he was back with his parents. He was a bit disappointed by the quietness and relative calm of San Marino, where his family had settled. It did not compare to the liveliness of El Salvador.

**Initial adjustment.** Like many immigrant families in San Marino, the Colons settled in the Laguna area. The family lived in a small 2 bedroom apartment that they shared with another relative. Upon arrival, Jimmy was enrolled as a fifth grader in the local elementary school. After two weeks in the United States, Jimmy was expelled from school. His parents were very disappointed in him and Jimmy felt horrible. As he recalls, he was made to understand the sacrifice that his parents had made for him and his siblings. It was the realization of their sacrifice and the opportunity to have a different life, free of violence that prompted Jimmy to alter his behavior in school. He liked his new environment and did not want to return to El Salvador where corporal punishment was the way in which children were disciplined. Although he experienced many difficulties in school, Jimmy was able to adjust well to the United States. He appreciated that his parents had brought him and had no plans to return to El Salvador where economic opportunities were scarce and where personal safety was of concern.

**Family relations.** The Colon family has not been free from internal conflict. During the parent separation interview, Mrs. Colon was distressed because she had just recently separated from her husband. According to her, this was not the first time they had been at odds with each other; their marital problems had followed them from El Salvador where arguments were violent. Mrs. Colon reported having been a victim of domestic violence but said that her husband no longer resorted to violent outbursts. As to Mr. Colon's frequent infidelities, these had not ended. Mrs. Colon always tried to hide the infidelities and violence from her children, but had not always been successful. Jimmy's older brother Alex had witnessed his father's abuse and had urged his mother several times to separate from him permanently. Jimmy had a good relationship with his father when he first arrived. His father was in charge of disciplining and Jimmy was thankful that instead of hitting him, he talked to him. During the eighth grade, domestic violence became a salient theme in Jimmy's interviews. He never admitted to being a victim of violence, but he made reference to violence between his parents in the past.

It is unclear when Jimmy became aware of his father's abuse towards his



mother. What is clear is that as he became older, he began to resent him. According to Mrs. Colon, Jimmy's relationship with his father deteriorated to the point that Jimmy had lost all respect and fear of him. Jimmy, who at 17 years old towered his father, had no qualms about confronting him. This caused a great amount of friction in the home. At the time of the parent separation interview, Mr. Colon had moved out and Jimmy did not want his father to come back. A year later, however, Mr. Colon had moved back in.

For the most part, sibling relations were a source of support for Jimmy. He and his brother Jimmy were very close; Jimmy was very proud of his older brother and looked to him for guidance. He was almost like a surrogate father. Alex had become very involved in the church something Jimmy appreciated since his parents were not religious. He was also enrolled in the local community college and hoped to attend a university. Jimmy, who had no educational aspirations, was particularly impressed by his brother's achievements and held him up as a role model. Jimmy's little sister Elizabeth was bright, outgoing, and social. Jimmy had a contentious relationship with her and they fought often.

**School performance.** In middle school, Jimmy was polite and seemingly shy. He liked to ride his skateboard and according to his little sister, spent most of his afternoons skating when he should have been doing his homework. Even though Jimmy was proficient in English, he remained in the English Language Development Program. In class Jimmy was quiet, almost to the point of going unnoticed. His teachers often complained about his lack of motivation and his inconsistent work habits. Attempts to contact his parents were for the most part unsuccessful, which was frustrating to teachers. Billy was able to enroll in an after school program that offered among other things, help with homework. Billy took advantage of this program for a short while. He also received homework assistance from an AmeriCorps volunteer at his school twice a week. He enjoyed the individualized attention and benefitted from receiving additional explanations when he felt like he didn't understand. Unfortunately, however, the help Jimmy received did little to assure him academic success as his grades continued to drop. Towards the end of middle school, Jimmy was failing. His English teacher began classifying him as a "knucklehead" because he was not only performing below average on tests but because he consistently failed to do his homework. According to Jimmy, he was the only one responsible for his failure. He never made any attempt to improve his academic performance and it seemed as though his lack of motivation may have been a result of an unmet special education need rather than just laziness. One of his teachers seemed to think that he was in need of special education services but never referred him for assessment. By the end of the eighth grade, Jimmy was faced with the prospect of not graduating from middle school. Fortunately, he managed to complete the necessary credits during the summer in order to advance on to high school. There his academic performance plummeted. By the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade he earned all Fs. Nearly three years later, at the time of the separation interview Jimmy was a senior in high school, worried about his ability to pass the state's exit exam and about being able to graduate.

To place Jimmy's academic performance in context, it is important to talk about his schooling experiences in El Salvador, where school was a source of anxiety and stress for him. He was not only victimized by his classmates but was also disciplined

harshly by his teachers. According to his mother, Jimmy suffered in school. When the teachers used corporal punishment to discipline him, she felt helpless, feeling unable to question a common practice there. Jimmy's perception of schools in the United States was colored by his experiences in El Salvador. Although disengaged in many ways, Jimmy liked his school. He appreciated the fact that his teachers were nice and that they did not use corporal punishment on low performing students. School in the United States was not particularly a source of stress for Jimmy, in the way schools in El Salvador were. So in a sense, Jimmy enjoyed the social aspects of schools, the relationships he had established and to an extent some of the things he was learning, but his behaviors did not reflect this engagement. Perhaps the underlying learning difficulties, made this difficult.

**Social relations.** Although shy, Jimmy did not have a problem making friends. During middle school he had two close friends with whom he shared similar interests and spent time after school and on weekends. They skated together, listened to music, and played on the computer. Jimmy expressed little interest in girls in middle school and seemed more interested in spending time with his friends. In high school, however, girls began to take notice of him and by the age of 17 he had a serious girlfriend.

In terms of his friendships, Jimmy was not exclusive and had friends of different ethnic backgrounds. He had negative views of the gang culture that had taken hold of his peers and made it a point of steering away from those types of influences. His views on gangs were primarily fueled by his experiences in El Salvador where gang violence was extreme and prevalent. He resented their presence in his neighborhood and its effect of on his daily activities.

In spite of his rejection of gangs and the gang culture, Jimmy was not immune to negative peer influences. During the separation interview, Jimmy admitted to smoking marijuana with regularity and had been arrested during a traffic stop for possession of drug paraphernalia, which had been found in his car. Even though Jimmy claimed that the paraphernalia belonged to his friend, he was still charged with a felony. This turn of events placed Jimmy's chances of gaining permanent residency in this country in jeopardy.

Jimmy's family was socially isolated. His brother Alex had joined the church and had found support there, but neither Jimmy nor his parents had followed in his steps. Therefore, aside from his brother, Jimmy had no other important social relationships or any positive role models to provide him support or guidance. His mother was also socially isolated as she had no other family members in the Bay Area.

### **Conclusions for Jimmy and family**

Jimmy's separation from his mother was initially precipitated by economic hardship and by her desire to reunite her family. In many ways, Jimmy's mother seems to have planned well for the separation. She secured a safe and caring environment for her children and explained to them the reason for her migration, framing it as a necessary sacrifice to reunite the family. During the separation, she kept in constant contact with her children. She also kept the reunification as her top priority, saving

money to be able to send for her children, sometimes without the help of her husband. She made good on her promise to bring her children to the United States, and her commitment to them strengthened the trust and devotion that each of them felt for her. Jimmy in particular, who had been very close to his mother in El Salvador, enjoyed a good relationship with her. To him, she was the most important person in his life and the person he confided in. In this sense the reunification was successful. Jimmy and his mother were able to rekindle their relationship and overcome the difficulties that prolonged separations engender.

The adjustment difficulties the family encountered were mainly related to the abusive relationship between his parents, which caused a significant source of stress and tension in the family. It is difficult to say to what extent the abuse may have affected family relations during the entire reunification process, but it is certain from Mrs. Colon's account that family relations were contentious between her sons and their father. Whether these difficulties affected his academic performance and his negative behaviors, it is hard to say with certainty as Jimmy seldom mentioned any problems at home during our interviews. What is certain is that Jimmy could have benefited from the guidance and support of his father.

## **Disintegrated Families: Difficult Reunifications**

In the following two case studies, family reunifications were complicated by a number of risk factors, including parents' lack of adequate planning before the separation and reunification, domestic violence issues, absence of social support networks, and difficult problems that preceded the separation but that colored the experience of families at each step of the way. For these three families, the outcomes were poor as families were unable to find cohesiveness, in spite of attempts by its members to reconcile. Children followed paths that were maladaptive, in spite of attempts of people to help them. What seems apparent from these narratives is that families with underlying problems in their structure, or whose members are burdened by unresolved trauma, lack the resources to cope with the stress that reunifications engender and seem unable to access resources in their social environment to help them cope with their stress.

## **Sarah Castillo: Secrets and Lies**

When Sarah's mother was only 13 she was raped and became pregnant with Sarah. In order not to bring shame upon the family, she married the father but could not tolerate living with him beyond 3 months after Sarah's birth. For several years, she struggled to support her daughter in Mexico but was not able to make ends meet on her own. After six years of struggling, she left her 6 year-old daughter in the care of her parents and made her way northward to care for other people's children. She sent money to support her and visited her on occasion. It took another six years before they were finally reunited. While Sarah's mother viewed these years of separation as a necessary sacrifice, Sarah resented her perceived abandonment. Over time, she ceased to miss her mother and the betrayals and sustained losses left a scar on the relationship that never quite healed over after the reunification, despite the mother's best intentions. Mother and daughter are often at odds with each other, never quite finding how best to relate to one another.

### **Family composition and socioeconomic circumstances**

Sarah's family is composed of her mother Blanca, her brother Billy, and her sister Rocio. Billy and Rocio were born in the United States to different fathers. At the time of the student separation interview, Mrs. Castillo was expecting a third baby and Sarah was preoccupied because her stepfather, Luis, had recently separated from her mother. Aside from her immediate family, Sarah has maternal aunts, uncles, and cousins that live nearby. Her father lives in Mexico and she does not have much contact with him, although on her most recent trip to Mexico, she had the opportunity to meet him and his children. Sarah is very close to her grandparents who cared for her during her mother's absence and with whom she stays in touch via phone calls.

Sarah's family has always struggled financially. Mrs. Castillo came from a humble background. Her father was a small farmer in Oaxaca, Mexico and her mother was a homemaker. They both had little schooling. Mrs. Castillo herself only completed 5 years of formal education and had dropped out of school after becoming pregnant with Sarah. With limited occupational skills, Mrs. Castillo had few economic opportunities in Mexico and the United States. In Mexico she worked as a store clerk and in the United States, she worked as a live in nanny, a house cleaner and baby sitter. The nature of the work that Mrs. Castillo was doing was labor intensive and sporadic and therefore did not provide sufficient income for her family. Further, Mrs. Castillo ill health impaired her ability to work full time. In order to make ends meet, Mrs. Castillo relied financially on her partner, who worked full-time installing wooden floors. She also made use of public assistance programs like TANF, Medical, and WIC in order to supplement her household income. At the time of the student separation interview, Sarah was working part-time as a hostess in a restaurant and was able to take care of some of her expenses with her earnings. However, she did not earn enough money to be of assistance to her mother and after graduation, her undocumented status would make finding a good paying job difficult.

### **The pre-separation period: The trauma**

The Castillo migration narrative is riddled with trauma and a deep sense of betrayal that has permeated their every experience. Sarah's family is from a small town in Oaxaca, Mexico. Her mother, a petite woman who looks herself like an adolescent, moved to the United States out of financial necessity. Like Sarah, she is very open about her life experiences and during the separation interview, she related some very difficult and tragic events in her life that have set the tone for her relationship with her daughter. When she was 13 years old, she was raped by a young man from her town. In order not to disgrace her family, she was forced her to marry her abuser. She lived with him for three months before she left him. As a teenage mother, Mrs. Castillo struggled to support herself and her daughter. Work was difficult to find and she was often taken advantage of by her employers. When Sarah was a little bit older, they moved to Mexico City to live with her aunt. There, Mrs. Castillo worked as retail clerk in a store, but was unable to earn enough to adequately support herself and her daughter. But income was not the only worry in Mrs. Castillo's mind. While at work, Mrs. Castillo had no other recourse than to leave Sarah with her sister. Under her care Sarah suffered from neglect and it became difficult for Mrs. Castillo to witness Sarah's suffering.

***La niña sufría de que los más grandes le pegaban. Yo me iba a trabajar y cuando yo regresaba yo le decía a mí hija, ¿ya comiste? “No, porque mi tía no me quiso dar de comer.” Y ese fue y era mi sufrimiento, de ver como sufría. Hay veces que yo me la llevaba al trabajo pero no siempre podía llevarla conmigo [The girl suffered because the older ones would hit her. I would go to work and when I would come back I would ask her, did you eat? “No, because my aunt didn't want to feed me”. That was my torment, to see how she suffered. Sometimes I would take her to work but I couldn't take her with me all of the time.]***

Mrs. Castillo saw no other recourse than to take Sarah back to Oaxaca to live with her parents. Sarah, however, preferred living with her mother, even in the most difficult of circumstances. As she recalls, even though life in Mexico was difficult for both of them, they shared a common bond that was stronger than any other family tie they shared. Sarah's memories of life with her mother in Mexico are bittersweet and show a side of Sarah that is often hidden from view.

***Cuando yo estaba con mi mamá vivíamos en el Distrito Federal. Ella trabajaba allí y yo la esperaba todas las noches para abrirla la puerta para que ella entrara a dormir, porque ella llegaba ya muy noche y se quedaba dormida... Teníamos solo una cama. La esperaba y cuando ella llegaba yo le decía, ay, mi tía no me dio de comer hoy, yo tengo hambre. Y a pesar de que vivíamos con la familia, no teníamos lo que era el apoyo de una familia unida, entonces eso era muy triste. [When I was with my mom we lived in Mexico City. She worked there and I would wait so that I could open the door for her so that she could come in and go to sleep, because she would***

***get home really late and would fall asleep... We had only one bed. I would wait for her and when she would come I would say to her, my aunt did not feed me today, I am hungry. Even though we lived with family, we never had what was the support of a united family that was very sad.]***

The bond Sarah shared with her mother was based in a sense of betrayal, on the part of their family, and was reinforced by their shared hardship. Rather than be separated, Sarah would have preferred to have endured any hardship. Mrs. Castillo saw things differently however. When the opportunity to improve their living conditions presented itself, she did not hesitate to take it. Her love for Sarah was too great to allow her to see her suffer.

### **The Separation period: Loses**

Sarah was about 6 years old when her mother migrated to the United States for the first time. She had been sent to Oaxaca to stay with her grandparents during the school break. Mrs. Castillo had remained in Mexico City with her sister who lived in the United States and had come for a visit. After assessing her situation, her sister offered to bring her to the United States. Mrs. Castillo felt like she had no better option but to take her sister on her offer, so she left without telling her parents or her daughter.

***Nunca pensamos que nos íbamos a separar, nunca pensamos nada, pues solo así de repente...no y por otra parte pensé que era mejor, porque si la hubiera visto, no me hubiera podido despedir de ella o hubiera dicho ya no voy, ya no me voy. [We never thought that we would be apart, we never thought anything like that, it was really very sudden...no and really, I thought it was better because if I would have seen her, I would not have been able to say goodbye to her, or I would have said, no I can't go.]***

The separation was difficult for both but it was the manner in which Mrs. Castillo left that caused a rift in their once close relationship. After arriving in Tijuana, Mrs. Castillo called her parents to let them know that she was on her way to the United States. Her parents were not pleased with her decision but could do nothing but wish her good fortune. For Sarah, the news of her mom's migration was devastating.

***Y le dije a Sarah, ya no vas a regresar a México. Te vas a quedar con tus abuelitos. Y ella se puso a llorar, porque ya no iba a volver a mí. Imagínate, una niña de 6 años. Al principio ella no se acostumbraba...la maestra me dice, "yo no se lo que esta pasando. Ella no quiere estudiar, dice Sarah que sus papas no la quieren, dice que no tiene papá porque no lo conoce y que su mamá se fue para los Estados Unidos." [I told Sarah, you won't go back to Mexico City. You will stay with your grandparents. And then she started crying because she would not return to me. Imagine, a 6 year old girl. At first, she could not get used to it ... the teacher said "I don't know what is happening. She does not want to study, she says that her parents don't want her, says that she does not have a dad because she doesn't***

***know him and that her mom left for the United States.”]***

After conversing with her daughter, Mrs. Castillo was able to explain her reasons for migrating. She urged Sarah to study and promised to send school supplies. She also promised to work hard so that Sarah could have everything that she wanted. While Sarah was able to understand the rationale behind her mother’s migration, her grief was too great to allow her to accept it emotionally. Mrs. Castillo stated that her reasons for migrating were purely economical. For Sarah however, the motivation to improve their financial situation was in itself not a good enough justification for her mother’s departure. She admired her mother for giving her the opportunity to get ahead in life but remained resentful.

***Yo le decía a mi abuelita que yo quería que mi mamá regresara aunque una vez no teníamos que comer, porque solo teníamos frijoles y mis tías agarraron y se lo comieron y mi mamá llegó y le dije que tenía mucha hambre y comimos tortillas. Yo quería estar con ella, yo no quería dinero. Entonces fue muy difícil, hasta que por fin entendí que mi mamá no iba a regresar. Ya entonces me acostumbre y me daba mucho coraje cuando mi mamá venía y iba a verme cada año, pero iba una semana y después se regresaba y era muy triste y yo ya sabía. [I would tell my grandmother that I wanted my mom to return even though one time we had nothing to eat, because we only had beans and my aunts took them and ate them. When my mom got home I told her I was very hungry and we ate tortillas. I wanted to be with her, I did not want the money. It was hard until I finally understood that my mom would not return. Then I got used to it and I would get so mad when she would come and see me every year, but she would come for a week and then she would return y it was so sad because I already knew.]***

With time Sarah eventually adjusted to life with her grandparents in Oaxaca. In her interview, she described her childhood there as happy and worry free. She felt loved and was delighted to find in her grandparents acceptance and devotion.

Mrs. Castillo returned to Mexico two years later. During this first visit, she stayed only for a short time. Her mother did not want her to return to the United States, but Mrs. Castillo felt compelled to make the trip once more. Just as she had the first time, she did not tell her parents or Sarah that she was planning to return to the United States. Instead, she told them that she was going to Mexico City to retrieve a few belongings. Once in Mexico City, she took a plane to Tijuana and called her family to let them know that she was on her way back to the United States. They were not pleased.

**Mother-child relationship during the separation.** The relationship between Sarah and her mother during the separation became defined by rejection and a general lack of trust. Mrs. Castillo’s deception proved to Sarah that her mother was not to be trusted. Her resentment made it difficult for her to understand the sacrifice that her mother was making by leaving her behind. Mrs. Castillo understood Sarah’s pain and



felt extremely guilty. She tried to compensate for her absence by sending Sarah money and gifts, realizing that this would not be a good enough substitute for her presence.

***Cuando hable con ella, me dijo, “me engañaste mamá, dijiste que nada mas ibas a ir y ya no regresaste, me engañaste”, me puse a llorar, a llorar, y a llorar, y lo que ella me dijo, sentí que me había roto el Corazón. Pero que le podía hacer? A las dos semanas le envíe dinero a mi mamá para que le comprara una cama y le comprara no se que y al ratito se le fue quitando, y yo sabia que con eso no es nada como que si yo estuviera con ella. [When I spoke with her she said to me, “you lied to me mom, you said that you were only going and you never came back, you lied,” I started crying, crying, and crying, and what she said to me, I felt like she had broken my heart. But, what could I do? Two weeks later, I sent my mom Money so that she could buy her a bed and I don’t know what other things and in a while she started to forget, and I knew that that wasn’t anything like me being with her.]***

Eventually, it became apparent to Mrs. Castillo from her phone conversations with Sarah, that her daughter had begun to emotionally distance herself from her. Material compensation had become a substitute for motherly love, and for Sarah, material goods became the price her mother had to pay for her abandonment. Feeling betrayed and rejected by her mother, Sarah found solace in the love of her grandmother. She began to refer to her as “mother”, much to Mrs. Castillo’s dismay. Although, she understood that her daughter was resentful and hurt by her migration, she could not help but feel a little resentment towards her inability to value the sacrifice she was making. In a sense, they both felt rejected and undervalued by each other.

***Y decía “fui con mi mamá a comprar esto y fui con mi mamá acá y allá”. Y ahí fue donde yo me sentía mal, porque ya sentía que ya no era ya su mamá. Mi mamá era su mamá y yo ya no porque le decía mamá a ella. Y cuando yo hablaba con ella, ella me decía y me puedes mandar esto... pero nunca me decía mami o mamá. [She would say “I went with my mom to buy this and I went with my mom here and there” and that is when I started to feel bad because I felt like I wasn’t her mother anymore. My mom was her mother and I wasn’t because she would call her mom. And when I talked to her, she would say “can you send me this...” but she would never call me mommy or mom.]***

Aside from rejecting her as a mother, Sarah found other ways of punishing her for leaving. She emphasized her desire for material goods above any kind of wish for reunification. According to Mrs. Castillo, Sarah was no longer interested in living with her in the United States and was only interested in what new toys her mother could send. During her visits to Mexico, they would enjoy each other’s company but painful feelings would eventually surface. During bouts of anger, Sarah would lash out at her mother in hurtful ways.

***Ella llegaba y me gustaba porque de repente no me conocía, porque estaba cambiando mucho. Entonces me llevaba, me enseñaba todos los juguetes. Ella estaba ahí y me decía que ella era mi mamá, porque cuando yo me enojaba yo le gritaba que ella no era mi mamá, que yo no la quería. Y se ponía a llorar ella. Así era...no quería que se fuera. Era, es muy difícil cuando estás en esa etapa, pero fue más difícil cuando me vine, yo no la conocía a ella; no sabía cómo era. [She would come and I liked it because all of the sudden she did not recognize me, because I was changing a lot. Then she would take me and show me all the toys. She was there and she would tell me that she was my mother, because when I would get mad I would scream at her that she wasn't my mother, that I did not love her. And she would start to cry. That is how it was during those times, but it was more difficult when I came, I didn't know her; I didn't know how she was.]***

As a young adult, Sarah is now able to understand and articulate the motives behind her actions. As a child, however, the painful feelings elicited by her mother's migration took the form of bouts of anger and indifference. It was difficult for Sarah to understand her mother's lack of sincerity. She became suspicious of her during her visits, sensing her imminent departure. Under these circumstances it became difficult for them to establish a positive relationship.

Mrs. Castillo remembers the separation as being particularly painful. She remembers how much she missed her and about how difficult it was to live without her. At first she wasn't sure if she could tolerate the separation, but after finding work it became a little easier.

***Al principio la extrañaba bastante, sentía que no podía estar sin ella. Para mí era muy difícil...lo único bueno fue que como yo cuidaba a una nena el cariño que no podía dar a Sarah se lo daba yo a la nena, me gustaba estar con ella...Y pues ella me acompañaba muy bien. Pues se me olvidaba un poco, y me acordaba de la niña, pues ya estando con la nena me sentía bien. [At first, I missed her a lot, I felt like I couldn't be without her. For me it was very difficult...the only good thing was that because I took care of a little girl the love that I couldn't give to Sarah, I would give to her, I liked being with her ...And well, she was good company, I would forget a little, and I would start remembering (Sarah), being with the little girl made me feel good.]***

Her job as a nanny allowed Mrs. Castillo the opportunity to cope with the loss of her daughter by transferring the love and nurturance that she could not provide Sarah, to another child. In a way, the little girl became her surrogate daughter and their relationship helped Mrs. Castillo deal with the pain of loss. Just as Sarah had found nurturance and love in her grandmother, Mrs. Castillo had found them in the little girl that she took care of.

### **The reunification period: Sarah leaves Mexico**

Sarah and her mother were separated for nearly 6 years. She was 12 years old when they were finally reunited. The context in which the reunification took place, however, was complicated by yet another betrayal. Soon after Mrs. Castillo's son Billy was born, his father convinced her to allow him to take him to Mexico to meet his parents. As Mrs. Castillo relates, her boyfriend's real motive was to take her son away from her, however, when she realized this it was already too late.

***Todo lo tenían bien tramado. Cuando llegamos allá, tenían los papeles del notario que me hicieron firmar... arriba estaban en ingles, y él me decía firma y el me volteaba la hoja, y firma. Y yo tenía cargando al bebe en un brazo y como estaba muy chillón... entonces yo firmaba de este lado, y el nomás me doblaba así las hojas y yo las firmaba. ... yo solo sabía que era el permiso por dos semanas. Cuando hable con el por teléfono, me dijo no, "los papeles que tú me firmaste, son donde me estás dando en adopción el niño a mi mamá, ahí está bien claro que tú dices que el niño se lo dabas a mi mamá." [They had everything well planned. When we got there, they had papers with the notary that they made me sign ... on top, they were in English, and he would say, "sign" and he would turn the page, and I would sign. And I had the baby in my arms and because he was very fussy... then I would just sign on one side and he would just turn the pages so that I could sign them... I only knew that it was permission for two weeks. When I spoke with him on the phone, he told me "the papers you signed, say that you are giving the boy up for adoption to my mother, it is very clear there that you say that you are giving him to my mom."]***

Mrs. Castillo decided to leave for Mexico right away but he had stolen her identification and passport, so that she could not travel. With a borrowed birth certificate, she traveled to Mexico to find her son. In Mexico, officials honored the notarized statement in which Mrs. Castillo had given her son up for adoption to his paternal grandmother. Seeing no other viable options to retrieve her son in Mexico, she returned to the United States. After consulting with a legal aid organization in her community, she was reassured that the document she had signed had no legal value and was advised to seek full custody of her son in a United States court. After gaining full custody of her son and feeling like she had the law on her side, Mrs. Castillo returned to Mexico. There she sought the assistance of a television show and with their help and the help of a couple of public officials, she was finally able to locate her son and bring him back to the United States. On that particular trip, Mrs. Castillo asked Sarah if she wanted to come with her to the United States, she agreed. Mrs. Castillo felt like she had no choice but to take Sarah without her parents' knowledge. She feared that in retribution, her ex-boyfriend may one day attempt to harm her. This was a risk that she could not take. Her decision to bring Sarah to the United States was abrupt. They took a plane to Tijuana and called her parents from there to let them know that Sarah would not be returning.

***Se sintió muy triste, me hablo por teléfono, y me pregunto porque no le***

***había dicho que me la iba a traer. Entonces le dije, mamá si le hubiera dicho no me hubiera dejado. [She felt very sad, she spoke to me on the phone, she asked me why I hadn't told her that I was going to bring her. So I told my mother, if I would have told you that I was going to bring her, you would not have let me.]***

She knew her mother would not approve partly because both of her parents had become accustomed to living with her and because they had grown extremely attached to her. She also felt that she needed to reestablish herself as Sarah's bona-fide mother. Further, in the United States, Sarah could have a better future, more opportunities for success. She felt like in Mexico, she would marry, have children, and never amount to much else. Mrs. Castillo wanted a different life for Sarah; she wanted to give her opportunities she had never had.

For Sarah the prospect of migrating was exciting, yet it left her conflicted. She was glad to be reunited with her mother and to have the opportunity to live with her in the United States, but felt sad about leaving her grandmother behind. Her desire to be with her mother, however, was so great that it surpassed any desire to stay.

***Me dijo que nos íbamos en avión y todo. Y me daba risa porque era como que no me importaba irme en avión y todo. A mí lo que me importaba era estar con mi mamá. Pero también me puse triste porque tampoco quería dejar a mi otra mamá, entonces era muy difícil. [She told me that we would take a plane and everything. It made me laugh because it was like I didn't care about taking a plane or anything. What was important for me was to be with my mom. But I also became sad because I didn't want to leave my other mom that made things difficult.]***

Sarah did not have a chance to say goodbye to her grandparents and this made her feel guilty because she had left them in the same manner as her mother had left her. She felt conflicted because she had chosen to be with her mother, over staying with them. She felt guilty because they had loved her like a daughter, and because ultimately she had traded that love for the opportunity to be with her mother.

***No sabía ni que decirle por teléfono, porque me sentía mal porque me había venido, porque ellos sabían que me llevaba mas con mi mamá que con mis abuelitos, y a mi mamá yo no la iba a dejar... Yo le decía ¿a quién quieres mas de tus hijos? y ella decía a todos los quiero igual, y yo decía no puedes querer a todos igual y ella me decía que a mí, y le decía pero si yo no soy tu hija y ella se me quedaba viendo... y bueno, le decía, ¿pues a quien quieres mas? y decía "a todos, y de todos es a ti a la que quiero más". [I didn't even know what to tell her over the phone, because I felt bad because I had come, because they knew that I got along better with my mom than with my grandparents, and I would not leave my mother... I would ask her which of her children she loved most, and she would say, I love them all the same, and I would say, you can't love them all the same and she would tell me that she loved me, and I would say, but I am not your***

***daughter and she would stare at me... well, I would say, who do you love most? And she would say, "all of them and out of all of them it is you I loved most."***]

Sarah was a child in constant need of reassurance from those around her. In spite of her strong character and sense of self, she was vulnerable. She also had a strong sense of loyalty. So leaving her grandmother behind was extremely difficult for her because, in a sense, she felt as though she was betraying her. Sarah could not refuse her mother, no matter how much she loved and was loved by her grandmother.

Sarah and her mother took a plane to Tijuana. There, they looked for a coyote or smuggler to pass them across the border. Mrs. Castillo paid \$1800 dollars so that Sarah could pass the border inspection point in a car. As Sarah recalls, she travelled with two young women in a car. The trip was smooth and when they approached the border inspection point, she pretended to be asleep. Once Sarah had arrived safely in Los Angeles, Mrs. Castillo proceeded to cross the border on foot through the mountain. Sarah's baby brother, Billy, had already returned to the United States with his aunt who had legal status in the United States. The family was soon reunited in San Marino.

At the beginning Sarah's family shared an apartment with other relatives. The apartment was located in the Laguna area, San Marino's Latino enclave. Sarah was enrolled in the local middle school and was placed in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Sarah participated in an after school program offered by a local community agency, where she received help with her homework and had the opportunity to interact with other immigrant children her age. Mrs. Castillo was happy to finally be reunited with both of her children and vowed never to separate from them again. But the entire process of reunification had taken a toll on her health. Six months after returning to the United States, she began suffering from headaches and consequently, began losing her sight. After seeing a specialist, she was told that she had been under so much stress that blood had stopped circulating to her eyes. She was treated immediately and was told that she would have to rest for a few months. This was extremely hard for Mrs. Castillo because she now had two children to take care of. She was forced to seek public assistance which was extremely difficult for her, who prided herself with her ability to work hard. Asking for help was humiliating, but she felt like she had no other choice.

After recovering, Mrs. Castillo was able to work again. Shortly thereafter, Sarah's family was able to move out of her relatives' apartment into an apartment of their own. Sarah's new home was closer to her school. Her neighborhood was also safer but less ethnically diverse. Sarah disliked the fact that she now lived far from her friends and no longer had access to the after school programs she enjoyed. She felt lonely in her new neighborhood and visited friends less often. A year later, Mrs. Castillo and Luis, Sarah's stepfather, decided to move in together.

**Initial adjustment.** According to Mrs. Castillo, when Sarah first arrived in the United States, things were wonderful. Sarah was happy to be reunited with her mother and in awe of everything. She described her relationship with her mother as "very good". She felt like she could count on her for support and help with homework or personal problems. She liked living in the United States and thought that everything about this country was wonderful. Sarah and her family spent time together all of the

time. She helped her mother with household chores and with the care of her baby brother. Soon, however, things began to change. In the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Sarah began skipping school, fighting, and engaging in risky behaviors. These behaviors were troubling to her mother, who wished for her daughter to take advantage of all of the opportunities that she had struggled so hard to provide for her. Sarah's relationship with her mother also began to deteriorate. She still had admiration for her mother's strength and her ability to overcome obstacles but something had changed.

**Mother and child relationship after the reunification.** As Sarah's relationship with her mother continued to deteriorate, Sarah's distress became more evident. During one interview, Sarah reported that her mother had physically and verbally abused her. After filing a report about the incident with her school and the appropriate channels, Sarah became upset because her confidence that been betrayed and because she feared the repercussions the report would have on her home life. Nothing resulted from the report that was filed. The case workers visited Sarah's home, spoke to her mother, and found no signs of abuse. But it was clear that mother and daughter were having difficulties. Partly to blame was Sarah's perception that she was no longer as important in her mother's life as she had once been.

***Yo veía que ella tenía que trabajar, ella tenía a mi hermano y yo lo tenía que cuidar. Y has de cuenta que, yo nunca tenía que compartir a mi mamá y entonces fue un cambio muy difícil. No podía salir con mis amigos como antes porque no tenía a nadie porque ellos vivían ya mas lejos de donde antes vivíamos. [I would see that she had to work, she had my brother and I had to take care of him. And imagine, I never had to share my mom and that was a really difficult change for me. I could not go out with my friends like before because I had no one, because they lived far, where we lived before.]***

She also felt that things had not changed for the best. Her mother still had to work a lot to support them and she now had the responsibility of taking care of her brother. She could not visit her friends because they lived far away and felt very alone.

According to Mrs. Castillo, Sarah was becoming uncontrollable. She began coming home late from school, going out without asking for permission, and when at home, shutting herself off in her bedroom. On Saturdays, she would leave the house early in the morning without asking for permission. When Mrs. Castillo would protest her behavior, Sarah would yell or insult her. Mrs. Castillo felt like she was losing control of her daughter and feared that she would end up leaving.

***Yo tenía mucho miedo de que ella, con lo que me amenazaba, de que se quería ir con unos padres adoptivos. Y su tía me dijo, “ni le haga caso, para que ella busque unos padres adoptivos tiene que tener una justificación, que usted la maltrate...entonces no solo porque si se la va a llevar cualquier persona. Ella nada mas la esta chantajeando; no le haga caso.” Pero yo tenía miedo. [I was very afraid that she, with what she was threatening me with that she wanted to go live with adoptive parents. And***

***her aunt told me “don’t pay attention to her, for her to look for adoptive parents she had to have a justification, that you are mistreating her... so, someone cannot just take her like that. She is just blackmailing you. Don’t listen to her.” But I was afraid.]***

As Sarah drifted further away from her family, she began feeling more isolated. Her only confidant and source of support was her best friend Irma. They had kept in close contact after Irma had moved away. Irma had been placed in foster care after her step father had tried to rape her. In foster care, Irma enjoyed more freedom and for this reason, Mrs. Castillo perceived her as a bad influence on Sarah. According to Mrs. Castillo, Irma’s foster parents let her stay out until all hours and even gave her access to contraceptives. Sarah wanted to have the same freedoms as Irma, and would often argue with her mother about this issue. Mrs. Castillo sought to limit Sarah’s interactions with Irma but only succeeded at pushing Sarah further away from her.

Another factor influencing Sarah’s relationship with her mother was the presence of her stepfather Luis. Sarah had never seen her mother in a relationship and to witness her interact with another man in a romantic way made Sarah very upset. She perceived Luis as a threat, because in addition to sharing her mother with her brother, she would now have to share her with her stepfather.

***Nunca la había visto con nadie, ni siquiera con mi papá. No me podía llevar bien con mi padrastro, me daba coraje porque yo sentía que mi mamá no me respetaba cada vez que la abrazaba en frente de mí. [I had never seen her with anybody, not even with my dad. I could not get along with my stepdad. I would get so mad because I felt like my mom was disrespecting me every time he embraced her in front of me.]***

Even though, Sarah had known Luis since she had arrived in the United States, she could not accept him as her stepfather. Luis had established a close relationship to Sarah’s brother Billy because he had known him since birth. Billy called Luis dad and to Luis, Billy was like a son. Sarah and Luis never developed a close relationship. In fact, it was after her mother and Luis decided to move in together that Sarah’s overall behavior and relationship to her mother began to deteriorate.

Sarah, being in need of constant reassurance and validation may not have felt certain of her mother’s unconditional love. As Mrs. Castillo recalls, Sarah always felt unloved by her, in spite of the sacrifices that she had made for her.

***Pero siempre la separación, y siempre me dice que yo fui por Billy y a él si lo quería porque lo fui a traer y a ella no. No Sarah, a ti te quise y eres mi hija y aun las circunstancias que la tuve, porque fue una violación. Yo la cuide y estuve con ella, y también nunca deje que me separaran de ella porque igual el papa siempre quería que regresara con él. Yo no quería y me amenazaba que me iba a quitar a la niña. [And always the separation and she always says that I went for Billy, that I loved him because I went to get him, but not her. No Sarah, I loved you and you are my daughter, and in spite of the circumstances in which I had her, because it was a rape. I***

***took care of her, I stayed with her, and I also never let anyone separate me from her, because the father wanted me to go back to him. I did not want to and he would threaten me with taking her away from me.]***

Ultimately, Sarah understood that she and her mother would never be as close as they were in Mexico. In the newly constituted family, Sarah saw herself as an outsider, which caused her to become more alienated. Mrs. Castillo tried to reassure Sarah by letting her know the painful circumstances that surrounded her very existence. Her disclosure, however, had the opposite effect on Sarah, who ended up feeling like the cause of her mother's problems. In Mrs. Castillo's mind, Sarah needed to know about her rape so that Sarah could understand how difficult it had been for her to be a young mother. She needed to feel appreciated, to know that Sarah appreciated the sacrifices that she had made. But the truth only made Sarah feel worse. She dreaded hearing her mother talk about her experiences and felt guilty about being the cause of so much pain.

***Ahorita, la entiendo, pero también siento que ella me tiene que entender a mi, que no siempre va a ser lo que ella quiera y siento que ha tenido un gran problema de acordarse siempre de todo lo que ha pasado... ¿Te imaginas si todas las personas recordáramos todo nuestro pasado como estaríamos? si hay un momento que necesitas desahogarte con una persona y hablar de tus cosas, pero no todo el tiempo, porque eso te hace deprimirte. [I now understand her but I also feel like she needs to understand me that it isn't always going to be what she wants. And I feel that she has a problem in remembering always everything that has happened... Imagine if everybody remembered everything that has happened in the past, how would we be? There is a moment when you need to vent with another person and talk about your things, but not all of the time, because that can make you depressed.]***

Another point of contention between Sarah and her mother was dating. Sarah, as most girls her age, was interested in boys. Unlike most girls, however, Sarah was interested in dating older boys. She regarded boys her age as immature and sought to date older men. It was not rare to hear of young Latina girls in middle school and high school dating older men. In fact, it seemed that older men preyed on young girls to the point that it became a concern at her school. Three of Sarah's schoolmates were dating older men, two had already become pregnant. In the eighth grade, Sarah began dating a 19 year old man with gang affiliations. When asked about how her mother felt about her new boyfriend, Sarah said that her mother approved of the relationship. It later became evident, from the parent interview, that this was not the case, and that Sarah's mother was very much against her dating.

When Sarah began attending high school, she continued dating older men. She also became sexually active. She had conducted her own research and had found a clinic where she was able to get contraceptives. During one student interview, Sarah told me that her mother was sending her back to Mexico because she had walked in on her and her boyfriend, a young man that "had just gotten out of juvenile hall". Because



Sarah insisted on continuing to see him, her mother decided to send her back to Mexico.

***Yo le decía si tu quieres salir con tus amigas ve, si quieren ir al mall...si quieres ir al cine, avísame donde estas. Yo no me preocupo. Pero ella quería hacer lo que se le diera la gana y ya no me gusto... la mande para México. Y ahí ni nada de que me voy a hablar a la policía, ni nada...Mi hermano le decía, “¿A ver Sarah háblale a la policía, no que allá amenazabas a tu mamá? A ver, échale la policía a tu abuelita.” [I would tell her, if you want to go out with your friends, go ahead. If you want to go to the mall ...if you want to go to the movies, just tell me where you are. I won't worry. But she wanted to do whatever she wanted and I didn't like that...I sent her to Mexico. And there is not like I am going to go and call the police, or anything like that...My brother would tell her “Go ahead Sarah, go call the police, didn't you threaten your mom like that over there? Go ahead, call the police on your grandmother”.]***

Mrs. Castillo was pregnant with Rocio at the time and it was a high-risk pregnancy. She was concerned for her health and that of the baby's. She no longer felt confident about her ability to stray her daughter from trouble. She was conflicted in her decision to send her back; she wanted Sarah to stay and be part of her family and to share in the joy of the birth of the new baby, but she also felt like she could no longer protect her from herself. So, after nearly 4 years in the United States, at age 15, Sarah was sent back to Mexico.

Sarah's adaptation to life back in Mexico was difficult at first. She had to adjust to life in a small town again. She found it hard to fit in because she could not relate to young people around her. She also began noticing the lack of opportunities there and began to realize that she had given up an opportunity to have something different. She called her mother often, asking her to send for her, promising to be obedient and to study. At first, Mrs. Castillo worried about whether she had done the right thing. Afterwards, she realized that Sarah had begun to change and that sending her back, might have been the best thing. Almost two years after having returned to Mexico, Sarah was back in the United States. Mrs. Castillo felt that she had matured enough to have gained another chance, so she sent for her. By then, Sarah was almost 17 years old.

***Mira para que tu te des cuenta, yo por eso quería que aquí estuviera,...aquí estudiando puedes lograr muchas cosas. Sarah ya te dije, yo te iba a apoyar en todo. Y no quisiste. Y ya que ahorita se vino, pues ya está estudiando, ahorita ya me pide permiso...desde que llego en septiembre, ahorita ya tiene 8 meses, y todo este tiempo ya como que la sentí más Madura. [So that you can see, that is why I wanted you here... studying you can accomplish a lot. Sarah, I told you that I would support you in everything. And you didn't want to. And now that she is back, well she is studying; now she asks for permission... since she got back in September, she has been here 8 months, and all of this time, is like I have felt her more***

**mature.]**

Relations between mother and daughter improved. Sarah was more engaged in school, she found a job, and began obeying and respecting her mother's demands. This, however, was a honeymoon that would not last. There were also changes in the family composition at the time that posed additional stress on the family. Sarah's stepfather had moved out and Mrs. Castillo was pregnant again with a baby boy. The family was again struggling financially.

Relations between Sarah and her mother became strained once more when Sarah began dating the father of the children her mother was caring for. At the time of the last interview, Sarah and Mrs. Castillo were not speaking. Sarah began feeling like things between them would never improve. She expressed a desire to move out of her mother's house, but understood that her mother loved her and that she would never be better cared for by anybody else. At the same time, she felt that her mother did not understand her and that the separation had caused a drift between them that could not be mended.

***A veces pienso que ella no me conoce. Es la verdad, creo que cuando no vives con una persona desde que eres chiquita, creo que para tenerle respeto a una persona, necesitas estar con ella mucho tiempo, quererla para respetarla. Y has de cuenta que una madre la miras desde que estas pequeña hasta que estas grande y no la dejas de ver. [Sometimes I think that she doesn't know me. It's true, I think that when you don't live with somebody since you are little, I think that to have respect for somebody you need to be with them for a long time, love her to respect her. And you figure that a mother, you see her from when you are little, until you are older and you don't stop seeing her.]***

In essence, Sarah felt that with the separation she had not only lost precious time with her mother, but she had also lost her ability to love and respect her. Likewise, with the separation, her mother had lost the opportunity to get to know her and to understand her. In the United States, it would be difficult for them to make up for lost time. Mrs. Castillo had two young children to bring up and another one on the way. Sarah would just have to live with that and make the best of a difficult situation.

**School performance.** Sarah's school experience was difficult and in a way mirrored what was happening in her personal life. She began school struggling but with a good attitude and a desire to learn. With time however, she began to disengage. After being in school for two years, she had barely learned any English. Her school had an English Development Program which divided immigrant students into three groups, a newcomer, intermediate, and advance group. Throughout her middle school tenure, Sarah remained in the newcomer group. She seldom spoke English and was low performing. In high school, Sarah remained in the lowest level English Development courses and her overall academic performance remained poor. When Sarah returned from Mexico there was a profound change in her attitude towards school and learning. According to her mother, she became serious about school and

was going to be able to graduate from high school. At the time of the student separation interview, Sarah was fluent in English and spoke it without hesitation. Had she had known English all along and had just refused to speak it?

**Social relations.** As a child in Mexico, Sarah had a rich social life. She had friends and family and many opportunities to socialize outside of her home. In the United States however, Sarah became socially isolated. When I first met Sarah, she was a 7<sup>th</sup> grader at her local middle school. She did not seem to have very many friends aside from her best friend Irma. During the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Irma moved into a foster home outside of the area after having a lot of difficulties with her own family. Sarah and Irma kept in touch through phone conversations and visited each other from time to time. Sarah remained loyal to Irma throughout her middle and high school years and did not establish any other close friendships. She had a difficult time relating to other girls. Most girls at school seemed to dislike her and limited their interactions with her. On more than one occasion she was sent to the office for fighting. In contrast, Sarah was coquettish with boys and sought their attention quite actively. The overall impression of Sarah was that she was a lonely girl whose disaffection kept her from very tangible and important sources of peer support.

At first, Sarah's social isolation was deepened by her apparent inability to speak English. Her language skills also prevented her from interacting with other English speakers and with other immigrant students with more advanced language skills. Sarah's relationships with adults were also limited. With most teachers and other school staff she was shy. She was able to establish a relationship with a Spanish speaking staff in her high school, but she used this relationship to procure hallway passes when she was late to class. Outside of school, there were no other support systems available to Sarah. Therefore, she lacked mentors and other positive role models in her life. Her tendency to be manipulative and her lack of social savvy may have prevented her from establishing these important social relationships.

During the separation interview, Sarah talked about the challenges of establishing a social network upon her return to Mexico. She did not fit in at first but with time she was able to acclimate to her new environment and to learn the social norms that governed it. With time, Sarah felt more connected with her family and had a supportive environment. From her interview, it is evident that her social life in Mexico was rich and that she felt a strong sense of belonging to people there. Still however the pull of the United States was great and her desire to be connected to her immediate family was stronger. Now that she is back in the United States, she speaks English with ease and has established friendships at work. Irma continues to be her best friend and confidant. In terms of her relationships with her family in the United States, Sarah prefers to keep her aunts at an arm's length. She is quick to recall being a hungry child in Mexico City, betrayed by the family members that were supposed to look out for her. Mrs. Castillo remains close to her siblings and has sought their help in times of need. Sarah cannot understand her mother's devotion to her family and sees it as pathological.

At the time of the separation interview, Sarah was feeling ambivalent about her relationship with her mother. She loves her very much and is confident that out of anybody else in the world, it is her mother that she can always count on. But, she has

also realized that they may never have the kind of relationship that she wishes they could have. In this sense she feels at a loss.

### **Conclusions for Sarah and family**

Sarah is a lonely young woman who is a victim of a poorly managed family separation. After having been abandoned by her mother on several occasions and without any kind of explanation, Sarah has become unable to establish basic trust. Her mother's inability to be truthful is perhaps a result of her own traumatic experiences. Experiences that now, Sarah must make sense of for herself. For her own part, Sarah's inability to trust her mother has translated into her inability to establish positive relationships with other adults and peers, with the exception of Irma, with whom she shares similar experiences.

Many years after their initial separation, Sarah's relationship to her mother continues to be defined by conflict. Sarah remains ambivalent towards her mother; she is able to appreciate the many sacrifices that she has made for her family but she remains resentful towards her. She has punished her mother by denying her and by repeatedly defying her authority. Mrs. Castillo has a deep sense of guilt, yet resents her daughter for failing to appreciate the extent of her sacrifice. Therefore, Sarah continues to seek love and reassurance from her mother, while at the same time, rejecting her. Her mother, in turn, seeks validation for all of the sacrifices that she has made but Sarah's pain and resentment keeps her from giving in to her mother. Her mother's own resentment also keeps her from giving Sarah what she needs, a mother who can love her unconditionally.

## **Edwin Sanchez: A Ruptured Relationship**

Edwin is a young man who was separated from his mother when he was 10 years old when she migrated to the United States from Mexico. Edwin's mother Elvia, left him in the care of his maternal grandparents with whom he had lived since birth. She migrated to the United States along with her boyfriend in search of better economic opportunities, something that she communicated to her son prior to her departure. After a short separation of 11 months, Edwin and his mother were reunited. Family relations were good at first but soon turned sour and Edwin's family began to experience adjustment difficulties. Edwin not only began to engage in destructive behaviors that resulted in academic difficulties and drug abuse, but became abusive towards his mother. His mother who had also been experiencing adjustment difficulties felt helpless and unable to deal with her son's destructiveness and abuse. At the time of the student separation interview, in 2004 Edwin was 17 years old and had become more independent. His problems at home had eased somewhat, but he tried to spend as little time at home as possible. Eventually, he moved out on his own. In spite of having had a very close relationship with his mother prior to the separation, Edwin and his mother never quite reached that level of closeness after the reunification.

### **Family composition and socioeconomic circumstances**

Edwin's family is composed of his mother Elvia, his stepfather Oscar, and his little brother Joel, who was born in the United States shortly after Edwin's arrival. At the time of the separation interview, Edwin's family shared an apartment in a diverse neighborhood of San Marino, California. Edwin's mother worked full time at a dry cleaner shop, while his stepfather worked as a bus boy and waiter. In the past, Mrs. Sanchez had also worked as a housekeeper in a hotel and as a seamstress in a sewing shop in New York City. These were jobs she had disliked for several reasons. She also disliked her current job, but felt that she had no choice but to keep working there since she was undocumented and had no other viable employment options. Back in Mexico, Edwin's mother had worked as a stylist. This was a job she enjoyed. She not only worked in a salon but had an established clientele that she serviced in her spare time. As she recalls, she was able to earn a decent income in Mexico and was never financially strapped. Her husband, who was already residing in the United States when she met him, had earned a teaching degree in Mexico but had migrated north in search of more lucrative economic opportunities. During his visits to Mexico, he worked as a substitute teacher in Edwin's school. Mrs. Sanchez completed 8 years of formal education in Mexico before she became pregnant with Edwin. Thereafter, she was able to complete a short career in mass communications. In the United States, she had begun to take English as a Second Language courses at a local community college with the hopes of earning credits towards an AA degree.

Edwin's family has been struggling financially since they came to the United States. In 2001, his family was earning on average \$2,200 a month. Their monthly rent was \$1200 so this left them little money to cover other needed expenses. At the time, Edwin had begun working part-time and used his earnings to buy clothes and to cover his personal expenses. Both Edwin and his little brother were enrolled in the Healthy

Families program and received free medical care through this program.

### **The pre-separation period: Escaping the violence**

Edwin's mother became pregnant with Edwin when she was 17 years old. Soon after learning about her pregnancy, Edwin's father abandoned her. At the time, she was living with her parents in Mexico City. They were supportive of her and helped her through her pregnancy and until she was able to support herself. For nine years, she and Edwin shared a room in her parents' house. Edwin's father never attempted to contact them and they never received any financial help from him. Therefore, Mrs. Sanchez had to secure employment in order to meet her financial needs. According to Mrs. Sanchez finding employment was never a problem for her. Aside from her work at the beauty salon she had a steady flow of clients that helped her supplement her income and cover all of her expenses. She never considered migrating to the United States because she lived comfortably.

When Edwin was 6 years old, Mrs. Sanchez met Oscar. He was a substitute teacher at Edwin's school. Oscar lived in the United States and traveled back to Mexico during the summers to visit his parents and to substitute teach. As Mrs. Sanchez recalls, they fell in love and after a 3 year long distance romance, decided to live together. Because he lived in the United States and she in Mexico, one of them had to relocate. Oscar felt that moving to the United States was the better option for them since finding a good paying job in Mexico for him would be far too difficult. He had also been living in the United States for over 10 years so moving back was not an option for him. He then convinced Mrs. Sanchez to migrate to the United States, something that she had been reluctant to do. After she assented, he travelled back to the United States in order to arrange for her trip.

Edwin's mother described her motivation to migrate to the United States as rooted in love, as financially, she felt that she was doing well.

***Se oye quizás mal, pero por estabilidad económica no vine yo, vine por porque mi esposo estaba aquí, por amor, yo tenía mi trabajo allá en México, yo tenía un buen trabajo y estaba bien dentro de lo que cabe, yo tenía mi hijo, pero me enamoré. [It probably sounds bad, but I did not come for economic stability. I came because my husband was here, for love. I had work in Mexico, I had a good job and I was doing relatively well, I had my son, but I fell in love.]***

She also felt that she was being selfish by placing her own needs over her son's. At the same time, the opportunity that Oscar offered was difficult to turn down. In the end, Mrs. Sanchez reasoned that Edwin would also benefit from this migration and would have access to more opportunities in the United States. Furthermore, she would never abandon him; her ultimate goal was to reunite the family once she was settled.

***Para mi dejar a Edwin, fue lo más duro, o sea fue, así como un sueño, que decías ¿lo estoy haciendo por él o por mi? Yo decía, yo siempre decía, pero estoy siendo egoísta, o sea, porque estoy pensando en mi, en mi***

***felicidad, pero yo decía, Edwin siempre va a estar conmigo, Edwin se va a quedar un tiempo aquí, para que yo vaya abrirle el camino al él allá. [For me, leaving Edwin was the most difficult thing, I mean; it was like a dream, you say, am I doing it for him or for me? I would say, I would always say, but I am being selfish, I mean, because I am thinking only of my happiness, but I would say, Edwin will always be with me, Edwin will stay here for a while so that I can open a path for him over there.]***

The plan that she and her husband devised was to migrate to the United States to work, earn some money, and then return to Mexico with enough money to build a house and start a small business. By framing the migration as a temporary sacrifice for the good of the entire family, Mrs. Sanchez was able to cope better with her conflicting feelings. While she still felt bad about leaving Edwin behind and was haunted by concerns over his well being, she was also comforted by the fact that the separation would be temporary. Mrs. Sanchez planned to bring Edwin to the United States as soon as it was feasible. In the United States, he would have better educational and economic opportunities.

There were other motivating factors propelling Mrs. Sanchez migration. In Mexico, she and Edwin lived with her parents and her brother. According to Mrs. Sanchez, her brother was a drug addict with increasingly violent tendencies. He used to physically abuse her mother. Even though Mrs. Sanchez believed that she was “unaffected” by the violence in her home, she felt like she needed to leave that toxic environment. Her denial did not shield her from the fear that one day she too would become a victim of her brother’s rage. In fact, she admitted to sleeping with a chair propped up against her door every night so that her brother would not be able to enter her room and harm them. This fear made her decision to migrate even more difficult. In her mind, she needed to find a safe environment for her family, she needed to flee the destructive environment in which they lived, but leaving Edwin behind seemed selfish and wrong. Even if the separation was short and the plan was to eventually reunite.

***Había conocido a Oscar en ese tiempo, entonces, como que vi a Oscar como un escape, ...yo tenía veinte tantos años, cuando conocí a Oscar tenía como 24 , 25 años, en el tiempo que nos hicimos novios, Edgar tendría como 5 o 6 años, no coordino bien, me tendría que recordar, entonces, en ese tiempo yo vivía la violencia que le daba mi hermano a mi mamá y yo vivía ahí, siempre estaba con el miedo de que él me fuera hacer algo, me fuera agredir físicamente, verbalmente,... entonces tenía la opción, salirme de mi casa, con un hombre bueno, que me quisiera y que me aceptara con mi hijo o a seguir viviendo lo mismo. [I had met Oscar during that time, so it was like I saw Oscar as an escape...I was in my twenties, when I met him I was 24 or 25 years old, that was when we became boyfriend and girlfriend. Edwin was around 5 or 6 years old, I can't really remember, I would have to remember. Then, around that time I was living the violence that my brother gave my mother and I lived there, I always feared that he would do something to me, that he would***

***hurt me physically and verbally...so I had the option to leave my home with a good man that would love me and would accept me with my son, or to continue living the same thing.]***

For Mrs. Sanchez, Oscar provided an escape from the violence and the constant fear in which she was living. She also worried about being a single mother and about ever finding a man that would accept her with a child. The fact that Oscar was willing to accept her with her son was a great relief; it provided her with a sense of security and hope. She felt like she needed to take that risk and hope that it would pay off for everybody in the end.

Edwin found out his mother was leaving one month before her actual departure, when she broached the subject with him. Her explanation was simple and framed as a necessary sacrifice for the good of the family. His mother also sugarcoated her talk by telling him that once in the United States she would be able to afford all of the toys that he wanted.

***Yo le dije que me iba a venir para acá porque allá no podía darle a el muchas cosas que me pedía...Por ejemplo, en ese momento el quería cosas materiales. Le decía, mira si yo me voy a los Estados Unidos va a ser mas fácil para que yo te pueda comprar algo, por decir un Nintendo, que estaba de moda...y me voy a ir porque quiero que vayamos a estar mejor tu, Oscar, y yo. [I told him that I was coming because over there I could not give him a lot of the things that he asked me for...For example, at that time he wanted material things. I told him, look, if I go to the United States it will be easier for me to buy you something, say like a Nintendo, that was the thing back then...and I am leaving so that we can all be better, you, Oscar, and I.]***

Edwin understood his mother's motivations for leaving and not only accepted her decision but looked forward to reaping the benefits of her migration. The day she left, he was nonchalant about the prospect of being separated from his mother.

***El día que me vine...su amigo lloro más por mí que él. Su amigo, "no te vayas por favor, te voy a extrañar mucho" y el, "me va a comprar un Nintendo, deja que se vaya". Y su amigo muy triste "nunca mas te voy a volver a ver"...lloro mucho, me acuerdo que se arrastraba por la calle, "no te vayas porque no te voy a volver a ver". [The day he came...his friend cried more for me than he. His friend was like, "don't leave please, I will miss you a lot" and he was like "she is going to buy me a Nintendo, let her go". And his friend, very sad "I will never see you again"...he cried a lot, I remember that he dragged down the street "don't leave, because I will never see you again".]***

Mrs. Sanchez was taken aback by Edwin's lack of reaction to her departure, but knew that her absence affected him deeply. According to Edwin, however, his mother's departure did not distress him because he understood that the separation was only



temporary. The day she left, it did not take much to cheer him up.

***Well, si me puse triste al principio pero luego pues, no. Pues iba a estar con ella y me mandaba cosas...le dije, ¿jefa, pues antes de que te vayas déjame una lana, no? Y me acuerdo que mi primo me llevo a un centro comercial a comprar...oh yeah! Era un avión que me gusto mucho, que era de soldados. Pues ya con eso me quede contento. [Well, yes I was sad at first, but only at first because I knew I was going to be with her and because she sent me stuff...I told her, mom, before you leave, leave me some money no? And I remember that my cousin took me to a shopping center to buy...oh yeah! It was a plane that I liked a lot, it had soldiers. With that I stayed happy.]***

Edwin also understood why he had to stay behind. He understood that it was necessary for his mother to establish herself in the new country before sending for him. He knew that by doing that she was making his own migration easier. He would have done the same thing if he had been in her shoes.

**Mother and child relationship before the separation.** Prior to the separation, Edwin and his mother were very close and spent a lot of time together. According to his mother, Edwin was a spoiled child. Because he was her only son, she pampered him in every way she could. Edwin remembers life in Mexico with his mother as being happy and carefree. They spent a lot of time together and were inseparable.

***Siempre ella llegaba de trabajar y hacíamos la tarea. Los fines de semana me iba a jugar soccer, o me llevaba así a McDonald's, o a comprar juguetes, o a la feria...siempre me llevaba a la feria pues es casi donde siempre nos la pasábamos. [She always returned from work and we would do homework. On weekends I would play soccer o she would take me to McDonald's or to buy toys, or to the fair...she would always take me to the fair and it was where we would almost always hang out.]***

Because Edwin did not have a father, Ms. Sanchez compensated for his absence by devoting herself to him entirely. Edwin felt loved and enjoyed the attention and devotion that his mother showered on him. When she left, he was sad to see her go but was secure enough in their relationship to understand that their separation would only be temporary.

### **The separation period: Disillusionment and hardship**

When Mrs. Sanchez first arrived, she settled in San Marino, where her husband's brothers lived. There, she found a job as a housekeeper in a hotel. For Mrs. Sanchez the type of work she now had to perform was not a problem for her. Cleaning rooms for a living was not what she was used to but she had expected that her work options in the United States would be limited. What was difficult for her was getting used to the attitude of other Latinos she encountered. At work, she felt marginalized, berated, and

defeated.

***¿Entonces sabes que fue lo más duro? A parte de encontrarme con el idioma, con mi misma gente de aquí, encontrarme con tanto egoísmo, me encontré como un, me sentía... Yo siempre me he descrito como que yo era un pajarito y me desplumaron, los leones me desplumaron, siempre en mi mente lo he sentido así O sea, que si he conocido buena gente aquí, son contadas, como que tus sentimientos se van secando...me dañaron mucho. [Do you know what was the hardest thing? Aside from finding myself with the language, with my own people here, finding myself amidst so much selfishness, I found myself in a, I felt...I have always described myself like a little bird, and they plucked all my feathers, the lions plucked all my feathers. Always in my mind I have felt it like that. I mean, I have met good people here, but they are like a needle in a haystack. It's like your feelings get dried up...they did a lot of damage to me.]***

Mrs. Sanchez felt that her coworkers were completely unsupportive and hostile towards her. The few Latinos she had met had also let her down. She felt like she could trust no one, out of place, out of her element. She was upset and desperate for a change. When the opportunity to move to New York presented itself, she took it and both her and her husband left for New York City in search of better economic opportunities. In New York, they rented a basement apartment and Mrs. Sanchez found a job in a sewing factory. Her experience there proved even more disappointing.

***En Nueva York igual, trabaje en una fabrica, me pagaban bien poquito, el chino, con el señor que trabajaba, una vez me toco las pompas y me dio mucho coraje y entonces yo no sabia que eso era penalísimo aquí, porque era acoso sexual, entonces el siempre me molestaba, o sea siempre la mujer estaba muy celosa de mi y me aventaba las cosas y así...yo sentía que yo no encontraba lugar en ningún lado. [In New York, I also worked in a factory, they paid me very little, the Chinese man that I worked for, one time he touched my buttocks and I got really angry, and back then I didn't know that it was illegal to do that here, because it is sexual harassment, so then he always accosted me, I mean always, his wife was very jealous of me and would throw things at me like that...I felt like there was no place for me.]***

After struggling in New York, Mrs. Sanchez and her husband decided to return to San Marino. They moved in with another Mexican family and began to look for work. Mrs. Sanchez found a job in a dry cleaning business. She hated her job but decided that she needed to work in order to earn enough money to bring Edwin to the United States. As soon as they were able to save enough money, they rented their own apartment. That same month, Mrs. Sanchez made the necessary arrangements to bring Edwin to the United States.

***Yo veía que había mucha gente que no tenía a sus hijos, que sus hijos***

***estaban en México y que ellas estaban viviendo aquí...yo decía que no quería eso para mí, y yo quiero que el venga para acá,...lo mas importante era que estuviera conmigo. [I was seeing that a lot of people didn't have their kids here, they were in Mexico and they were living here...I would say, I don't want that for me, and I want him to come here]***

Even though Mrs. Sanchez was not happy living in the United States she felt that Edwin would have more opportunities there. She wanted him to study, learn English, and be able to obtain a good job. She realized that she could not easily go back to Mexico, not without her husband. She was also hesitant to return, not knowing what fate would await for her there.

For Edwin, the separation period required some adjustment, but was not difficult. He missed his mother and the time they spent together, but his grandparents were there to fill in the gaps. They made sure he was always busy. They took him to the fair, to swimming lessons, and to soccer practice on Saturdays, much as his mother had done prior to her migration. Edwin enjoyed the time he spent in Mexico with his grandparents and the memories of his life there are happy. Most of all, he enjoyed spending time with his friends on the block something he was not able to do in the United States.

**Mother and child relationship during the separation.** During their short separation, Edwin and his mother kept in constant contact through phone calls. Edwin recalls speaking to his mother on the phone often. Mostly, they talked about school and about Mrs. Sanchez's experiences in the United States. The message that Edwin received from his mother was that the United States was a place filled with opportunities and that she was making the necessary sacrifices so that they could be together again. Edwin never doubted his mother intentions and during the time she was away, enjoyed the benefits of her labor which came in the way of gifts and money. In particular, Edwin remembers receiving a pair of Air Jordan tennis shoes that made him feel special.

***Varios amigos los tenían, yeah. Pero allá pues los amigos, pues ya sabes allá los tenis, esos Jordans costaban como 1,700 pesos. Pues casi nadie los tenía, nadie los tenía. Nomás yo y otro amigo los teníamos... siempre me decían niño rico porque siempre andaba bien vestido y todo..les decía, yo no soy rico, yo soy igual que todos ustedes pobres. [Several friends had them, yeah. But over there well friends, well you know over there those Jordan shoes cost almost 1,700 pesos. So, almost nobody had them, nobody had them. Only my friend and I had them...they would always call me rich kid because I was always well dressed and everything...I would tell them, I am not rich, I am poor like you.]***

Although the material rewards were well received, they never entirely replaced the presence of his mother. When Edwin felt sad, he thought about what his mother had said to him. In a way, thinking about why she had left always made him feel better. But her absence was clearly the trade off for the promise of something better.

***Bien, de que pues íbamos a hacer una buena vida, mejor vida y mal de que,***

***pues no iba a estar conmigo todo este tiempo. [Good that we were going to have a better life but bad because we were not going to be together all that time.]***

For her part, Mrs. Sanchez worried incessantly about Edwin. The thought that something could happen to him was foremost in her thoughts. The presence of her brother in Edwin's life troubled her most.

***Siempre pensaba que José no era una buena influencia. Me daba mucho miedo saber que José estaba viviendo allí y que Edwin estaba allí. Me daba mucho miedo. Yo siempre le decía, nunca permitas que nadie te toque tus partes privadas, nadie, ni tus abuelitos, ni tus tíos, ni nadie, solamente tú, ni yo puedo, jamás, Edwin. [I always thought that Jose was not a good influence. I feared that Jose was living there and that Edwin was there too. I was scared. I would always tell him, don't let anybody touch your private parts, no one, not your grandparents, not your uncles, nobody, only you, not even me, never Edwin.]***

Not only was Edwin's absence deeply felt, but her guilt over having left him in a potentially dangerous situation made the whole separation extremely difficult for her.

***O sea, fue un año, pero si fue bastante doloroso, fue muy doloroso, o sea, a veces yo no entiendo a los papas que se van por años, por años, si para mi un año fue muy, muy doloroso. Es algo que todavía no termino de pedirle perdón a Edwin por haberlo dejado un año y algo. Y a él siempre le afecto eso. [I mean, it was a year, but it was extremely painful, very painful, like, sometimes I don't understand parents that leave for years, years, and for me a year was very, very painful. It is something that to this day, I am not done asking Edwin to forgive me for having left him for one year and some. That really affected him.]***

Her feelings of guilt and her resolve not to remain separated much longer from her son, for fear of estrangement, motivated her to speed up the process of reunification. When Edwin received the call informing him that everything had been arranged for his trip, he was taken by surprise and was excited. He doesn't remember much about the day he left Mexico, but recalls relatives coming to his home to say goodbye. According to Edwin, leaving his grandparents was not hard because it was not in his plans to remain in the United States permanently. He only intended to come to the United States for a short visit.

Edwin described his trip north as relaxed, even though he travelled alone and had to cross the border without a visa. That day, he took a plane to Tijuana with his uncle and was picked up by his smuggler, a woman who seemed very friendly and nice.

***Pues llegue a Tijuana con una señora. [Well, I came to Tijuana to see a lady.] She was really, really nice and the other guys too. They were really nice. Y ahorita que me acuerdo, you know, los chavos que me pasaron***

***eran cholillos, [and now that I remember, you know, the guys that passed me were gangsters], they were gangsters, and la señora también, que me paso con su esposo [and the lady too, that passed me with her husband]. They were really cool, you know...con su hijito chiquitito [with their little son], so you know, ya pasamos por la línea y ya [we passed through the line and that was that].***

Edwin crossed the border with a couple and their son. When they came to the inspection point and were asked for documents, the couple handed the inspection officer some papers, after which they were told to proceed. After crossing the border, Edwin was taken to a house in San Diego where he was picked up by the same woman who had picked him up at the Tijuana airport. Together, they traveled by plane and then by car to his mother's house in San Marino. Mrs. Sanchez described the experience of waiting for Edwin as extremely stressful.

***Vino solo. Cuando agarramos apartamento, al mes envié por él. Llame y mi hermano lo trajo a Tijuana. Y le dije que lo tenía que ir a dejar con las personas que lo iban a traer. Era un contacto de aquí. Y le dije que tenía que quedarse allí hasta que yo lo llamara para decirle que Edwin ya estaba aquí conmigo. Y fueron dos días duros, ya no podía dormir porque era una preocupación tan grande, y cada vez que sonaba el teléfono... [He came alone. When we secured the apartment, a month later I sent for him. I called and my brother brought him to Tijuana. I told him that he had to drop him off with the people that were going to bring him. It was a contact from here. I told him that he had to stay there until I called him to let him know that Edwin was with me already. And those two days were extremely difficult; I could not sleep because I was sick with worry and every time the phone rang...]***

After Edwin arrived, Mrs. Sanchez remembers that they both hugged and cried together. After spending a little time together, she sent him to take a bath and then to bed.

### **The Reunification period: Reliving the trauma**

When Edwin arrived in the United States he was immediately impressed by his surroundings. His mother was very happy to see him and had prepared eagerly for his arrival. Edwin remembers that she had a room full of toys set aside for him. Although he liked the United States, he was not impressed by his new home. He thought that it was too small in comparison to his grandparent's house in Mexico, where he had plenty of space to play. He was happy, however, to be finally reunited with his mother. He remembers being very tired from the trip. The next day, his mother took him sightseeing.

**Initial adjustment.** Edwin was enrolled in the local middle school which was in close proximity to his home. He liked his school at first and reported having little

difficulty adjusting. His mother had a friend with a daughter attending the same school and arranged for them to meet. With her help, navigating the school system became easier. In no time, Edwin began to make friends and to change his mind about returning to Mexico. He still missed his grandparents and friends but with time his homesickness began to wane.

***Decía, “yo no tengo amigos aquí,...ahorita estuviera jugando con Rafael, ahorita estuviera jugando con Carlos, ¿Que estará haciendo Juanito? ¡Ay! Mi abuelita me prepararía esto”, o sea siempre anhelando. Y todo eso se quedo, se fue olvidando. [He would say, “I don’t have any friends here...right now I would be playing with Rafael, right now I would be playing with Carlos, I wonder what Juanito is doing? Ah! My grandma would be preparing me this”, I mean always yearning. But all of that stopped, and he began to forget.]***

Perhaps one of the most marked changes for Edwin was the loss of personal freedom. Back in Mexico, he was allowed to go out to play with his friends, in the United States, his mother expected him to come home after school and did not like him hanging out in the street. Edwin understood the reasoning behind his parent’s rules about coming home and doing homework. He knew that his parents feared that he would be drawn into drugs and/or gangs and that they expected him to be a good son who helped his family around the house. At first, Edwin accepted this change but as he became older, he began to feel that his mother’s rules were excessive. He began to rebel against her and to engage in dangerous behaviors. By the time of the separation interview, Edwin had become more independent from his mother, to the point that they rarely saw each other. He had a job that helped pay for his personal expenses and a social life that kept him occupied. In terms of his life prospects, he was glad to have had the opportunity to live in the United States, where he saw more opportunities for advancement. He felt however, that he could no longer live at home where he felt asphyxiated.

Mrs. Sanchez felt as though she had escaped a bad situation to end up in a worse one. After Edwin’s arrival, she became pregnant. After learning of her pregnancy, she and Oscar got married. Marriage was something that she gave little importance. The only reason she had agreed to marry was so that her child would not be born out of wedlock, but in the end, she was not happy about the situation. She felt trapped in a relationship that was she felt was not working. She had been having problems with her husband since Edwin’s arrival and was beginning to feel like coming to the United States had been a bad idea. After all, she was stuck in a job she hated and had no friends.

***Ahora soy una persona completamente sola o sea yo siempre estoy sola, mi mundo es solo. No tengo amistades, me cuesta mucho hacer una amistad, o sea, me cuesta mucho encontrar una amiga. [Now I am a person who is completely alone, I mean I am always alone, my world is lonely. I don’t have friends, it is difficult for me to establish a friendship, I mean, it is difficult for me to find a friend.]***

It was during her pregnancy that Edwin began to rebel against her rules and to exhibit problematic behaviors at school. Her social isolation, the stress of Edwin's behavior, and the problems she was experiencing at home with her husband caused her to become depressed. The day she gave birth to her second child, her brother passed away. She then had to deal with that loss in addition to everything else.

***Después cuando nació Joel, este, ese mismo día que nació el mismo día murió mi hermano. Entonces yo salí del hospital muy mal porque había tenido complicaciones con el embarazo. Me internaron por siete días. Entonces me sacaron mucha sangre y llegue muy anémica, muy falta de defensas, muy deprimida post-parto. [After when Joel was born, that same day that he was born, that same day, my brother died. Then I came out of the hospital and was not doing well because I had had complications during my pregnancy. They kept me in the hospital for seven days. Then they took a lot of blood and I was anemic, very low on defenses, very depressed post-partum.]***

The bouts of depression that followed were strong and necessitated therapy, which she was able to access. Individual therapy and later, couples therapy, proved extremely beneficial to Mrs. Sanchez, who then began to take more control of her life. Her marriage was saved but her relationship with her son worsened. After a while she stopped trying, and accepted his independence. At the time of the student separation interview, Edwin and his mother were getting along better but were never as close as they had been before the separation.

**Family relations.** For Edwin, living with his mother and stepfather was not always easy. For one, his relationship to his mother had changed after the separation. She no longer treated him with the same devotion he was used to. For Mrs. Sanchez it was the realization that he was no longer a child that made her change her behavior towards him.

***Cuando yo lo deje en México yo lo bañaba y lo sacaba cargado, porque era muy consentido Edwin. Y cuando llego, como que ya no. Ya estaba más grande. El todavía quería que lo bañara, pero no, o sea yo ya no me sentía cómoda. Porque él ya tenía 11 años, él ya estaba grande y me iba a encontrar con una sorpresa, no es el mismo que deje. [When I Left him in Mexico I bathed him and would carry him out, because Edwin was spoiled. And when he came, it was not the same. He was older. He still wanted me to bathe him, but no, I mean I didn't feel comfortable. Because he was already 11 years old, he was older and I was going to find myself with a surprise, no, he was not the same as when I left him. ]***

Although things were different, their relationship was still good and during that first year, Edwin and his mother got along well. Edwin was glad to be with his mother and was thankful to her for having given him the opportunity to be in the United States. In the

first student interview conducted in 1998, Edwin reported that he communicated well with his parents. They knew of his whereabouts and knew his friends. If he had a problem, he felt confident enough to discuss it with his mother. His mother shared his sentiments and in her first parent interview reported that their relationship was close and that it had not changed as a result of their migration experience. She did report disagreements and conflicts about Edwin's misbehavior, abuses of trust, and about his "talking back", but these behaviors did not trouble her at the time. During this first interview Edwin commented that he had a fight with his stepfather, but he did not go into too much detail about it. In fact, Edwin never made much mention of the family problems that he was experiencing at home.

Family relations became strained when Oscar began to change his attitude towards Edwin and his mother. According to Mrs. Sanchez, soon after his arrival, tension began to build between Edwin and her husband. Oscar became not only jealous of Edwin but also resented the closeness of their relationship. To Mrs. Sanchez this jealousy seemed irrational and particularly unfair to Edwin who became the source of discord between them.

***Fue difícil porque Oscar se ponía celoso cuando yo abrazaba y besaba a mi hijo. Decía que lo hacía porque me acordaba a su papá. Fue bien difícil. Oscar me dijo, mamá porque no se va Oscar y así nos quedamos nada más tú y yo solitos. Oscar nunca ha tenido mucha autoridad con Edwin. Edwin ha sabido eso, pensaba que si el me dice algo o hace algo, mi mamá lo pondrá en su lugar. [It was difficult because Oscar would get jealous when I hugged and kissed my son. He used to say that I would do it because he reminded me of his father. It was a very difficult time. Edgar said to me, mom why doesn't Oscar leave so that we can stay here just you and I by ourselves. Oscar never had much authority over Edwin. Edwin knew this, so he thought, if he says something to me or does something to me, she will put him in his place.]***

As the relationship problems between Mrs. Sanchez and her husband began to escalate, Edwin began to resent his stepfather. According to Mrs. Sanchez, Oscar never disrespected her son but acted in a way that made him feel unwelcomed.

***Yo le decía a el, si vienes de mal humor vete al cuarto o evita que el niño te vea así, porque tu me pones tensa a mi y al niño lo haces sentir mal porque el viene de otro país, viene a otra cultura, no habla ingles, viene con otros problemas en la escuela. [I would tell him, if you come home in a bad mood go to your room, or don't let the boy see you like that because you stress me out and your are going to make him feel bad because he comes from another country, he comes to a different culture, he doesn't speak English, he comes with other school problems.]***

Aside from his bad moods, most of the time Oscar stayed out of Edwin's way. He also left the job of disciplining Edwin to his mother and stayed out of their problems and disputes. Mrs. Sanchez preferred it that way and was so protective of her son that for



her, it was a good way of avoiding problems between them.

***Oscar nunca le faltó el respeto a Edwin, pero hubo un tiempo en que Edwin se puso muy rebelde con Oscar. Y las cosas no andaban bien. Ahora los dos se llevan mejor. Hasta se prestan los zapatos. [Oscar never disrespected Edwin, but there was a time when Edwin was rebellious with Oscar. And things were not going well. Now they both get along better, they even share each other's shoes.]***

Edwin also appreciated not having to answer to Oscar as it made their relationship less problematic, especially when he began to engage in negative behaviors at school. During the separation interview, he reported that he had a good relationship with his stepfather because he never became involved in the problems that he and his mother were having.

The problems between Mrs. Sanchez and her husband continued to escalate to the point that he became abusive towards her. This was a very difficult period for Mrs. Sanchez who had never imagined her family life would become so dissatisfying. Most of the abuse was emotional and rooted in Oscar's jealousy. When Mrs. Sanchez became pregnant the abuse became more pronounced and hurtful. After she gave birth to her son Joel, Mrs. Sanchez sought counseling for her post-partum depression and related to her therapist the details of the abuse. The police was then contacted and they came to her house to speak to her husband. According to Mrs. Sanchez, after speaking with the police, her husband changed his ways.

***Y hasta ahora él sabe que yo, ni de él, ni de nadie me voy a dejar. Le digo que él no tiene ningún derecho a tratarme mal, y él ahora ha cambiado mucho. Siempre ha sido un buen hombre. Como que tuvo sus, como que estuvo desubicado...no lo justifico, pero te estoy contando lo malo de él, pero hay muchas cosas positivas. [And until now he knows that I will not let him or anybody else treat me that way. I tell him that he has no right to mistreat me, and now he has changed a lot. He has always been a good man. It was as if he had his, he was out of sync...I don't justify him but I am only telling you the bad things about him, he has a lot of positive things.]***

Little by little, Mrs. Sanchez was able to overcome her depression and to become empowered. At one point she decided she had endured enough abuse and decided to leave her husband. He did not want to lose her and committed to seek counseling. With therapy, their relationship began to improve.

As her relationship with her husband began to improve, her relationship with Edwin began to suffer. During his second year in the United States, Edwin began to engage in problematic behaviors at school. His grades began to decline and his behaviors in the classroom were problematic. He also began to change his appearance adopting a style of dress and behavior associated with gangs. He wore baggy jeans or dark colored pants, oversized shirts or sweatshirts, and a long blue belt that hanged almost to his knees. He also began to grease his hair back and to adopt the speech

patterns of his friends. In school, Edwin was a vato, a guy in low-rider slang, who affiliated himself with the sureño (southern) gang and claimed 18<sup>th</sup> street allegiance. His mother was appalled by his sudden transformation and attempted to put a stop to this behavior, but her attempts were unsuccessful and only ended up alienating him.

***Pero después me fuiste fallando Edwin, ... lo primero que te dije, fue lo primero que llegaste hacer a este país, en primer lugar involucrarte con gente negativa... fue lo primero que hiciste, verme la cara de tonta, porque lo primero que hizo en la escuela, fue empezarse a juntarse con gente, con niños, porque eran niños, que se creían pandilla, que querían formar pandilla, porque eran mexicanos...¿cuándo viste a los muchachos, tus amigos Carlos, los niños cuando fuiste creciendo con los pantalones así, tres tallas más grandes que la talla normal? ¿Cuando los viste haciendo señas con las manos así? ¿Qué es eso? ¿Tú tienes alguna idea de lo que tú piensas o haces? Y él nunca me escucha, o sea yo te puedo decir todo lo que yo le hago, pero no escucha, no me escucha. [And then you began to let me down Edwin...the first thing I told you was the first thing that you came to do in this country, first of all involve yourself with negative people...it was the first thing that you did, think that I was a fool, because the first thing that he did in school was to start hanging out with people, with kids, because they were kids, that thought themselves a gang, that wanted to form a gang because they were Mexican...when did you see your friends, your friend Carlos, the kids you grew up with wearing pants like this, three sizes bigger than your normal size, when did you see them make hand signals like that, what is that? Do you have any idea of what you think or do? He never listens, I mean I can tell you all of the things that I do, but he doesn't listen.]***

For Mrs. Sanchez, the hardest part was feeling like all of the sacrifices that she had made had been in vain. She talked to her son and tried as best she could to reason with him but was unsuccessful. She also tried to curtail some of his negative behavior by becoming more involved in his life, but this only made Edwin feel asphyxiated and resentful. She was desperate and felt like she lacked the skills to successfully guide him.

***Ahora que tengo a Edwin que es adolescente, me siento como que no siento que, a veces ya no puedo con la tarea de ser mamá, o sea como que no sé cómo hablarle, no sé cómo expresarme, como ser amiga con él. Si le hablo fuerte es malo, si le hablo con cariño es malo. O sea no sé. Ahorita ya no estoy tan metida en eso de que ay, de que vine a este país a hacer dinero y eso. No, como que ahora lo más importante para mi es como la estabilidad de ellos, tanto emocional como económica, en ellos, que ellos estén bien, que ellos estudien, que se realicen, o sea esa es mi meta ahorita muy diferente a mi perspectiva futuro que habíamos dicho. [Now that I have Edwin, that he is an adolescent, I feel that sometimes, sometimes I can't handle the job of being a mom, I mean, it's like, like I***

***don't know how to talk to him, I don't know how to express myself, how to be his friend. If I speak to him sternly, its bad, if I speak to him with caringly, it's bad. It's like I don't know. Now I am not that into that oh, I came to this country to make money and all that. No, now the most important thing for me is their stability, emotional and economical, it's them, that they are well, that they study, become somebody. It's like that is my goal now, very different than that future-focused perspective that we had proposed to ourselves.]***

During the separation interview, Edwin was cognizant of the effect that his gang membership had on his relationship with his mother.

***Yeah, todo estuvo bien hasta que me empece a meter en pandillas, you know. Only my mom...pero mi padraastro nunca se metia...como problema de familia [Yeah, everything was fine until I started to join the gangs you know. Only my mom, because my stepfather never got involved...como problema de familia] it's like he cared but, ¿Qué me podía decir a mi si, you know, si no es mi papá? [What could he say to me, if he wasn't my dad?] It was fucked up. A lot of fights.***

Because Oscar was not involved in carrying out the discipline in the home and because he played such a small role in Edwin's life, he was not a source of support for his wife during this time. He mainly shied away from their disputes and the responsibility of dealing with Edwin's rebelliousness fell entirely upon her shoulders. As a result, she had to shift her focus. She was no longer motivated by the dream of finding success and realization for herself, that dream would have to be deferred; her new purpose would be to propel her sons forward. She did not harbor any resentment towards Edwin for making this harder for her, but felt overwhelmed by the difficulty of the job that lay ahead of her. The most difficult part was the loss of trust and closeness that had resulted from her attempts to help Edwin overcome his difficulties.

***Edwin y yo éramos muy apegados, aquí ya no, ahora que ya esta grande. Edwin tiene mucho resentimiento, como que me culpa de cosas que no son...quizá cuando el madure va a entender. [Edwin and I were very close, here were are not that much, now that he is older. Edwin has a lot of resentment towards me, for things that he shouldn't be resentful for...maybe when he matures he will understand.]***

Not only was Edwin rebelling against her but, according to his mother, he was using their separation as way of making her feel like a bad parent. Mrs. Sanchez knew that Edwin used her guilt to his advantage, but was still affected by his words.

***Hasta la fecha el siente que yo lo deje. Me dice "¿te acuerdas cuando me abandonaste en México?" Edwin, no te abandone, porque si yo te hubiera abandonado no estarías conmigo. Y fue un año. Y no fue porque yo quisiera, fue por la circunstancia, no tenía trabajo, no tenia donde meterte,***

***yo no quería que tú sufieras en cuanto me dieron el apartamento, ese mismo mes, yo mande por ti. [To this day he feels that I left him. He says to me “Do you remember when you abandoned me in Mexico?” Edwin, I didn’t abandon you, because if I had abandoned you, you would not be here with me. And it was a year, and it wasn’t because I wanted it that was, it was because of the circumstances. I didn’t have work; I didn’t have anywhere to put you. I didn’t want you to suffer, once I received the apartment, that same month, I sent for you.]***

Relations between Edwin and his mother became more strained. During one of the parent interviews in 2002, Mrs. Sanchez reported that Edwin had physically abuse her. She did not go into too much detail about the incident but did say that she had called the police on her son. Edwin never made any mention of the problems at home during any of his student interviews or communications. It wasn’t until the separation interview that these issues were addressed but not with a lot of detail.

Another source of distress for Mrs. Sanchez was the memory of her brother and of the violence that her family had experienced in Mexico. These memories exerted a powerful influence on her relationship and dealings with Edwin. She not only lived in fear that her son would one day become a drug addict and end up dead like her brother, but she began to fear him. She distrusted Edwin and took the necessary measures to ensure that he was not using drugs or alcohol.

***Siempre estoy viviendo eso a diario, o sea, siempre imagino a Edwin, lo imagino como mi hermano, o siempre estoy oliendo a Edwin de que no huele a droga, que no huele a alcohol, no le tengo confianza. Lo imagino, lo visualizo como a mi hermano, o sea todo eso, quizás si yo no hubiera tenido problema, fuera una madre menos absorbente, o menos desconfiada con el, o sea son muchas cosas, me entiendes. Que los nervios se me, yo no soporto que nadie me grite, o sea o que alguien me agrede, no lo tolero, no tolero groserías. Es lo peor que me puedes hacer, decirme una majadería. Se me hace muy...me da rabia. Es mas allá de... quizá me puedes dar una cachetada y la acepto, pero una grosería no, porque oí muchas. ¿Me entiendes? [I am living that daily, it’s like I always imagine Edwin, I imagine him like my brother, O I am always smelling Edwin to make sure he doesn’t smell like drugs, that he doesn’t smell like alcohol, I don’t have much trust in him. I imagine him like my brother. It’s like, all of that, maybe if I had not had that problem, I wouldn’t be as overbearing, or less distrustful with him. It’s like is too many things, you know what I mean? It’s like my nerves are shattered, I cannot stand it when somebody yells at me, or that somebody hurt me physically. I cannot stand it, I can’t stand insults. It is the worst thing that you can do, call me a name. It makes me...it makes me furious. It goes beyond...you might be able to slap me in the face and I can take that, but to call me a name, no. Because I have heard many. You know what I mean?]***

Even though, Mrs. Sanchez took great care in monitoring her son, Edwin eventually

began to use drugs recreationally. In this sense, his mother's greatest fears had been realized. It is uncertain whether she became aware of his drug use because she never mentioned it in her interviews. Having had the experience of drug addiction with her brother may have made her more perceptive to the signs of drug abuse, but it may not have been as big a problem for Edwin as it may have been for her brother. When Edwin disclosed his drug use, he claimed that he was no longer using. This was in 2002, when he was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and when his relationship with his mother was particularly problematic.

Mrs. Sanchez state of mind during Edwin's rebellious period was precarious. During a parent interview conducted in 2002, she related how the family had been in very bad shape for a while and how she had been feeling depressed and overwhelmed not only with her own work but also with her responsibilities at home. Her stress was evident during the interview, which took two days to complete because it was difficult for her to focus on the questions at hand. Even though she had a great sense of humor and a good disposition, it appeared that Mrs. Sanchez was not a happy woman. She complained of about her work incessantly and reported feeling like crying everyday because she was so unhappy. She was also very pessimistic about her family's prospects for the future and about their ability to improve the quality of their lives. Not having legal status seemed to be an insurmountable hurdle and something that she had been hopeful about prior to the events of September 11, but that now, after an anti-immigrant backlash, seemed like an impossibility. This sense of hopelessness prompted her to seriously consider moving back to Mexico. Edwin agreed that things had not improved for his family but did not want to return to Mexico and wished to remain here even if his family decided to return. In the end as Edwin put it, Mrs. Sanchez, "had to stay".

Mrs. Sanchez's constant monitoring and over protectiveness had a devastating effect on Edwin. He became so distressed that on one occasion he threatened to commit suicide. This was in 2003, when Edwin was 16 years old. That day, he and his mother had been arguing over the cellular phone bills that he had incurred by calling a girl he had met at a youth conference. She had gotten him a cellular phone on the condition that he would be a responsible user. After the conference however, he began calling the girl incessantly and amassed a two thousand dollar phone bill. He hid the bill until his mother found it and confronted him about it. She was extremely upset and disappointed.

***Ó sea tú dices, "Ay mami, por favor por favor sácame un celular, no voy hacer llamadas, nada más las necesarias", pero yo pensé, oh! Si Edwin va a necesitar un celular así, yo le voy a poder hablar...si, si yo tengo preocupación de donde esta le marco y ya se donde esta, siempre pensaba así. ¡Ay, pero dios mío! Cuando voy viendo los esos los biles, fueron dos...y pues Oscar me dijo, no pues, que se tiene que pagar ese dinero, ni modo, has de cuenta que tiraste ese dinero, pero mas se perdió en la guerra, verdad? Pero el dinero como quiera que sea va y viene...a mi lo que me duele es la mentira, o sea, la mentira, y él miente mucho... me duele eso, me duele, me da miedo que vaya a usar drogas, eso me da mucho miedo, pero, yo lo veo y lo veo bien, y a veces lo veo muy alterado,***

***muy agresivo, porque será? [It's like you say, "Oh mommy, please, please get me a cell, I am not going to make calls, only the necessary ones". And I thought, oh yes, Edwin will need a cellular, that way I can call him... if I have am worried about where he might be I can just call him and know where he is at. I always thought of it that way. But oh no, Dear God! When I saw those bills, there were two...and Oscar said, well we have to pay them, what can we do? Just see it as money you threw away, but what is more is that we lost the war, right? But the money is something that comes and goes...what pains me is the lies, and he lies a lot...that hurts me, it hurts me, I fear that he will use drugs, that scares me a lot, but I see him and I see him well, but sometimes I see him too agitated, very aggressive, why is that you think?]***

After the argument, Edwin called the police and told them that if they did not come to get him out of the house, he was going to kill himself. The police arrived with a psychiatrist to evaluate the situation. He told them that he did not want to continue living with his family. He was taken to the hospital and kept there for observation for two days. The psychiatrist told Mrs. Sanchez that Edwin was not suicidal, but that he was only blackmailing her. The family was referred to family therapy. During a conversation his reported that one of Edwin's friends had told her that she was too overbearing and that she policed Edwin too much. Something she understood was true but that she saw as her motherly duty. On another occasion, Edwin ran away from home. According to Edwin, he ran away because his mom "started bitching" about him coming home late. That time he had gotten home at 2 o'clock in the morning and when his mom began to lecture him, he decided to leave. He went to live with his friend Ana but was only there two days. He decided to return home after his mom called to ask him to come back. At that time Edwin made it known to his mother, that his return would be contingent upon her acceptance of his independence.

***I told her man, you want me to live with you, you have to respect me and I'm gonna respect you. You know...I'm gonna come ...and you know I'm gonna come to the house to sleep...if I wanna come to sleep, you know. That's right, now I only have to come home to sleep.***

Edwin felt that his mother was disrespecting him by treating him like a child. He was 17 years old and had a job that covered his expenses; he felt that he was mature enough to deserve more respect. Because he no longer depended on her financially for his personal expenses, he felt justified in his desire for greater independence.

***Well, you know, it's true, like the more freedom you want is like the more, you know you depend less on your parents.***

At the time of the separation interview, Edwin rarely saw his mother. He was working as a day laborer and in a local restaurant, sometimes making up to \$100 a day. When he wasn't in school or working, he was out "clubbing", even though he was not of age. Edwin regularly went out on weekends and usually arrived home at 4 am. His mother

who still worked at the dry cleaners had a set schedule and they would seldom coincide.

***La veo lunes, martes, a veces hasta la noche, hasta las diez, once. Ah, el miércoles a las ocho, a veces hasta las diez. Jueves lo mismo. Viernes trabajo, more clubbing; Sábado I go clubbing, Sunday is ...I'm going to work tonight. [I see her Monday, Tuesday, sometimes not until the evening, after ten or eleven o'clock. Ah, Wednesday at eight o'clock, sometimes not until ten. Thursday is the same. Friday I work, more clubbing; Saturday I go clubbing, Sunday is ...I am going to work tonight.]***

According to Edwin the less time they spent together, the better their relationship was. Now that they hardly saw each other they no longer argued. His mother had gotten used to his schedule although she was not happy about it. Overall he was glad that his mother had decided to move to the United States.

***Pues me siento cool, and then, first of all porque aqui estoy haciendo muchas cosas que yo quiero y es todo por ella, porque ella vino pues para bien ¿no?...Ahorita estoy estudiando y tengo mas oportunidades aquí que en México. Porque alla en México, aunque tengas tu degree, you'd still be working in a piece of shit ... shop or some shit like that. [Well, I feel cool, and then, first of all because here I am doing many things I want to do and it is all because of her, because she came for a good cause, no?...Now I am studying and I have more opportunities here than in Mexico. Because in Mexico, even if you have your degree, you would still be working in a piece of shit...shop or some shit like that.]***

Edwin, was interested in continuing his education and studying mass communications like his mother. He had gotten involved in a radio station sponsored by a local community agency a few years back and had taken a liking to being a radio host. He planned to attend the local community college after high school and was very optimistic about his prospects.

**School performance.** Edwin began his academic career in the United States performing relatively well. During his first year in school, he liked everything about school. He was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade in a newcomer class with many immigrant students who were also recent arrivals. His teacher also spoke Spanish which helped Edwin feel more comfortable and to adapt to the new school system more rapidly. Edwin saw his arrival to this country as an opportunity to better himself and to succeed. In Mexico he lagged behind academically and this was an opportunity to start fresh. That first year he showed a strong desire to apply himself and “be somebody”. He made the honor roll that year and proved very popular with his teachers.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Edwin's attitudes about school began to change. While he still thought that academic success was important, it became less of a priority for him. He began to associate with other Latino boys who were part of a gang and became more preoccupied with gang-related issues and politics. His behavior in class had also

changed; he began to pay less attention to his homework and schoolwork and to engage in negative behaviors.

Edwin's English and Science core teacher had little patience with him and often called him a "space cadet" in front of the whole class. But Edwin was not entirely disengaged from the learning process. Whenever he knew the answer to a question or was interested in a topic, he raised his hand and participated. But this occurred less and less frequently as the negative behaviors became more pronounced. In the end, Edwin became the class clown. He made sardonic comments that made other students in his class laugh, sometimes even the teacher would laugh. This was often a strategy that Edwin employed to deflect attention from his lack of knowledge of the subject matter when the teacher called on him. This strategy proved effective and Edwin employed it frequently.

Edwin finished the 7<sup>th</sup> grade with below average grades. He was doing well in mathematics but poorly in his other courses. His grade point average dropped from 3.17 (computed at the end of the sixth grade) to a 2.23 (computed at the end of the seventh grade). Edwin's academic performance continued to decline as he began to completely disengage from school.

During observations of Edwin in the science and English core classes it became evident that he had difficulty staying on task and following his teachers' instructions. Edwin required additional explanations of basic instructions and content. He did not always understand what was expected of him and required a great deal of individual help. He would become exasperated if he did not receive the help he needed. In class, Edwin often seemed anxious. He looked lost and was unable to focus on what the teacher was saying and was easily distracted. The work that he turned in was often of poor quality. Sometimes he copied text without much care as to what he was copying so that his assignments did not make much sense. It seemed evident that Edwin needed help but the teacher seemed hesitant to refer him for a learning needs evaluation.

In contrast, Edwin's performance in math was above average. At the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade he had earned an A- in math. His teacher felt that Edwin was eager to participate in class and that he "loved to say the answers". His overall attitude in her class was excellent and his motivation and behavior was also commendable. The only concerns his teacher had that year were that Edwin was easily influenced by others and that he was attracted to gangs, something that had prompted her to refer him for services.

Edwin's difficulties in the classroom did not go unnoticed by his friends, who tried to help him. They would often explain the assignment or let him copy their answers. One of his friends referred to him as "dumb", but took care never to make him feel bad by calling him names in person. Edwin tried to play off his inability to understand the coursework by pretending not to care about class. Appearing disrespectful or funny to his peers seemed preferable than looking dumb. He was referred to detention on a number of occasions for his unruly behavior. In the eighth grade, Edwin's attitudes towards school and his behaviors towards his teachers and peers worsened. He often complained about the amount of work he was assigned and about everything else that did not agree with him. He was irritable and used profanity profusely to insult his classmates. While before he used to clamor for help, in the eighth grade he was



unmotivated and did not seem as concerned with completing his assignments. Offers of help were met with annoyance. Notwithstanding his deteriorating behaviors, Edwin's English teacher believed that he had a great potential that could be channeled into positive things. He also believed that Edwin had a lot of charisma and that he was a natural leader. Despite much encouragement from his teachers, Edwin's negative behaviors began to escalate to the point of becoming criminal. He was involved in acts of vandalism at school and was caught drinking alcohol in school grounds. The school's response to his acting out behaviors and low academic achievement was to transfer him to an alternative school for troubled youth.

To say the least, Edwin's mother was devastated by the turn of events. She could not believe that her son had been sent to a school for students with behavioral problems. She was not only disappointed in Edwin but felt ashamed to admit that her son had been expelled.

***Fue algo muy duro para mi aceptar que tu, mi hijo, estuvieras en esa escuela, y le dije que eso ya ni se borra, ni con cloro...Luego sale a los seis meses, porque le eché ganas con él, tienes que salir y se graduó y se salió de ahí, gracias a Dios, nada más estuvo seis meses. [It was very hard for me to accept that you, my son would be in that school, and I would tell him that that cannot be erased, not even with bleach...Then after six months he gets out because I gave it my all with him, you have get out and he did graduate and got out of there, thanks to God, he was only there six months.]***

But his mother was not the only one upset with the transfer. Edwin was miserable in his new school. He found the classes small, the coursework boring, and more than anything, disliked the fact that no girls attended the school. With the relentless help and advocacy of his mother, Edwin was able to finish his last semester of middle school there and transfer into a regular high school the following academic year.

During his stay at the alternative school, Edwin was evaluated for learning disabilities and was found to have difficulties in certain domains of learning. A more thorough evaluation was conducted at his new high school and he was deemed qualified for special education services, much to his dissatisfaction. His mother, however, was glad that the school had been able to find, what she believed the cause of much of Edwin's problems, but at the same time realized that her work of motivating and keeping Edwin on track would be even more difficult.

***Entra a esta escuela y fue cuando se dieron cuenta que tiene un problema para retener y esta en sus clases especiales, pues igual, ahí le estoy, has de cuenta que le estoy empujando y a veces de doble y sigo, sigo, sigo pero a veces siento que ya no puedo, o sea porque no agarra responsabilidad, ¿me entiendes? [He enters this school and that was when they noticed that he had a learning problem and is now in his special classes. Well, again there I am, it's like I am pushing him and sometimes double and I keep at it, going, and going but sometimes I feel like I cannot longer do it. It's like I feel that he does not take responsibility, do you***

### ***understand me?]***

Edwin was not in the least bit grateful to have been deemed learning disabled. This was a terrible blow to his self-esteem. During his freshman year most of his courses were special education courses, except for physical education. He hated his classes, his school, and his teacher. His teacher felt that the stigma placed on special education by other students was so great it was affecting his progress. She knew that Edwin was being teased outside of class and that this teasing worked very much against him. As most teenagers, Edwin placed a lot of importance on what his friends thought of him. Edwin's teacher felt that by incorporating regular classes into his schedule, Edwin would be less resistant to the special assistance and academic support he was being offered by the program. So mid-year his schedule was integrated and he was placed in a regular English Development Program course. This helped changed his attitudes about school.

In terms of his academic performance, his special education teacher felt that he was an okay student in terms of his behaviors. His skills however ranged from fair to poor. She found that Edwin was "often eager to learn but is hampered and frustrated by learning disabilities". His frustration would often lead to him acting silly or becoming angry. In math, Edwin performed much better and his behaviors had also improved. By the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Edwin had demonstrated a slight improvement in grades. By the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade the improvement was more visible. At the time of the student separation interview, Edwin was a senior in high school. He reported performing better in school and was eager to graduate. He planned to attend a local community college where he planned to study mass communications.

**Social relations.** In middle school, Edwin was very popular among his Latino peers. Mostly, however, he gravitated towards a small group of male students with whom he spent the lunch period. Edwin and his friends were part of the school's *sureño* gang. The group consisted of 5 boys in total and Edwin had a prominent role in the group. At first most of the focus of the group was on the other small gangs that existed in the school. The Asian students had formed their own gang and there was another group of Latinos boys that claimed allegiance to the *norteño* gang. In the eighth grade, Edwin's gang began to grow in membership and to absorb some of the members of the *norteño* group. The focus then shifted to drugs and vandalism. On one occasion, Edwin and his friend came to class under the influence. The gang was also blamed for vandalism of school property and drinking alcohol on campus. Criminal charges followed. When asked how his parents had dealt with the situation, Edwin said that they had no knowledge of his gang-related activities. He claimed that one of his uncles had helped him get out of jail and had acted as his guardian in court, but his mother never made any mention of an uncle in any of her interviews. Edwin also displayed other risky behaviors. On one occasion he brought a switchblade to school for protection. He also brought cigarettes and displayed proudly the marks that a girl with whom he was sexually active had left on his neck.

In high school, Edwin's was no longer part of a gang. He had opted to attend a high school where gangs were not a significant presence and where Latino students were more of a self-selected group. He began to dress differently and to care about

different things. He had two friends whom he considered close. Both of them were girls. One of them he had met in middle school. She was a good student and someone that Edwin's mother approved of. Both she and Edwin were radio hosts. Edwin's other friend was approximately four years older than him. She gave him a place to stay when he ran away from home, and was someone that Edwin felt understood him. His focus had also changed. He was interested in working and partying. He began to use cocaine in high school and continued to engage in other risky behaviors, mainly drinking, driving under the influence, and promiscuous behavior. During the separation interview, Edwin claimed that he had stopped using cocaine, yet during the entire interview he was jittery and made a few trips to the bathroom which made me suspect that this was still a problem.

Edwin's risky behaviors were counteracted with constructive behaviors. In the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Edwin became active at a local community agency serving immigrant populations. He participated in their educational programs which he found fun and beneficial. The academic support that the organization gave him was essential due to his poor performance in school. Later on, he began to participate in a radio program sponsored by this same agency. He and one of his good friends hosted their own radio show, became involved in organizations for youth in radio, and attended conferences in which they had the opportunity to interact with youth across the country. The whole experience was enriching for Edwin and he was able to remain engaged in these organizations and activities for years. At the time of the separation interview in 2005, Edwin was still involved in the radio station and planned to pursue a career in radio broadcasting.

Edwin and his mother are adept at accessing community resources and support and have been quite active in their social environment. When Edwin was threatened with a transfer to an alternative school, he and his mother were able to rally teachers and community members to support him. When the meeting to discuss his transfer convened, his family, a tutor, and another community agency worker attended to protest the transfer. The show of support was able to delay the transfer for a couple of months, until Edwin's poor behavior and lack of academic performance prompted the school to finally transfer him out. Yet in spite of the social support that the family was able to access, his family remained relatively isolated from the rest of the Latino community in San Marino. Edwin's mother expressed feelings of loneliness and complained about the nature of interactions between Latinos there. She was distrustful of most people and generally kept to herself. In contrast to his mother, Edwin's did not have difficulty making friends and was able to maintained long lasting friendships.

### **Conclusions for Edwin and family**

Violence is a salient theme in the separation and reunification narrative of Edwin's family. The violence they experienced in Mexico, for instance, had a lasting effect on Mrs. Sanchez' mental health. Her hyper vigilance, instability, and inability to trust proved devastating to the mother-child relationship. This lack of trust was manifested in her over-protective behaviors and her constant monitoring of Edwin. These behaviors not only served to alienate Edwin from his mother but also caused him to engage in risky behaviors. Edwin's desperate attempts to separate from his mother,

most notably his violence towards her and his threat of suicide, were pathological but nonetheless responses to her smothering. Furthermore, Edwin's violent reactions to his mother's over-protectiveness further complicated their tenuous relationship and reinforced Mrs. Sanchez' fears about Edwin becoming "like her brother". Their relational problems eventually resulted in an avoidance pattern that according to Edwin was the only way that he and his mother could coexist in the same household. Edwin remains appreciative of his mother's sacrifice but is unable to have a close relationship with her. Mrs. Sanchez remains distrustful of her son and seems to harbor a deep seeded fear of him.

Also notable in this narrative are the marital problems between Mrs. Sanchez and her husband. Their abusive relationship created a hostile home environment for Edwin and caused Mrs. Sanchez to become depressed and less emotionally available to her son during his difficult transition. The breakdown of the marital relationship and Mrs. Sanchez' unwillingness to involve her husband in Edwin's parenting also resulted in the loss of much needed support during the difficult reunification process. It is possible that Oscar's involvement in the parenting of Edwin during the reunification may have led to increased family cohesion and to a less stressful mother-child relationship.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the immigration-related separation and reunification experiences of Mexican and Central American families to achieve a deeper understanding of the factors that either facilitate or complicate these processes. In addition to providing a description of the experiences of families, this study attempted to examine in depth the factors contributing to positive and negative reunification outcomes, including pre-separation and reunification planning, family relations, and parenting practices. Special attention was also given to the role that substitute caregivers played in shaping the experiences of children and other factors that influenced how reunifications were experienced by families. Furthermore, by exploring these events both contextually and longitudinally, this study sought to fill existing gaps in the literature on immigration-related family separations and to move beyond current frameworks that provide a narrow lens from which to examine these events.

In order to address the research study questions, 7 Latino immigrant children and their mothers were interviewed about their separation and reunification experiences. The interviews were in-depth and semi structured with a particular focus on the pre-separation, separation, and reunification periods. In addition to in-depth separation interviews, 5 years of longitudinal data about participants gathered during their participation in the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) study, were incorporated into the current study in order to provide a context for the reunification process. These data included participant observation notes, structured interviews with children and their parents, and academic outcome data. The separation interviews for the current study were conducted over a 3 year period following the end of the LISA study, so contact with study participants on average spanned over 8 years on average. All data were synthesized into family case studies which were analyzed in order to achieve an understanding of the particular experiences of families and their meaning within a longitudinal context. The research questions guiding this study sought to explore the separation and reunification experiences of families, the role of surrogate caregivers, and the pre-separation and pre-reunification planning. Additionally, the study sought to elucidate factors that may have influenced the separation and reunification outcomes for families.

Studies on immigration-related family separations have established that these types of separations have a disruptive impact on immigrant families (Artico, 2003; Baptiste, 1997; Lashley, 2000; Glasgow and Goose-Sheese, 1995; Perez-Foster, 2001; as quoted in Suarez-Orozco et al., 2005). What the findings from the current study seem to suggest is that immigration-related family separations are a normative part of the immigration experience of families and that as such, they do not necessarily lead to poor outcomes for children and their families. The overall sense is that when these events are well planned and when children know what to expect, separations may not be harmful. They can, however, generate conflict among families and result in ruptures in attachment bonds that cannot always be mended.

An important contribution of this study is its longitudinal scope into the process of reunifications. By examining the lives of reunited families over a span of 8 years, it is possible to explore how families manage the stress of reunifications over a considerable period of time. As a whole, reunifications were not easy for most families in this study.

Many families struggled during the initial adjustment process. Children reported feeling uncomfortable with their parents and parents found their children's ambivalence towards them unsettling. Children were homesick and found it hard to relate to parents they hardly knew. Yolanda who had been raised by her grandparents since infancy found the transition extremely painful. It took some time for her to become accustomed to living in the United States and to feel at ease with her parents. For the majority of families, adjustment difficulties and relational problems lessened over time. This is a finding that is consistent with a study conducted by Suarez-Orozco et al. (2010) which found that symptoms of anxiety and depression, for children who had experienced family separations during the course of migration, abated over time. For Yolanda's family, who had experienced years of family conflict, resolution came nearly 5 years after the reunification. For the Ramirez family, conflicts resulted shortly after the reunification and were complicated by feelings of estrangement, the father's abusive behavior, and Yolanda's unwillingness to accept her parent's authority. When her father stopped drinking and began attending church services, family relations improved. It also took some time before Yolanda's parents were able to understand her need for independence and to accept that they would need to change their parenting practices, if they wanted to establish a positive relationship with her. The family conflict in the Ramirez family eventually ceased, but without the longitudinal perspective, it would have been difficult to see their entire trajectory as they managed the difficult transition period. For other families who were still experiencing difficulties several years after the reunification, external factors predating the separation may have hampered their ability to manage these events successfully and to adjust to life as a reconstituted family. We see this illustrated in the case of Edwin, who after years of struggling with his mother's controlling behavior, moved out of the home. In his case, his mother's parenting was largely a result of her own experiences in an abusive home. Her fear that Edwin would someday become an abuser or fall victim to drugs and violence fueled a dynamic that was not only counter productive but that eventually resulted in further deteriorating their relationship.

Another unique contribution of this project was its inclusion of both the child and parent perspectives into the exploration of immigration-related family separations. Most studies so far, have only incorporated either the child's or the parent's experiences into their analysis. Having both perspectives has yielded a deeper understanding of how these events are experienced by both parties. Sometimes the experiences resonate, but sometimes they are divergent. This is apparent when comparing how both children and mothers experience the separation period. Children left as infants, for instance, report having been little affected by the absence of their mothers. David, for example, did not know he had another mother until he was five years old. Yolanda, who was separated from her mother at the age of 2, did not have any recollections of her mother and reported having been unaffected by her absence. Most children who were older when their mothers migrated remember the separation as a significant event in their lives. But even though they missed them, their loss was mitigated by the presence of a supportive family. For most children, the separation period was a time they spent with family members they loved and who were especially attentive to their needs. Some children not only received special treatment from their caregivers but also material benefits made possible by their parents' remittances. These perks made them feel

special and their experiences memorable. As children now in the United States reflected on these experiences, there was a longing for that sense of belonging and closeness that they received from their family and that for some of them was now absent from their lives.

For mothers, the separation experience was stressful, lonely, and painful. Many struggled to adjust to a new environment while at the same time trying to cope with their own feelings of loss. Many mothers also reported constantly worrying about their children's health and well being. Relatives back home did not always inform them when their children were sick or sad in order not to worry them. But this, however, only increased their anxiety and preoccupation. Feelings of powerlessness, sadness, and guilt were not uncommon. Mothers in the United States not always had supportive systems in place to cushion the negative effects of the separation. This was the case of Edwin's mother, who felt isolated and marginalized in the United States.

Reunifications were also experienced very differently by both mothers and children. While for parents, reunifications signified an end to their worries and suffering, for children it was the commencement of a period marked by anxiety, ambivalence, and painful separations from important people in their lives. It was perhaps this divergence that made reunifications particularly difficult for some families. In their narratives, children spoke about their relatives back home and about their longing to be reunited with them. Grandparents, uncles, and aunts were an integral part of the extended system of child rearing that provided care and emotional stability to them in their parents' absence. Relinquishing these attachments was extremely difficult and most children struggled with the decision to migrate. For the most part, they felt ambivalent about leaving. For David, the attachment to his grandmother was so strong that leaving her behind was not an option. In his case, his mother had to agree to arrange for her to accompany him. This created a complex situation at home, in the United States, where both mother and surrogate had to negotiate their parental rights. David's mother, although happy to enjoy a good relationship with her son, had to accept the fact that in his heart, his grandmother would always be his real mother. Others gave in to their parents and agreed to migrate without their caregivers. These caregivers, however, always figured prominently in their lives. This was the case of Yolanda, who even after the reunification, referred to her grandparents as her parents.

The use of case study methodology provided a stage for the inclusion of contextual factors that have been largely excluded from studies on immigration-related family separations and that fall outside the scope of attachment theory. Context is of particular importance in shaping and understanding the experiences of families. For one, mothers and children are not only separated by time and space, but they are also separated by contextual factors unique to their respective cultural experiences. Bridging that gap, required children to travel across borders that were not only international but also linguistic and cultural. It also required them, as was the case of Jimmy, to risk their lives crossing multiple borders without proper documentation and in perilous circumstances. After the reunification, children must adapt to a different familial context where they may encounter stepparents or siblings. David, for instance, not only had to adapt to life with a mother he hardly knew, but also to a stepfather that did not readily embrace him. His stepfather's rejection created a situation that was not only stressful for him and his mother, but also damaging to the entire family. The family

tension and conflict that ensued from his stepfather's attitude resulted in a difficult transition period for David's family that only subsided after David left for college.

Children must also adapt to an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile host environment. They have to learn a new language and new systems of learning. They must also adapt to customs unfamiliar to them and even to their parents, while at the same time, feeling ambivalent about being there. In their new environment, family relations are negotiated very differently. Children are expected to be more independent and parents have less time to orient and guide them. Like Laura, some children have to adjust to their parents' new rhythm of life. They may be expected to fix their own meals or to supervise themselves while their parents work long hours. Some children also feel the loss of status that comes from being part of the ranks of a disenfranchised community of immigrants. Whereas in their countries of origin they may have enjoyed a special status because of the privileges they enjoyed from their parents' remittances, in their new environment, as newcomers they may be the most disadvantaged because they lack the language skills and the cultural know how needed to feel competent in their new environment. Additionally, children may feel the hostility of a society that does not always embrace them. While some children may adapt well to the change, some still long for the family meals they enjoyed back home or for the presence of their caregivers who always had a meal ready for them when they arrived home from school. The longing the children feel is for family and home and the relative comfort and safety that it provided them. Eventually all children adjust to their new environments and begin to see increased opportunities in the United States. Their memories of the home country, now romanticized, continue to express that longing for a childhood and home where things were more familiar and less complicated.

When children become more acculturated, the parent and child relationship must be renegotiated. By then, children have become more self-reliant and acculturated. Their desire to separate from their parents is met with resistance, as their parents are unwilling to lose their children to the host culture. For children, it is perhaps difficult to understand why parents are resistant to their Americanization when it was their desire to bring them to this country that caused them to change. Indeed, parents desired their children to have more opportunities, to become fluent in the new language, and be successful. What they did not foresee was that their children would adopt customs and ways of thinking that would be contrary to their own cultural values. For parents, there are only two options, they must either adapt to the new culture and the customs that their children embrace, or remain firm in their ways and risk losing their already tenuous relationship. Yolanda's parents chose to adapt their parenting practices to reflect a more American style which seemed to have diffused the escalating tension in the household and even resulted in improved family relations. Most parents learn to make concessions and slowly allow their children some independence. We see this in the case of Laura, whose strict parents eventually allowed her to have a boyfriend at the age of 16.

In some cases, mothers' distrust of the host environment prompts them to take drastic measures in order not to lose control over their children. For example, Edwin's mother, who felt at odds with her environment, attempted to sway her son away from what she perceived as negative influences. She not only distrusted her environment but also her son's ability to make smart choices. For Edwin, there was more than



acculturation at play. Mrs. Sanchez's fears were rooted in her past experiences with her brother in Mexico, this was the context that had largely shaped her thinking and actions. They were also rooted in the experiences that she had lived in the United States, where she had suffered abuse and mistreatment. Her fears were also influenced by what Mrs. Sanchez had learned about her own community, where gangs were an increasing problem both in the street and in schools. Gangs for Edwin provided a sense of belonging and respect that he felt he was missing at home. It provided him with an alternative to the disparagement he experienced in the classroom and a refuge from the hostility he perceived from school officials. For Mrs. Sanchez, allowing Edwin too much independence meant risking losing him to the gang. Allowing him no autonomy, however, caused him to feel smothered. In some cases, there was little parents could do to battle against an environment that made it easy for their children to engage in dangerous behaviors. For Sarah, her acting out behavior prompted her mother to send her back to Mexico. While this punitive measure seemed to have knocked some sense into Sarah, who came back from Mexico with a desire to study and get ahead, it further damaged her relationship to her mother. In both cases, contextual factors played a role in setting the tone for the mother-child relationship and created environments in which already problematic relationships became even more difficult to manage. In the United States, the stakes were much higher and families without support systems were even more vulnerable to discord and negative outcomes.

Attachment theory and the literature on immigration-related family separations were useful in identifying other factors particular to these events that helped shape the experiences of families. These factors are identified in the literature and provide a framework from which to develop interventions for families who have been separated during the course of migration (Artico, 2003; Falicov, 2007; Suarez-Orozco, et al 2003).

### **Pre-Separation Factors**

Data from the current study suggests that planning for parent-child separations is extremely important and that there are a number of factors that can influence the separation experiences of immigrant families and influence their outcomes. It has been suggested that when separations are well planned and executed, reunifications need not be problematic (Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008), something that is illustrated in several of the case studies presented. Poorly planned or haphazardly carried out separations, however, can be disastrous for both children and their families. Feelings elicited by poorly planned separations include rejection, resentment, and mistrust. There are two important elements essential for good planning that were identified in this study, one is providing the child with an adequate explanation for the parental migration and the second is ensuring the availability of a supportive caregiving environment during the parental absence.

**Explaining the parental reasons for migrating.** As illustrated in the case studies, the manner in which the parental decision to migrate is conveyed to the child can determine the meaning the child attributes to the separation and thus his ability to cope effectively with the parental loss. Framing the separation in a way that children can understand and accept it is extremely important. For example, framing the

separation as necessary for the good of the family ensures that children understand that they are not being abandoned but rather that their parent's decision to leave is ultimately a sacrifice for their wellbeing. This message is echoed in many of the narratives of children in this study. Further, this particular manner of framing the separation is easily reinforced by the benefits that are gained by the parents' labor abroad, mainly improved living conditions, gifts and other tokens that children receive from their parents during the separation. Framing the separation as temporary is also important. When children are certain that the separation will be of short duration or temporary, they are less likely to feel ambivalent about it, as in the case of Laura who was undoubtedly certain that her parents would return for her as they had promised. Knowing what to expect can ease the anxiety children feel about the separation and help them cope with the loss of their parents (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). When children are not given any clear details about the migration coping with the parental loss can be challenging. Not only are children left mourning the ambiguous loss of their parent(s) but are also left in a state of emotional limbo where they are not able or willing to surrender their attachment to their parent(s) but also unable to move on and form new attachments (Boss, 1999; Suarez-Orozco et al., in press). We see this in the case of Sarah, whose mother left Mexico without telling her. Not only was there a definite rupture in the parent-child relationship as a result of her mother's perceived abandonment, but the feelings of abandonment and rejection that Sarah experienced dictated the nature of her relationships to others around her. Children in this study who received an adequate explanation for their parents' migration were better able to cope with the loss of their parents, able to form strong attachments to their caregivers, and did not report any feelings of rejection or abandonment.

#### **Selecting an adequate surrogate caregiver and caregiving environment.**

Six out of the seven children in this study were cared for by loving relatives, and their lives in the country of origin were described for the most part as idyllic. In this sense most parents were successful in securing an adequate caregiving situation for their children during their absence. The importance of adequate care and continuity during the parental absence cannot be understated as it provides a good foundation for optimal development in the absence of the parent (Bates & Dozier, 2002; Goldberg, 2000). By choosing the least disruptive and most adequate care giving scenario, parents were able to ensure that their children's development and sense of self was not particularly compromised. All of the children in the study were acquainted with their substitute caregivers and reported feeling secure in their environments.

The two children in the study who were left as toddlers had no memory of the separation. Their grandmothers had also been involved in their care prior to the separation and continued to care for them after their mother migrated replace. This continuity of care may have protected them against the negative effects of the parent-child separation, especially if an attachment to their grandmothers had already been established. For children who were old enough to have distinct memories of when their mothers left, the parental absence was an entirely different experience. For the most part, these children recalled their mother's departure as a painful and emotive experience and in their narratives the pain of the separation is evident. For Andres, his mother's departure was so difficult and painful that he had to be restrained by relatives. During the separation, her absence was deeply felt but thanks to his loving relatives he

was able to overcome his sadness and adjust successfully to the separation.

For the immigrant mothers in this study, leaving their children behind was the most difficult thing they ever had to do and a sacrifice that was only possible thanks to the parents or relatives that were willing to provide the care that their children would need in their absence. For 5 out of 7 of the families in this study, grandmothers were already part of the system of care available to children. This tri-generational mothering system ensured a working caregiving triangle in which the parent, surrogate, and child could be in frequent communication and working together for the best interest of the child and the parent-child relationship (Falicov, 2007). We see an example of this working relationship in the case of Yolanda, whose paternal grandmother not only took care of her like a mother, but also ensured that the memory of her real mother was preserved. In this sense, not only was her grandmother fulfilling her needs for love and affection but she was also acting on the best interest of the parent-child relationship.

## Separation Factors

**Length of the separation.** Longer separations lasting more than 4 years were found to pose more challenges to reunited families than short-term separations, but overall did not appear to be harmful to children. This was especially true for children who were left at a young age and were able to form strong attachments to their surrogate caregivers. Estrangement was perhaps the most notable difficulty encountered by families who endured the longest separations. Upon reunification, children reported feeling awkward around their parents and feeling uncomfortable with their displays of affection. Another challenge encountered by these families was related to the effects of the rupture in the bond between the children and their surrogates. Because children considered their surrogate caregivers their true parents, separating from them was particularly difficult. In such cases, not only were children expected to adjust to a new environment with parents they barely knew but were also expected to cope with the loss of the only parents they had ever known. For most of the children in this study, the separation from their surrogate caregivers was painful and while migrating presented them an opportunity to be reunited with their parents, in their narratives, they voiced reservations about leaving their loved ones behind.

*“bueno ya nos vamos a ir ya la otra semana.” Y yo ¡ay! Fue una despedida tan dura, porque especialmente mis abuelitos; recuerdo de que yo lloramos porque se quedaron mis abuelitos. [“Well we are leaving next week.” And I was like, oh! It was a very difficult goodbye, especially because of my grandparents; I remember that we cried because they stayed behind.]*

In a sense, children’s feelings mirror that of their parents when they migrated. There was apprehension, pain, a sense of loss, and guilt. For children like Andres and Jimmy, who experienced a difficult separation from their parents, the second separation was just as difficult. Because parents were not always aware of their children’s ambivalence and feelings of loss, they were not sensitive to their feelings or simply unaware of their grief. This was not always easy and at times it caused children to grieve in silence (Boss 1999).

**Transnational parenting practices and the caregiving triangle.** Family life is defined by the interactions and the ritualized practices of its members; these provide the

material from which intimate emotional ties are made and a family narrative is constructed (Falicov, 2007). One way transnational families maintain a sense of unity and continuity is by creating their own rituals and shared memories. Separated families in this study maintained unity and continuity through weekly phone calls, correspondence, visits, and remittances. Constant communication between parents and children was important for keeping families connected and giving children the assurance that they were not forgotten. Children interviewed for this study remembered specific gifts their parents sent them and improvements in their daily lives that came as a result of their parents' labor abroad. Parental visits during the separation were also remembered with fondness and constituted the memories of the parent-child relationship during the separation period that children cherished and that provided the continuity necessary for a shared narrative.

In their new transnational roles, mothers became the providers of material sustenance for their children, and gifts and remittances were the currency they used to show their devotion and commitment to their children. While the value of remittances as a fulfillment of the parental duty is great, it can also lead to the materialization of the parent-child relationship as children begin to equate material provision with parental love (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). Parents interviewed expressed feeling used by their children and some resented them for placing so much value on the material aspect of their relationship. Fortunately however, this kind of dynamic did not seem to have a negative influence on the quality of relationship that children developed with their parents after the reunification. In their narratives, children did not express any dissatisfaction that could be directly attributed to their parents' ability to provide them with material goods.

Another dimension of the transnational parenting effort is the role played by the surrogate caregiver in what Falicov (2007) has referred to as the caregiving triangle. In these systems of care, immigrant mothers are still part of their families but their role is that of providers of remittances and other forms of long-distance care, whereas grandmothers are the providers of nurturance and direct parenting. According to Falicov (2007) these systems can either function seamlessly or dysfunctional. In this study, many examples of how this triangle functions are presented. The most common scenario is that of the grandmother who not only provides nurturance and security but who maintains the memory of the biological mother alive. For all of the families in which a relative was left in charge of the child, the caregiving triangle functioned adequately. The child was able to embrace both the caregiver and biological mother, and for the most part the mother was comfortable with the collaboration. In the case of Sarah, whose grandmother disapproved of her mother's migration, the caregiving triangle was dysfunctional. Sarah's grandmother may not have communicated messages to Sarah about the importance of her mother's sacrifice. Her feelings about the migration may have prevented her from reinforcing that narrative. As a result, Sarah's resentment towards her mother grew and was later reinforced by her mother's repeated deception. Further, both grandmother and mother seemed to be at odds with each other and to an extent competing for parental rights over Sarah. A testament of this was her mother's decision to take her to the United States without her grandmother's knowledge. As Falicov (2007) points out, in the case of immigrants, the quality of the relationship between these caregivers largely depends on whether the caregiver approves or

disapproves with the parent's decision to migrate and in Sarah's case, this seems to be largely the problem.

## **Reunification Factors**

In spite of parents' efforts to maintain a relationship with their children during the separation period, reunifications for most children seemed more like a meeting of strangers than a joyful family reunion. For most children there were different emotions at play, culture shock, anxiety, sadness, and ambivalence. Adding to these emotions were their reactions to the life complexities they encountered in their new environments. For some children there were changes in the composition of their families because their mothers had either married or taken in new partners. For others, there were new siblings who had been born during their absence, some of them half-siblings. For most children, reunifications were far more difficult than they or their parents had anticipated and for the most part, they were ill prepared for them. Upon arriving, they had little sense of what life would be like for them in their new environment and felt at odds. Parents were also unprepared for the complexities that reunifications engendered. They had prepared for their children's arrival by buying them toys and preparing their living spaces but there was no preparation for what would be some of the more difficult aspects of the reunification adjustment, the estrangement, the grief that children experienced from the loss of their surrogates, the presence of new family members, and the adjustment difficulties that children experienced in their new environment. This lack of preparation has been documented in the literature (Falicov, 2007). While none of the parents felt that the reunification was itself a mistake, in retrospect, a couple of parents voiced reservations about having migrated. For some, the gains from the migration had come at the cost of their relationship to their children.

**Blended families.** At the time of the reunification, all of the 4 single mothers in this study that had migrated alone, had either married or taken in a partner. The presence of new family members including any children who were born out of those unions added an additional layer of complexity to the reunification experience of families, and for some, it became a source of conflict and tension. Children in these situations not only had to become accustomed to living with their own mothers again but also had to accept that their mothers' love would now have to be shared with others. Feelings of jealousy and rejection were not uncommon, as illustrated in the case of Sarah whose jealousy prevented her from establishing a relationship with her stepfather. In Sarah's case, a better relationship with her stepfather would have contributed to family cohesiveness. It is unclear however whether the stepfather made any attempts to gain her affection or whether her mother preferred his noninvolvement. In either case, the presence of two competing family structures (Sarah and her mother vs. her mother, stepfather, and siblings) further complicated an already problematic reunification.

For mothers, the process of bringing together family members was not easy. Mothers reported feeling like they had divided loyalties to their children and spouses. When these two camps were in conflict, mothers were usually caught in the middle and felt powerless to appease either side. Stepparents were usually kept at the margin of the mother-child relationship, and seldom became involved in conflicts between the

dyad much less in the disciplining of the children. While this arrangement may have seemed preferable for mothers feeling protective of their children, it seemed to be the least constructive. By marginalizing the stepfather, mothers reinforced the feelings of divisiveness within the family and alienated an important source of support during the reunification process. In the case of Andres whose mother made it a priority to involve her spouse in the lives of her children throughout the reunification process, family conflict during the reunification process was minimized. In this particular case, Andres' stepfather's involvement in all aspects of parenting led to the establishment of family cohesiveness. Because he was an active member of the parenting team, Andres had little difficulty establishing a relationship with him and respecting his authority.

**Parenting practices.** The importance of adequate parenting practices for reunited families cannot be understated because these provide an important framework in which the parent-child relationship can be redefined during its new stage. All of the reunifications in this study take place when children are adolescents, which is also very important as children's developmental demands and challenges influence the kind of parenting that they will need during this difficult reunification adjustment period. Parents in this study varied in the type of parenting practices that they employed with their children. Some parents were strict and supervised their children closely while others were generally more permissive and provided little supervision. Those parents who felt confident in their parenting enjoyed better relationships with their children than those who struggled and voiced feeling ill prepared to parent their adolescent children. In the most problematic scenarios, parents struggled unsuccessfully to establish their authority over their children, while their children acted out in ways that potentially undermined their parents' efforts to parent them. In some cases this power struggle was a result of deep seeded feelings of rejection and abandonment while in other cases it stemmed from tensions that developed as a result of the more punitive parenting practices parents wanted to employ and the resistance that more acculturated children display towards them. For these families, disciplinary crisis tended to dominate the parent-child relationship during the reunification. One successful resolution to this problem is illustrated in the case of Yolanda, whose parents' commitment to shift their attitudes and parenting practices to reflect the more "American" mentality that she was embracing succeeded in easing the tensions between them and gave way to a more open and healthy relationship parent-child relationship.

**The Resiliency factor.** Most of the families in this study displayed a significant amount of resilience during the reunification process. Resiliency was facilitated by the presence of assets or protective factors that increased the family's ability to overcome these difficult events (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Masten, 2001). Human capital, effective parenting practices, the availability of support systems within the family and the community, and to a certain extent documented status were some of these protective factors. The lack of these important elements along with the existence of other risk factors or hardships, in turn compromised the ability of certain families to successfully manage these difficult events. Undocumented immigrant status, for instance, added stress to the family unit as it precluded both parents and children from taking advantage of government programs like Medicaid or food stamps, as well as employment and educational opportunities. Undocumented families were particularly vulnerable to changes in the informal job markets, the economic down turns, and anti-immigrant

sentiments.

For families in this study, the existence of supportive social networks was extremely important. Because migration often results in the loss of social capital, the family's ability to establish and maintain social networks within and outside their own communities was extremely beneficial because these networks served to buffer against the negative effects of discrimination, marginalization, and challenges posed by difficult reunifications (Zhou and Bankston, 1998). Most of the reunified families in this study relied on these systems for support during their adjustment period. The church in particular provided a much needed source of support and structure that kept families together. Community centers were also important sources of support for families providing recreational and educational assistance to the newly arrived children and support for parents dealing with relational and other personal problems. Families with legal immigration status had greater access to economic and educational opportunities and had achieved more concrete gains than their undocumented counterparts. These gains served not only to justify lengthy family separations but provided a more positive and hopeful environment for children. Undocumented families generally had fewer opportunities for advancement and were generally more vulnerable. But not all undocumented families felt limited by their immigration status. In the case of Laura, we see that her undocumented status did not prevent her from attending college nor did it prevent her family from purchasing a house. In her family's case, human capital (e.g., parental education level, ability to navigate social systems, membership to and participation in social systems) played a more important role in their ability to take advantage of opportunities available to them.

Although most families in this study exhibited a tremendous amount of resilience, there were families who seemed overburdened by extreme hardship and thus unable to overcome the additional stress that reunifications presented. Domestic violence issues, trauma from sexual abuse, depression, and other relational problems not only affected the parenting practices of parents but also depleted them of personal resources necessary to successfully guide their children through the post-immigration adjustment period. For children these situations were difficult to manage without the guidance of their parents. Some adopted maladaptive coping strategies which in most cases proved detrimental not only to their own personal development, but also to the parent-child relationship. In short, families with more protective factors or assets were generally more resilient than families with fewer resources. Situations of extreme hardship posed great obstacles for families and rendered them unable to cope successfully with the challenges posed by family reunifications.

## **Limitations**

The use of in-depth qualitative case studies provided a viable tool for understanding how immigration-related family separations are experienced by children and their families. The use of qualitative data collection methods and the use of longitudinal data also added a depth of understanding that may not have been possible using other more quantitative methods. There are however obvious limitations to this study. The sample size was small and one of convenience. This limits the ability of this study to be generalizable to the larger immigrant population. Nonetheless, these data

afforded a valuable glimpse into the complex lives of immigrant families who having undergone separations were attempting to navigate through difficult reunifications. Moreover, it offers the advantage of a longitudinal perspective and the contributions of both children's and parents' points of views.

Attachment theory provided the general context for conceptualizing the separation and reunification experiences of families. The narrow focus of this theory on the mother-child dyad however, prevented the researcher from incorporating the experiences of other important actors in the separation and reunification drama, like surrogate caregivers, siblings, and step parents. The inclusion of multiple perspectives would have yielded a greater understanding of how these events impact entire family systems. This much wider focus would have been more beneficial for the study of Latino families with more interconnected extended family networks.

## **Implications**

Future research into the area of Latino and other immigration-related family separations would benefit from more in-depth studies on the separation and reunification experiences of children. These would be best carried out in the sending countries and with input from surrogate caregivers and professionals working with children who have been separated from their parents as a result of migration. Such studies would need to take into account cultural norms of child rearing and childcare and employ culturally relevant frames of reference. This is particularly important as separations become more prevalent and normalized in sending communities.

Further research is also needed to determine the short and long term effects of separations on immigrant families. While Suarez-Orozco et al. (2010) have established the effects of separation on mental health outcomes in children, an examination of the effects of these events on other domains such as academic performance, family relations, and interpersonal relations for both children and their parents may be of great value and interest to mental health practitioners and other professionals working with immigrant families.

Immigration related family separations posed unique challenges to mental health practitioners. While these seem to be increasingly normative events in the lives of Latino and other immigrant families, they nonetheless pose a number of challenges to children and their families. What appears to be useful is preparation for both parents and children, reframing the separation in ways that make coping more fruitful, and guidance and support for both children and parents throughout the reunification process.



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## Appendix A

### Field Study Guide: Note taking

- You should strive for clarity and consistency. Anticipate that others will need to use your field notes.
- Field notes can include:
  - Quotes
  - Paraphrased quotes
  - Summary of points or themes
  - Questions that occur to the recorder
  - Big ideas that affect the study
  - Observation on body language
  - Conversations/discussions
- Develop a scheme that separates types of information
- Jot down follow up questions that could be asked
- If big ideas or hunches occur, write them down
- Note other factors that may aid analysis, such as passionate comments, body language, or nonverbal activity.
- The notebook is a mnemonic device. It is a way for you not to forget what you have observed. Be sensitive & unobtrusive in its use. Remember social graces and watch your informants' responses.

[Some of these materials were adapted from materials developed for LISA study and from Morgan, D.L. (1998). The Focus Group Guidebook. Thousand Oaks: Sage Press.]

## Appendix B

### Child Interview Schedule

1. Cuéntame un poco acerca de tu país.  
¿Como era en donde vivías?  
¿Con quien vivías?
2. ¿En tu opinión, porque vinieron tus padres a vivir a los Estados Unidos?  
¿Porque piensas así?  
¿Quien te hablo acerca de eso?
3. ¿Porque crees que te tuviste que quedar en (country of origin)?
4. ¿Antes de irse, te hablaron tus padres acerca de cuando volverían a estar juntos? ¿Que te dijeron?
5. ¿Cuando vivías con tus papas en (country of origin) como era?  
¿Como se llevaban?  
¿Me puedes contar acerca de las cosas que hacían juntos o de algún recuerdo que tengas de aquellos tiempos?
6. Cuéntame un poco acerca de cómo se fueron tus papas.  
¿Cuantos años tenias?  
¿Quien se fue primero?  
¿Quienes se quedaron?
7. ¿Con quien te quedaste a vivir?  
¿Como era tu relación con (caretaker)?  
¿Me puedes contar de algún recuerdo que tengas de tu vida con (caretaker) durante el tiempo en que estuviste separado de tus padres?
8. ¿Cuanto tiempo estuviste separado/a de tus padres?
9. ¿Te mantenías en contacto con ellos?  
¿Como?
10. ¿Regresaron a visitarte alguna vez? ¿Cuéntame acerca de esa visita?
11. ¿Me puedes contar acerca de alguna carta, regalo, o fotos que te hayan mandado?
12. ¿Cuando hablabas con tus padres por teléfono de que hablaban?  
¿Que les decías tu?  
¿Que te decían ellos?

13. ¿Que fue lo mas difícil de que se fueran/que no estuvieran tus padres contigo?  
¿Como te sentías tu acerca de que ellos se hubieran ido?
14. ¿Pensabas mucho acerca de ellos?  
¿Que cosas pensabas?  
¿Como te los imaginabas?  
¿Como te imaginabas que vivían?
15. ¿Que te decían tus (caretakers) acerca de que ellos estaban lejos?  
¿Que te decían acerca de porque habían partido?  
¿Que te decían acerca de cuando estarían juntos otra vez?
16. ¿Cuéntame acerca de tu viaje a los Estados Unidos?  
¿Cuando supiste que vendrías?  
¿Quien te lo contó?  
¿Que pensaste de esto?
17. ¿Como te preparaste para el viaje?
18. ¿Cuéntame acerca del día en que te fuiste?  
¿Como fueron las despedidas?  
¿Como te sentías?
19. Cuéntame un poco acerca de tu viaje.  
¿Que paso?  
¿En que pensabas?  
¿Como te sentías?
20. Cuéntame un poco acerca de la reunión entre tu y tus padres.  
Que sentiste?  
Que se dijeron?
21. Que pensaste de tu nuevo hogar?
22. Que fue lo mas difícil de vivir aquí?
23. Que fue lo mas bueno/divertido?
24. Me puedes describir como fueron tus primeras dos semanas. Que clases de cosas pensabas? Que sentías?
25. Hubieron nuevos miembros de familia que tu no conocías (e.g. hermanitos)?  
Que pensaste de ellos?  
Como se llevaron?

26. Al principio, como te llevaste con tus papas?  
Como era la relación?
27. Fue difícil acostumbrarse el uno al otro?  
Que fue lo mas difícil? Que fue fácil?
28. Hablaron acerca de la separación? Que se dijeron?
29. Ahora que ya tienes \_\_\_\_\_ años de vivir en los Estados Unidos, como crees que la decisión de tus padres de venir a vivir acá te ha afectado?
30. Que piensas acerca de las razones de tus padres de venir a los Estados Unidos?
31. Cuando piensas en el tiempo en que estuvieron separados, como te sientes?
32. Como es la relación entre tu y tus padres ahora?  
Me puedes dar un ejemplo de cómo se llevan ahora?
33. Como es tu relación con (caretaker)?
34. Dame los nombres de tres personas que tu consideres muy cercanas a ti?  
Dame tres palabras que las describan
35. Tienes novio/novia? Como describirías la relación que tienes con el/ella?

#### **ATTACHMENT STYLE CHECKLIST:**

Te leeré tres declaraciones, elige la que mejor describa como te sientes.

1. Se me hace muy fácil acercarme/apegarme (get close to) a otros y me siento cómoda/o dependiendo de ellos (emocionalmente). No me preocupo mucho acerca de que me abandonen o de que se me apeguen mucho.
2. Me siento incomodo al apegarme/acercarme a otros (being close to others); se me hace difícil confiar en ellos completamente, difícil de dejarme depender de ellos, me siento nervioso cuando alguien se acerca/apegua mucho a mi.
3. Siento como que los demás no se acercan tanto a mi como yo quisiera. Me preocupa que no me quieran de verdad o que no quieran estar conmigo. Quisiera acercarme a ellos (or to a partner) pero pienso que esto los asusta (scares people away).

## Appendix C

### Immigration-Related Family Separations –Parent Interview Guide

1. ¿En que año vino a los Estados Unidos por primera vez? Con quien vino esa vez?
2. ¿En donde vivía antes de venir a los Estados Unidos?
3. ¿A que ciudad vino/vinieron a dar en los Estados Unidos? ¿Por qué?  
¿Conocían a alguien allí?
4. ¿Cuántos años tenía su hijo(a)/hijos cuando se fue?
5. ¿En que año vino/vinieron su hijo(s)/a?
6. ¿Cuántos años tenía su hijo(a)/hijos?
7. ¿Cuanto tiempo en total estuvieron separados?
8. ¿Quién/quienes se quedaron a cargo de el/ella/ellos en (su país de origen)?

### Separation

9. ¿Cuénteme un poco acerca de su decisión acerca de venir a vivir a los Estados Unidos?
10. ¿Cuénteme un poco acerca de su decisión de dejar a su(s) hijos en (su país de origen)? ¿Qué factores tomo en cuenta?
11. ¿Se hablaba mucho en su familia acerca de venir a vivir a los Estados Unidos?
12. ¿Quien o con quien hablaba mas (usted) acerca de esto?
13. ¿Cómo se sentían acerca de que usted se viniera a vivir a los Estados Unidos?
14. ¿Cómo le explico usted a su hijo su viaje a los Estados Unidos? ¿Que le dijo?
15. ¿Cómo le explico a el/ella/ellos que se tendrían que quedar en (país de origen)? ¿Qué le(s) dijo?

16. ¿Qué les dijo acerca de reunirse otra vez en los Estados Unidos?
17. ¿Cuénteme acerca de cómo se fue? ¿Quién se fue primero?  
¿Quién se quedó?
18. ¿Cómo se despidió?
19. ¿Cómo era la relación entre su hijo y (las personas con quien se quedó)?  
¿Cómo se llevaban? [ Probe: ¿Había vivido su hijo antes con ellos? ¿Le hablaba su hijo acerca de ellos? ¿Qué le decía?]
20. ¿Cómo era su relación (con estas personas)? ¿Hablaban con ellos acerca de su hijo? ¿De que hablaban?
21. ¿Qué le decían a su hijo(a)/hijos acerca de su ausencia? ¿Le hablaban acerca de cuando se volverían a reunir? ¿Qué clase de cosas le decían a su hijo(a)/hijos?
22. ¿Pudo mantenerse usted en contacto con su hijo(a)/hijos? ¿En que maneras? ¿Si pudo regresar de visita, como eran sus visitas?
23. ¿Me puede contar acerca de las cartas que le mandaba, o de los regalos o cosas que le mandaba mientras estaban separados?
24. ¿Cuándo hablaba por teléfono con su hijo(a)/hijos, de que hablaban?  
¿Hablaban acerca de cuando se reunirían otra vez? ¿Qué se decían?
25. ¿Pensaba mucho en su hijo cuando estaba viviendo aquí? ¿Qué pensaba?
26. ¿Que hizo la separación mas difícil para usted?

### **Reunification**

27. ¿Cuénteme acerca de su decisión acerca de traer a su hijo a vivir con usted?  
¿Qué clase de factores tomo en cuenta?
28. ¿Hablo con (surrogate caregiver) acerca de esto? ¿Cómo se sentía el/ella/ellos acerca de su decisión?
29. ¿Cómo fue el viaje de su hijo a los Estados Unidos? ¿Vino solo o fue acompañado por alguien?
30. ¿Cómo se sintió el/ella acerca de venir a vivir aquí? ¿Cómo fue la reunión entre ustedes? ¿En donde se encontraron? ¿Que se dijeron? ¿Cómo se

sintió?

31. ¿Habían miembros de su familia que su hijo(a) no conocía? ¿Quién(es)?
32. ¿Me puede contar acerca de su relación con su hijo después de que se reunificaron? ¿Fue difícil acostumbrarse el uno al otro? ¿Qué fue difícil?
33. ¿Hablaron usted y su hijo acerca de la separación? ¿Qué se dijeron?
34. ¿Cómo se llevan ahora?
35. ¿Quién de su familia vive en (país de origen) todavía? ¿Cómo fue la despedida de su hijo con estas personas? ¿Han podido mantenerse en contacto con estas personas?
36. ¿Tomando en cuenta lo bueno y lo malo, cree que haya resultado algo positivo de su migración?
37. ¿Hay algo que usted hubiera querido que fuera diferente?
38. ¿Si pudiera, que cambiaría?

## Appendix D

### Trajectory of Edwin

	<b>1996 (Pre-separation)</b>	<b>1997 (Separation)</b>	<b>1998 (Reunification)</b>
<b>Migration narrative</b>	Migration is seen as temporary. She plans to work for a while and return to Mexico to start a business	Mother travels to the US.	Edwin travels to the US with stepfather. Initially does not want to migrate, then intends his stay to be temporary
<b>Family composition</b>	Mrs. S. becomes involved with Edwin's substitute teacher (Juan)	Mrs. S. travels to US to join Juan and to start a life together. Sees Juan as an escape.	mother becomes pregnant
<b>Living arrangements</b>	Mrs. S and Edwin reside with her parents and brother in Mexico city	After a short while in CA, family moves to NY. They rent a rat infested basement apt.	Family moves back to San Marino, CA and shares an apt. with another family
<b>Financial Situation</b>	According to Mrs. S. She is fine economically	Financially strapped once in the US	Mrs. S. gets a job she hates, family is finally able to afford an apartment and Edwin's traveling costs
<b>Family relations</b>	Domestic violence in the home. Edwin's uncle was abusive towards his grandmother. Edwin and his mother close.	Mrs. S. upset because Edwin does not appear to miss her or to be upset by her absence.	Happy reunion. Conflicts emerge when Edwin becomes too clingy and begins to act younger than his years. Edwin and his stepfather don't get along.
<b>General adjustment (mother)</b>		Mrs. S. finds NY unbearable. She is victim of sexual harassment at work.	Mrs. S is depressed she does not want to be pregnant, also hates her job.
<b>General adjustment (Edwin)</b>		Reports being fine although missing his mom. He enjoys gifts his mother sends.	Appears well adjusted. Likes everything about US. Sees relations between Mexicans and Americans as contentious
<b>social relations/networks</b>	Mrs. S and Edwin live with family, Mrs. S reports domestic violence	Mrs. S settles in NY where she has a sister.	Family is socially isolated. Mrs. S. cannot trust people around her. Complains about friends that have turned on her. Finds other Latinos rude. Edwin is popular at school and well liked by girls and his teachers.
<b>School performance</b>	According to his mother, Edwin always a lazy student. Allows others to do his homework.		Edwin enters the 6th grade, begins the school year with a lot of motivation and good grades. He makes the dean's list.
<b>Feelings about separation/reunification</b>	Edwin is reported as being fine with the separation.	Mrs. S. reports feeling devastated and extremely worried about Edwin's welfare. Edwin misses his mother but welcomes prospect of moving to US	Edwin is happy about being reunited with his mother. Is hopeful about his prospects here.



## Appendix D continued

### Trajectory of Edwin

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Migration narrative</b>	Family struggles with undocumented status. After 9/11 Mrs. S. feels like they should return since an amnesty is seen as unlikely. Edwin does not want to return to Mexico.						
<b>Family composition</b>	Edwin's brother is born						
<b>Living arrangements</b>	Family gets own 1bd. apartment near Edwin's school.		Family moves to another neighborhood of San Marino		Edwin moves out of home		
<b>Financial Situation</b>	Edwin's stepfather takes on two jobs.		Edwin works as a day laborer.		Edwin continues to work. He buys his own clothes and car.		
<b>Family relations</b>	Family conflict. Relationships become abusive (with her husband emotional abuse, with Edwin things escalate to physical abuse). Mrs. G calls the police on her son.		Problems with Edwin and parents begin to escalate. He is out of control. Edwin calls police and claims he wants to commit suicide.		According to Edwin family relations have improved because he and his mother don't see each other very much. He is more independent and she no longer tries to control him.		
<b>General adjustment (mother)</b>	Mrs. S is depressed. She receives counseling and information about domestic abuse. Mrs. G. wonders why she is in this country.		Mrs. S. begins to recover from her depression but is still dissatisfied with her life in the US. Juan and Edwin seem to be ok with staying in the US				
<b>General adjustment (Edwin)</b>	Begins to adopt gang style of dress	Edwin begins to experiment with alcohol and drugs.	In his separation interview (2005) Edwin admits to having used cocaine during school and to have sexual relations with older women/girls.		Edwin claims to have stopped using cocaine, but admits to consume alcohol and to engage in risky behaviors (driving under the influence, promiscuous behavior). During the separation interview, he was jittery and unfocused.		
	Family is socially isolated but is able to tap into community resources when in need.						
<b>social relations/networks</b>	Edwin begins to associate with gang members. This brings him trouble in school, the community, and at home.			Edwin no longer in a gang. He is very active socially. He has no steady girlfriend but many friends with whom he is intimate. Clubs are a big part of his social life			
<b>School performance</b>	Edwin begins to have academic difficulties. He begins to act out and to adopt the "gang " style	Edwin is expelled from school and sent to an alternative school. He is placed on probation.	Edwin attends a local high school. There he is placed in special education classes. He hates his school.		Edwin improves his school performance slightly.		According to Edwin he is doing better in school and cannot wait to graduate.
<b>Feelings about separation/reunification</b>	When problems with his mother ensue, he blames his mother for having abandoned him. But continues to prefer the US over Mexico because he feels he has more opportunities here in the United States.						

## Appendix E

### Case comparison: Explanation of parental migration, child

Name	How did your mom/parents explain their decision to migrate?
<b>Edwin</b>	[Laughs when I ask this question, in fact is laughing throughout the interview]. Que se iba a ir, creo que se iba a ir el aeropuerto, luego iba a ir a no se donde con los papas de mi padrastro, no se a donde a Arizona creo, y ya llego a San Marino. I don't really remember...
<b>Jimmy</b>	No me dijo nada. Que iba ir a otro lugar, pero yo de por acá [yo] no sabía...Después me dijo. <b>R:</b> Y quién te dijo acerca de eso, de que tus papas vinieron para superarse? <b>I:</b> Quién me dijo, yo pienso... mis abuelitos
<b>Yolanda</b>	<b>R:</b> Que te decían tus abuelitos? <b>I:</b> Que ellos se venían acá para sobrevivir, para tener mejor futuro, para darnos dinero y todo eso. <b>R:</b> Oh, okay...¿Y por qué te dijeron o por qué crees que te tuviste que quedar en Guatemala? <b>I:</b> Bueno pues, en realidad era algo difícil para mi mamá traerme de bebe, cruzar la frontera y todo eso, porque se cansaría o algo así, entonces mejor me dejo allá. Y yo creo que fue mejor, porque si me hubiera traído acá se le hubiera hecho mucho más difícil conseguir trabajo y todo.
<b>David</b>	<b>R:</b> Y quién te dijo todo eso, o quién te contó, o tu mismo lo pensaste? <b>I:</b> Yo mismo lo pienso. <b>R:</b> Pero no te explicaron, no le preguntaste a nadie nunca? <b>I:</b> No. Para mi esta bien.
<b>Sarah</b>	Yo no sabía, yo era muy niña, ella me dejo con mi abuelita Como si fueran vacaciones y simplemente ella ya no regreso y fue cuando me explicaron lo que pasaba.
<b>Andres</b>	<b>First interview</b> -No me acuerdo. No me dijo nada. Que venia acá. Me dijo, voy a los Estados Unidos, y ya fue lo que me dijo. No me acuerdo muy bien. Ya no me acuerdo lo que me dijo. Lo único que me acuerdo es que la vi salir por la puerta y ya. <b>Second interview</b> - Si me dijo eso [que se iba a venir a EEUU] no me recuerdo es muchisimo tiempo que paso eso.
<b>Laura</b>	Yo recuerdo que nada mas dijeron que iban a venir por un tiempo o sea no dieron mucha explicación... no le tome mucha, no importancia, pero como no se iban por mucho tiempo, dije ah ok. ...nos habíamos quedado en el internado antes. Ya nos habían dejado antes allí...

I: Interviewee

R: Researcher