UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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Using Theories of Relational Maintenance, Coping, and Resilience to Bridge the Distance between Separated Latinx Immigrant Families

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Communication

by

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December 2021

The dissertation of Roselia Mendez Murillo is approved.

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EDUCATION

2018-present University of California, Santa Barbara
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PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

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Kam, J. A., Marcoulides, K., Steuber Fazio, K. R., **Mendez Murillo, R.,** & Cornejo, M. (2021). Latina/o/x immigrant youth's motivations for disclosing their family-undocumented experiences to a teacher(s): A latent transition analysis. *Journal of Communication.*

Kam, J. A., **Mendez Murillo, R.,** Cornejo, M., & Mendoza, N. (2020). The importance of norms and efficacy in predicting undocumented college students' intentions to talk to an on-campus mental health professional. *Health Communication.* Published online first on October 22, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2020.1834208

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undocumented youth of Mexican origin. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 36,* 3178-3198.

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Kam, J. A., **Mendez Murillo, R.,** & Cornejo, M. (2020). Immigration and family communication: Resilience, solidarity, and thriving. In J. Soliz & C. Warner Colaner (Eds.), *Navigating relationships in the modern family: Communication, identity, and difference* (pp. 103-122). New York, New York: Peter Lang.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Kam, J. A., **Mendez Murillo, R.,** Cornejo, M., & Mendoza, N. (November, 2020). *The importance of norms and efficacy in predicting undocumented college students' intentions to talk to an on-campus mental health professional.* Paper to be presented at the National Communication Association, Indianapolis, Indiana. **Top Paper Panel**. Health Communication Division.

Mendez Murillo, R., & Kam, J. A. (November, 2018). *How family members and people from U.S. mainstream culture communicate support to Latina/o early adolescent language brokers.* Paper presented at the National Communication Association, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Kam, J. A., Steuber Fazio, K. R., **Mendez Murillo, R**. (November, 2018). *Disclosing one's undocumented status to non-family members: Exploring the perspectives of undocumented youth of Mexican origin*. Paper presented at the National Communication Association, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Kam, J. A., Marcoulides, K., Steuber, K. R., **Mendez Murillo, R**. (May, 2017). *Uncovering patterns of family-undocumented-status disclosures for Latina/o early adolescents: A latent transition analysis.* Paper presented at the International Communication Association, San Diego, CA. **Top Paper Panel.** Interpersonal Communication Division.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

7/2020-10/2020 **Research Assistant, Latina/o/x Undocumented Immigrants Coping with COVID19**
Supervisors: Dr. Jennifer Kam & Doctoral Student Monica Cornejo
Department of Communication, UC Santa Barbara

- Conducted two-hour English interviews with Latina/o/x undocumented college students
- Conducted two-hour Spanish interviews with a non-college-student sample of Latina/o/x undocumented immigrants
- Attend weekly interview training meetings over a three-month

period
- Provided feedback for Spanish/English protocol
- Helped recruit participants

9/2018-present **Project Manager, Examining the Support Provided to Children of Immigrant Families When Language Brokering**
Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Kam
Department of Communication, UC Santa Barbara
- Schedule research team meetings
- Attend biweekly research team meetings
- Supervise four undergraduate research assistants
- Translate consent forms and surveys from English to Spanish

7/2019-4/2020 **Researcher, Hispanic Serving Institution Assessment for Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)**
Supervisor: Dr. Mark Shishim
Counseling and Psychological Services, UC Santa Barbara
- Attended biweekly project meetings
- Met with UCSB's Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) Director and a psychologist
- Developed the study's research design
- Conducted focus groups with students who have used CAPS services to understand the factors that encourage students to seek mental health services and assess their experience with CAPS
- Qualitatively analyzed the focus group transcripts

8/2015-2/2017 **Research Assistant, Stress and Coping for Children of Immigrant Families**
Department of Communication, UC Santa Barbara
- Drove 1-1.5 hours from campus to survey and interview Latina/o/x middle school and high school students.
- Assented several hundred Latina/o/x middle school and high school students in Spanish and English
- Surveyed several hundred Latina/o/x middle school and high school students in person
- Conducted semi-structured interviews with Latina/o/x middle school students who language broker for a family member
- Conducted semi-structured interviews with Latina/o/x undocumented high school students
- Conducted semi-structured interviews with Latina/o/x high school students who had experienced family separation from migration
- Attended weekly research team meetings
- Conducted qualitative data analyses with transcribed interviews

GRANTS AND AWARDS

FA 2020 – SP 2021 **Fellow. University of California President's Pre-Professoriate Fellowship. UC Santa Barbara.**

- $30,000 stipend for the 2020-21 academic year
- $10,000 grant for professional development
- Release from teaching for academic year to conduct study on family separation and reunification

FA 2019 – SP 2021 **Fellow. National Science Foundation and Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate Hispanic Serving Institution. UC Santa Barbara, UC Merced, CSU Channel Islands, CSU Fresno.**

- Overall stipend award of over $23,000
- Release from teaching for two quarters
- Two-year mentorship with California State University, Channel Islands professor
- Create class assignments and assessments for different types of learners
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  - How People Learn & High Impact Practices
  - Conducting Undergraduate Research
  - Assessment in the Classroom
  - Diversity & Inclusion in the Classroom and Research
  - Mentoring Undergraduate First-Generation Students
- Receive job market, job search, and job talk mentorship
- Paid travel to conference at California State University, Fresno
- Attend summer teaching institute and received two week's worth of pedagogical training

SU 2020 – SP 2021 **Chicano Studies Institute (CSI) Dissertation Funding ($2,250). UC Santa Barbara.**

- Received research funding to conduct a study on family separation and reunification
- Access to CSI Publishing and Methods Labs equipped with computers (running graphics, publishing and GIS software)
- Transcribing equipment

SP 2020 **Received Outstanding Graduate Student Service Award, Department of Communication, UC Santa Barbara**

SP 2019 **Humanities & Social Sciences Research Grant ($3,000). UC Santa Barbara.**

- Received research funding to conduct a study on the separation and reunification of Latina/o/x immigrant families.

SU 2019 **Hispanic Serving Institution and Student Affairs Assessment Grant ($2,000). UC Santa Barbara.**

- Received research funding to conduct focus groups for UCSB's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS).
- The goal was to learn about students experiences with CAPS to improve the services.

FA 2019 **National Communication Association Student Caucus Travel Grant ($170).**

FA 2018 **Graduate Student Association Travel Grant ($200). UC Santa Barbara.**

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

F = Fall Quarter, W = Winter Quarter, S = Spring Quarter, SU = Summer Session

SU 2020 Instructor of Record, *Dark Side of Communication,* UC Santa Barbara

SU 2019 Instructor of Record, *Theories of Communication*, UC Santa Barbara

S 2020 Teaching Assistant, *Relational Communication,* UC Santa Barbara

W 2020 Teaching Assistant, *Risk Communication,* UC Santa Barbara

S 2019 Teaching Assistant, *Theory in Communication*, UC Santa Barbara

W 2019 Teaching Assistant, *Social Networks*, UC Santa Barbara

F 2018 Teaching Assistant, *Communication Research Methods*, UC Santa Barbara

SU 2018 Teaching Assistant, *Dark Side of Communication*, UC Santa Barbara

S 2018 Teaching Assistant, *Communication Research Methods,* UC Santa Barbara

W 2018 Teaching Assistant, *Intercultural Communication,* UC Santa Barbara

F 2017 Teaching Assistant, *Introduction to Communication,* UC Santa Barbara

S 2017 Teaching Assistant, *Theory in Communication*, UC Santa Barbara

W 2017 Teaching Assistant, *Introduction to Communication*, UC Santa Barbara

F 2016 Teaching Assistant, *Theory in Communication*, UC Santa Barbara

INVITED LECTURES

11/13/2019 Guest Lecture, *Mixed Methods.* Communication Research Methods (COMM 310). California State University, Channel Islands.

6/7/2018 Guest Lecture, *Cultural Adaptations*. Research Methods (COMM 88). University of California, Santa Barbara.

3/7/2018 Guest Lecture, *Cultural Adaptations*. Intercultural Communication (COMM 183). University of California, Santa Barbara.

11/13/2016 Guest Lecture, *Communication Accommodation Theory*. Communication Theory (COMM 89). University of California, Santa Barbara.

AD HOC REVIEWING

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships
Sociological Forum
Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

FA18-present **Graduate Student Committee Member, Human Subjects Committee, UC Santa Barbara.**

- Attend monthly 2.5-hour meeting
- Co-review assigned full-board research protocols
- Present and discuss assigned protocols to other committee members
- Discuss and provide feedback on 4-5 other protocols

FA20-present **Senior Graduate Mentor, Graduate Scholars Program, UC Santa Barbara.**

- Organize and facilitate monthly meetings
- Provide guidance and serve as a resource to three first-year graduate students from minoritized backgrounds

FA 2019-WI 2020 **Graduate Student Representative, Diversity and Communication Search Committee. Department of Communication, UC Santa Barbara.**

- Reviewed 100 job applications
- Attended four search committee meetings
- Attended four job talks
- Attended four candidate dinners
- Attended four candidate diversity discussion sessions
- Provided campus tours to three job candidates
- Assisted with reception clean-up for four candidates
- Facilitated four graduate student luncheons with the candidates
- Scheduled graduate student volunteer activities for four candidates

- Collected feedback from graduate students and presented the feedback to the faculty

2/2017 Womxn of Color Conference panel participant: "Womxn in Academia."

- Presented on a 2-hour panel
- Shared academic experiences with undergraduate and high school students of color

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

2018-present Member. National Communication Association
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ABSTRACT

Using Theories of Relational Maintenance, Coping, and Resilience to Bridge the Distance between Separated Latinx Immigrant Families

by

Roselia Mendez Murillo

Separated Latinx families experience a multitude of stressors. Although stress is inevitable, theories of relational maintenance, coping, and resilience may offer insights into improving the lives of separated Latinx families. Limited research has explored the perspectives of separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers and the strategies they enact to sustain their relationships while navigating geographical separation. Thus, through 20 separated Latinx parents, 20 separated Latinx children, and 20 surrogate Latinx caregivers (N = 20 low-income, Latinx immigrant family triads), the current studies aimed to extend: (1) our theoretical understanding of relational maintenance behaviors enacted before, during, and after the separation through the lens of the Theory of Resilience and Relational Load (TRRL; Afifi et al., 2016) coupled with the Long-Distance Relational Maintenance Model (LDRMM; Merolla, 2010), (2) our understanding of individual and communal coping among separated families through the lens of the Extended Theoretical Model of Communal Coping (TMCC; Afifi et al., 2020), (3) the role of the surrogate caregiver in helping or inhibiting separated parent-child relational maintenance, and (4) the role of culture and structural barriers in understanding separated, low-income, Latinx families' relational maintenance and coping.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focuses on separated, low-income, Latinx immigrant families' efforts to navigate and manage family relationships and separation, while living apart from each other in two different countries (i.e., in the United States and in a Latin American country). The dissertation represents the culmination of a one-year process to uncover separated Latinx immigrant families' relational maintenance strategies, coping, and resilience, using a family triadic approach. In this dissertation, I present two studies, one based on the Theory of Resilience and Relational Load (TRRL; Afifi et al., 2016) and the Long-Distance Relational Maintenance Model (LDRMM; Merolla, 2010), and the other based on the Extended Theoretical Model of Communal Coping (Afifi et al., 2020). I draw from individual semi-structured interviews with 20 separated Latinx parents, 20 separated Latinx children, and 20 surrogate Latinx caregivers (N = 20 low-income, Latinx immigrant family triads) to acquire an in-depth understanding of their desired relational states; relational maintenance strategies utilized prior to, during, and following separation (if applicable); and factors that contribute to their individual or communal coping.

Rationale: The Separation and Reunification of Low-Income, Latinx Immigrant Families

Because of extreme political turmoil, poverty, and lack of educational opportunities many Latinx parents make the heart-wrenching decision to live in a country separate from their children, with the hopes of eventually being reunited (Hershberg et al., 2019; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2011). Alternatively, their children might migrate to another country to stay, while the parent(s) remain in their native country. Historically, family separations have been

common. For instance, under operation Peter Pan, the largest organized political exodus of children in the 1960s, over 14,000 Cuban children were separated from their families in hopes of escaping war violence (Castellanos & Gloria, 2018). This secret operation between Cuban civic groups, the Catholic Church, and Central Intelligence Agency, "smuggled visas into Cuba and children out of Cuba" because parents feared the political turmoil under Fidel Castro (Haymes, 2004, p. 120). Ultimately, unaccompanied Cuban minors were separated from their families and brought to the United States to find refugee. As another example, from the 1940s to the 1960s, the Bracero program, the largest U.S. labor contract, temporarily welcomed over two million Mexican immigrant agricultural workers (Center for History and New Media, 2020). The Bracero program was part of an immigration reform aimed to control undocumented immigration and help offset the labor shortages in the United States (Massey & Liang, 1989). Because of the financial instability in Mexico, this program appealed to many men, specifically fathers. Yet, this program separated Mexican families and prohibited correspondences between family members, which led to negative consequences for the families (Rosas, 2011). To this day, many of these agricultural workers have not reunited with family or returned to their native country.

Although many Latinx families desire to reunite, this might not always be financially possible. For example, if undocumented, the smuggling fees might make it impossible for the entire family to leave (Abrego, 2009; Pribilsky, 2012). When Latinx family members immigrate to another country, they are often forced to first pay off their smuggling fees before they can start sending money back to their family (Abrego, 2009). Furthermore, some separated Latinx parents immigrate with the idea that the separation will be temporary, and thus, have no plans to bring their children to the United States (Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012).

Unfortunately, their plans to reunite do not always work out, and families remain separated. Lastly, as children grow older, some might refuse to leave their native country and surrogate caregiver (i.e., person who takes care of the child during the parent's absence), thereby preventing reunification with their separated parent (Schapiro et al., 2013). In sum, the separation of Latinx immigrant families has been occurring for a long period of time, and it is often accompanied by many arduous and traumatic experiences (Abrego, 2009, Hershberg, 2018; Parke & Cookston, 2021).

The Stressful Nature of Family Separation

The separation of Latinx families can be an incredibly challenging stressor to navigate for everyone involved (Bermudez & Mancini, 2013; Schmalzbauer, 2008; Solheim & Ballard, 2016). On top of experiencing acculturation stress from moving to a new country, separated parents who emigrate from their home country might feel pressured to earn enough money to send remittances back home (Dreby & Adkins, 2010). Sending money home, however, can be challenging because often separated parents must first find a stable job, pay off smuggling fees, and pay their own bills. Compared to immigrant families who migrate together, separated parents have been found to have higher acculturative stress as they must navigate a new country's customs and policies alone, while also worrying about their family who stayed behind (Rusch & Reyes, 2012). Unfortunately, despite separated parents' attempts to create a better life for their children, as a consequence of the separation, some children might harbor negative feelings toward their parent(s) (e.g., Beazley et al., 2018, Schapiro et al., 2013). Ultimately, this might result in strained-parent child relationships. Furthermore, separated parent's parental role might be compromised if children perceive their biological parents as strangers (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Separated children can also experience negative consequences from family separation. Beazley et al. (2018) found that children who experience family separation with two parents report experiencing more trauma than children who experience separation from one parent. Children with two separated parents felt that their parents abandoned them and rejected them, thereby possibly threatening their self-esteem (Beazley et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2004). Furthermore, depending on the surrogate caregiver's age and state of health, a child's safety and basic needs might be at risk (Jingzhong & Lu, 2010). Moreover, if children reunite with their parents and leave their surrogate caregiver behind, separated children might experience another loss and restructuring of family (Greenfield et al. 2020; Schapiro et al., 2013). Although living apart from the parents might be challenging, reunification is not necessarily an easy adjustment. Separated children who reunite with their family might struggle to fit in at home and at school (Arnold, 2006). Length of separation might also be positively associated with depressive symptoms (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). Overall, children might benefit from the financial remittances; however; the family separation might be associated with lower emotional wellbeing (e.g., Lahaie et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002).

Although limited research has centered on the impact of separation on surrogate caregivers (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011), they face a number of stressors associated with the separation. With the spousal surrogate caregiver shouldering most of the parenting and household responsibilities, spousal surrogate caregivers might not have sufficient availability to respond to all household needs and educational needs of the children (Lahaine et al., 2009). Furthermore, spousal surrogate caregivers must learn how to fill both parents' roles, which can be challenging, and at times, rejected by the separated parent or child (Bacallao &

Smokowski, 2007; Taylor & Behnke, 2005). Non-spousal surrogate caregivers (e.g., a grandparent, aunt or uncle, older sibling) often have their own children to look after; thus, their caregiving responsibilities increase but often with not enough financial support (Beazley et al., 2018). Furthermore, non-spousal surrogate caregivers might struggle to navigate between their role as surrogate caregivers without overstepping the biological parents' role (Moran-Taylor, 2008; Solheim & Ballard, 2016).

Extending Past Work on Family Separation

Given the severe stress associated with family separation and reunification, the first study (Chapter 2) aims to provide a better understanding of the role of relational maintenance among separated Latinx families across the separation period. Family separation can be incredibly difficult to endure; nevertheless, the Theory of Resilience and Relational Load (TRRL; Afifi et al., 2016) coupled with the Long-Distance Relational Maintenance Model (LDRMM; Merolla, 2010) can help identify ways in which families can develop positive emotional reserves prior to, during, and following separation. When faced with stressors, TRRL posits that families with positive emotional reserves are more likely to withstand the stress compared to families with limited positive emotional reserves (Afifi et al., 2016). Yet, little is known regarding separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers' desired relational states during the separation; how separated parents and children maintain their relationship at a distance, and the role of the surrogate caregiver in helping (or hindering) separated parents and children's relational maintenance. Study 1 utilizes semi-structured interviews with 20 separated, low-income, Latinx immigrant family triads to fill these knowledge gaps.

In the second study (Chapter 3), I use the Extended Theoretical Model of Communal Coping (TMCC; Afifi et al., 2020) as a framework to explore how, if at all, separated Latinx family members engage in individual or communal coping at different points in the separation (i.e., prior to, during, or following separation). In accordance with TMCC, this article argues that communal coping varies along a continuum of two dimensions: (1) appraisal which consists of both being cognitively affected by the stressor and claiming joint ownership of the stressor and (2) taking action to manage the stressor (Basinger, 2018). Thus, Study 2 explores the stress appraisal of separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers and then identifies factors that contribute to individual or communal coping for the various parties. To provide more insights, Study 2 then explores how, if at all, coping differs throughout the separation process (i.e., prior to, during, or following separation). Lastly, Study 2 sheds light on coping among separated Latinx families by considering the extent to which certain Latinx cultural values (e.g., familismo, caballerismo, marianismo, respeto) are related to the functionality of communal coping.

In Chapter 4, the dissertation ends with the conclusion that highlights the two studies' theoretical and practical contributions. What is particularly noteworthy of the studies presented in this dissertation is that they take a triadic approach to better illuminate the separation and reunification process of low-income, Latinx immigrant families. As a family system, the separated parent, the separated child, and the surrogate caregiver all contribute to each other's wellbeing; however, each party also has a unique perspective that at times, might match each other, and at other times, might diverge. By interviewing all three involved parties, this dissertation can uncover the discrepancies and gaps in perspectives among the

family members, which might affect how they feel about the separation, how they feel about their relationships, and their overall wellbeing.

Lastly, in the field of Communication, there is a call to action to diversify communication research and knowledge acquisition by moving beyond using White, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) samples (e.g., Afifi & Cornejo, 2020). The sample in this study consists of 20 low-income, Latinx family triads who are either undergoing or have undergone family separation. Most of the families experience severe financial strain, have not obtained a higher education, and reside in a Latin American country (i.e., Columbia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru). Thus, in this dissertation, I aimed to uncover how underlying cultural values and systemic barriers play a role in two prevalent communication processes: relational maintenance and coping. Combined, the two studies emphasize the importance of a larger family network that extends beyond the separated parent and child, and they identify communication strategies grounded in the lived experiences of low-income, Latinx immigrant families. Consequently, I present two thought-provoking studies that offer insightful theoretical extensions and practical recommendations aimed at improving the lives of separated Latinx families, with the hopes that such work will stimulate further communication scholarship focused on separated, low-income, Latinx immigrant families.

CHAPTER 2:

EXTENDING THE THEORIZING OF RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE BY EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPEREINCES OF SEPARATED LATINX IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Because of limited opportunities in their native country and/or threats to health and safety, families often have to migrate to another country, with the hopes of improving their situation (e.g., Vazquez Guzman et al., 2020; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). Some families, however, must migrate in a stepwise fashion, such that one or more family members move to the new country first to establish themselves in anticipation of eventually being joined by other immediate family members who had to remain in their native country (e.g., Gonzalez et al., 2017; Lovato-Hermann, 2017; Rusch & Reyes, 2012). For example, one or more parents may migrate to another country, while their child(ren) remain in their native country with a relative (Patel et al., 2021) Alternatively, children may migrate to another country with one of their parents or alone, while the other parent(s) remains in their native country (Hernandez, 2013). Lastly, contrary to stepwise migration, some families might migrate together to a new country but experience separation if one of them is detained or deported (Lovato, 2019; Torres et al., 2018). All of these migration patterns involve family separation, which can occur for weeks, months, or years until immediate family members can be reunited (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Although there is limited data on the number of immigrants who have experienced family separation, a meta-analysis on family separation studies revealed that approximately one in 11 Mexican children (< 18 years of age) has had their father migrate to the United States, while the child remained in Mexico (Nobles, 2013). This scenario represents only one

type of family separation; therefore, the number of Mexican children who experience family separation could be far greater. In efforts to document the prevalence of family separation via migration, Deward et al., (2018) analyzed census data from eight Latin American countries and Puerto Rico. They concluded that between 7% and 21% of children live without a parent due to migration.

Being separated from family because of stepwise migration, detention, or deportation is likely to be an incredibly challenging, traumatic experience that can significantly negatively affect emotional, physical, relational, and academic well-being (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Greenfield et al., 2020; Hernandez, 2013; Smith et al., 2010). Indeed, Suárez-Orozco and colleagues (2011) found that among separated Latinx and Asian youth, length of separation was positively associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms, anxiety, and family conflict. In terms of academic achievement, separated Latinx youth were more likely to drop out of high school than nonseparated youth and U.S. born immigrant children (Gindling & Poggio, 2012). Separated Latinx children have also reported feeling abandoned and resentful toward the separated parent (Hernandez, 2013), and these feelings can impede a smooth reunification process between the separated parent and child (Lashley, 2000).

Although separated immigrant families are likely to experience severe stressors that can jeopardize their emotional, physical, relational, and academic well-being, the Theory of Resilience and Relational Load (TRRL; Afifi et al., 2016) states that families can develop positive emotional reserves (i.e.,) through daily relational maintenance behaviors that can protect against adversity. When faced with stressors, TRRL posits that families with positive emotional reserves are more likely to withstand stress compared to families with limited positive emotional reserves (Afifi et al., 2020; Afifi et al., 2018). Yet, many questions

remain, such as: how do immigrant parents of low socio-economic status and limited resources maintain their relationships with their children when experiencing family separation? Furthermore, what goals and expectations do immigrant parents and their children have for relational maintenance when living in separate countries for an indefinite amount of time?

With respect to the first question, separated immigrant families may rely on phone calls, social media, remittances, letters, or other family members for support (Binghma Thomas & Smith-Morris, 2020; Negi et al., 2021; Schapiro et al., 2013). Surrogate caregivers (e.g., a family member who serves as the primary caregiver of the child, while the parent is away) may also help or hinder relational maintenance, given that they are the primary liaison between the child and the separated parent (Conway et al., 2020; Dreby, 2010; Schapiro et al., 2013). Yet, it is unclear how separated parents maintain their relationship with their child(ren); how the surrogate caregiver's communication with the separated parent and child shapes how the separated parent and child view themselves, each other, their relationship, and the separation itself; how the surrogate caregiver enables or impedes the parent and child's relational maintenance; and which relational maintenance strategies contribute to separated immigrant families' positive emotional reserves. A closer look at relational maintenance strategies that is rooted in a triadic perspective (i.e., the separated parent, the separated child, and the surrogate caregiver) and that captures separated families lived experiences with relational maintenance is necessary because as TRRL states, a relationship that is not continuously nourished might develop relational load (i.e., relationship depletion due to frequent wear and tear; Afifi et al. 2016).

To shed light on separated immigrant families' relational maintenance, this study also draws from Merolla's (2010) Long-Distance Relational Maintenance Model (LDRMM). In this model, Merolla (2010) argued for considering relational maintenance strategies that occur at the *intrapersonal* (i.e., individual level thoughts about the parent and the relationship), *dyadic* (i.e., communication between the parent and child), and *network levels* (i.e., communication with extended family members about the separation, the parent, and the relationship) that can occur prior to the separation (i.e., prospective strategies), during the separation (i.e., introspective strategies), and following reunification (i.e., retrospective), should reunification occur. Merolla (2012) found that before and during separation, future-focused intrapersonal maintenance predicted relationship satisfaction. Yet, following separation, intrapersonal maintenance predicted stress, thereby revealing that relational maintenance's associations with health experiences may depend on the types of strategies used and when they are used. Prior applications of LDRMM, however, have focused primarily on White, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) samples in long-distance romantic relationships (e.g., Ellis & Ledbetter, 2015; Maguire & Kinny, 2010) rather than relational maintenance among separated immigrant families of extremely low socio-economic status with limited resources, and possibly with different goals and expectations for relational maintenance. Their unique experiences can extend our understanding of LDRMM.

Examining separated immigrant families' relational maintenance is crucial because with no clear reunion in sight, family members rely on relational maintenance as a primary source of connection. Hence, the need for a systematic approach to studying how maintenance strategies may contribute to the positive emotional reserves of separated

immigrant families and can provide greater specificity to TRRL and the LDRMM. Such findings might also help identify effective relational maintenance strategies that immigrant families can use prior to, during, and following separation. Thus, based on individual semi-structured interviews with 20 separated Latinx parents, 20 separated Latinx children (ages 9-17 years), and 20 surrogate Latinx caregivers ($N = 20$ Latinx family triads), this study's goals are to: (1) identify separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers' goals for relational maintenance, (2) explore how separated parents and their children build positive emotional reserves through relational maintenance prior to, during, and if applicable, following separation at the intrapersonal, dyadic, and network levels, and (3) determine how the surrogate caregiver helps or hinders the separated parent and separated child's relational maintenance.

Explicating Relational Maintenance for Separated Latinx Immigrant Families

Relational maintenance as defined by Canary and Stafford (1992) is the communication efforts "people use to sustain desired relational definitions" (p.243). However, scholars have varied in their definition and perceived functionality of relational maintenance. For example, Ayres (1983) argued that relational maintenance is used to develop intimacy. Bell et al., (1987) framed relational maintenance as a means to make one more desirable, and others (e.g., Braiker & Kelley, 1987) defined relational maintenance as the frequency of relational self-disclosure. To address, the discrepancies among the functions and definitions of relational maintenance, Stafford and Canary (1991) systematically categorized relational maintenance behaviors. They established five core maintenance strategies: (1) positivity, (2) openness, (3) assurances, (4) networks, and (5) sharing tasks. *Positivity* includes optimistic interactions with the partner such as a separated parent

complimenting a separated child on their school accomplishments. *Openness* refers to direct disclosures, for example, the surrogate caregiver encouraging the separated child to talk about their feelings towards the separation. *Assurances* include behaviors that convey commitment to the relationship, such as the separated parent scheduling weekly conversations with their child. *Network maintenance* strategies include spending time with shared social groups (e.g., upon reunification both the separated parent and surrogate caregiver spend time with each other's relatives). Lastly, *sharing tasks* refer to co-owning responsibilities and tackling them together. In the context of separated Latinx families, this might be seen when the separated parent shares parenting duties and calls the separated child to help them with their homework.

Dindia (2003) and Dindia and Canary (1993) have described relational maintenance strategies as having four purposes. First, the most basic function of relational maintenance is to keep a relationship alive (i.e., not terminated; Dindia, 2003). For a Latinx separated family, this might include weekly phone calls from the separated parent to the separated child in order for the separated child to not forget about the father. Second, relational maintenance has also been described as keeping a relationship in its current condition (Dindia,2003). In the context of separated Latinx families, this would be a family that wants to keep a relationship as is, meaning this relationship could either be positive or negative, emotionally close or distant. Third, attempts might be made to improve the relationship, for example, increasing relational closeness or relational satisfaction. Lastly, Dindia (2003) states that relational maintenance can be used for the purpose of repair--to fix a relationship. Here, relational maintenance uses corrective and preventative strategies, so that it does not terminate (Dindia, 2003). Because separated children might hold resentment towards their

separated parent due to feelings of abandonment (e.g., Hernandez, 2013; Phoenix, 2020), the separated parent might try to repair the relationship by engaging in strategies that foster closeness in the relationship. Although these four purposes of relational maintenance are commonly used, Scharp's (2019) study on estranged adult children from their families revealed that relational maintenance can also be used to distance oneself from others. The desires for a relationship might not necessarily be to move it forward; instead, it might be to create or maintain relational distant. Thus, some separated children might want to create distance between themselves and the separated parent by avoiding communication with the separated parent.

Given the various types of relational maintenance strategies and their purposes, individuals in a relationship might enact and prefer certain strategies. Naturally, then, separated parents and separated children might each have different desired relational states, which in turn, is likely to shape the kinds of maintenance behaviors that each party enacts. The extent to which the relational maintenance received matches the person's (e.g., the separated child) desired relational state (e.g., to be emotionally close) is likely to affect the person's (e.g., the separated child) relational satisfaction. Although Dainton (2000) did not find support for this assumption with respect to romantic partners, past relational maintenance work suggests that women have been found to implement more relational maintenance strategies than men (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 1992; Ragsdale, 1996). In addition, relationship type (e.g., friendship, romantic) might also affect the desired state of a relationship and the relational maintenance desired (Canary et al., 1993). Separated parents and separated children might desire, enact, and receive different relational states and different relational maintenance strategies. Furthermore, given that surrogate caregivers can act as

relational gatekeeps who can help or hinder the relational maintenance between the separated parent and child, it is also important to know the type of relationship that surrogate caregivers believe the separated parent should have with their separated child. Because of the various desired relational states and purposes of relational maintenance, it is unclear what separated Latinx families want for the separated parent-separated child relationship; therefore, the following research question was developed:

RQ1: According to separated Latinx parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers, what is their desired relational state for the separated parent and the separated child?

Integrating the Long-Distance Relational Maintenance Model with TRRL

Numerous approaches exist to studying relational maintenance; however, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how separated Latinx immigrant families build positive emotional reserves at different points in their separation, this study draws from Merolla's (2010) Long-Distance Relational Maintenance Model (LDRMM). LDRMM identifies three relational maintenance strategies: (1) intrapersonal strategies, (2) dyadic interaction strategies, and (3) social network strategies across three time periods: (1) before, (2) during, and (3) following separation (Merolla 2010, 2012). Ultimately, the intersection between the temporal framework (i.e., before, during, after) and interactional dimensions (i.e., intrapersonal, dyadic, network) might help identify which communicative behaviors make for the best relational maintenance strategies (Merolla, 2010).

Intrapersonal strategies. Intrapersonal strategies refer to individual psychological and behavioral processes that separated Latinx individuals may use to remain connected to each other (e.g., looking at the parent's or child's pictures, treasuring gifts from one another).

LDRMM can help us further understand the relational maintenance process of separated Latinx immigrant families in several ways. Merolla (2010) details the importance of long-distance maintenance strategies as they all contribute to behaviors beyond in-person interactions. Although interpersonal communication plays a role in the separation process, intrapersonal communication is also essential, which includes looking at pictures, fantasizing about future interactions, and reflecting on past interactions. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010) found that pictures played a crucial role in keeping the presence of the absent parent (i.e., intrapersonal strategy).

Dyadic interactions. Dyadic interaction strategies refer to interpersonal communicative efforts made to remain connected (e.g., the parent and child talking on the phone detailing each other's days). Because of the geographical distance during the separation, in-person interactions with the separated parent are limited; however, family members may remain connected through other interpersonal interaction efforts. Dreby (2006) noted the importance that mothers placed on phone conversations with their children because it enabled them to convey emotional intimacy (i.e., partner interaction strategy). LDRMM can help identify the dyadic interactions, if any, that separated Latinx families engage in while individuals prepare for the separation, live apart, and, if applicable, reunite.

Social network strategies. Social network strategies involve engaging with network members to sustain the relationship (e.g., the child talking to the surrogate caregiver about a fond memory of the parent). The use of social network strategies in immigrant family separation is demonstrated through the important role that the surrogate caregiver plays in the parent-child relationship (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). With some family members physically absent, extended family members or siblings may take their roles (Falicov, 2007). For

example, Mitrani et al. (2004) reported that often the older sibling, typically a sister, may adopt a parental role and look after their siblings. Upon reunification, however, the strong sibling bond and parental role may interfere with the mother's authoritative parental figure. Thus, conflict and rivalry between mother and older child may also place a strain on the younger child as they navigate being loyal to both family members. The older sibling might feel betrayed if the child forms a stronger relationship with the mother, after the older child looked after the younger sibling during the separation. Consequently, it seems that not all maintenance strategies are effective, and family members must manage their maintenance strategies in a way that will not jeopardize certain family ties. By contrast, surrogate caregivers also can help the separated parent and child by explaining the separation to the child to help them understand why the parent had to leave.

Timing of relational maintenance strategies. The effects of relational maintenance might also depend on when and how the strategies are enacted. Merolla (2012) found that before and during separation, future focused intrapersonal maintenance predicted satisfaction for romantic partners. Yet, following separation, intrapersonal maintenance predicted stress, thus revealing that relational maintenance's associations with relational satisfaction and health may depend on the types of strategies used and the timing. With respect to immigrant family separation, these discrepancies are crucial because sometimes, with no clear or near reunion in sight, family members rely on these relational maintenance strategies as their only source of connection. Hence, this area of research would benefit from engaging a systematic approach to study how maintenance strategies may contribute to the resilience of separated Latinx immigrant families.

Previous work on the separation of immigrant families has touched upon the different practices and behaviors enacted before, during, and after separation. Letter writing, remittances, and phone calls are all behaviors used to maintain contact during separation (Suárez-Orozco, Bang, et al., 2011; Falicov, 2007). Unfortunately, prior work is limited in that it typically focuses on the outcomes of separation and not necessarily the strategies enacted that might explain certain outcomes. Although Rusch and Reyes (2012) found that negative appraisals among separated Latinx immigrant families might be associated with depression, family functioning, and acculturative stress, they did not explore why or how these families had negative experiences. A closer look at the intrapersonal, dyadic, and network relational maintenance strategies enacted during the separation and reunification process might help explicate certain outcomes.

Despite the scant work on relational maintenance among separated Latinx families, some scholars have considered how technology might help families remain connected during the separation. In fact, Ledbetter (2009) found that the five core relational maintenance strategies (i.e., positivity, openness, assurances, shared tasks, network) are a good measurement of relational maintenance efforts both in face to face and computer mediated contexts. Separated Latinx immigrant families who can financially afford Internet and communication technologies have benefitted from these services because it allowed for increased communication (Orellana et al., 2001). Technology (e.g., Facebook, Skype) can offer opportunities for communication and intimacy (Francisco, 2015). The use of cellphones among Filipina mothers and their separated children helped their parent-child relationship because it made voice communication more prominent among separated families (Madianou & Miller, 2011). Despite technology's ability to help separated Latinx immigrant families

maintain connected, technological resources are not available and affordable to all separated Latinx immigrant families (Orellana et al., 2001). Given that one of the main reasons why families immigrate to a new country is because of financial instability, family members that reside in the native country might not have access to internet.

According to Martinez-Dominguez and Mora-Rivera (2020), internet usage in Mexico is low, especially in rural parts of Mexico. Unsurprisingly, their findings showed that households with higher educational levels and socio-economic status were more likely to use the internet. In the United States, Latinxs are among the lowest ranking ethnic group to use home broadband at 46% compared to non-Latinx whites at 73% (Pew Center, 2016). Furthermore, according to the National Health Survey (2015) over 60% of the Latinx/Hispanic population lived in households with only cellphones as compared to 44% of whites. Given these findings, access to reliable internet might not be readily available for Latinx immigrants. Consequently, routine and constant communication for some transnational families might not be feasible for separated Latinx families of low socio-economic status.

Despite previous research on family separation, the literature is limited in that it does not take a systematic approach in exploring intrapersonal, dyadic, and network strategies that Latinx families of low socio-economic status use to maintain their relationship prior to, during, and if applicable, following separation. TRRL posits that individuals constantly calibrate their relationship (i.e., continuously gather feedback on relational stress and invest resources to help invigorate the relationship) and in turn, this process fosters resilience (Afifi et al., 2016). This process of resilience occurs through the routine prosocial verbal and nonverbal behaviors enacted with the aim of helping individuals communally manage a

stressor. Yet, due to the geographical distance of separated Latinx immigrant families, their cultural values, and their low socio-economic status, traditional relational maintenance strategies stemming from work conducted with WEIRD long-distance romantic relationships may not adequately capture separate Latinx immigrants' experiences.

Through semi-structured interviews, the current study can help uncover the individual and communal maintenance strategies enacted by separated Latinx immigrant families that may help foster individual and relational well-being. Little is known about the intrapersonal, dyadic, and network strategies that separated Latinx families' use at each stage (i.e., pre-separation, separation, reunification) and their perceived impact on relational and individual well-being. Ogolosky et al.'s (2019) relational maintenance metanalysis calls to action "more focus on the mutuality of relationship maintenance and the complex interplay between individual and dyadic strategies should be a priority for future research" (p.293). Consequently, this study explores the relational maintenance of separated Latinx families, which may extend TRRL's framework of how emotional reserves are built despite structural barriers that may impede routine relational engagement activities. Additionally, practitioners, therapist, teachers, and not-for-profit immigration community organizations might benefit from learning what strategies help enhance emotional and cognitive resources. Thus, this study poses the following research question:

RQ2: According to separated Latinx parents and children, what prospective, introspective, and if applicable, retrospective relational strategies do they use to help them maintain their relationship?

Moving Beyond the Dyad: The Role of the Surrogate Caregiver

In addition to focusing on separated Latinx parents and children, LDRMM emphasizes the importance of considering other network members in the relational maintenance process (Merolla 2010). As argued by Merolla (2012), network members might help fill the communication gaps between the dyad. This brings to light a crucial, but often overlooked aspect of family separation, the role of the surrogate caregiver (e.g., Rusch & Reyes, 2012). As Mazucatto and Shans (2011) stated in their literature review of separated immigrant families, "The role of the caregiver of the child in the country of origin is understudied, but the scant studies on the topic suggest that the caregiver is extremely important for the well-being of the child" (p. 705). Often, the child forms strong bonds with these caretakers (Lovato-Hermann, 2017), sometimes viewing them as parental figures (Hernandez, 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Yet, few studies have reported on how the surrogate caregiver affects the parent-child relationship (e.g., Hernandez, 2013; Miltrani et al., 2004; Artico, 2003; Glasglow & Goucse-Sheese, 1995). Those studies that have considered the surrogate caregiver have not considered the caregiver's perspective firsthand. With such a central role, much is missed when leaving out the surrogate caregiver's perspective in studying the relational maintenance process of separated Latinx immigrant families.

Surrogate caregivers play multiple roles in the lives of the child and the parent. They are the surrogate liaison between the child and the parent, and they can serve as communication gatekeepers (Schapiro et al., 2013). Furthermore, if reunification occurs, the separation of the surrogate caregiver might symbolize yet another abandonment (Dreby, 2007). Thus, depending on the relationship between the child and the surrogate caregiver, as well as the surrogate caregiver and the separated parent, the reunification process might come

with additional trauma. Indeed, children have reported missing their surrogate caregiver thereby making the reunification process much more difficult to endure (Lovato-Hermann, 2017). In some cases, the surrogate caregiver might also migrate with the child and affect the reestablishment of the separated parent-child relationship.

Despite the potential for strong child-caregiver bonds, this might not always be the case. The child left behind might feel like a burden, especially if they are passed from one family member to the next (Orellana et al., 2001). Furthermore, the caregiver's interpretation of the separation might influence the child's sensemaking of the separation. Sensemaking refers to how "individuals make sense of complex social dynamic environments and phenomena, develop mental representations, and use these representations to guide their action" (Mamykina et al., 2016). In the context of separated Latinx family, the surrogate caregiver's attitude and their perception of the separated parent may affect the child's perception of their parent (Hine-St. Hilaire, 2008). That is, the surrogate caregiver's attitudes towards the separated parent might either negatively or positively affect the way the child interprets the separation (i.e., stress appraisal) which has the potential to affect the child's desire to communicate with their parent (i.e., relational maintenance). Because the surrogate caregiver can have a profound influence on the separated parent and separated child's experiences, the following research questions were developed:

RQ3: How does the surrogate caregiver facilitate or impede separated parents and separated children's relational maintenance?

RQ3a) What verbal and/or nonverbal behaviors does the surrogate caregiver engage in to help separated parents and children make sense of the separation?

RQ3b) How does the surrogate caregiver help or hinder the separated parent and child's relational maintenance?

Method

Data Collection

Upon receiving university Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in Winter 2021, recruitment and data collection began. To recruit families, English and Spanish flyers were distributed through various groups and pages on social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook). Flyers and emails were sent to different university email listservs and nonprofit organizations that might work with Latinx communities. In addition, the author and bilingual research assistants contacted family members and social networks. All recruitment materials were made available in Spanish and English.

To be eligible to participate, parents must have identified as Hispanic, Latina/Latino, or Latinx and have lived in a country separate from their child(ren) for 6 months or longer. In addition, the separated child must have been between the ages of 9 to 17 years old at the time of data collection, and all three family members (i.e., the separated parent, separated child, and surrogate caregiver) must have been willing to participate in individual telephone interviews. Latinx families who had reunited within the past 2 years were also eligible to participate in the study.

Interested participants had the option to contact the author via email, text message, or phone call. After the initial contact, the author would call the interested participant to provide an overview of the study, discuss the study requirements in more detail, and review the study procedures. If the participant continued to show interest, that participant coordinated with the other two family members. If the other two family members agreed to participate, they

contacted the author again. The author would then schedule the interviews for all three participants.

Because the majority of participants were located outside of the United States, WhatsApp (i.e., a low-cost messaging and voice social media platform) was used to contact the participants. WhatsApp was used because most participants already used it as the primary method of communication between their family members. Four of the participants did not have WhatsApp, so direct international calling was used.

Separated parents and surrogate caregivers provided informed consent, and separated children provided informed assent (see Appendices B, C, and D). The participants were told that the aim of the study was to learn more about their separation experiences and that the information they shared would not be disclosed to the other family members that were also participating in the study. Participants who had not completed the demographic survey on their own completed the survey during the interview with the assistance of a bilingual research assistant (see Appendix E for sample demographic survey).

The interviews ranged from one to two and a half hours. With the participants' permission, each interview was recorded. All survey and interview materials were provided in English and Spanish; however, all 60 participants chose Spanish. The interview protocol can be found in the appendix (Appendix F). Each participant was paid $75 USD for a total of $225 USD per family. All families were paid via money wires except for one family who preferred an electronic gift card.

Participants

A total of 20 Latinx family triads (i.e., 20 separated Latinx parents, 20 separated Latinx children, and 20 surrogate Latinx caregivers) independently participated in semi-

structured telephone interviews. Ten families were currently separated and the other 10 had recently been reunited. The currently separated families were from Mexico (n = 6), Peru (n = 2), Guatemala (n = 1), and Colombia (n = 1). Four children were boys and six were girls with an average age of 13.90 (SD = 2.42). The average age of currently separated parents was 42.5 years (SD = 7.52) and 44.60 years (SD = 15.32) for surrogate caregivers. Of the 10 currently separated parents, five had completed up to secondary school (7^{th}-9^{th} grade), three had completed elementary school (k-6^{th}), one completed high school (10^{th}-12^{th} grade), and one had a graduate degree. Among these surrogate caregivers, four had finished up to elementary school, three completed up to secondary school, two completed up to high school, and 1 had not gone to school. Among the ten currently separated children, eight lived with a caregiver in their native country, while the parent(s) lived in the United States. Two children lived in the United States with their caregiver, while their parent(s) lived in Mexico. One child was separated from their mother, three children from their fathers, and six children were separated from both parents. Three separated children were taken care of by their grandmother, three by their other parent (mother), two by an uncle, one by an aunt, and one by their sister. Three families had been separated for two years, two families had been separated for one year, two families separated for four years, one family for three years, one family for five years, and one family for more than five years.

Among the 10 reunited families, all were from Mexico. Five of the children were boys and 5 were girls and their average age was 12.60 (SD = 3.02). The average age of currently reunited parents was 42.9 years (SD = 9.06) and 39.56 (SD = 10.01) for surrogate caregivers. All 10 reunited children had been separated from their father, who had migrated to the United States, while they stayed with their mothers (i.e., surrogate caregiver). Seven of

the parents had completed up to primary school (kindergarden-6th grade) and the other three had completed up to secondary school (7th-9th grade). Seven of the caregivers had completed up to secondary school, one had completed up to primary school, one had completed up to high school, and one had no formal schooling. Three families have been separated for two years, two families had been separated for more than five years, two families had been separated for five years, two families had been separated for three years, and one family for less than a year.

Interview Preparation

The interview guide was constructed using the main components of TRRL and the LDRMM. TRRL emphasizes several constructs such as relational maintenance, communal orientation, emotional reserves, resilience, and thriving. LDRMM argues for considering relational maintenance strategies that occur at the intrapersonal, dyadic, and network levels which may occur prior to the separation, during the separation, and following reunification, should reunification occur. These theoretical concepts combined with the experience of Latinx immigrants helped frame the questions for the interview guides. The interviewers also remained open to naturally emerging discussions around family separation.

Six different interview protocols were created, one for each relationship role (i.e., separated parent, caregiver, child) and those interview guides were modified to reflect the specific scenario of the separation (i.e., the child stayed in the native country with a surrogate caregiver, or the child immigrated to the United States while one of the parents stayed in their native country; see Appendix E for sample interview protocol). After the initial drafts of the surveys and interview protocol guides were created, scholars with expertise in relational maintenance, long-distance relationships, Latinx families, resilience, and thriving provided

feedback on the documents. After their feedback was implemented, bilingual research assistants who were either first generation immigrants themselves or whose parents were first generation immigrants, looked over the materials. They provided feedback based on their own experiences. After all feedback was implemented, the documents were translated into Spanish. To ensure accuracy, all documents were originally created in English, then a bilingual research assistant translated the originals to Spanish, then a different bilingual research assistant conducted accuracy checks of the translations. This process was followed for all consent forms, surveys, and interview protocols.

After all the study documents were created and translated, the research assistants went through an extensive training period. Each week, the research assistants practiced one of the interview guides with a friend or family member in either English or Spanish. Each practice interview ranged from 1-2 hours and were audio recorded. Immediately after each practice interview, the research assistant wrote memo notes on their interview. They provided feedback on the phrasing of the questions, reflected on their strengths as an interviewer, and noted areas of improvement. The author then listened to all the practice interviews and provided feedback during weekly research meetings. The research assistants were then required to listen back to their previous practice interview and make notes of instances where they could have probed more, identified questions that needed clarity, and created smoother transitions. After they completed this exercise, they conducted their next practice interview. This was repeated until they had fully practiced all the protocols in both English and Spanish. Given the nature of the interviews, research assistants were also trained on how to navigate difficult topics and were taught how to respond to a distressed participant. For example, if the participant changed their tone, the research assistant was instructed to pause the interview.

However, if the participant began to cry, the research assistant would pause the interview, given the option to terminate the interview, and depending on the participant's response they would either continue the interview and validate the participants emotions or terminate the interview and reassure them that it was okay. Research assistants were also given contact information of international counseling centers which could serve as a resource to our participants (e.g., Mexico- Sistema Nacional de Apoyo, Consejo Psicologico e intervencion en Crisis por Telefono (SAPTEL), Guatemala's Emergency Hotline).

Throughout the data collection period, the research assistants attended weekly research meetings to discuss findings, debrief about sensitive information, and share interviewing challenges. This allowed the research assistants to share insights and effective strategies when, for example, talking to minors. All audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

To uncover the patterns among separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers, the author first coded all the separated children's interviews, followed by all the separated parents' interviews, and then lastly, all the surrogate caregivers' interviews. Tracy's (2019) recommendations for a thematic analysis served as guidelines. The author engaged in first-level coding, second-level coding, axial coding (i.e., hierarchical codes), and selective coding. First-level coding was the first step in analyzing the transcripts. During this stage, the author coded without any restrictions (i.e., unlimited coding), and codes were general activities or processes (Tracy, 2019). After this initial stage, codes were then consolidated into related themes based on analytic and theoretical knowledge (i.e., second-level coding). The author re-read the interviews and coded different emerging themes related

to intrapersonal, dyadic, and network relational maintenance strategies. In the third stage of coding, themes were grouped under their corresponding hierarchical categories (i.e., axial coding or hierarchical codes). To visualize links between the themes, the author used conceptual maps and figures. Lastly, the final codes helped refine theory and tell a story (i.e., selective coding; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the data, the author, who as a child, experienced separation and reunification with her own Latinx family, analyzed the interviews and thus can testify to various perspectives. Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe several procedures to obtain reliability and validity (i.e., trustworthiness, credibility, authenticity) for qualitative data. One of them is triangulation which is described as, "If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study" (p. 321). Because the author analyzed 60 different perspective and converged their themes, it can be said that the author triangulated the data. Another procedure that Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe is adding rich thick descriptions, which the author did by providing several examples and describing how each perspective represented the theme.

Findings

RQ1: Desires for the Separated Parent-Child Relationship

RQ1 inquired as to the desires that separated parents, their separated children, and the surrogate caregivers have for the relationship between the separated parent and child. From the data emerged themes consistent with previous relational maintenance research (e.g., Dindia, 2003; Scharp, 2019): (a) *maintain the relationship in its current state,* (b) *improve the relationship,* and (c) *create relational distance*. What is noteworthy about the present

study, however, are the discrepancies in desires for the relationship which may influence the type of relational maintenance strategy that each family member enacts.

Separated Parents' Desires

Among the separated parents (N = 20; n =14 fathers; n = 6 mothers), most reported not desiring any change in their relationship with their children, regardless of whether they were in a satisfactory relationship or not. For example, some separated parents were content with the frequency of communication and with the state of the relationship, "I say that right now my relationship with her is good. I have faith in God that it will continue like this and that nothing changes" (14a, father, separated from 17-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated more than five years). Similarly, a separated mother stated, "Yes, I have a good relationship...No, no, I wouldn't change anything. We are always affectionate. She is very loving, 'Mommy I love you. I miss you, kisses'" (6a, separated from 17-year-old daughter, currently separated for more than five years). Both of these separated parents reported having a good relationship with their children; however, the second parent noted that her child brings up the separation and questions why the separated mother left. Despite those comments, the separated mother reported that she still would not change anything about her relationship with her child.

Although some separated parents were happy with the relationship's state and wanted to keep it at a satisfactory state, there were other separated parents who did not share a satisfactory relationship with their separated child, yet these separated parents did not want or try to change the relationship. When asked how often the parent contacted the child, this father stated, "Now it's like every three days. How do I say this? Whenever I feel like it, I call. I can't tell you every day" (1a, separated father from 14-year-old daughter, currently

separated for two years). Here, the separated parent was not trying to make the relationship better. Instead, he called when he thought it was necessary and to keep the relationship alive. The separated parent was accustomed to the separation and did not necessarily perceive it as a challenge that needed fixing.

Although most separated parents reported not wanting their relationship to change because they were content with the relationship with their separated child, some separated parents reported having a distant relationship and wanting more from the relationship. For example, a separated mother stated, "At first, I did [have a good relationship], but not right now because I have more time over here [in the United States]. At first, I thought I'd only be here for one or two years and then return…oh well, I wish she would tell me more about her life" (3a, mother, separated from 12-year-old daughter, currently separated for more than five years). Similarly, another separated mother expressed her desire to make her relationship closer with her son:

> No, well right now he is different with me. He is not the same. Before, he would hug me, he would talk to me, he would tell me things, and now, well, I feel him kind of distant from me. Like if he was holding onto something because I left, and he stayed. (12a, separated mother, separated from 17-year-old son, currently separated for four years)

This separated mother felt the relationship had changed because her son might feel resentful towards her for leaving him behind. This mother reported that she wished circumstances could be different and wished her relationship with him was closer. Of important note is that both of these families had over a decade of being separated, possibly hinting to the importance of length of separation.

In short, separated parents mentioned desires of keeping the relationship in its current condition or bringing it closer. Although not all relationships were in a good state, not all separated parents had a desire to improve the relationship. A possible explanation for this is that separated parents were preoccupied with acclimating to the United States and were focused on survival needs rather than relationship needs. Separated parents left their family in search of better financial opportunities, thus that was their primary goal. Furthermore, some separated parents mentioned that their separated children would bring up the separation in a negative light; however, parents still reported having a good relationship with their separated children. It seems plausible that the distinction between these situations could depend on the relational maintenance behaviors enacted by both parties. Lastly, regardless of the positive or negative state of the relationship, separated parents did not report wanting to create distance with their separated children.

Separated Children's Desires

Among separated children (N = 20; n = 11 girls; n = 9 boys), some engaged in relational maintenance strategies with their separated parent to keep their relationship at its current state, to improve the relationship, or to create distance. Several children reported being accustomed to the separation; therefore, their desire was to keep the relationship at its current state. They were also asked if they would like to have more communication with their parent to which one girl said, "Well, no, because he is always tired after work, and we want him to take that time to take care of himself" (4b, separated from father, currently reunited, 17-year-old, separated more than five years). Another separated child shared a similar sentiment:

> No [I wouldn't want to talk to him more] …well, I don't know why. I don't like talking like that to my dad through the phone…well, I think it's up to him. If he wants to come back, he should come back, and if not well then, he should spend more time over there (5b, 15-year-old son, separated from father, currently separated four years)

In turn, these behaviors contributed to maintaining the relationship at its current condition. In both of these situations it seems that the separated children were looking out for what is best for their separated parent. This was a common theme across many separated children. Interestingly, child 5b who stated that it was up to the father when to return, mentioned that he felt bad for himself because he is missing a paternal figure in his life. Thus, it seems plausible that children might desire more out of their relationships; however; they put the parent's needs before their own needs.

Yet, others wanted to bring the relationship to a satisfactory state, so their parent would not forget about them or abandon them. One separated child stated,

> I told him yes, that it was better that I stayed with her, but to please return one day, and that day for him to look for me. Do not forget about me…" (10b, 10-year-old girl, separated from father, currently separated for one year).

Another girl said, "I told him I would always send him messages to see how he was doing. Every week, every Sunday when he is over there, he calls, and we talk, and we tell each other how our week went" (#14b, 17-year-old girl, separated from father, currently reunited, separated for more than five years). Here, children tried their best to keep the relationship at optimal level because they were afraid of being forgotten by their father. Among separated children, being forgotten or abandoned by their separated parent was their biggest concern.

Again, through the use of relational maintenance, such as frequent dyadic interactions, the separated children hoped to bring their parents closer to them.

Contrary to the separated parents, one separated child reported wanting to create relational distance. He mentioned that he did not like disclosing or communicating with his separated parent or surrogate caregiver:

> I don't know because I don't really confide in my mom, and if I talk to my dad, I would get embarrassed to talk. I don't know. I get embarrassed talking to them about my things… When I was out with my friends or things like that, and he would try calling I would say that I was busy". (20b, 16-year-old son, separated from father, currently reunited, separated for two years)

This separated child reported feeling distant and uncomfortable sharing information with both his surrogate caregiver (i.e., mother) and separated father, yet he shared that when friends tried to make him feel better, he would tell them he needed his father with him. Hence, the behavior that he enacted toward his surrogate caregiver (i.e., mother) and separated father did not match how he actually felt about the separation. This separated child felt comfortable sharing with his friends the need to have his father present; however, he did not feel comfortable with his parents. An explanation for this difference might lie in the relational maintenance strategies enacted by this family. The separated father mentioned that he felt his wife (i.e., surrogate caregiver) avoided his communication efforts, "I would dial, and she would say 'oh I'm so sleepy' and then later I would see that she would be connected to Facebook" (20a, separated father from 16-year-old son, currently reunited, separated two years). The limited communication and the role of the surrogate caregiver could have contributed to the separated child's desires of wanting to create distance.

Surrogate Caregivers' Desires

Among the surrogate caregiver (*N* = 20; *n* = 13 mothers; *n* = 3 grandmothers; *n* = 3 aunt/uncle; *n* = 1 sibling), some wanted to help the separated parent and separated child maintain their relationship at its current state, while others wanted the separated parent's relationship with the child to improve. Some surrogate caregivers reported actively making sure that the separated parent and separated child maintained a good relationship:

> Yes, we [surrogate caregiver and separated child] would talk about [his dad]. I would always talk to him about his dad. Because I've heard of friends who do not. Them, if their child asks them about their dad, they don't tell them anything about their parents. They say, 'ask him'. I do [talk to him about his dad] because I think that no matter if they are near or far, they should try to talk, so that they won't forget about each other. And so that they know that the dad loves them and that the dad knows that they love him. (19C, surrogate caregiver to13-year-old son, currently reunited, separated for three years)

A separated child shared how his surrogate caregiver helped facilitate communication between he and his separated father, "She takes me to her work, so that I can videocall him because where she works, there is Internet' (18B, separated 10-year-old son from father, currently reunited, separated two years). The surrogate caregiver's efforts were particularly important because several separated parents reported technical issues due to a lack of resources,

> The first couple of years I didn't have a phone because honestly, I didn't know how to use it. That's why we didn't talk, and they didn't have a phone here, well, we live in a village. Just recently we have signal out here. They put an antenna, but before it

> was very difficult to talk on the phone. (4a, separated father from 17-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated for more than five years)

Other separated parents also noted how a lack of technology impeded communication between them and their family members:

> I can't call her [daughter] because in Colombia it's not like here [United States] where they call you and you just take out your phone and pick up. Over there, you take out your phone and you run the risk of it being stolen. (Separated mother from 17-year-old daughter, separated for 2 years)

Similarly, another noted that they did not always have a balance on their phone to be able to call:

> Well here in our community sometimes we do not have internet and well sometimes we can't go and load up [add money to cellphone]. So that's why I think it's okay [that we only talk a few days] because we can't go and load up every day. (3b, separated 12-year-old daughter from mother, currently separated more than five years)

Another separated child shared how good his surrogate caregiver would make him feel about his separated parent, "She makes me feel good daily. She tells me that soon I'll be able to go with my parents and meet my baby brother" (2B, separated 11-year-old son from mother, currently separated, separated two years). The surrogate caregiver for child 2B explained why she strives for the separated parent and child to have a good relationship:

> No ma'am [I don't discourage my grandson from reuniting with his father] that would be very egotistic of me to claim my grandson as my own son. He has every right to move with his parents to be together. I'm already 64 years old. If one day

> they decide that he can join them, I won't be opposed to that. On the contrary, that would be perfect for the child. Like he says, so that he can meet his baby brother, and they can grow up together. (2C, surrogate caregiver to11-year-old grandson, currently separated, separated two years)

Although most surrogate caregivers wanted the separated child to have a positive relationship with their separated parent, only one surrogate caregiver wished that the separated child would stop defending the separated parent, "[what I would change about the relationship is] that she [separated child] defends her dad too much. She defends her grandmother too much" (10C, surrogate caregiver to 10-year-old daughter, currently separated, separated for one year). In this case, the surrogate caregiver had shared that she was resentful towards her husband for abandoning her and their daughter. Consequently, she did not appreciate it when her daughter would defend her separated father or her father's side of the family. Perhaps, in this situation, the surrogate caregiver wanted the separated child-separated parent relationship to be distant.

Overall, most surrogate caregivers wanted the separated parent's relationship with the child to be optimal. Even when the relationships were perceived to be good, the surrogate caregivers found room for improvement. Mainly, they wanted the separated children to keep in frequent communication with their separated parent(s).

In sum, the different parties (i.e., separated parents, separated children, surrogate caregivers) had distinct desires for the relationship between the separated parent and child. Surprisingly, most separated parents reported not wanting to change the state of their relationship. This was the case regardless of whether they had a strong or weak relationship with their child. This finding differed from the separated children's desires which were to

keep the relationship in a good state or not change it out of respect for their separated parent. Some separated children feared that their separated parent would forget about them; therefore, to avoid abandonment; separated children engaged in relational maintenance strategies. Some of the separated children that reported wanting to keep the relationship in its current state shared that they wanted to respect their parent's time. Lastly, the majority of surrogate caregivers wanted to keep all relationships at optimal levels.

RQ2: Children's and Parents' Temporal Maintenance Strategies

RQ2 inquired about the temporal strategies (i.e., prospective, introspective, retrospective) that separated parents and children used to maintain their relationship. In addition to timing, Merolla (2010) also identified the strategies enacted by interaction level: a) intrapersonal, b) dyadic, and c) network. Separated parents and their children reported using distinct strategies depending on the timing of the separation. Appendix A includes three tables that summarize the relational maintenance strategies for separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers, prospectively, introspectively, and if applicable, retrospectively. The following section discusses the findings in detail.

Prospective Strategies

Prospective strategies occurred before the separation, and they occurred at different levels for separated parents and separated children. The following section discusses the prospective strategies that separated parents and children utilized.

Separated Parents. Separated parents reported engaging in all three levels of interaction throughout the entire separation process (i.e., before, during, and if applicable, following separation). Before the separation, the separated parents focused mainly on

intrapersonal relational maintenance. Here, the separated parent spent much of the time contemplating their decision and fearing the journey:

> Yes, I did feel a little bad because sometimes I would tell myself 'What am I going for, what am I going for?' I don't know the place. I don't know how to speak that language'…I would think about how I would no longer be with them. I wasn't going to see them, all that. At first, I would get really sad. (11A, father, separated from 9-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated for five years)

Particularly they were very uncertain about their success, and to help lessen that uncertainty, they would try to visualize their plans during their time apart (e.g., build a house, save for children's tuition, save enough money for reunification period). During this phase, the separated parent worked to reassure themselves that they were making the correct choice and that it was best for their family:

> I would think that I was going to get ahead. In having a better future, at least make a small house, have a car or something. That the children would have their things because sometimes even buying shoes is difficult. (16A, father, separated from11-year-old son, currently reunited, separated 3 years)

This engagement in intrapersonal maintenance strategies not only allowed them to justify the separation, but it also allowed them to feel better about their decision. In other words, these intrapersonal thoughts gave them the motivation and courage to leave their family behind because they knew what they needed to do this for survival reasons. During these moments of thought, they focused on the belief that they were providing for the family, and they were encompassing a parental role. They tried to avoid the emotional aspects of the separation and

instead tried to rationalize with themselves as to why they were making the sacrifice of not being physically present with their family, especially their children.

Interestingly, past relational maintenance research has found that individuals engage in positive relational maintenance strategies to feel closer to other individuals: (1) engaging in positive relational thinking and rumination (Acitelli, 2001), (2) engaging in relational artifacts (e.g., looking at photos, gifts; Lohmann et al., 2003), (3) positive imagined interactions (Honeycutt, 2003), or (4) visiting memorable locations (Altmnan, 1993). However, these positive themes did not emerge in the current study's findings. Instead, family members dwelled on and feared the upcoming separation:

> At first, I was really sad, and I thought about being without her, what would my life look like without her? You want benefits for her. Yes, it was something very sad. It was something like 'uff'. I was not accustomed to being far away from her, and I would visualize my life without her, and I would tell myself, 'Oh no, maybe I won't be able to live without her.' (8a, separated mother from13-year-old daughter who lives in the United States, currently separated for one year).

Here the mother engaged in negative imagined interactions, which made her doubt her decision about letting her child migrate to the United States. However, she believed it was for the best and ultimately decided to let her go.

Although not as common and limited, before the separation, some separated parents also engaged in *dyadic interaction* with the separated child. Often, it was left to the surrogate caregiver to deliver the sensitive news of the separation. When the separated parent disclosed the separation, the other parent was also present; however, most of the time it was done only

a couple days before the departure. For example, one separated parent reported not telling their family until the day came that way he would avoid hurt feelings,

> Everything was spontaneous. I didn't think of anything. I told myself, I'm going to tell them in that moment that I leave because I'm not going to be in anguish about what I'm going to tell them. No, instead give me your blessing, so that God can accompany me. I'll see you later" (14A, father, separated from 17-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated more than five years).

In this case the separated parent reported not disclosing information to his daughter to protect both himself and her; however, this type of lack of disclosure was not always beneficial to the children. Although avoiding the communication might have helped the separated parent feel better in the moment, the lack of communication or short notice might not have given children enough time to prepare themselves for the separation. This strategy might not have been best for some separated children, "I felt mad, I felt that they ignored me…I never imagined this. I wanted to see him [separated parent] and it wasn't until I no longer saw him that I missed him" (16b, separated 11-year-old son from father, currently reunited, separated three years). Children reported feeling alone, changes in eating patterns (i.e., not eating or overeating), and feeling extremely sad and unmotivated. Although initially challenging to cope with the unexpected separation, with time, these sentiments and behaviors seemed to improve.

Some separated parents that informed the child of the separation tried to focus on the positive aspects of the separation such as the benefits of financial stability (e.g., clothes, tuition, healthier food, trips):

> "At first, she [daughter] didn't want me to go, but later I explained things, and I told her that this was the only way that we could get ahead and be able to pay the accumulating bills and everything. And she started to understand. She saw that I tried here [Mexico] and that it still was not enough. That's when I explained things, and she told me it was okay, that if I had decided to leave that she would support me in that too. (13A, father, separated from 10-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated for five years)

A separated child shared how the separated parent's conversations helped him understand:

> We were here at the house and he told us. I told him no and later he told me yes and convinced me. He left and left me with my mom. He told me that he was leaving so that he could buy me a horse. I told him yes. (19b, separated 13-year-old son from father, currently reunited, separated for three years)

Similar to separated parents' intrapersonal thoughts, these dyadic interactions served the purpose of justifying the separation. As demonstrated in the above quotes, at first, the separated child was reluctant about the separation, but after thoroughly discussing the situation, the separated children became more understanding of the situation. This highlights the importance of prospective dyadic relational maintenance strategies for the wellbeing of the children. This type of communication might allow the separated child to understand why the separation had to occur and to prepare for changes in their lives, such as a restructure in family roles (e.g., mother as authoritative figure), change in socializing patterns (e.g., less trips), or moving to a different house (e.g., moving in with grandmother).

To help prepare for the parents' absence, a few separated parents reassured their children that they would remain in constant communication, "I told her we would talk daily

on the phone or through videocall" (6a, separated mother from 16-year-old daughter, currently separated, separated for five years). These intrapersonal maintenance strategies are in line with previous maintenance literature that has identified positivity (i.e., optimistic about the separation by highlighting the benefits), assurances (i.e., reassuring family members that they will maintain in contact despite the separation), and openness (i.e., direct disclosures about the separation) as relational strategies to help maintain positive relationships (Stafford & Canary, 1991).

During this time, some separated parents had *limited network interactions*. They purposefully avoided talking to friends or acquaintances about their immigration plans because they believed this to be a family matter. Despite the belief that this was a family issue, they did not rely heavily on communicating with extended family members (e.g., cousins, siblings, aunts/uncles) because initially these family members often discouraged them from migrating,

> They would make comments like 'You are going to leave, and you're going to leave your daughter. You're not going to see her grow and maybe you'll leave and not come back.' Things like that did get me thinking, but what I wanted was to get ahead because I knew that wasn't possible here. It is very difficult (10A, father, separated from 10-year-old daughter, currently separated for a year).

As is evident from the intrapersonal relational maintenance strategies, many separated parents already had enough doubts and insecurities about the migration journey they were about to take. Thus, they might not have wanted to exacerbate their stress by having loved ones question their decision to move away from family members. Furthermore, just as separated

parents did not want to inform the children of the separation to avoid hurt feelings, this could also be the case with outside family members (e.g., siblings, aunts, uncles). Latinx families tend to be collective and united (Ramos, 2020), so the separated parent might not want to worry the rest of the family.

Despite some extended family members initially communicating hesitation, after separated parents made their decision clear, extended family members became instrumental in the separation process:

> Yes, from that perspective they said, they were not happy that I was leaving, but I had already made the decision. That I should try my best. They gave me their blessing and let's go. I asked them to look after my kids, my wife, and even a pig I had there. (16A, father, separated from 11-year-old son, currently reunited, separated for three years)

Separated Children. Due to the limited prospective communication between the separated parents and the separated children and because some children were too young to recall the pre-separation period, separated children reported engaging in few relational maintenance strategies prior to the separation. This was largely because separated children reported not knowing about the separation or anticipating the separation. For instance, one separated child, who has been separated for 11 years, mentioned that she thought her surrogate caregiver was her biological mother, but the surrogate caregiver was actually her maternal grandmother. Another separated child reported only finding out about the separation because he noticed that his father was missing:

> A couple days later, once I started to not see him, my mom told me that my dad had traveled to the United States, and I got mad at her because I missed him so much. (16B, 11-year-old son, separated from father, now reunited, separated for three years)

This separated child also reported feeling upset and ignored because his parents had not informed him of the situation. In addition, the separated child reported being upset with the surrogate caregiver (in this case, the mother) for not informing him of the separation but not at the father. Typically, the surrogate caregiver was the one to inform the child of the separation and talk about the changes to come. This pattern might imply that there is an almost inherent expectation that the surrogate caregiver would inform the separated child of the separation. This might explain why the anger was directed towards the surrogate caregiver and not the separated parent.

In the instances when separated children were notified about the upcoming separation, the conversation mainly occurred only a couple days prior to the separated parent's departure, thereby limiting their preparation time. When told about the separation beforehand, some separated children were able actively engage in relational maintenance strategies, such as this boy who migrated to the United States while his parents stayed in Mexico:

> I would spend more time with them because those were my last days. Then on the last day, I said goodbye to them. We planned to keep in contact through videocalls (15b, separated from both parents, living in the U.S. with uncle, 14 years old, separated for three years)

Another separated child shared how they became more accustomed to the separation ahead of time:

> She started to work more time, so that I would become accustomed to her not being there, right? My mom probably thought I should spend more time with my grandma. And like that, little by little I started adapting to it. (6B, daughter, separated from mother, grandmother as caregiver, 16 years old, separated for five years)

In both of these situations the separate children were aware of the separation and were able to better adjust to the idea of the separation. As can be seen in the first case, the separated child had autonomy over their maintenance behaviors because they were aware of the separation. They chose how to spend their last days together with their family as opposed to being stripped of that opportunity.

Despite separated children's limited prospective relational maintenance strategies, they mainly engaged in *network interactions* with the surrogate caregiver:

> I thought about it, and my mom (i.e., surrogate caregiver) told me that many opportunities would come up and that here in Mexico we do not have a stable salary. And with what they do pay it does not go well. He (father) looked for better opportunities for his family, and she made me understand things…honestly, she made me come to reason, and I understood things, but it still hurt. (14b, daughter, separated from father, mother as caregiver, 17 years old, separated for more than five years)

The goals of these interactions were twofold: (1) for separated children to receive an explanation of the separation and (2) for the surrogate caregiver and separated child to cope with the anticipated separation together. Given that the surrogate caregiver would be primarily responsible for the separated child, it makes sense that the surrogate caregiver and the separated child communicated closely about the separation. Furthermore, because they

would be the ones to physically endure the separation together and spend more time together, it might be beneficial for them to jointly make sense of the separation.

In addition to the surrogate caregiver, the grandmother (i.e., prospective network strategy) played a particularly important role for the children. For example, one child reported that she confided in her grandmother for more information and support because she felt like her parents were not being completely honest with her about the separation:

> It affected me a lot that they did not want to tell me from the beginning, that I had to ask my grandma what was happening with my parents because they were distant. (10b, separated 10-year-old daughter from father, mother as surrogate caregiver, currently separated for a year)

Another child shared how her aunts were instrumental in making her feel better about the separation:

> A separation is not easy, but when I would talk to my family, to my mom's sisters, they have always been very united and very understanding, always. They would encourage my brothers, my mom, and me. (14b, separated 17-year-old daughter from father, currently reunited, separated more than 5 years)

In this situation, as Merolla (2010) argued, the network plays an important role in the maintenance of the relationship. Here, extended family members contributed to sensemaking of the separation.

Introspective Strategies

Separated parents and separated children relied on introspective strategies, which are maintenance behaviors enacted during the separation that could occur at any interaction level. The following section describes their use of introspective strategies.

Separated Parents. During the separation, the separated parents' most commonly used relational maintenance strategy was both *past-focused* and *future-focused intrapersonal relational maintenance*. They would look at videos and photos of their family while reflecting on past memories and imagined future interactions:

> For me it's very emotional because I'm very emotional. I look at her pictures and many memories come to mind. And I start thinking about what it would be like if I was there, what it's like when I'm not there, if I was there with her, I would be doing this, we would be playing or going somewhere, I would take her out. (11A, father, separated from 9-year-old daughter, now reunited, separated for five years)

Another separated parent shared:

> I start to think and that's when memories come up. Memories of when I was with her and suddenly, I get the urge to have them nearby. There are times when I'm working and suddenly, I get those thoughts. (10a, separated father from 10-year-old daughter, currently separated for a year)

A separated parent shared thoughts about future interactions, "I would imagine that I would be with him, that I could be there at home, be with him and be able to hug him" (13a, separated father from 10-year-old son, currently reunited, separated for five years). Although these memories were painful and difficult to endure, it was also these thoughts that motivated separated parents and reminded them of why they were making the sacrifice to live apart. This type of relational maintenance strategy was particularly crucial for the separated parents because many of them echoed the same sentiment that they strongly disliked being away from their home country. Many of them shared how it negatively affected their mental health and how they felt isolated from everyone. When asked if they shared these thoughts with the

surrogate caregiver or with the separated child, most said they did not because they did not want to worry or add stress to their family members. One separated parent even mentioned that he would avoid telling his wife (i.e., surrogate caregiver) when he would go out to social gatherings because he feared that she would think he was enjoying the separation.

In addition to intrapersonal strategies, separated parents also engaged in *dyadic introspective interactions* with their separated child. During the separation, some separated parents reassured their child(ren) that the separation was for the best and that they would be able to reap the benefits later. A common theme that emerged was that separated parents reported relying on false hope about a return date. They would tell their children that they would be back for a special occasion (e.g., Christmas, Quinceañera), although they knew they would not be returning to their home country any time soon:

> We [separated parents] say that we are somewhat okay, but I don't know, and they [separated children] keep asking. And we feel sad about not knowing what to respond each time and tell them that almost [returning back home] or tell them anything. And then later we talk to them again, and they ask you the same thing. That if I'm almost going to go home, and again, I don't know what to tell them. (13A, father, separated from 10-year-old son, now reunited, separated five years)

Another separated parent reported lying about when he would return to instill hope in his child:

> My daughter didn't want me to leave. She cried a lot. I had to lie to her, that I was going to return soon and things like that because she cried a lot. She's very attached to me, 'Daddy this, daddy that'. I had to lie to her. When she would call me, she would ask me, 'Daddy when are you going to return?' I would say, 'Soon, daughter.

> God willing, I'll be there for Christmas.' I would tell her things like that. (10a, separated father from 10-year-old daughter, currently separated for a year)

These fathers used false hope as way to maintain the relationship with his family because telling the truth was too painful for both him and his family. Furthermore, separated parents engaged in false hope to provide some sense of security for their children. They gave a false return date, so the children could feel motivated and not feel abandoned. Although false hope was used as a maintenance strategy, some parents reported that this was not always the best strategy because some children became more upset when the promised date arrived, and their separated parent did not return, "She would ask me if it was true. She would ask me if I would be there for her birthday, and I would say yes. And she would say, 'No, because you always tell that you will be here for my birthday, and you are not. Let's see if this time it's true.' (9A, father, separated from 12-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated two years).

As previously discussed, separated parents endured a difficult time in a new country away from family. However, *supportive dyadic conversations* with loved ones back home seemed to make some feel closer despite the geographical distance:

> Well, they make me feel more accompanied. Believe it or not, immigrating to a new country is difficult. The American dream is no joke. Here, we fight the battle. And we reflect that we are far away from family especially when you have such a special family like mine, and it's difficult to fill that void. So then when I talk to them on the phone, well, one feels a little closer to them. Then it's really beautiful, right? One talks to them, asks them how they are, know that my daughter is okay. (7A, mother, separated from 17-year-old daughter, currently separated for two years).

During the separation, *network interactions* with nonfamily members were limited according to separated parents. The separated parents reported not having time to share with nonfamily members (e.g., friends or coworkers) or that the family separation was a private matter, "One should not talk about family, only about work and do this and that. Family is very distinct there at work" (5A, father, separated from 15-year-old son, currently separated more than five years). Other separated parents reported that they would rather spend their free time talking to their family rather than friends:

> Like I said, with friends no. I did have friends, but when I decided to leave, I didn't have much communication with friends. When I could, I would communicate with my family. With my friends, I didn't really have communication. That's why during that time when I could talk, I would always use that time to talk with my family. (13A, father, separated from 10-year-old son, currently reunited, separated for five years).

Yet, another separated parent shared that their friends discouraged them from talking to family:

> With friends, this time that I was over there, we would talk about them. Like when we are over there and we start talking, 'I already miss my family'. I also got to witness some that hardly talk to their family. They preferred doing other things instead of talking to their family, and they would tell me, 'Why do you talk to them so often?' 'One misses them, don't you miss your children?' 'Well, yes but you need to give them space' 'Yes but we also have to see if they are okay.' (11A, father, separated from 9-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated for five years)

Although a few separated parents confided in friends, here we see three different reasons why network relational maintenance strategies were limited. Some separated parents held the belief that friends should not be involved in such personal matters. Others limited their communication with friends because they would rather dedicate that time to their family. Several avoided talking to their friends because their friends did not place the same value on talking to family.

Separated Children. During the separation (i.e., introspective), separated children engaged in intrapersonal, dyadic, and network maintenance strategies. At the *intrapersonal level,* separated children would compare themselves to other children whose families were not separated. One girl said, "It was difficult, because on the streets I would see other girls with their parents, and I would feel bad because I didn't have mine with me" (14b, separated from father, currently reunited, 17 years, separated more than five years). It was particularly difficult for separated children to see other families who were together because this often served as a reminder that their family was separated.

Others would use intrapersonal strategies to instigate hope and optimism within themselves:

> Well, let's say that I would get happy and sad. So, then I would think inside of me 'No, that I'm not going to be like that, that I am going to be strong, that that's positive, that it's a positive thing that I'm far away from my mom' and let's just say that that would help me feel happy inside. (7B, daughter, separated from mother, grandmother as caregiver, currently separated, 17 years old, two years separated).

Another separated daughter shared that she tried to think positively, "I encourage myself. I tell myself 'He does it because he loves his family. He wants the best for us' that's how I get

accustomed to the separation" (14b, separated from father, currently reunited, 17 years old, separated more than five years).

In these cases, the intrapersonal thoughts instilled positive feelings in the separated children. The last two cases demonstrate how some separated children used their own thoughts as a source of empowerment to help them cope with the separation. Particularly, child 14b's positive reminders helped her maintain a positive impression of her father because there were times when she would reflect on the separation, and it would make her upset at her father:

> There were times when I would ask myself why he didn't get documents for my mom, and I would feel bothered. Before when I was in elementary, I would feel very alone, and I felt like I hardly had friends and I was very sad. I would say that I wanted to be with my dad because he was my refuge. It bothered me that he didn't get me documents, so that I wouldn't be here. It bothered me and sometimes I didn't want to talk to him. (14b, daughter, separated from father, now reunited, 17 years old, separated more than five years)

In this situation, the separated child expressed a sense of resentment towards her father. Ultimately, her thoughts influenced her actions of avoiding communication efforts from her father.

Introspectively, most separated children primarily used *dyadic relational maintenance strategies to* maintain their relationship with the separated parent. Their interactions were centered around reunification, school progress, obedience, and taking care of farm animals. Reunification was a common theme, "She calls me, and I ask her how the lawyer is doing, and she tells me 'good' so that then gives me more hope [to reunite]" (#7b, girl, separated from mother, grandmother as caregiver, currently separated, 17 years old, two

years separated) and “My mom says that I’m going to live with her and she’s going to make me study. But first she has to be legal over there” (6b, daughter, separated from mother, grandmother as caregiver, currently separated, 16 years old, separated five years). In both situations, the daughters discuss reuniting with their mom; however, this is not possible due to their documentation status.

Separated parents were also interested in knowing about the child’s behavior and would consistently ask them about it, “We talk about how I behave, how we are doing” (12b, separated son from mother, currently separated four years), and “We talk about how I am doing in school, if I have good grades, if I behave” (16b, separated son from father, currently reunited, separated three years). Discussing farm animals was also another common theme between separated parents and separated children, “Because we had farm animals he would ask me if I looked after them. He would ask how we were doing, if I behaved…if I listened to my mom” (20b, separated 16-year-old son from father, currently reunited, two years separated), “We would just talk about how we were doing, how it was going with the animals” (15b, separated 14-year-old son from father, currently separated three years), “[we talk about] school and a horse that he bought me. He asks me if I already domesticated him” (19b, separated 13-year-old son from father, currently reunited, separated three years). Ultimately, although the dyadic interactions helped the separated children feel more connected to their parents, their biggest desire was to be reunited with their parent.

Similar to before the separation, during the separation at the *network level*, children would spend more time at their grandparents’ house and talk to friends who were in similar situations:

> Well, I have several friends that similar to my dad. Their dads go to the United States, but their dads do not stay there as long as mine. So, they tell me that I should value everything, each moment, that it's not nice being separated from your family. (1b, separated from father, currently separated, 14 years old, two years separated)

This separated child reported that having friends in similar situations made her feel closer to them because they looked out for her and frequented her so that she would not be alone. Similarly, other children noted that their friendships helped them cope with the void that their separated parent had left, "We would play and all that. We talked. They hugged me and they would tell me that all this would pass" (2b, 11-year-old son, separated from mother, currently separated two years). He mentioned that this would help distract him from thinking about the separation. It seems that friends may help the separated child feel less alone and help them view the separation in a positive light.

Retrospective Strategies

Retrospective strategies are relational maintenance behaviors enacted after the separation and may include intrapersonal, dyadic, and network interactions. The following sections discusses how separated parents maintained their relationship upon reunification.

Separated Parents. Ten separated parents (i.e., 50% of separated parents) had reunited with their families, and although reports of relational maintenance after reunification were sparse, separated parents reported primarily engaging in *dyadic retrospective relational maintenance*. To make up for lost time, the separated parents tried to engage in as many activities as possible with the separated child, "Yes, the communication is good. I think we communicate well. When she goes to school, I take her and pick her up" (17A, father, separated from 11-year-old daughter, separated less than a year). Furthermore, some parents

tried to avoid separation talk altogether, “We kind of don’t talk about that” (20A, separated father from 16-year-old son, currently reunited, separated two years); however, others shared stories about life in the United States:

> So that they know what it’s like to live there, so that they do not think that we just waste time and stay there. He sees that they have nice cars from over there. They think that we are just there sweeping money (16A, father, separated from 16-year-old son, currently reunited, two years separated).

Separated parents shared that they liked to tell stories of their time in the United States because they wanted their children to have a realistic idea of the United States. Separated parents wanted to make it clear that they were making a sacrifice by being apart and that they did not like the separation. Separated parents wanted the separated child(ren) to have a similar view of the separation as they did because this would help prevent feelings of resentment or abandonment.

Separated Children. Separated children who had been reunited (n = 10) also reported primarily resorting to *dyadic interactions* upon reunification. Overall, children reported being happy with the reunification, “I hugged him. I said ‘hi’. I cried of happiness, and I did not want to let him go. I was very happy because we were able to see each other again” (18b, 10-year-old son, separated from father, currently reunited, two years separated). However, one separated child stated, “Right now we don’t really spend time together because I had the accident, and he works. He’s hardly home. It’s kind of like if he was over there” (20b, 16-year-old son, separated from father two years). This separated child seemed indifferent about his father’s return perhaps because his reunification plans did not go as expected due to him being hospitalized after a car accident. He discussed that he was

previously looking forward to the reunification because he would be able to go out with his father and would have his father's support in everything. However, due to his injuries, this was no longer possible.

Overall, reunited families seemed to adjust to the new family structure fairly quickly and smoothly, "Now he is with me, and I am no longer sad. He takes me for a ride in his car" (16b, separated 11-year-old son from father, currently reunited, separated three years) and "The reunion has been good, very good. Now I am here relaxed with my family, with harmony, with calmness" (18a, separated father from 10-year-old son, currently reunited, separated two years). Another father shared the smooth transition with his daughter:

> She [daughter] assimilated to it fairly quick that I was her dad. She assimilated to it quickly and later she even showed me off to her friends, 'My dad arrived. My dad is back'. It was not difficult for her to accept me. (11a, separated father from 9-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated five years)

A potential reason as to why separated parents did not engage in many retrospective maintenance strategies about the separation could be because they found the topic too painful to discuss. Others might not have discussed the separation because they perceived it as a normal part of their family structure. Many of the participating families endured the separation on a yearly basis, so they were accustomed to the constant shift. Furthermore, cultural values might help explain the limited retrospective relational maintenance strategies found in the present study. A majority of the separated parents were men, who might adhere to traditional Latinx gender roles (e.g., machismo or caballerismo) and thus see it as their duty to do whatever it takes to help them family. In turn, the separation is a sacrifice that needs to occur for the wellbeing of the family, and no further explanation might be needed.

In sum, separated parents and children used different relational maintenance strategies throughout the different phases of the separation (i.e., before, during, after). Before the separation, most separated parents mainly engaged in intrapersonal maintenance strategies that consisted of ruminating on their upcoming journey and contemplating whether they were making the appropriate decision. During this time, separated children were often not aware of the separation; therefore, they engaged in limited relational maintenance strategies. During the separation, most separated parents continued to engage in intrapersonal strategies and would reminisce about past memories and imagine future interactions (e.g., hugging children). Introspectively, separated children would often compare their family situation with friends who had a united family. Separated children wished they could physically interact with their separated parent like their friends. Lastly, retrospective maintenance strategies were limited for both parties. When relational maintenance did occur, separated fathers shared what their life was like in the United States.

RQ3: Surrogate Caregivers' Role in the Separated Parent-Child Relationship

The last RQ explored how the surrogate caregivers facilitate or impede separated parents and separated children's relational maintenance. More specifically, this research question explored the various verbal and nonverbal behaviors that the surrogate caregiver engaged in to help the separated parent and/or child make sense of the separation (RQ3a) and behaviors that helped maintain the relationship (RQ3b). Overall, compared to the separated parents and children's reports of relational maintenance strategies, surrogate caregivers heavily engaged in various strategies at every stage of the separation with both the separated parent and the separated child. Perhaps the most instrumental role that the surrogate caregiver

played was at the *network level with the child* because they were usually in charge of informing the child of the separation and helping the child make sense of the separation.

RQ3a: Surrogate Caregiver's Role in Making Sense of the Separation

RQ3a explored the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that surrogate caregivers enacted to help separated parents and children make sense of the separation. For both the separated parent and the child, sensemaking with the surrogate caregiver occurred both prospectively prior to the separation and introspectively during the separation.

Surrogate Caregiver and Separated Parent Prospective Sensemaking. To help the separated parent make sense of the separation, some surrogate caregiver had conversations with the separated parent (often their spouse). During this time, some separated parents reported feeling uneasy and uncertain about the separation; therefore, sensemaking with the surrogate caregiver was crucial for the wellbeing of both the separated parent and the surrogate caregiver. For example, the following separated parent (i.e., father) and surrogate caregiver (i.e., mother) dyad shared their experience discussing the separation with each other:

> **Separated parent**: I'm going to be frank. We both started crying and I think we couldn't even sleep that night because we were thinking how we were going to do this. In fact, I didn't even have the money to go. It was difficult to make that decision, but with time we see that it was good to make that decision. It's difficult, but with time you see that it is worth it. (11a, separated father, separated from 9-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated five years)
>
> **Surrogate caregiver:** In the moment that I heard the phone ring and he started with 'the passport', I told myself 'He's leaving'. Sometimes it's difficult to say, 'I'm going

to stay alone with my children'…in that aspect it is difficult. What he would tell me is, 'It's only going to be 9 months. God willing, we will see each other soon.' (11c, surrogate caregiver to 9-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated five years)

In this situation, the separated parent and the surrogate caregiver each reported their own worries (e.g., money, childcare). However, despite only having four days to prepare for the separation, they were able to navigate the situation together. They discussed the challenges together and through each other's support they concluded that the separation was necessary and best for the family.

Although many of the families had a parent migrate to the United States, two of the separated children in the study lived in the United States, while their parent(s) lived in Mexico. In the following example, a separated parent discusses how the surrogate caregiver was instrumental in helping her make sense of her daughtering migrating alone to the United States to live with her aunt:

Separated parent: We had talked about it. In fact, more than anything it was her [surrogate caregiver; sister] who suggested it because my son was already over there. We talked about my daughter's desires to study, her career. We knew that it was only possible over there, and she told me, 'I know you are having a difficult time.' I do have a job, and I am working but a university career is expensive, and we don't qualify for scholarships. And she [surrogate caregiver; sister] told me, 'You are having a difficult time. Why don't you send your daughter? It's going to help me because I have my daughter here. She's growing up on her own, and they are close in age. They are basically sisters, neither of them would be alone. In that sense I said yes. It seemed like a good idea, and I meditated on it, and I talked about it with my

daughter. (8a, separated parent, separated from 13-year-old daughter who lives in the United States, currently separated for a year)

Surrogate caregiver: It was a benefit for me to bring her, a benefit in that I have a daughter who is the same age. My daughter needed some company. My daughter was always quiet or this and that. I didn't have much time for her because of work. Now that my niece is here it's different… because over there it's not as easy to study, in Mexico. Over there they must leave town to go to high school. But here it was good for the girl. That's why we planned it with my sister. We talked about it, and well it was for the best that she should come to school here and learn more English. (8C, surrogate caregiver to 13-year-old niece in the United States, currently separated for a year)

In this scenario, it is evident that the surrogate caregiver had an important role behind the separation decision. Both the separated parent and the surrogate caregiver had conversations to rationalize why it was for the best that the child join the aunt in the United States. In fact, the separated parent notes that it was the surrogate caregiver who brought up the idea. Here, the migration of the child helped serve various purposes which benefitted both the child (e.g., educational opportunities) and the surrogate caregiver (e.g., companion for her daughter).

Surrogate Caregiver and Separated Child Prospective Sensemaking. In addition to helping the separated parent make sense of the separation, the surrogate caregiver also helped the separated children make sense of the separation. Furthermore, given that the surrogate caregivers primarily shouldered the responsibility of informing the children about the separation, one major behavior that surrogate caregivers engaged in is the co-construction of a shared meaning of the separation:

> Daughter, your dad is going to leave. Now it is just going to be your brother, you, and me. You are going to have to help me. I know it is not your responsibility to help me with the baby. I know it is not your responsibility to help me because above all it is my responsibility, but if you help me, we are going to get ahead because your dad needs to leave. God willing in December he will come back, all well, we must push through. (11C, surrogate caregiver to 9-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated for five years).

The conversations between the surrogate caregiver and the separated child were particularly important because these two parties were going to confront the separation physically together. Because family roles were about to be reassigned and everyday life activities most likely needed to be adapted, it was critical for the surrogate caregiver and the separated child to discuss the upcoming changes. Moreover, given the young age of many of the separated children, they might have a difficult time understanding why their father would be leaving their family. Thus, the surrogate caregivers shouldered the responsibility of portraying the separation in a way that would not only make sense to the child but would also accurately represent the situation.

A separated daughter shared how her surrogate caregiver's interpretation of the separation influenced her own thoughts about the separation and her separated father.

> I still think that she is still not okay with him leaving. Because like she said he left us alone without knowing how we were going to be. It affected us a lot that he left far away and that it was all only for money. (10b, daughter, separated from father, currently separated, 10 years old, separated for a year)

As can be seen from this quote, the separated child reported that she believes she and her mom were abandoned by her father only for money based on what her mother said. Interestingly, when the mother was asked about her conversation with her daughter the mother responded with "I explained to her that he was leaving, so that she wouldn't need things, so that she would always have food, so that she wouldn't suffer" (10C, surrogate caregiver taking care of 10-year-old daughter, currently separated for a year). Furthermore, when we asked the separated parent if the surrogate caregiver had said anything negative to him or to his daughter about the separation he said:

> No, she has never made a comment like that. Like say things such as 'oh you left and left us' no not that type of comments. We were in agreement. She knows that that's why I'm here. (10a, separated father, separated from 10-year-old daughter currently separated for a year)

The discrepancies between this family triad are interesting because the child reported that the mother (i.e., surrogate caregiver) engages in negative talk about the separation and her father; however, the mother did not think she talked negatively about the separation and her husband. Furthermore, the father mentioned that both he and his wife had agreed to the separation, yet the mother noted that she was against the move and feels abandoned. Thus, the discrepancies reveal how individuals in the same family may have different interpretations of the separation.

Surrogate Caregiver and Separated Parent Introspective Sensemaking. During the separation, the separated parents disclosed that they had a challenging time adapting to a new lifestyle in the United States without their children and spouse. Thus, the surrogate caregiver also shouldered the responsibility of helping the separated parent make sense of the

separation during the time apart. When asked how they managed the separation together, a surrogate caregiver said:

> I think it was through talking, talking about the benefits of him being over there and us over here. I know that is a bit of a better life, that we were able to finish building our house, buy things that we needed or have savings for when he returns. (17c, surrogate caregiver to 11-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated less than a year)

A common theme across many couples in this study was that updates on the progress of the house they were building served as a tangible reminder of why they had to live apart. This and sharing other accomplishments (e.g., child's academic progress) were the primary ways that the surrogate caregiver helped the separated parent make sense of the separation.

Additionally, to help the separated parent stay connected to their native country, some surrogate caregivers would keep the separated parents up-to date with current news:

> We talk about his work, how work is going, how his roommate is doing, about my family, what we have done, how we are doing, and what I'm going to cook. He always asks what's new, it's a way to start the conversation. If something happened here. Something new, this and that. That so and so came back. That a girl left with her boyfriend, if they invited us to a wedding. Things that happen here. (14C, surrogate caregiver to 17 -year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated more than five years)

Another surrogate caregiver shared:

> We talk about whether he already ate. He also asks us how we are doing, if we are okay. Things like that, that might seem insignificant. The basic stuff. I don't' know only about things that we do during the day, how our day was. When the girl would

> go to school, he would ask about how it went, now that school is online, if she did her homework. (17c, surrogate caregiver to 11-year-old daughter, currently reunited, separated less than a year)

Overall, most surrogate caregivers aimed to make the separated parent feel good about their decision to immigrate, even though it was painful. Thus, when surrogate caregivers felt sad or lonely, they did not disclose this information to the separated parent. They did not want to contribute to the separated parent's stress of being far away from family.

Surrogate Caregiver and Separated Child Introspective Sensemaking. During the separation, almost all surrogate caregivers were in charge of helping the child continue to understand the separation:

> She talked to the boy. They were sad. I didn't tell him because I left at night. So, I couldn't say bye to him. I didn't tell him anything. I told his mom 'Go and tell him, when he wakes up talk to him about everything. I'll talk to him later on" (16a, separated parent from 11-year-old son, currently reunited, separated for three years).

To accomplish this, most surrogate caregiver discussed the benefits of the separation to the children:

> Yes, we do talk, but all I tell him is that it's for his own good. That by bringing him over here, it's for his own good, so that he has opportunities that we did not. So that one day if he gets married that he may live financially better and that he receives more opportunities that we would have wanted. (15c, surrogate caregiver to 14-year-old nephew in the United States, currently separated three years)

In this excerpt, a surrogate caregiver shared that he tries to emphasize the opportunities that will come because his nephew migrated to the United States. In this case, such

communication from the surrogate caregiver is critical because it might feel easy for the separated child to become unmotivated in a new country far away from his parents. Thus, the surrogate caregiver's communication efforts may help put their separation into perspective.

Overall, the caregiver helped the separated parent and separated child maintain a positive relationship. In the family that had been separated the longest, the separated child had no recollection of her mother because they had been separated for over a decade, but she mentioned that she knows her mother loves her because of what her grandmother (i.e., surrogate caregiver) tells her, "My grandmother told me 'She did love you it's just that we didn't have money that's why she left over there.' She told me and that's when I felt good knowing that my mom loves me" (3b, daughter, separated from mother, currently separated, 12 years old, separated more than five years).

RQ3b: Surrogate Caregivers' Network Relational Maintenance Behaviors

Research question 3b inquired about the behaviors that the surrogate caregiver enacted to help the separated parent and child maintain their relationship. Along with helping explain the purpose of the separation to the separated parent and the separated child, the surrogate caregiver also took the responsibility of helping the separated child and surrogate caregiver maintain their relationship. The surrogate caregivers maintained the relationship between the separated parent and the separated child by reassuring the child that the separation was worth it and placing the separated parent in a positive light, "I explained to her that he had to leave, so that she would not need things, so that she was not missing food, so that she would not suffer" (10C, caregiver to 10-year-old daughter, currently separated for a year). In addition to positively talking about the separated parent, the caregiver would also show pictures and videos of the separated parent to the separated child:

> Because the boy was young, he didn't know his dad. Over there, where I lived with my mom, there was a lot of men, many of my friends that I knew since we were kids and to all of them my boy would call them dad. He would ask 'and my dad?' younger than a year old. I would laugh but as he got older, I would tell him 'That's not your dad. Your dad is in the United States', and I would show him pictures on my cellphone because I would give him pictures of his dad and I would show them to him" (13c, caregiver to 10-year-old son, currently reunited, separated five years).

Furthermore, to help maintain the parent-child relationship, some surrogate caregivers would encourage the separated child to speak with their parent:

> He (separated parent) would always ask me about him. 'Tell him that I love him very much' because there were times when he didn't want to talk because he was playing. I would tell him 'Come and talk to him. Your dad misses you'. He would say 'I'll just go and tell him that I love him very much too' and he would get the courage and tell him 'Dad I love you very much but it's because I'm with my friends'. I would tell him that I felt bad because he didn't want to talk, but he would understand because he would tell me 'Let him be. Let him play. He already came and told me that he loves me very much'. (19c, caregiver to 13-year-old son, currently reunited, separated three years)

Surrogate caregivers engaged in numerous behaviors to facilitate parent-child relationships. These behaviors are critical for the parent-child relationship, particularly when the child is too young to remember the separated parent. As noted from the second example, the surrogate caregiver made a conscious effort to let the child know who his dad was by showing him pictures. Additionally, surrogate caregivers discussed the wellbeing of the

separated child to the separated parent, that way the parent felt included. As mentioned in the third example, sometimes caregivers would encourage the separated child to talk to the separated parent. The separated parent felt bad because the separated child did not want to talk; therefore, the surrogate caregiver attempted to justify the separation to the child (i.e., playing with friends). This sheds light on the importance that the surrogate caregivers play in helping maintain the separated parent-child relationship.

The surrogate caregiver also helped the separated parent feel better about living apart from their children. The separated parent noted the surrogate caregiver's relational maintenance efforts made her feel good because it showed that she cared:

> It makes me feel good because most of the conversations she has with me about my daughter are always positive. Because it's always 'that my daughter did this, that she did that. When I get home, she already prepared this' and it makes me feel good. In the same manner, when she tells me 'She didn't do this, she didn't do that' it makes me feel the same because I feel she is in good hands, because I know that to a child you must praise the accomplishments but also call their attention when something is not right. I like that part too because when I need her to tell my daughter some things, I know she tells her. I know she does it because she loves her; otherwise, she would let her do what she wants. (8a, mother, separated from 13-year-old daughter, separated for a year)

In this study, both the separated parent and the separated child reported feeling good or better because of the surrogate caregiver's efforts. In the above example, the separated mother felt better about her decision because the caregiver's actions reassured her that her child was in good care. Overall, the caregiver's actions toward the parent-child relationship helped both

the parent and the child feel not only better about themselves, but also about the separated parent.

The surrogate caregivers' relational maintenance underscores their invaluable role because both the separated parent and the separated child, particularly when they are young, depend on the surrogate caregiver as their only source of connection. Many of these families have limited resources meaning, that for example, children do not have their own cellphones and cannot readily, if at all, communicate with their separated parents. This also highlights the important role that the attitude of the caregiver towards the separation plays in relational maintenance. If they have a negative outlook towards the separation, they might not be as motivated to make extra efforts towards connecting the separated child and the separated parent.

The findings shed light on the different parities' perspective on separation; however, discrepancies also occurred within family triads. Particularly, most families who had older children (15 years and older) differed in their desires and actions. These separated children wished to become independent and disclosed less personal information to their surrogate caregiver. However, the surrogate caregivers reported wishing their children would tell them more about their life (e.g., boyfriends, girlfriends). Older children also had more agency in contacting, or not, their separated parent whereas younger children relied more on their parents. Older children also seemed to view the separation as necessary for the wellbeing of their family, whereas younger children simply wanted the affection of their separated parent. Lastly, children who experienced longer separations were accustomed to the family structure and often said that the separated parent would return when they saw fit. Younger children in shorter separations were essentially counting the days for their parents to return.

Discussion

Drawing from TRRL (Afifi et al., 2016) and Merolla's (2010) LDRMM, this paper systematically explored the role of relational maintenance and the various strategies that separated Latinx parents, separated Latinx children, and Latinx surrogate caregivers (i.e., triadic approach) utilized during the three stages of the separation (i.e., before, during, and after). Understanding the different desired relational states, identifying relational maintenance strategies applied at various points of the separation, and uncovering how surrogate caregivers shape separated parents and children's understanding of the separation and their relational maintenance are particularly important because of the already heightened stress that immigrant families are under when having to live apart from each other. To better understand the nuances of separation and relational maintenance among Latinx immigrant families, the following section takes a closer look at the findings and their theoretical and practical contributions.

RQ1: The Desired State of the Relationship

One of this study's main contributions is in uncovering the desired states of the relationship for each member of the family triad. Some desired relational states overlapped between parties, and others diverged. The desired relational state and the purpose of relational maintenance varied by the individual enacting the strategies, the recipient of the maintenance behaviors, and the stage of the separation. Separated parents generally wanted to keep the relationship how it was, no matter the current condition (i.e., negative, or positive state). However, most separated children reported either one of two desires: (1) to either leave the relationship in its current state out of respect for their parents or (2) to engage in maintenance behaviors to avoid abandonment from their separated parents. Lastly, almost all

surrogate caregivers shouldered the responsibility of helping maintain a positive separated parent-separated child relationship.

Unexpectedly, most separated parents reported not wanting their relationship with their children to change, regardless of whether they were in a satisfactory relationship or not. A plausible explanation for this might lie within a multiple goals perspective (Caughlin, 2010) and the consideration of cultural values. Multiple goals theory suggests that when individuals communicate, they may enact multiple goals simultaneously: (a) identity (i.e., motivation to create or maintain a desired image), relational (i.e., motivation to create or maintain a certain relationship), and instrumental (i.e., motivation to accomplish a certain task through the interaction). Given the context and reasons why separated parents immigrated to the United States, when they enact maintenance behaviors, they might be prioritizing certain goals. Their primary goal might be instrumental (i.e., provide financial support for their family in the home country). Furthermore, considering that a majority of separated parents were men, their cultural upbringings might motivate them to maintain a certain image of a strong masculine figure (Villegas et al. 2010; i.e., identity goal). Furthermore, through a western perspective, one might be inclined to believe that a relational goal would include be becoming closer to the child; however, for a Latinx father, providing basic needs to his family might mean that he is accomplishing his relational goal.

Another noteworthy contribution of this study is in revealing that most separated children who wanted to maintain the state of the relationship did so out of care for the separated parent. One possible explanation for this finding may be cultural values. Latinx children might adhere to *respeto* for their elders and might not want to inconvenience them by requesting more time or energy onto their relationship, “I agreed because we must always

respect our elders and obey them" (12b, separated 17-year-old son from mother, currently separated for four years). Respeto refers to the expectation that children should obey their elders, not defy authority figures, and know how to properly behave in a particular situation (Calzada, 2010; Gonzales-Ramos et al., 1998; Delgado-Gaitan,1994).

Other separated children wanted to improve the relationship, so their separated parent would not forget about them or abandon them. The desire to improve the relationship to avoid abandonment is in accordance with previous relational maintenance literature. By engaging in optimistic interactions (i.e., positivity; Stafford & Canary, 1991) and constant reassurances that they will maintain close contact (i.e., assurances; Stafford & Canary, 1991), separated children attempt to maintain or enhance the relationship.

The current study also provided insights into the surrogate caregivers' desires for the separated parent-separated child relationship. Overall, most surrogate caregivers wanted the separated parent-separated child relationship to be at optimal levels. As gatekeepers their goals and desires for the relationship may affect the separated parent-child relationship. These findings parallel with research on kinkeepers (i.e., family member who takes greater responsibility of keeping family members in contact; Leach & Braithwaite, 1996). According to di Leonardo (1987) the kinkeeper's activities include, "creation and maintenance of fictive kin ties and decisions to intensify or neglect ties" (p. 194). In other words, kinkeepers are the gatekeepers of family relationships; therefore, they have the power to prioritize certain relationships over others. In the current sample, most surrogate caregivers prioritized the separated parent-separated child relationship. For example, when the surrogate caregiver and the separated parent talked, the main topic of conversation was the wellbeing of the child. Often the surrogate caregiver sacrificed the limited time they had with their spouse (i.e.,

separated parent) to focus on their child, and not necessarily on their own relationship. The surrogate caregivers' behaviors might be explained by *marianismo*, which reflects expectations for women and includes self-sacrifice for the family, nurturing roles, and spiritual pillar of the family (Desouza et al., 2004; Niemann, 2004). Most of the surrogate caregivers were women (mothers, grandmothers, and aunts). Guided by these gender values, women are expected to give up their personal interests to serve their husband and children (Villegas et al., 2010).

In sum, when theorizing about desired relational states and relational maintenance among separated Latinx families, it is crucial to consider culture. Furthermore, another consideration that is worth noting is the upkeep of the surrogate caregiver and separated parent's relationship. According to TRRL, if these individuals do not consistently calibrate their relationship, the relationship will experience a downfall (i.e., relational load; Afifi et al., 2016). However, it seems that in this context, maintenance of this relationship is kept through communication about the child and not necessarily about one another. Again, this might be explained through a cultural value, familismo, which prioritizes family loyalty over individualism.

RQ2: Separated Parents' and Children's Temporal Maintenance Strategies

The current study is noteworthy because it contributes to our knowledge of enacted relational maintenance strategies across a timespan and the discrepancies among relational parties. Both separated parents and children differed in the primary relational maintenance strategy that they enacted throughout the separation period. Separated parents mainly resorted to intrapersonal strategies both before the separation and during the separation. However, for those that reunited with their family, they mainly relied on dyadic interactions

with both the surrogate caregiver and the child. A plausible explanation for their reliance on intrapersonal strategies might be due to protective reasons. Most of the separated parents reported that before the separation they were fearful of the journey, had doubts about their future success, and experienced guilt leaving their family. Thus, to prevent other family members from worrying, they might not have engaged in dyadic or network interaction relational maintenance strategies. Furthermore, gendered cultural values such as caballerismo which centers the man as chivalrous, emotional, and family-oriented individual (Arciniega et al., 2018), might deter separated fathers from expressing their emotions to the family members. In fact, many separated parents discussed the extreme hardships that that they had to endure in the United States all by themselves. They described feeling anxious, out of place, and lonely. Yet, they managed these emotions on their own. However, upon their return they are excited to be back with their family and thus engage in more dyadic interactions.

In addition to learning more about the separated parent's preferred maintenance strategies, this study also contributed to our understanding of the maintenance strategies enacted by separated children. Separated children's main strategies differed from their separated parent. Due to the limited or non-existent conversations before the separation, children were limited in their ability to engage in prospective relational maintenance because they were unaware of the upcoming family structure change. However, when they are given time to prepare, they may resort to network and dyadic strategies to help them make sense of the separation. Some confided in their grandparents for advice and for an explanation as to why their parent is leaving. Some children reported engaging in these network strategies because they felt betrayed by their parents' lack of communication with them.

Overall, these finding contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of relational maintenance strategies. Merolla's (2010) LDRMM holds that relational maintenance positively contribute to the wellbeing of the dyad. However, in this situation, the separated parent's introspective intrapersonal relational maintenance strategies may negatively affect their relationship with their child. Due to the separated parent's primary use of intrapersonal strategies, the separated child might feel neglected due to a lack of communication. Consequently, when theorizing about relational maintenance strategies, it might be important to use a combination of strategies and not only rely on one.

RQ3: Surrogate Caregivers' Role in the Separated Parent-Child Relationship

Another one of this study's contributions is the inclusion of the surrogate caregiver's perspective and their role in the maintenance of the separated parent-child relationship. As previously mentioned, Latinx women might feel obligated to keep the family in a harmonious state; thus, in this situation, they had to preserve multiple relationships, near and far. For example, to not overburden or cause the separated parent or child to worry, they avoided sharing concerns with them. Instead, they relied on their network to vent about the separation and ask for guidance. This is consistent with Buzzanell's (2010) argument that "the process of building and utilizing social capital is essential to resilience" (p.4). Interestingly, upon reunification, surrogate caregivers did not rely as much on their network. A potential reasoning for this might be that now that the separated parent had returned, they might have felt as if their obligation was at home with the family. Thus, this would imply attending to their immediate family's needs and making sure to resolve any family strains.

Another important contribution of the current study is its insights into how the surrogate caregiver facilitates or impedes communication between the separated parent and

child. Given that all separated parents migrated to the United States due to financial instability and in search for better opportunities for their family, many of these families had limited resources (e.g., cellphones, internet services). Both TRRL (Afifi et al., 2016) and LDRMM (Merolla, 2010) make relational maintenance claims based on the assumption that individuals will be able to readily maintain relationships on their own. However, in the case of separated Latinx families, children might depend on a third party to enable communication between them and their separated parent. Similar to research on divorced families, children depend on their parents for ongoing contact with the non-residential parent (Yarosh et al., 2018). If the child is too young or there are not enough resources, the children might not have a cellphone of their own, which was the case for many of the families in this study. Furthermore, if the children have their own cellphone, but have no means of making an income, they might rely on the surrogate caregiver to pay the phone bill. If the surrogate caregiver has a job of their own and is limited with their time, they might not be able to connect the child with the separated parent as frequently as the child or parent might desire. The surrogate caregiver might also dictate the modality of communicating with the separated parent (e.g., telephone call, text, videocall), which might not necessarily match the preference of the separated child or parent. Consequently, the surrogate caregiver plays a critical role in this situation because their interpretation of the separation might influence the communication efforts between the separated parent and child. As one caregiver said, "honestly, if I am being negative, I am going to transmit that to my grandson" (2C, surrogate caregiver to 11-year-old grandson, currently separated two years). Future studies would benefit from exploring the role of caregivers' narratives (e.g., hero vs villain) on the relational maintenance efforts on children.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the study provided numerous insights, this study is not without limitations. The triadic approach provided rich understanding of the maintenance preferences of each individual, but future studies would benefit from examining a live interaction between the family triad. This would highlight the discrepancies between individuals and would help uncover the effective and ineffective strategies among the family members. Additionally, the study's sample of caregivers mainly consisted of the other parent, which brought upon insights into the immediate family dynamics. However, future studies would benefit from studying separated families whose surrogate caregivers consist of extended family members (e.g., aunts/uncles, grandparents). Extended family members might influence children's perspective differently than their parents which might impact reunification efforts and children's perspectives on their parents differently.

Furthermore, this study looked at both families who are still separated and families who are now reunited but have an "on and off" nature to them. Many of the families who were reunified were in the on and off situation. Thus, the reunification findings might not be representative of the families that are not in these situations. For example, families in on and off situations reported that "it has always been like that" so they are accustomed to that family dynamic. In turn, this might make for a smoother reunification. However, for families who reunite but do not have a future separation planned, the transition period might be more difficult and consist of more adjustment time than compared to the families in this study.

Another limitation of this study is that although participants were from different Latin American countries (i.e., Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Guatemala), most families (80%) were Mexican, which meant that the findings could not be distinguish by country. Because Latinxs

are heterogenous, different cultural and parental norms exist within the Latinx population. Additionally, the migration journey for families from central America might come with additional stressors than compared to families that are closer to the United States' Border (e.g., Mexico). Although many of the outcomes (e.g., psychological distress) of separation are similar across Latin American countries, some differences may exist with respect to nationality. For example, compared to Mexican immigrants, Salvadorian immigrants endure a longer and more arduous immigration journey (Abrego, 2009). This requires a more expensive and riskier journey, as well as a lower probability of migrating with the entire family. Compared to Mexican families, Central American families are generally separated for longer periods of time (Suárez-Orozco, Bang et al., 2011). Furthermore, immigration laws are in place that make it easier for some Latinxs to immigrate over others (Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). For example, after one year of residence in the U.S., the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act (CAA) grants Cuban the right to apply for legal residence. However, for example, Dominicans and Haitians are not granted this. In addition to nationality, individual differences such as age might contribute to the differing experiences brought upon the separation of families. Thus, future studies might benefit from differentiating between Latin American countries.

An additional limitation to consider is the retrospective nature of the interviews. Because 10 families were already reunited, they had to retrospectively report the relational maintenance strategies enacted before and during the separation. For the families that were currently experiencing separation, they had to recount the pre-separation period. This is challenging because two families had been separated for more than five years. Particularly, young children might have difficulty accurately recalling what happened. Lastly, because this

study is descriptive in nature, it would be beneficial to create relational maintenance measures from the findings aimed for the various separated Latinx family members. This would help test the effectiveness of the relational maintenance strategies outlined in this study. In turn, the strategies might then form part of an intervention program for families in similar situations.

Practical Implications

Despite this study's limitations, its findings contribute to our understanding of the dynamic nature of relational maintenance strategies enacted by separated Latinx families. The strategies outlined in this paper might be particularly helpful for those families who frequently experience separation and reunification. Although families might report being accustomed to their family structure, these strategies might help them better overcome the stressors next time they are separated. Additionally, if their goal is to maintain a satisfactory relationship, these strategies might help them feel better equipped to accomplish that. For example, surrogate caregivers reported that they experienced the most challenges during the separation when they had to parent on their own. If separated parents would like to establish a satisfactory relationship with the surrogate caregiver, the recommendation would be to engage in introspective dyadic interaction with the caregiver and discuss their relationship, wellbeing, and to focus on each other. Similarly, separated parents reporting having a difficult time adapting to a foreign country while living apart from the family. Although most men in this study were reserved with their emotions, it might be beneficial for surrogate caregivers to partake in introspective assurances about the relationship. It might be beneficial for separated parents to hear that their loved ones miss and care for them. Furthermore, separated children might benefit from prospective dyadic relational maintenance with the

separated father. Many children reported that their surrogate caregiver was the one that informed them of the separation; however, it might make the child feel more included in the family if this information comes directly from the parent (i.e., openness; Stafford. & Canary, 1991).

A main contribution of this study is its triadic nature, which not only provides three different perspectives of the separation process, it also helps fill in gaps. For example, some children had a difficult time recollecting the pre-separation period either because they were too young or because they were not told about the separation beforehand. However, by talking to the surrogate caregiver and the separated parent, this helped shed light on the strategies used during those times. Additionally, another contribution to this study is the perspective of the fathers, who were mainly the separated parents. To date, it is challenging to obtain the perspective of Latinx men in research studies.

Furthermore, this study can also help shed light on differences within family triads. For example, families with older children often struggled to reciprocate each other's relational maintenance desires. Older children wished to be reserved and independent, whereas their surrogate caregiver expressed wanting to know more about their life. In turn, the surrogate caregiver assumed that their child was distancing themselves, yet, the children did not report enacting distance. However, it is important to note that despite the differences, most family members noted the benefits of the separation. Overall, these findings can help separated families be better equipped with the resources needed to navigate current and future separations.

Theoretical Contributions

This study's findings inform relational maintenance in the context of separated Latinx families. According to the assumption of TRRL (Afifi et al., 2016), routine relational maintenance behaviors will help develop emotional reserves which in turn will help build resilience under stressful conditions. This points to the importance of maintenance strategies enacted during the pre-separation period. The emotional reserves built up before the separation, might be critical for when the separation occurs because due to the geographical distance and structural barriers, these separated Latinx families might not be able to continuously upkeep daily relational maintenance behaviors. However, not many children had the opportunity to build these reserves before the separation because they were unaware of the situation. Thus, Merolla's (2010) temporal relational maintenance strategies helped uncover and inform the strategies used by the families while geographically separated. Moreover, past relational maintenance literature has focused on relational maintenance strategies being stagnant across time (Dainton, 2000). Yet, the current study demonstrated that relational maintenance behaviors can be dynamic both across the individual employing them, the recipient, and the temporal stage of the separation (i.e., prospective, introspective, retrospective).

Furthermore, as Merolla (2010) calls to action, "as relational maintenance research continues to mature, it is important to continually question if scholarship is sufficiently capturing partners' day-to-day relational maintenance experiences." (p. 169). Thus, this study goes beyond capturing partner's perspective on relational maintenance behaviors by uncovering what this process looks like for a triad undergoing geographical separation. Examining the differences and preferences of relational maintenance strategies among the

various members of the family triad might be more practically and informative than considering the strategies as stagnant across time.

CHAPTER 3:

THE CULTURAL NUANCES, STRUCTURAL BARRIERS, AND DYNAMIC NATURE OF COMMUNAL COPING FOR SEPARATED LATINX IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

The communal coping model (CCM; Afifi et al., 2006) and more recently, the extended theoretical model of communal coping (TMCC; Afifi et al., 2020) suggest that when faced with a stressor, dyads, groups, and communities can engage in communal coping by appraising the stressor as a shared problem and by taking joint responsibility to manage the stressor. What happens, though, when a group—in this case immediate family—experiences a significant stressor that physically separates immediate family members from each other and makes communal coping challenging for the family? This question is particularly relevant to low-income, Latinx immigrant families who experience separation because of stepwise migration. Faced with limited financial resources and educational opportunities, political turmoil, and threats to safety and wellbeing, some Latinx immigrant parents are forced to migrate to the United States, while leaving their child(ren) behind in their native country with a surrogate caregiver (e.g., the other parent or an extended family member), with the hopes of eventually bringing the remaining family members to the United States or returning to their native country (Hernandez, 2013; Roy & Yumiseva; 2021; Solheim & Ballard, 2016; Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012). Alternatively, children might migrate to the United States on their own to join a family member, while their parent(s) stays behind in their native country (Cardoso et al., 2019; Chavez et al., 2021; Menjívar & Perreira; 2021).

In both situations, separated parents and separated children often experience severe stress and trauma (Abrego, 2009; Solheim et al., 2016). For example, separated parents have reported feeling guilty and severe emotional pain from being unable to see and raise their own children (Dreby, 2006; Falicov, 2002; Gindling & Poggio, 2012; Li, 2016). In turn, immigration-related separations have been associated with poor parent-child relationship quality (Conway et al., 2020). Lehaie et al., (2009) found that compared to Mexican non-migrant households, Mexican households in which the primary caregiver migrates to the United States are more likely to have a child with academic, behaviors, and emotional problems. For separated parents who migrate to the United States, while leaving their child(ren) behind, separated parents have reported feeling pressured to work long hours to earn money to send back home for fear of being perceived as selfish by the surrogate caregiver and separated child (Orellana et al., 2001). Letiecq et al., (2014) found that among Mexican fathers, being separated from family and sending remittances were the top predictors of depression. Furthermore, separated parents experience more acculturative stress than nonseparated parents (Rusch & Reyes, 2012). Separated children also report resentment toward the separated parent, particularly when their parent engages in stepwise migration as opposed to being separated from deportation (Dreby, 2015).

With the severe stressors that Latinx immigrant families experience when separated, the present study explores how Separated Latinx parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers (e.g., the other parent or extended family member who primarily cares for the child while the separated parent is away) appraise the separation and its related stress, as well as the shared or individual actions they engage in to manage the separation. This study has the potential to make several significant theoretical contributions to the TMCC (Afifi et al.,

2020). First, in their most recent theorizing of communal coping, Afifi et al. (2020) called for more research that explores what communal coping looks like in different cultures and the conditions under which communal coping can be "more or less functional" for some cultures (p. 441). The present study pays close attention to Latinx immigrant families' cultural backgrounds and structural barriers (i.e., obstacles that disproportionally affect minoritized groups) as primary lenses for understanding stress appraisal—a main component of communal coping—and the joint or individual actions taken to manage the separation.

Second, prior applications of communal coping have focused mainly on individuals or dyads rather than family triads; however, Afifi et al. (2020) encouraged researchers to consider why some dyad or group members—when experiencing the same stressor—engage in communal coping, while other members do not. They urged researchers to consider the factors that contribute to such discrepancies in communal coping, pointing to power asymmetry as a potential explanation. The present study explores communal coping or individual forms of coping for the separated parent, separated child, and surrogate caregiver (all three perspectives), paying particular attention to the power asymmetry in the parent-child relationship, the cultural elements at play, and the larger social network (e.g., extended family members and friends) that are often highly influential in Latinx families.

Lastly, the present study considers communal coping and individual forms of coping from a dynamic lens, exploring the movement between these coping strategies prior to the separation, during the separation, and for some, following the separation (i.e., reunification). People, including separated Latinx immigrant families, can move between individual and communal forms of coping (Afifi et al., 2020), and the present study explores such patterns and factors that might prompt shifts in individual and communal coping. To extend past

theorizing on communal coping in the aforementioned ways, the current study draws from individual semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 separated Latinx immigrant parents, 20 separated Latinx children (ages 9-17 years of age), and 20 Latinx surrogate caregivers (20 total family triads). The findings from this study have the potential to provide theoretical richness by shedding light on important cultural, structural, and dynamic factors that affect communal coping and its functionality for separated Latinx immigrant families.

The Extended Theoretical Model of Communal Coping Applied to Family Separation

According to the Communal Coping Model (Afifi et al., 2006), communal coping occurs when dyad, group, or community members perceive a stressor as "our problem and our responsibility". People must perceive the stressor as a shared problem, as opposed to an individual problem, and people must jointly, as opposed to individually, act upon the stressor. Thus, communal coping has two dimensions: an appraisal dimension that refers to people's cognitive interpretation of the stressor as individually or jointly owned and an action dimension that refers to peoples' behaviors used to manage the stressor individually or jointly (Afifi et al., 2006, 2020). Specifically, TMCC (Afifi et al., 2020) emphasizes communication as the main mechanism behind the construction of communal coping.

To distinguish communal coping from individual coping and social support, Lyons et al., (1998) used the dimension of appraisal and action, forming four types of coping. Individual coping consists of a person appraising a stressor as their own and viewing it as their responsibility to manage that stressor (i.e., "my problem, my responsibility"). Social support was broken down into two types: (a) when individuals jointly appraise a stressor, but only the individual who is mainly affected by the stressor takes responsibility for it (i.e.,

individual help/support provision; “our problem, my responsibility”) and (b) when an individual seeks helps to navigate the stressor, but they view the problem as their own (i.e., help/support seeking; “my problem, our responsibility”). Lastly, communal coping includes shared ownership of the stressor and shared responsibility to navigate it (i.e., “our problem, our responsibility”). Lyons et al. (1998) outline these typologies of coping as four very clear and distinct categories; but, TMCC (Afifi et al., 2020) argues that communal coping is not stagnant but instead appraisal and action are two dimensions on a continuum. That is, shared appraisal and action towards a stressor may change depending on the circumstances.

Across the communal coping literature, scholars have found that people benefit from communal coping in the context of varying stressors ranging from having a family member with diabetes (Basinger, 2020) to post-divorce families (Afifi et al., 2006). As previously discussed, however, for communal coping to occur, individuals must appraise the stressor as shared and must actively act upon the stressor together. Thus, not all stressors are conducive to communal coping, and individuals might not always benefit from communal coping. For instance, Afifi et al. (2014) found that among survivors of a natural disaster, communal coping could be stressful when individuals did not have the resources to provide support or were too emotionally exhausted to receive support.

Other factors, such as severity of the stressor might also dictate whether communal coping is best used. Among couples in which one partner had type 2 diabetes, Basinger (2018) found that depending on couples’ perceived seriousness of the disease, individuals either engaged in communal coping or not. When relational quality is low and levels of trauma are high, communal coping might not be the best strategy to enact as it might emphasize the negative effects of uncertainty on mental health (Afifi et al., 2018). Another

characteristic of separated Latinx families which might contribute to their communal coping efforts is their interdependent orientation. Groups of people who tend to be more interdependent than independent, might be more likely to communally cope because they have the interest of others in mind (Wolf, 2015). Yet, some interdependent groups might avoid communal coping because they do not want to add stress to those around them (Kam et al., 2018). For separated Latinx families, surrogate caregivers might not inform the separated parent when the separated child is sick to not worry the separated parent who is thousands of miles apart. In short, although communal coping has been found to benefit individuals under stress, communal coping is not suited for every stressful situation. Given that separated Latinx families experience a wide range of stressors due to family separation, it is not clear when communal coping is beneficial to them or not.

How (and Why?) Might Latinx Families Appraise the Separation Individually or Jointly?

Exploring how separated Latinx parents, separated Latinx children, and surrogate Latinx caregivers cognitively interpret separation (i.e., the stressor) is crucial because consistencies and discrepancies in each party's appraisal can have profound effects on their communication with one another, including their individual or communal coping, as well as how each party feels about themselves, each other, and the separation. In addition to understanding how separated Latinx families appraise the separation, it is equally important to ask *why* each member of the triad appraises separation in a particular way? The TMCC (Afifi et al., 2020) identifies numerous factors (e.g., nature of the stressor, communication quality, relational quality, identification with others, culture, environment and social structures) that likely predict the extent to which people individually or communally cope,

and these factors likely apply to separated Latinx families. Nevertheless, among the many factors that can affect how people interpret a stressor, *culture* (i.e., "shared meanings, understandings, or referents held by a group of people"; Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 240) and *structural barriers* (i.e., "obstacles that collectively affect a group disproportionately and perpetuate or maintain stark disparities in outcomes"; Simms et al., 2015, p. 5) seem particularly important to consider when exploring separation among Latinx families who are of extremely low socio-economic status.

Familismo. Latinx communities are often associated with the cultural value of f*amilismo*, which emphasizes family interdependence, loyalty, support, and reciprocity toward family members (Sabogal et al., 1987). Because familismo implies close family ties and shared activities (Behnke et al., 2008; Calzada et al., 2013), the migration of a family member might simultaneously concern and affect several family members. Thus, family members might navigate the stressor of being separated as a collective. However, due to the interdependence of the family, family members might also decide to cope separately to avoid burdening others. For example, Kam et al.'s (2018) study found that some undocumented Mexican adolescents resort to communal coping to help mitigate the stressors of being undocumented. Yet, some family members avoided communal coping to protect adolescents from the stress. Thus, in the context, of separated Latinx families, the separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers might all be cognitively affected by the separation but might have different perceptions for co-owning the stressor. Separated parents and young separated children might both be impacted by the separated parent's departure; but, the separated parent might not expect the young child to take responsibility for the separation. Thus, the separated parent might not engage in communal coping with the

separated child. By contrast, the separated parent and the surrogate caregiver might both appraise the stressor as a collective stressor and take equal ownership of it.

Familismo in separated Latinx families might also mean that family members have different expectations of those involved in the appraisal of the separation. Due to the connectedness of all the family members, when one family member departs, the family system is disrupted. Thus, there might be expectations that everyone helps fill the void of the family member who left. For example, in following traditional heteronormative gender roles, older sons might be expected to become the "men of the house" while older daughters might be expected to help with their younger siblings. Nevertheless, the children might not necessarily want to take on these roles because although they are cognitively affected by the departure of the family member, they might not take ownership for the stressor. This might be the case especially because children of separated families have reported that they need the physical presence of their parents, and money is not everything (Dreby, 2015). Furthermore, if children have resentment towards their parent for leaving, children might not confide in the separated parent to cope together. Consequently, the child might resort to individual coping. Another possibility is because the surrogate caregiver might simultaneously oversee the different relationships (Schapiro et al., 2013), the surrogate caregiver might view it as their responsibility to keep the family united. Thus, the surrogate caregiver might want to make the separation as seamless as possible and might resort to communal coping for the household to run the same.

In short, on the one hand, the absence of a loved one might create an irreplaceable void in the family system, given the family's interconnectedness (Schapiro et al., 2013). On the other hand, extended family is often highly involved; thus, extended family members

might communally work together to fill that void (e.g., help the child cope with the separation of a parent). The extended family network might also help the parent cope by normalizing the process of leaving a child behind with extended family (Hernandez, 2013). TMCC suggests that through active engagement with the stressor, communal coping may strengthen their resilience (i.e., positive adaption in the face of adversity; Afifi, 2016; Luthar, 2003). This process may be particularly relevant to separated Latinx families who adhere to familismo.

Respeto. Respeto is another important cultural value for Latinxs (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994), which might influence the appraisal of the separation. *Respeto* refers to the expectation that children should obey their elders, not defy authority figures, and know how to properly behave in a particular situation (Calzada, 2010; Gonzales-Ramos et al., 1998; Delgado-Gaitan,1994). Closely tied to familismo, respeto highlights the importance of immediate and extended family members in Latinx families (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012). Consequently, respeto might have implications for family separation because it implies that children should assume that the parent knows what is best for the family, which may lead separated children to appraise the separation as a shared stressor. Separated children might be more likely to engage in communal coping when adhering to the cultural value of respeto. Furthermore, children might feel obligated to co-own the stressor because separated parents give them responsibilities before departing (i.e., care of younger siblings, take care of surrogate caregiver, care for farm animals). From the separated parents' perspective, they might have certain expectations for their children to obey them even from afar; therefore, separated parents might have expectations for their children to engage in communal coping with the surrogate caregiver. That is, separated parents might expect children to take

responsibility for the stressor together because they should help their elders (e.g., surrogate caregivers).

Gender expectations. Although gender identity is not binary, some Latinx immigrant families might adhere to traditional binary gender roles for men and women, which can affect how Latinx immigrant families appraise the separation. *Machismo*—a gender value that may be salient among some Latinx immigrant families—refers to the expectation that men enact dominance, bravery, and strength; reserve their emotions, and serve as head of the household (Villegas et al. 2010; Niemann, 2004; Mayo, 1997). Applied to the separation of Latinx immigrant families, Dreby (2006) found that when separated Mexican fathers were unable to fulfill the role of family provider by sending money back home, they distanced themselves from their separated child. Yet, this pattern was not found for mothers. For these separated Mexican fathers, a lack of financial resources might have prevented them from fulfilling their role as fathers; however, a lack of financial resources did not discourage mothers from communicating with their separated child because the expectation for mothers was not to be the primary financial providers. Instead, heteronormative Latinx families who adhere to machismo expected Latina mothers to nurture the family, which mothers could do by maintaining communication with the separated child. In terms of appraising the separation, machismo might play a role in who takes ownership of the stressor. If the father ascribes to the traditional gender norms, he is expected to reserve his emotions and be the head of the household; thus, he might take sole responsibility for the stressor. In turn, he might not engage in communal coping; however, limited research has been conducted to explore this possibility. It is important to note that machismo is often associated with unhealthy behaviors (e.g., aggression, hypermasculinity), however; research has also pointed to the role of

caballerismo (i.e., male chivalry, emotional connectedness, and strong familial ties' Arciniega et al., 2018) in Latinx families. Whereas machismo might be perceived as unhealthy, caballerismo might help highlight the father's sacrifice in a positive light, because he does this for the wellbeing of his family.

In addition to ascribing expectations for men, machismo also is associated with certain expectations for how women should behave (e.g., comply with men's dominance, be the family pillar, adopt a housewife role, maintain family harmony; Ingoldsby, 1991). The woman counterpart of machismo is *marianismo*, which reflects expectations for women and includes self-sacrifice for the family, nurturing roles, and spiritual pillar of the family (Desouza et al., 2004; Niemann, 2004). Guided by these gender values, women are expected to give up their personal interests to serve their husband and children (Villegas et al., 2010). These Latinx cultural values permeate the family dynamics, guide family role expectations, and have been adapted as socially acceptable norms by many Latinx families (Nuñez et al., 2016). Given that a mother and a father are expected to serve different purposes in a heteronormative family that adheres to traditional binary gender roles, a separated child might interpret the departure of the father drastically different compared to if the mother were to migrate. That is, if a father migrates, then the separated child might be more accepting of the separation and thus be more likely to take ownership of the stressor with the caregiver. On the other hand, if the mother migrates, they might perceive the mother to be abandoning her motherly role and might be less inclined to communally cope as they might not take ownership of the stressor. Instead, they might blame the mother and decide to cope individually. Given the nurturing role that the mothers might portray, it might be more common for mothers or female caregivers to be both affected by the stressor and to also take

ownership of the separation. They might see it as their obligation to take ownership of the stressors associated with being separated because they must nurture the relationships around them.

Machismo, caballerismo, and marianismo might help explain why several studies (e.g., Dreby 2015; Shapiro et al., 2013) found that children felt more betrayed or abandoned when their mother immigrated without them as opposed to their fathers. Even in heteronormative families where both mothers and fathers migrate and leave the child with extended family members in their native country, children still may place more blame on the mother as opposed to the father (Parrenas, 2001). Mothers are often seen as saintly home-centered figure (e.g., serve as family pillar, maintain harmony; Nuñez et al., 2016) who should always nourish their family (DeSouza et al., 2004), however; a mother's departure might be perceived as neglecting her obligations. In sum, cultural values may shape how Latinx families appraise separation and the extent to which they adopt a communal orientation, which in turn, can affect the extent to which they engage in individual or joint actions to manage the separation.

Structural Barriers. In addition to cultural values, environmental and social factors might also foster or impede communal coping for separated Latinx families. For instance, proximity and the larger environmental surroundings might make it more challenging for some families to engage in communal coping than others (Afifi et al., 2020). Families who live closer to each other might be able to rely on one another more readily than those families who are geographically further away. This is exacerbated when transportation, telephone landlines, internet, or cellphones are not readily available for families. Orellana et al. (2001) gave an early example of how separated Latinx immigrant families who could financially

afford email and video technologies benefitted from these services because it allowed for increased communication. Francisco (2015) argued that digital technology (e.g., Facebook, Skype) offered the opportunity for intimacy among Filipino separated families. The use of cellphones among Filipina mothers and their separated children helped reconfigure the parent-child relationship because it made voice communication more prominent among separated families (Madianou & Miller, 2011).

Despite technology's ability to help separated Latinx immigrant families maintain connection, technological resources are not available and affordable to all separated Latinx immigrant families (Orellana et al., 2001). Because of the lack of technological resources and other amenities (e.g., transportation, access to healthcare), separation of a family member might affect some separated Latinx families more so than others. The missing resources and the environmental surroundings mean family members might be inclined to co-own the stressor because they are all experiencing the lack of resources. Due to limited resources, separated Latinx families might pool together their resources to better navigate the separation. For instance, the surrogate caregiver might not know how to drive; thus, when a separated child becomes ill, another family member might step in and provide transportation services.

Given that one of the main reasons as to why families immigrate to a new country is severe financial instability, the family members that reside in the native country might not have access to the Internet. According to Martinez-Dominguez and Mora-Rivera (2020), internet usage in Mexico is low, especially in rural parts of Mexico. Unsurprisingly, their findings showed that households with higher educational levels and social-economic status were more likely to use the Internet. Among their other results, they found that women and

younger people are more likely to have internet access. In the United States, 65% of Latinx adults reported using home broadband compared to 80% of white adults (Pew Center, 2016). Access to reliable internet might not be readily available for Latinx immigrants; therefore, routine, and constant communication for some transnational families might not be feasible, thereby inhibiting the ability for the separated parent to communally cope with the separated child and surrogate caregiver. These communication services might seem like luxuries when their basic survival needs are not being met (e.g., rent money, food, running water). In sum, cultural values and social structures may shape the extent to which Latinx immigrant families can engage in communal coping when separated; hence, the following research questions was developed:

RQ1: How do separated Latinx immigrant parents, separated Latinx children, and surrogate Latinx caregivers appraise separation stress from a coping perspective?

RQ2: What factors contribute to separated Latinx immigrant parents, separated Latinx children, and surrogate Latinx caregivers individually or communally coping?

Stress Appraisals and Coping Pre-Separation, During Separation, or Following Separation

The appraisal and coping strategies for separated Latinx families might change depending on the phase of the separation and reunification process. Different resources and factors come into play during the different phases of the separation; therefore, the separated parent, separated child, and surrogate caregiver might behave differently depending on the circumstances. Past research (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011) has found that with time the negative effects of separation (e.g., depression, anxiety) decreased.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argue that an individual's evaluation of a situation will determine their emotional and behavioral response. Regarding separated children who have reported fewer negative effects, this might mean that they re-evaluate the situation as less stressful. They might feel better equipped to deal with the separation or might have become accustomed to it. Consequently, their appraisal of the separation and their needs to cope as a group or individually might vary and change throughout the separation, and if applicable, reunification process.

Depending on the stage of the separation and given the various changing factors, separated Latinx families' appraisal and coping behaviors might be different pre-separation, during separation, and after the separation. Before the separation, young, separated children might not understand the need for the separation and might appraise the separation as their parents' responsibility. However, as they grow older and obtain jobs, they might value the sacrifice that the separated parent made (Artico, 2003) and reappraise the separation as a shared stressor. Furthermore, coping strategies might also change. For example, before the separation, the separated parent might rely heavily on their spouse for support and might not even inform the child of the separation. Thus, the separated child might not engage in any coping behaviors before the separation. Upon separation, the separated child might rely heavily on their surrogate caregiver for support. As time passes, the child might become more independent, adapt to the separation, and in turn, might no longer engage in communal coping as frequently, if at all. Furthermore, before and after the separation, all family members are geographically together, but during the separation family members are apart from each other. Separated Latinx families might rearrange their family roles and support provision, and they might rely more heavily on for example, the surrogate caregiver, over the

separated parent. Additionally, because a family member is physically apart, the way in which other family members communally coped with that person will change. In short, stress appraisal and coping might change depending on the stage of the separation, and as such, the following research question was developed:

RQ3: How does coping (individually or communally) look different, if at all, pre-separation, during separation, and if applicable, following separation?

The Functionality of Communal Coping for Separated Latinx families

The TMCC (Afifi et al., 2020) suggests that various predicators, moderators, and mediators impact the effectiveness and functionality of communal coping. Specifically, TMCC proposes that these factors affect communal coping: (1) nature of the stressor, (2) communication quality, (3) relational quality, (4) identification with others, (5) culture, and (6) environment and social structures. Furthermore, TMCC frames these factors in relationship to how they might affect resilience and thriving (i.e., surpassing previous level of functioning; Carver, 1998). TMCC focuses on the concepts of resilience and thriving because they address wellbeing and potential for growth (i.e., personal, relational, community).

The six factors outlined in TMCC may contribute to the extent, if at all, families engage in communal coping. The nature of the stressor includes taking into consideration the type of stressor, severity, length, perceived control over the stressor, and stigmatization. For separated Latinx families, length, perceived control, and stigmatization might be of particular importance. For example, Smith et al. (2004) found that among Caribbean children who had been separated from their parents for longer periods of time had more challenging parent-child relationships. Thus, this might make communal coping more difficult to enact. In the context of separated Latinx families, stigmatization might also play an important role,

especially when considering the gender of the parent that migrates. A Latinx family might perceive it appropriate for the father to migrate for the sake of the family; however; if the mother were to migrate this might be stigmatized as she might be perceived as abandoning her motherly role. Separation from mothers have been associated with more negative physiological outcomes (e.g., Dreby, 2007).

Communication quality, relational quality, and identification with others might also play a role in whether separated Latinx families engage in communal coping. The communication norms of a family such as openness might affect communal coping because it might be more difficult for some family members to share their thoughts on the separation. Furthermore, some family members might feel more silenced than others. Relational quality such as closeness and connectedness might lend itself more for a communal coping approach. If separated Latinx family members perceive themselves to be united, they might be more likely to work together (Kam et al., 2017). Similarly, TMCC states that those who more closely identify with others might be more likely to engage in communal coping. As previously discussed, perhaps most applicable in the context of separated Latinx families, is taking into consideration how Latinx cultural values and environmental and social structures encourage, or discourage, communal coping. As previously explained, the way in which Latinx immigrant families appraise their separation may depend on certain cultural values (e.g., familismo, respeto, machismo, marianismo). In addition to cultural values, environmental and social factors might also foster or impede a communal coping approach for separated Latinx families (i.e., internet access, transportation availability, proximity of family members).

TMCC (Afifi et al., 2020) proposes that resilience may culminate in thriving, which may be identified through five dimensions (Feeney & Collins, 2015): hedonic wellbeing (i.e., subjective well-being), (2) eudaimonic wellbeing (i.e., meaningful life goals), (3) psychological wellbeing (i.e., positive self-regard), (4) social wellbeing (i.e., deep human connections), and (5) physical wellbeing (i.e., good health status). In the context of separated Latinx families, remittances might afford individuals to have more than just their basic needs met (e.g., clothes, healthier food, trips), which might contribute to hedonic well-being. Being separated from a family member might also serve as an opportunity for personal growth for all those involved. For example, the child might learn new responsibilities by helping the caregiver and acquiring skills that promote independence while the separated parent learns to navigate a new culture and environment (i.e., eudaimonic thriving). During the separation, caregivers might be proud of themselves for being able to manage a household as single parents (i.e., psychological thriving). Being separated from one family member might mean that individuals might engage in meaningful relationships with others (e.g., social thriving). Lastly, the economic benefits that remittances bring might allow families to seek proper healthcare and take better care of their physical wellbeing (e.g., healthier foods). In sum, taking a communal coping approach may be critical to the overall wellbeing of all the separated Latinx family members. Consequently, this study asks the following research question:

RQ4: What is the functionality of communal coping and support provision, in general, for separated Latinx immigrant families?

Methods

Data Collection

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study in Winter 2021, recruitment and data collection began. All recruitment materials were made available in Spanish and English and distributed widely to different university email listservs, nonprofit organizations that work with Latinx communities, social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook), and to social networks. To participate in the study, participants must have identified as Latinx and either currently separated for at least 6 months or currently reunited. The separated child must have been between the ages of 9 and 17 and participation of all three family members (i.e., separated parent, separated child, surrogate caregiver) was required.

Interested participants contacted the author via email, text message, or phone call. Once an adult (i.e., surrogate caregiver or separated parent) contacted the author for more information, if they were still interested in the study, they would inform the other adult and separated child about the study. If they agreed to participate, the author would then schedule three individual semi-structured interviews.

Participants were mainly located outside the United Stated (e.g., Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Colombia); therefore, to facilitate communication, the research team used WhatsApp (i.e., low-cost messaging and voice social media platform). Most participants already used WhatsApp as their primary method of communicating with their separated family members. In the case that international participants did not have access to WhatsApp, direct international calling was used. Separated parents and surrogate caregivers completed an online demographic survey.

When the interview was initiated, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their rights as participants. They were reassured that their family members who

were also participating in the study would not be informed of how they each responded to the interview. with their permission, the interviews were recorded. Each interview ranged from one to two and a half hours. Although interview materials were available in both English and Spanish, all 60 participants preferred Spanish. Each participant was compensated $75 USD (i.e., $225 USD per family). Except for one family, all families were paid via money transfers.

Participants

A total of 20 Latinx family triads (i.e., 20 separated Latinx parents, 20 separated Latinx children, and 20 surrogate Latinx caregivers) independently participated in semi-structured telephone interviews. The separated parent and surrogate caregiver also each completed a 10-15-minute demographic survey. Of the 20 Latinx family triads, 10 of them were currently reunited and 10 were currently separated. By the end of the study, one family that had been reunited became separated.

The currently separated families were from Mexico (n = 6), Peru (n = 2), Guatemala (n = 1), and Colombia (n = 1). Regarding the children of the currently separated families, four children were boys and six were girls. The average age of currently separated parents was 42.5 years (SD = 7.52), 13.90 (SD = 2.42) for separated children, and 44.60 years (SD = 15.32) for surrogate caregivers. Regarding education level of the parents currently separated, five had completed up to secondary school (7^{th}-9^{th} grade), 3 had completed elementary school (k-6^{th}), one completed high school (10^{th}-12^{th} grade), and one had a graduate degree. Among the surrogate caregivers, four had finished up to elementary school, three completed up to secondary school, two completed up to high school, and one had not gone to school. Among the 10 currently separated children, eight lived with a caregiver in their native

country, while the parent(s) lived in the United States. Two children lived in the United States with their caregiver, while their parent(s) lived in Mexico. One child was separated from their mother, three children from their fathers, and six children were separated from both parents. Three separated children were taken care of by their grandmother, three by their other parent (mother), two by an uncle, one by an aunt, and one by their sister. Three families had been separated for two years, two families had been separated for one year, two families separated for four years, one family for three years, one family for five years, and one family for more than five years. Five separated parents reported keeping in touch with their child every day, four reported a few times a week, and one reported once a week.

Among the 10 reunited families, all of them were from Mexico. Similar to the sample of currently separated families, the sample of reunited families included four boys and six girls who participated in the study. The average age of currently reunited parents was 42.9 years (*SD* = 9.06), 12.60 (*SD* = 3.02) for reunited children, and 39.56 (*SD* = 10.01) for surrogate caregivers. Five of the children were boys and five were girls. All 10 reunited children had been separated from their father, who had migrated to the United Stated, while they stayed with their mothers (i.e., surrogate caregiver). Regarding education level, seven of the parents had completed up to primary school (kindergarden-6th grade) and the other three had completed up to secondary school (7th-9th grade). Seven of the caregivers had completed up to secondary school, one had completed up to primary school, one had completed up to high school, and one had no formal schooling. Three families have been separated for two years, two families had been separated for more than five years, two families had been separated for five years, two families had been separated for three years, and one family for less than a year. Four parents reported keeping in touch every day with their child while they

lived apart, three reported contacting the child a few times a week, two reported contacting the child once a week, and one reported a few times a month.

Interview Preparation

The interview protocols were developed with the main components of TMCC in mind. TMCC highlights the constructs of appraisal, action, and various factors that contribute to the functionality of communal coping (e.g., culture, environmental structures). These theoretical concepts coupled together with previous separation and reunification literature helped outline the interview guides. Given the nature of semi-structured interviews, the interviewers were prepared for the emergence of natural discussions around family separation to occur.

To tailor the interview guide for the participants, a separate guide was created for each relationship role (i.e., separated parent, separated child, surrogate caregiver), Additionally, to accurately reflect everyone's experience, those interview guides were each modified to reflect the specific separation scenario (i.e., child stayed in home country while parent(s) migrate to the United Stated, child migrated to the United Stated while parents stayed in home country). Thus, a total of six different interview guides were created. Scholars with expertise in communal coping and Latinx bilingual research assistants who had familiarity with this immigration topic provided feedback on the protocols. The interview guides were modified to implement their feedback. Lastly, all documents (i.e., consent forms, surveys, interview protocols) were translated to Spanish and checked for accuracy.

After all documents were finalized, the research assistants were rigorously trained over a period of several weeks. Each week, the research assistants were assigned an interview guide and were asked to practice with a friend or family member. They practiced in both

English and Spanish and audio recorded each practice interview which ranged from one to two hours. The research assistants were instructed to write a memo after their practice interview to discuss their strengths, areas of improvements, questions, confusing questions, and feedback. The research assistants were also asked to listen back to their practice interviews and identify strengths and areas for improvement. During weekly meetings, the author listened to all the practice interviews and provided feedback to all research assistants. Discussions were held about how to rephrase questions, how to probe, and how to navigate difficult topics. Because separation and reunification could be incredibly difficult to talk about, research assistants were trained on how to respond to distressed participants. For example, if an adult participant began to cry, the research assistant would validate their feelings, ask them if they would like to take a break, after the break they research assistant would ask the participant if they would like to stop the interview and reassure them that there was no penalty. If they continued the interview, they were reassured that they could stop at any point and that there was no obligation to continue. Additionally, research assistants could provide counseling information depending on the country the participants lived in (e.g., Mexico- Sistema Nacional de Apoyo Psicologico e intervencion en Crisis por Telefono (SAPTEL).

After the research assistants finished their training session, data collection began. During data collection, weekly meetings were still held to go over emerging themes, discuss challenges and solutions. This allowed research assistants to share effective and ineffective interview strategies with each other. After data collection, all audio recording were then transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The interviews were analyzed using Tracy's (2019) and Strauss and Corbin's (1990) recommendations of firsthand coding, secondhand coding, and axial coding. First, the author engaged in first-level coding, meaning that there were no restrictions in coding the interviews. Here, the author coded different emerging themes related to communal coping, social support, relational quality, communication quality, cultural values, social and environmental structures. Codes were then consolidated into related themes (i.e., second-level coding). A third pass of coding was conducted, and subcategories were collapsed enough for the emerging themes to be representative of the phenomenon being explained (i.e., axial coding).

To ensure validity and trustworthiness of the interview data, the author followed qualitative scholars' recommendations. As per Creswell and Creswell's (2018) recommendations, a qualitative codebook with emerging theses was established to help maximize consistency among codes. Furthermore, to increase coherence among the data and obtain a more holistic understanding of the separation and reunification process, data was collected from three different perspectives (i.e., data triangulation; Suter, 2009). Additionally, to allow others to see the relationship between code interpretation and the data, the author included exemplars of each theme with rich descriptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Suter, 2009). Member checking includes obtaining feedback from informants (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and although participants did not provide feedback, it is important to note that the author, who coded the interviews, experienced separation from both of her parents while being taken care of by her grandmother in her home country of Mexico. Lastly, audibility (i.e., transcript verification to match audio recorded interview; Suter, 2019) of the

data was ensured by having at least two different people check the accuracy of the interview transcripts.

Findings

RQ1: Appraisal of the Separation

RQ1 inquired about how separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers appraise the separation stress. TMCC contends that appraisal is made up of two factors: (a) cognitively impacted by the stressor and (b) collective ownership of the stressor. The data showed that separated Latinx family members differed in the way that they appraised the stressor of being of separated. Specifically, family members differed in their perception of co-owing the stressor. Although all family members seemed to be affected by the stressor in various ways, they did not all perceive the separation to be their problem. Despite all family members being affected by the separation and helping each other out, not everyone took ownership of the stressor.

Separated Parent's Appraisal

Based on the separated parents' responses, it seemed that many separated parents and surrogate caregivers jointly owned the separation stress. Most of the separated parents (mostly fathers) initiated the separation because they felt it was the only way to improve their financial situation and provide for the family. Despite initiating the separation, many of the fathers seemed to perceive the separation as co-owned with the surrogate caregiver who often was a spouse (65% of the surrogate caregivers). This appraisal might be rooted in fathers' adherence to traditional Latinx cultural elements such as familismo, respeto, caballerismo, and machismo, with the separation affecting the entire family unit, and thus co-owned, but

initiated by the father as the head of the household. For example, one separated parent explicitly discussed the partnership that he had with his wife, the surrogate caregiver:

> Since we made the decision to get married, we knew that she had the responsibility with the children, and I did too. We had an equal responsibility, same responsibility to look over them, and she knew that I wasn't leaving only because I wanted to abandon them. I only wanted to make some money to live a better life. (19a, separated father, separated from son, currently reunited)

In this example, the family was aware that the separation was done with their best interest in mind, so it was a collaborative effort. From the start, the separated parent and the surrogate caregiver had a shared understanding that they would undergo stressful situations together.

Another separated parent shared how he and the surrogate caregiver collectively navigated issues, utilizing a large amount of "we" language:

> [Our relationship] was good. It continues to be good. Like everything, sometimes there are disagreements like in every couple. But we always talk about it. We solve the problem. We have always communicated. We have communication. (10a, separated father from daughter, currently reunited)

In addition, another separated father shared how he and his wife jointly agreed on the separation:

> It was a conversation we had been having since we started to build our house. I told her 'You know staying here, we are not going to accomplish finishing the house. The solution is going to be me leaving you guys alone for some time,' and she'd say, 'As long as it's for the best, may God illuminate and accompany you and us. Do not worry. We are here. Push through to surpass this, to get accustomed to it.' We were

there talking about this for a while. (14a, separated father from daughter, currently reunited)

Having a mutual conversation and agreement about the separation seemed to be critical for some separated parents:

> At first, she did not want it, but later after I explained things to her, and I told her that this was the only way we were going to make it and be able to pay the pile of bills. And she started to understand. She saw that I tried here, and the money was just not enough. That's when I explained things to her, and she told me it was fine, that if I had decided that she would support me…when she told me that she agreed and she supports me, I felt better…I felt that I had more support, and I felt so much better. (13a, separated father from son, currently reunited)

Similarly, another parent noted, "When I tell her that I'm coming over here [United States] she supports me she tells me to go, that she will take care of our daughter during the time that I'm over here" (17a, separated father from daughter, currently reunited). Both separated parents expressed their spouses support which included co-owning the stressor and agreeing to navigate it together.

Although several separated parents perceived the separation as a joint and collaborative effort, other separated parents perceived the shared responsibility as an inherent understanding. They did not find it necessary to explicitly discuss the shared responsibilities. Instead, separated parents assumed that the surrogate caregivers would share the responsibility:

> I suddenly made the decision to go over. I told her (spouse; surrogate caregiver) 'You know I'm going to go to the United Stated, and you are going to stay with the boy

> because we are not going to make it here. I told her that she was going to stay with him, and she was like, 'Yes, that's fine' (18a, separated father, separated from son, currently separated)

Again, in this example the separated parent expected the surrogate caregiver to help throughout the separation. Although, he did not ask her for her perspective, and this approach might seem less collaborative, he appraised the stressor as jointly owned. He perceived the stressor to inherently co-owned and assumed that he would financially contribute, while his wife co-owned the stressor by taking care of their child. This separated parent also appraised the separation as a shared stressor with extended family members:

> I talked to her [daughter's] mom. In fact, I also talked to her aunts, her grandma. More than anything that they support her, 'It's fine, don't worry, we will take care of her'. One leaves a bit calmer because you know that you leave her in good hands. You know you leave her with her mom, same with her aunts. They have always looked after her. (11A, separated father, separated from daughter, currently reunited)

Here, the separated parent relied on extended family members to help him and his spouse (i.e., surrogate caregiver) navigate some of the stressors related to his absence. This was a common theme across separated parents because they viewed the separation as a collective effort to improve quality of life. Whether the separated parent decided to migrate with or without their spouse's input, they assumed that they would navigate the stressor together.

In the aforementioned quotes, the separated parent, mostly fathers, discussed with the surrogate caregiver (their spouse) why it was beneficial to the family to have seek better employment and financial opportunities in the United States; separated parents most often initiated the separation. Nevertheless, according to many of the separated fathers, the

surrogate caregiver supported the decision and played an important role in their relational partnership to care for their child(ren), while the father lived in the United States. Separated mothers reported similar behaviors, although often, they were initially faced with more backlash about their decision than compared to men. However, surrogate caregivers (non-spouses) came to terms with their decision and agreed to look after their child(ren). Lastly, given that the separation affected the entire family unit, it seems that fathers viewed the separation as family owned, with the father's responsibility being to make more money in the United States to provide for the family and the surrogate caregiver's (mostly, the mother, but sometimes a grandmother or aunt) responsibility to care for the children.

The assumption that immediate and extended family members would without a doubt cooperate with the separated parent's decision to migrate might be explained through the lens of various cultural values. *Familismo* places a strong focus on family interdependence and loyalty (Calzada et a., 2013). As one separated parent phrased it, "I received the support of all of them. We are a united family When someone takes a decision, everyone supports them. If it's a 'yes' then everyone agrees, and if it's a 'no' then everyone agrees" (18a, separated father from son, currently reunited). In essence, this parent is stating that either everyone or no one agrees with a decision, but regardless it is a collective effort. The surrogate caregiver for this family (i.e., spouse) shared that her family also cared for the separated parent:

> My mom worried a lot for my husband. She was always worried about his wellbeing. She always asked me how he was doing if he was okay. Yes, my mom would always be praying for his wellbeing. (18c, surrogate caregiver to son, currently reunited)

This family was strongly united with immediate and extended family members, however; one participant did share that he was not close to his extended family members:

> I don't get along with my siblings, I don't get along with my siblings because they do not love me. We don't have one of those relationships, why am I going to lie to you, I'll tell you the truth instead. We don't get along with the family, we are isolated from the family. (1a, separated from daughter, currently separated)

However, he emphasized the importance of his wife: "My wife is the best. If I didn't have her, I would have nothing. Everything is good from that side." (1a)

Additional cultural values might also help explain the separated parents' perceived shared stressors associated with being separated. *Machismo, caballerismo* and *marianismo* both provide insights for gender expectations and their respective family roles. Machismo or caballerismo might explain why some separated parents, particularly fathers, do not feel the need to discuss their separation plans with their spouses. Instead, they assume that the women will respect their decision and not question their choices. As the surrogate caregiver from the participant from the above example said:

> I'm sad about the decision, but what can I do? When the idea of leaving pops up in their [separated parent] heads, I can't do anything. We can't prevent that. Even if I say we'll find a way to make ends meet, once they decide to leave, they don't stay. (1c, surrogate caregiver to daughter, currently reunited)

However, not all surrogate caregivers agreed with the decision:

> It was his decision because I did not agree for him to leave. I did not want to stay alone with the boy. He decided it. I was never in agreement with him. But he decided to leave, and he left. (18c, surrogate caregiver to son, currently reunited)

Although she was not in agreement with the decision, she felt that there was nothing she could do but accept the separation. Furthermore, marianismo highlights the nurturing,

motherly role of the wife, which might indicate why most surrogate caregivers were naturally inclined to look after the children without question. Many traditional Latinx families may be socialized with these gender norms from a young age; therefore, certain actions might seem normal and expected.

Separated Children's Appraisal

Separated children had various perspectives on the separation. In general, separated children did not explicitly state whether they viewed the separation as their problem to navigate; however, several of them discussed their views on whether they deemed the separation as necessary or not. For example, because some separated children worried about their parents' absence and felt a void in their life, they did not think the separation was necessary or worth it. A separated child who had no recollection of her mother stated, "Well, honestly I do not think it was necessary…because she should have stayed with me, looked for a job, made money and not live in another country. She would be with me right now" (3b, separated daughter, separated from mother, currently separated). Another separated child stated, "No [the separation was not necessary], because without him we can't go out. Now the family is not the same" (10b, separated daughter, separated from father, currently separated), and another stated, "No [the separation was not necessary], because we were good together" (17b, separated daughter, separated from father, currently separated). In these situations, it seems that the separated children blamed their parent for the separation, which might indicate that the children viewed the separation as their parent's problem, not the child's.

Other separated children were cognizant of their family's circumstances and felt that the separation was necessary because their family was financially strained. For example, a separated child shared:

> I feel that yes [it was necessary] because right now in these moments there is no jobs here and over there. He had a good job. Thank God he is okay. I feel that yes it was necessary, even though it hurts, but yes, I feel it was correct. (14b, separated daughter from father, currently reunited)

Furthermore, another separated child noted how he did not see justification for the separation, but that his parents must know what they were doing, "I thought they were good, but only they know their things, if they owed money to people or family members" (20b, separated son from father, currently reunited). Another separated son said, "Yes, I was in agreement with the separation because we must always respect our elders and obey them" (12b, separated from mother, currently separated). Although these separated children might not have agreed with the separation, they thought it was for the best. Their appraisal of the separation might be rooted in the cultural value, *respeto.* Respeto emphasizes respect for authoritative figures such as parents and elders, assuming that they know what is best for the family. Consequently, some separated children might not perceive to have agency over the separation.

Overall, separated children were cognitively affected by their parent's absence. Although some negatively appraised the separation, they believed it was best for the family to remain united even if that meant they would struggle. They believed that the economic advantage brought upon by the migration was not a sufficient justification for the time spent apart. By contrast, there were other separated children who appraised the situation as

beneficial because they believed that the opportunities (e.g., education, food, toys) brought upon by the financial assistance were worth the separation.

Surrogate Caregiver's Appraisal

Surrogate caregivers were strongly affected by the departure of the separated parent, particularly for those 13 surrogate caregivers whose spouse was the one to migrate to the United States. They were all cognitively affected by the separation, "I would be sad. I would sometimes cry" (10c, surrogate caregiver to daughter, currently separated). A surrogate caregiver discussed how the separation had affected her mental health:

> "More than anything I think it affected me emotionally because sometimes I felt like I was failing as a mother, that I'm not doing things right, that that's why she [daughter] doesn't want to share things with me' (11c)

In this situation, the surrogate caregiver (i.e., mother) negatively appraised the separation because it impacted her mental health, and in turn, she felt her relationship with her daughtered suffered. In fact, a main concern for surrogate caregivers was parenting on their own because they felt they would no longer have the parenting support of the separated parent:

> Without a doubt it has been difficult, even though it is not me who has to provide the financial resources, but it is difficult to act both as a father and mother. Sometimes I don't know if I'm holding on too much, if I'm letting go to much, if I'm exaggerating with something. All that causes an emotional disequilibrium. I feel that it affects me, my children, and their dad because he comes, and he doesn't know how to treat them. (14c)

Here, the surrogate caregiver expressed the difficulties of parenting without the separated parent. She mentioned that she must take on both parental roles and discussed the repercussions this had for the separated parent. Clearly, the entire family is cognitively affected by the absence. Still, most surrogate caregivers did not feel that they co-owned the stressor together with the separated parent, "Yes, I felt very sad, very alone, unsupported, with fear" (16c). This was a common theme across surrogate caregivers, especially when it came to parenting, "staying alone and having the responsibility to take care of the children alone, if they got sick, I would be here alone or what if something happened to me" (16c). Another surrogate caregiver expressed how the conversations are one-sided, "I think it's a bit emotional because he [separated parent] never shares with me anything, never tells me anything. He only asks and I respond, and that's the conversation" (17c).

In sum, surrogate caregivers emphasized the effect that the separation had on their mental health. In addition to worrying about parenting their children on their own, they also worried about the wellbeing of the separated parent. They shouldered much of the responsibility of managing the separation (e.g., children, managing finances, caring for crops, managing relationships) on their own. They felt they had double the responsibility, and although the separated parents provided money, some surrogate caregivers felt they were mainly navigating the separation on their own. One surrogate caregiver shared that she contemplated divorcing her husband because of how challenging it was to navigate the separation:

> I feel like wanting to throw in the towel and 'I'm not going to live with you. I'm leaving.' Like every person who is tired of living the way I did during those three years. 'What am I doing here now? I'm leaving.' (13c).

Another surrogate caregiver discussed having resentment towards the separated parent for the separation:

> The most difficult thing is the absence. I'm left with some resentments. That I remember, I don't think the girls remember, or maybe only one time did they spend Father's Day with him. Very few years that he spent children's day [Mexican Holiday] with them. Even if I don't want to feel that way. In some moments I do feel distance between him and us. Sometimes even a little loss of respect for him. (14c)

Surrogate caregiver 17C expressed how difficult it was to see the benefits of the separation when she felt so alone:

> There are times when I do feel like no [there's nothing good about the separation]. When I have a problem over here and I need something, and he is over there, and I can't do this alone. That's when I get anxious and I say no, no there's no point of him being over there and me over here alone and I can't solve things. There have been situations when yes, I've felt like there's nothing good in him being over there. (17c)

In sum, most surrogate caregivers feared being alone during the separation because they would have to shoulder all the parenting responsibilities on their own. Yet, most separated parents did not have that same fear because they assumed they jointly shared the problem with the surrogate caregiver. However, it is important to note that not all surrogate caregivers felt alone. Only a few of them discussed how the separation was for best, and they believed that together with the separated parent they would be able to navigate the separation if they each contributed.

RQ2: Individual or Communal Coping

The second research question inquired about how stress appraisal is associated with how separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers individually or communal cope with the separation. TMCC contends that communal coping consists of both appraisal and joint action, that is "our problem, our responsibility". Because not all family members appraised the separation as a co-owned stressor, not all family members engaged in communal coping.

Separated Parents

Separated parents mainly shared that being separated from their family members was incredibly difficult and challenging and that their primary stressor was the wellbeing of their children. Despite the challenges associated with living in a new country with new cultural norms and being separated from family, some separated parents discussed how they managed the separation together with the surrogate caregiver, but only regarding parenting:

> Yes, I felt more united because knowing that my wife was giving it her all, and she knew that I was giving it my all, we are in a union, we maintain ourselves more united. We were aware of how she and my son were doing in Mexico. She was aware of how I was doing in that country [United Stated]. (19a, separated father, separated from son, currently reunited)

In this instance, the separated parent described how the separation was managed jointly. He felt that they were both united because they were equally contributing to the challenges of being separated. However, the surrogate caregiver shared that being alone and the conversations with her husband (i.e., separated parent) would make her feel stressed:

> I would tell him [separated parent], 'Look, it's because the boy asks me a lot that why is it that the fathers of his friends don't leave but his does'…. [those conversations

> make me feel] stressed. I'd sometimes feel very stressed. I would say. 'Oh, my God, help me'. I was stressed with my little boy. I had to be alone taking care of him' (19c).

Another separated parent stated that he felt united with his wife, "All the time ma'am [I feel united]. How am I going to feel separated? I am united with her" (1a, separated father, separated from daughter, currently separated). This separated father expressed his gratitude towards his wife for helping fill the void he left for his daughter. His spouse (i.e., surrogate caregiver) felt that the decision was outside her control, yet she understood that it was for the best. Thus, she contributed as much as she could, "the husband's responsibility is to help the family move along and the mom's responsibility is to stay with the kids, mutually helping each other" (1c). Lastly, another separated parent discussed the dual effort to parent:

> She always tried to give them what was best and cater to them. I try to give them as much as I can, and she also tries to give them what's best for them, teach them to study and support them in whatever they need. (13a, separated father, separated from son, currently reunited).

In sum, according to some separated parents, they jointly managed the stressors associated with parenting while separated with their spouse (i.e., surrogate caregiver). The main concern was co-parenting, and they expressed being satisfied with the surrogate caregiver's care for the child. Several separated parents mentioned that they and their spouse were a team and that they each contributed with their best efforts. The separated parents discussed that they each knew their responsibilities and acted accordingly, "It's in our actions. Now, we don't really have many problems. I don't fight with my wife. She [surrogate caregiver] talks well about me, and I talk well about her mom when I talk to her" (17a, separated father from

daughter, currently reunited). However, separated parents engaged in communal coping to care for the child but resorted to individually coping to manage their emotional distress concerning being alone in a new country. The difference in coping will be further explicated in the finding for RQ3.

Separated Children

Separated children reported both communally coping with their surrogate caregivers and extended family members and individually coping to help them navigate the stressors associated with being separated. Surrogate caregivers played a pivotal role in helping children make sense of the separation and navigating its challenges. One separated child stated,

> She [surrogate caregiver; grandmother] always encourages me. She never discourages me. My grandmas always tells me that my mom will always be with me. That she is my mom and that she loves me very much…uh no [I don't feel uncomfortable asking her anything] we simply have a lot of trust. (6b, separated daughter, separated from mother, currently separated)

In this case, because the surrogate caregiver (i.e., grandmother) made the child feel more comfortable, had a close relationship with the child, and maintained strength, she felt comfortable confiding in her grandmother. However, this was not always the case as some separated children reported not feeling comfortable talking to their mother, "I don't know, because I don't really trust my mom and with my dad. I get embarrassed talking to him" (20b, separated son, separated from father, currently reunited). This separated child reported not having a close relationship with his parents and being closed off. He did not communally

cope with either parent; however, this separated child mentioned that he needed his father, and he missed the relationship they had.

For some separated children, communal coping was inhibited by limited parent-child relational closeness, yet other separated children reported that they felt it was best not to disclose their feelings with their parent(s) because they did not want to be a burden:

> I try not to demonstrate that it hurts me, so that my dad doesn't feel bad. So that my mom and my dad can see that I am trying and so that they would be okay. (14b, separated daughter, separated from father, currently reunited)

Here, this child appeared to individually cope in an effort to protect her parents. Similarly, another separated child stated:

> Sometimes she [separated parent] would tell me that she felt sad because she had left us, but I never told her that I also felt sad...because I didn't want her to worry over there [United Stated]. (12b, separated son, separated from mother, currently separated)

In sum, although surrogate caregivers and separated parents could be of great help to the children, some separated children did not want to add more stress for them. Separated children seemed to recognize the toll that living apart took on their parents, so they felt it was best to keep their feelings to themselves to protect their parent and surrogate caregiver. Furthermore, as participant 12b mentioned, he did not want his separated mother to worry in the United States. This was a common sentiment shared among separated children because they worried about their separated parent being alone in an unknown country, which led separated children to individually cope with some of the separation stress.

Surrogate Caregivers

Surrogate caregivers shouldered many of the responsibilities during the separation, from parenting on their own to managing the relationship between the separated child and the separated parent. Surrogate caregivers relied on the separated children, on the separated parent, and on their social network to cope with the separation. Despite that, as discussed in the first research question, surrogate caregivers often felt alone and not supported by the separated parent.

Despite most surrogate caregivers feeling as if they shouldered most of the responsibility on their own, there were a few surrogate caregivers who discussed working as a team. Earlier, it was mentioned that separated parent 1A viewed the separation as a joint effort. Similarly, his spouse (i.e., surrogate caregiver) stated:

> We have high and lows like every marriage, but at least the problems and the decisions we make we share them between the two of us. And right now, that we are separated, he takes care of the finances and me over here I make sure they [children] are good, that they are on the right path, that they behave, that they don't need anything, that they don't get sick. (1c)

In this case, both the surrogate caregiver and the separated parent felt supported by each other and relied on each other to feel better. Although in this situation the surrogate caregiver communally coped with the separated parent by each of them fulfilling distinct responsibilities, the surrogate caregiver often also relied on their social network including extended family members for support during the separation. The following surrogate caregiver described the important role that her own mother played in helping her navigate the separation:

> I spend all day over there with my mom. The children the same. They were raised over there with my mom. That's their form of helping me. They help me a lot with them. If I need to go out or something, the children stay there with my parents…they too were really sad when he [separated parent] told them that he had to leave…like I've said he's the one that would take us out to places when we needed (11c, surrogate caregiver to daughter, currently reunited)

Surrogate caregiver 11c reported the influential role that her own mother played during the separation. The surrogate caregiver described that her parents were sad about the separation because they cared for her husband and relied on him a lot. An important note to consider is that before the separated parent departed to the United States, he went to talk to his mother-in-law about looking after his family. In this situation, it seems that the mother-in-law perceived to co-own the stressor and thus helped the surrogate caregiver navigate the separation together.

Despite communally coping with the mother, the surrogate caregiver also reported resorting to individual coping, "Sometimes I vent, but I vent to myself. I cry and stuff like that, but on my own…Sometimes, I try not to be with them or go to the bathroom and cry" (11c). Like some of the separated children, this surrogate caregiver did not want to worry anyone else, so she would keep her feelings to herself and would hide in the bathroom to cry. Another surrogate caregiver discussed that when she was a child, her father also used to migrate to the United States and she would take care of her younger siblings, so she was used to managing on her own:

> Yes, [because I took care of my siblings when I was young it was easier to care for my daughter on my own] I was already accustomed. My mom had two little kids, a

> year apart, my mom would take one and I always looked after the other one as if I was the mom. (9c, surrogate caregiver to daughter, currently reunited)

Another surrogate caregiver shared that there have been many occasions when she felt alone during the separation and share one of the most difficult times she had to navigate:

> There have been several difficult times. For example, when my oldest daughter was four years old, she fell off some cows that my father-in-law owned, and she broke her arm. I felt like it was late. I didn't have money, and my world came crashing down. I didn't know where to go. My brother-in-law took me to the hospital, and I was alone there. It was December and it was cold, and I only had a thin blouse on…I felt very alone. My daughter was little, it was nighttime, and I was alone. 'Oh my God, how am I going to get back?' Yes, there's been a lot of experiences where I have felt alone. That was one of the most difficult ones. (14c, surrogate caregiver to daughter, currently reunited)

The situation in this case helps highlight the role of structural barriers in impeding individuals from effectively coping. In this scenario the surrogate caregiver describes how lost and confused she felt because she felt alone during a very stressful and emotional time. Furthermore, her lack of transportation made her feel isolated and contributed to her stress. She discussed how in addition to worrying about her daughter's health, she worried about her safety and wondered how she was going to return home (one-hour ride). Several surrogate caregivers discussed how they were able to navigate other parental issues (e.g., homework help, inculcate values) on their own; however, with situations like this, even individual coping would be difficult to enact. In fact, multiple surrogate caregivers discussed that their

biggest fear was their child getting sick because many of them did not have transportation, and the hospitals were far away.

In sum, because surrogate caregivers had many stressors to manage simultaneously, they often relied on several individuals for assistance. A few surrogate caregivers felt that they jointly managed the separation with the separated parent. Nevertheless, surrogate caregivers mainly felt that although separated parents provided economic relief, the parenting role was still their responsibility. They relied on their extended family for support, but at times despite their assistance, some surrogate caregivers still felt alone and resorted to individual coping.

RQ3: Temporal Changes in Coping

The third research question investigated how, if at all, the appraisal and coping (individually or communally) process differed during pre-separation, separation, and if applicable, following the separation. In general, as time passed by individuals were able to appraise the separation as less stressful and were able to better adapt to the changes. Furthermore, both separated parents and separated children seemed to shift their coping (i.e., individual or communally) while surrogate caregivers mainly coped the same way throughout the process.

Separated Parents

Primarily, those separated parents who adopted different coping strategies did so from individual coping pre-separation to communal coping during the separation, but only in terms of coping related to parenting. This is to say that most separated parents individually coped with their emotional distress throughout the separation; however, when it came to parenting stressors during the separation, they would communally cope with the surrogate caregiver.

Before the separation, most separated parents coped with the stressors of the upcoming separation on their own. The reason behind this was because separated parents usually made the decision on their own, and they did not want to involve other family members because they did not want to worry them. For example, one separated father stated:

> Everything was spontaneous. I didn't think of anything. I told myself, "I'm going to tell them in that moment that I leave because I'm not going to be in anguish about what I'm going to tell them. No, instead give me your blessing, so that God can accompany me. I'll see you later" (#14A, father, separated from daughter, currently reunited).

Similarly, when asked if she felt comfortable talking about the separation to others, a separated parent said:

> Far from comfortable because it's the first time I talk about this. Because when she [daughter] left, I simply stayed alone. I went inside my house, and I assimilated to it on my own. Maybe there was no one to ask me or if someone asked me 'How did you feel when she left?' I would change the conversation because I didn't like to touch that topic. To me, that topic was too painful. It's the first time I talk about this topic because it was something very difficult. (8A, separated mother from daughter, daughter lives in the United States with aunt, currently separated).

In this situation, the separated parent avoided talking about the separation with others because it was too painful for her to discuss with others. In fact, she stated that the interview was the first time she discussed the separation with anyone. Thus, before the separation and during the separation, this separated parent individually coped because she felt that talking to anyone about it would induce overwhelming negative emotions. Similarly, another separated

parent continued to cope with their emotional distress on their own prior to and during the separation:

> Day in day out, I would motivate myself. Sometimes I felt bad but still I would motivate myself. At work when the date to return was approaching, I knew I would be able to be with my children again. I would tell myself that with each day that passed I was a day closer to being with them. Yes, I would motivate myself on my own. (13a, separated father from son, currently reunited)

As a protective mechanism, most separated parents preferred not to share their feelings or not to share their challenges associated with the separation. They knew that their family members already worried about them, so they did not want to contribute to the stress. Although most separated parents continued to individually cope with their feelings, they did communally cope with their surrogate caregiver regarding their child. One of the stressors to being separated is managing the relationship with the separated child. Thus, the separated parent relied heavily on the surrogate caregiver to achieve this goal. For example, a separated father said:

> When I would call her, we would talk about the kids, how they were, how they were doing, or if they got sick or something, we would talk about the kids, how they were doing in school, what they were up to and everything. (16a, separated from son, currently reunited)

Similarly, another separated parent described how he and the surrogate caregiver would coparent:

> Usually, we talk about him. [We discuss] examples of adolescents living an unorganized adolescence, and we give him examples of exemplar adolescents who

> have good conduct…we teach him the difference between good and bad conduct and that's what we try to give him as examples…we understand that he needs that as an adolescent (19a, separated father from son, currently reunited)

Although most separated parents struggled with the separation, they did not communally cope with the surrogate caregiver about issues concerning their wellbeing and the distressing nature of the separation. For example, one separated father (#16A), who communally coped with his wife regarding parenting, discussed how difficult the separation was to him:

> Yes, I miss them immensely. Sometimes I can't handle it. There are horrible moments where I get anxious. Especially when I am at home and there's no work or that it rains or something, that I stay at home, that's when the nostalgia hits when I am just there thinking and thinking. (Separated from son, currently reunited)

This separated parent echoed the sentiments of many separated parents who discussed the heart-wrenching moments of loneliness without their family. However, when asked how he would manage the stressors of being separated, this separated father responded with:

> Yes, one feels frustrated, like sad, like emotional, like nostalgia, with fear. We feel everything but because we are men, we are tough. We have a hard heart, and we give ourselves courage.

Clearly, this separated father shared that the separation was not easy and that he struggled emotionally; however, because he is a man, he felt he had to cope with his emotions on his own.

This pattern of expressing hardships and strong emotions, yet not expressing them to loved ones was a common theme across separated fathers both before the separation and during the

separation. Another separated father shared, “I just gave them a big hug so that they wouldn’t cry. They feel that we [men] don’t feel anything. But we do…. I cheered myself up as if I didn’t feel anything” (5a, separated father from son, currently separated). This separated father expressed wanting to cry when saying goodbye, yet he could not show those emotions to his family. The concealment of emotions among men might be explained through cultural gendered expectations. As one caregiver expressed when asked what advice she would give other families in similar situations:

> Well that they provide mutual support because it is very difficult to be separated. The responsibility of the husband is to provide for the family and the mom’s responsibility is to stay with the children. And only if they support each other in this way is that they can get ahead and having the trust in one another because this is difficult. (1c, surrogate caregiver to daughter, currently separated)

The surrogate caregiver expressed how there should be communal coping with one another, yet she differentiated the roles of each parent depending on their gender. In the examples, the separated parents and the surrogate caregiver both allude to gender norms and the expectations associated with each norm. Separated fathers might feel they should refrain from coping with the surrogate caregiver regarding their emotional state of being because it is their obligation to do whatever it is necessary to get their family ahead, “When I say goodbye to them, I feel like my soul leaves me. But then when you are two hours into the journey, you say ‘It’s for my family that I have to cross that dumb border’” (5A, separated father from son, currently separated).

Separated Children.

Separated children exemplified a small shift in their appraisal and coping, primarily becoming more adjusted to the situation as time passed. As discussed earlier, the majority of separated children did not mention any claims of ownership for the stressor, thus they were limited in their communal coping behaviors. Before the separation, most separated children did not have sufficient time to process the separation, with a few children not finding out about their parent's departure until the parent had already left. However, during the separation, children shifted their perspective of the separation and coped with it in various ways. As children became older, they began to think of the separation as needed, so they could have better opportunities:

> I did think about it [why father couldn't stay and work in home country], and my mom (i.e., surrogate caregiver) told me that many opportunities would come up and that here in Mexico we do not have a stable salary. And with what they do pay it does not go well. He (father) looked for better opportunities for his family, and she made me understand things…honestly, she made me come to reason and I understood things, but it still hurt. (14b, daughter, separated from father, mother as caregiver)

In this case, as time passed, the separated child could make better sense of the separation, although still painful. This could be due to a variety of reasons, such as the belief that their parents knew what was best for them (i.e., cultural value of respeto). It is also possible that as children came to recognize some of the benefits to the separation, they felt they did not need to cope with others because the separation became less painful:

> Yes, they [conversations with parents] make me feel better. Just my worries, but with time I forget about all that and I don't worry. I do worry about them, but not as much as at the beginning that I would worry about anything…I became accustomed to

> being apart from them. It was like three months that I felt strange, in a different country, far from them. In those three months I became accustomed each day more. I feel better now because I now know everything here. I know various places in this state where I now live. (15b, separated son, living in the United States with uncle)

In this situation, the separated child mentioned that he felt more comfortable in the new location because he was better acquainted with his surroundings. Thus, it makes sense that he might rely less on others.

Furthermore, some separated children reported initially closing themselves off and wanting to be alone but reported opening up to their surrogate caregiver as time passed:

> Yes, the relationship changes. Before, like I said, I was not very united with my mom. The separation made me more united with my mom, to have much more trust in her…compared to before when I distanced myself. A lot has changed because now I feel like we have more communication (14b, separated daughter separated from father, currently reunited)

As seen here, this separate child seemed to individually cope in the beginning of the separation; however, as the child began to communicate more with her mother and trust her mother, they became more united in their coping.

Not all separated children, however, felt comfortable disclosing to their family members. One separated child who was taken care of by his sister reported the transition in their relationship, “Before I would see her (surrogate caregiver) as a sister. Now I see her almost as my mom too” (12b, separated from mother, currently separated). Interestingly, although his relationship with her changed, he kept his feelings to himself, “with no one. I keep my sadness to myself”.

Moreover, for almost half of the participating families, the separations were a yearly or biyearly occurrence; therefore, they were accustomed to the constant separations that their family endured.

> Well, this last time, I was already accustomed to my dad leaving. And I almost didn't feel anything. Well, I only felt worried and sadness, but I was accustomed to my dad coming and telling us that he was leaving. (5b, separated son from father, currently separated).

In these cases where separation was common and frequent, the separated children did not report much appraisal change. Because the separations were common and normalized, some separated children might not have felt the need to communally cope. For some, the separation had been occurring since before they were born; therefore, it was the only family structure they knew, "I think that since I was little, he would leave. I think that since I was little, honestly, I am not sure [how long he has been migrating to the United Stated]" (14b, separated daughter from father, currently reunited). In this case, the separation was normal to her, that she did not remember when it was not like that. Nonetheless, some separated children wanted support from their surrogate caregiver, although they did not want to burden them, "My mom is better now in respect to that [the separation], and I wouldn't want to open up that wound and make her feel bad again" (10b, separated daughter from father, currently separated). Similarly, a separated daughter said, "And I try not to demonstrate that it hurts, so that my dad doesn't feel bad" (14b separated from father, currently reunited) and "Um no cause my friends, I haven't told them because I start crying" (6b, separated daughter from mother, currently separated). In these examples, children avoided talking their surrogate

caregiver, separated parent, and friends, respectively, to avoid a painful interaction. Thus, it seems that most separated children individually coped rather than communally coped.

Surrogate Caregivers.

Surrogate caregivers reported managing several stressors associated with the separation. In general, unlike the separated parents and the separated children, surrogate caregivers struggled throughout the separation process with not much appraisal change. For most of the surrogate caregivers, their coping stayed the same throughout the entire process. Because they took on multiple responsibilities in the absence of the separated parent, they constantly experienced stress. Although some of them reported becoming accustomed to their spouse's absence, the challenges did not become easier because they worried about their safety now that the "man of the house" was gone. Furthermore, many frequently worried about what they would do in case of an emergency or if their child needed to go to the doctors.

Furthermore, upon reunification, although most surrogate caregivers felt safer and more protected with their spouse, they still struggled with feeling alone or left out. Several caregivers reported feeling excluded from the family once the separated parent returned. Consequently, they had to resort to individual coping because they felt excluded from the family:

> Yes, in that manner I sometimes feel like they don't even need me. She (separated child) has a lot of communication with him (separated parent) 'Daddy this, daddy that" and I just feel left out. (11c, surrogate caregiver to daughter, currently reunited).

Another surrogate caregiver described her experience of feeling left out having to cope on her own throughout the separation process:

> I felt worthless there. I was worthless, that he (separated child) didn't love me, honestly that he didn't love me. Maybe it was because I always checked in on him, maybe because I was stricter. I would call his attention a lot… when he once told me that why did he have a mother. That was the most difficult thing. That was the most difficult thing he told me because he went to a dance, and I went for him, and he told me 'I don't know why I had to have a mother.' (20c, surrogate caregiver to son, currently reunited).

In these scenarios, these surrogate caregivers felt alone not only during the separation but also after the reunification. They felt underappreciated and overlooked.

Interestingly, one surrogate caregiver discussed slight doubt in her decision to look after her niece in the United States. Initially, she discussed that it was her idea to bring her niece to the United States because she could have more educational opportunities. Furthermore, she also had a daughter around the same age, so both teenage girls could grow up together. However, she disclosed that she would occasionally doubt if she made the right choice by bringing her niece to the United States. She often heard rumors that the separated child's mother seemed to be living life stress-free while she, on the other hand, had to work two jobs as a single mother to financially care for her own children and her niece. She stated:

> How do I tell you? Sometimes, like I mentioned that people tell me that she's (separated parent) like that. Yes, sometimes I don't like it because I feel like I took away a responsibility from her. Like I took away a responsibility. I'm here watching her children, and she is over there calm. But for me to tell her that, no. I just sometimes feel that. There's days when moments come and you're like 'Yeah, it's

true, maybe I am taking away her responsibilities that she should have with her children. (8c, surrogate caregiver to niece in the United States, currently separated)

In this situation, the surrogate caregiver was already taking care of her nephew when she offered to also take care of her niece. As a single mother herself, there were times when she did not feel supported by the separated parent and her appraisal of the separation seemed to shift. At times she did not feel as if they co-owned and co-managed the stressors of the separation.

In sum, the stressors of being separated did not seem to decrease as much for the surrogate caregivers as they did for the separated parent and the separated child. Before the separation, the surrogate caregivers were tasked with notifying the child of the separation, during the separation they were tasked with ensuring that the separated child's needs were met and managing the relationships between one another and parenting, and after the separation many of them felt exclude and undervalued. Although some became accustomed to the separated parents' absence and learned to manage on their own, they encountered new challenges during every stage of the separation. Furthermore, many relied on extended family members for support such as transportation to the doctor, childcare, and emotional support; however, there was little evidence of communal coping among surrogate caregivers. Most separated parents engaged in individual coping with the separation both before and during the separation. However, during the separation they would partially engage in communal coping, but only to navigate parenting stress. Because many separated children were not given enough time to prepare for the separation, they did not engage in communal coping. However, for them support provision during the separation was critical.

RQ4: The Functionality of Communal Coping

RQ4 explored the functionality of communal coping, other types of coping, and support provision for separated Latinx immigrant families. TMCC states that various factors may influence the functionality of communal coping which is measured by indicators of thriving as outlined by Feeney & Collins (2015): hedonic wellbeing (i.e., subjective well-being), (2) eudaimonic wellbeing (i.e., meaningful life goals), (3) psychological wellbeing (i.e., positive self-regard), (4) social wellbeing (i.e., deep human connections), and (5) physical wellbeing (i.e., good health status). Because living apart from family members can be incredibly challenging for all individuals involved, even when communal coping, it is important to explore the extent to which communal coping was beneficial (or not) to separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers.

Separated Parents

Some separated parents engaged in communal coping to help them manage worrying about their children, but they rarely engaged in communal coping to process their own emotional wellbeing (e.g., depression, anxiety) associated with the separation. For separated parents, communal coping primarily helped them accomplish eudaimonic and psychological wellbeing.

Eudaimonic Wellbeing. Feeney and Collins (2015) described eudaimonic wellbeing as "having purpose and meaning in life…autonomy/self-determination, mastery/efficacy, accumulation of life wisdom" (p.115). A primary reason why parents immigrated to the United States and sacrificed leaving their family behind was to improve the living conditions of their family. Out of the 20 families, 14 of them had a father migrate to the United States, which highlights the role of caballerismo in Latinx families. The Latinx fathers in this study primarily adhered to the role of the household breadwinner. With the help of the surrogate

caregivers, a majority of separated parents were able to accomplish parenting goals, the separated parents were able to achieve eudaimonic wellbeing because they felt they were fulfilling their role as fathers. Separated parents reported that because of the separation their families were able to live a better lifestyle (e.g., secure housing, education, food security). However, that would not be possible without the adult family members that stayed in the home country with the children. A separated parent shared that the surrogate caregiver helps him cope with the separation by highlighting the positive outcomes of the separation:

> [She tells me] Don't give up, you remember that you have us. We are praying for you, so that it goes well for you, for you to have health, work, and for us to not need anything and that your sacrifice to leave us alone is worth it. (14a, separated father from daughter, currently reunited)

In this situation, the surrogate caregiver's efforts highlight the purpose of the father's separation, which he reported makes him feel good about his family role and helps alleviate some of his sadness from being apart. Another separated parent shared:

> They are sacrifices. They have their benefits. When one returns and sees them healthy and everything, one says 'it was worth it'…When I talk to them, and they are happy. Sometimes I could buy them things or if they wanted a particular food and with me working, I could provide that for them, sometimes a blanket that they wanted. After talking to them I feel good because they were happy. (13a, separated father from son, currently reunited)

Again, in this situation, their family's words and actions help the separated parent make sense of their separation. Given that some Latinx fathers adhered to caballerismo and took

pride in their role as fathers, hearing about the beneficial outcomes of the separation help them feel purposeful in life.

Psychological Wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing refers to resilience, positive self-esteem, and a lack or a decrease in adverse mental health experiences (Feeney & Collins, 2015). A main concern for separated parents was the wellbeing of their loved ones. Consequently, through communal coping, separated parents were able to assuage some of their parenting concerns. Without the mutual help of the surrogate caregiver, the separated parent's anguish concerning their children would likely have been heightened. As one separated parent shared:

> Yes, the biggest worry I have is how do I explain? How is she doing? Is she good or is she bad? Is she sad? Did she already eat? Those are the worries I have…when I get home, I have time to call them. If I have thoughts about how they are doing, if they are at home I can call, and we talk, and I feel calmer. (17a, separated father from daughter, currently reunited)

Another separated parent shared the perceived impact that communicating with his family had on his wellbeing:

> Sometimes, when no one was watching I would call them quickly at work. I want to hear them a bit, feel motivated to work, feel that they were with me. (16a, separated father from son, currently reunited)

Similarly, a separated father discussed the positive impact of relying on his family and having open communication:

> No, not at all did it [the separation] affect my emotional much less my physical health. All the time, thank God, we had good conversations, positive that left me

feeling calm, and I tried to do the same so that they would also be as calm as possible. (19a, separated father from son, currently reunited)

In sum, separated parents were able to overcome some of the emotional toll that the separation had on them through open communication with their loved ones. Several of the separated parents shared that they felt uneasy and anxious about the wellbeing of their loved ones, especially because they felt helpless due to the distance. At the same time, because some families engaged in communal coping and maintained constant open communication, the separated parents' worries about their children decreased. As the above examples show, a simple phone call allowed separated parents to feel more at ease. This highlights the beneficial role that communal coping can have on an individual's mental health. Nonetheless, as previously discussed, separated parents did not communally cope to deal with their own emotional distress. Because separated parents were apprised of their children's wellbeing and their parenting worries were assuaged, this indirectly lessened their emotional distress. They did not engage in communal coping to navigate their own personal stressors associated with the separation (e.g., feeling lonely, acculturation stress, anxious feelings). Thus, it seems that separated parents could further benefit from communal coping in other aspects of the separation.

Separated Children

Separated children in this study did not report owning the stressor; consequently, they did not engage in communal coping, however; they did receive support from family and network members. Perhaps because the separated children had less responsibilities to worry about, they were able to reap more of the benefits from support provision with the separation. Extended family and the surrogate caregiver played a pivotal role in the lives of separated

children. Surrogate caregivers helped separated children make sense of the separation, which in turn, helped their overall wellbeing. The separated children in this study shared indicators of eudaimonic, psychological, and social wellbeing.

Eudaimonic Wellbeing. A main goal for separated parents and surrogate caregivers was to inculcate good values to the separated children. That included being obedient children and finding a goal to pursue. Parents and surrogate caregivers encouraged separated children to continue pursuing their education, but if they chose not to, they emphasized the need to learn how to work, so they could become successful in life. Separated children discussed how their parents encouraged them academically and taught them how to work. For example, one separated child said:

> They told me that my dad was going to come back. So that's when I started to give it my best and study more. I started to become more responsible for myself and help my mom… they make me believe in things that I didn't even know I was capable of. Like for example to never give up, to keep pursuing your dreams and to give it your all until God lets you live. (1b, separated daughter from father, currently separated)

Another separated child shared that the most meaningful support she could receive from her separated parent was regarding her education:

> [A good thing that has come from the separation] is that she has supported my studies and that everything has come out good with my education…That she supports me and tells me to give my studies my all so that I won't suffer what she suffered. She tells me that. (3b, separated daughter from mother, currently separated)

A common theme across separated children was that the words and acts of encouragement from their surrogate caregiver and separated parents made them feel that their goals were

feasible. In the first example, the separated child shared that her parents' encouragement allowed her to do things that she did not know she was capable of.

Psychological Wellbeing. Several children reported depressive symptoms before and during their parent's separation. Surrogate caregivers and separated parents also expressed concerns for their children's mental health, especially at the beginning of the separation. Indeed, some families reported that they did not tell their children about the separation ahead of time because they were worried about their wellbeing. Thus, support played an instrumental role in an attempt to decrease negative emotions among separated children. For example, a separated daughter mentioned, "she always asks me what I am doing, if I am sad, she asks me why and she always tries to give me advice" (8b, separated daughter living in the United States, currently separated). As one caregiver shared:

> Above anything else I would try for him to not notice the absence. We would go out to take a stroll or we would watch a movie, but I would try for him to not notice his dad's absence. (18c, surrogate caregiver to son, currently reunited).

Another separated child shared how her surrogate caregivers support helped her psychological wellbeing:

> When I was stressed or feeling unmotivated, she would always ask if I needed to go out to destress. To go outside, to take a walk or that if I wanted, she could accompany me so that I wouldn't be so stressed. (14b, separated daughter from father, currently reunited)

These examples illustrate the importance of checking-in with the separated children to make sure their mental health was not being compromised. Separated children seemed to benefit the most from advice and the physical company of their family members. Mainly, surrogate

caregivers tried to distract them by constantly engaging in activities (e.g., watching movies). The separated children disclosed that such behaviors helped alleviate some of their negative feelings associated with the separation.

Social Wellbeing. Feeney and Collins (2015) define social wellbeing as "deep and meaningful human connections…a prosocial orientation towards others, faith in humanity" (p. 115). Through sensemaking of the separation with the surrogate caregivers and extended family members, several children reported strengthening and building relationships with family members because of the separation. For example, a separated child reported being eager to get to meet his new little brother, "I feel good knowing that we are brothers but also bad because I haven't met him, only through photos and video calls" (2b, separated son, currently separated). Although this separated child had not met his baby brother, he has already developed a strong sense of affection towards him because of the frequent communication with his mother.

Although still painful, separated children developed a stronger sense of appreciation for their parent's sacrifice, "They went over there illegally to look for work, to pay for my studies and all that" (2b, separated son, currently separated). Another separated child reported recognizing that her father was not going to abandon her:

> Now, I feel that it [the separation] was something good. So that my dad can continue looking after me. It was good because I did come to think that he wasn't going to look for me, that he wasn't going to call me or be checking in on me. I was very scared. (10b, separated daughter, currently separated).

This separated child shared that her greatest fear was that her father would abandon them and forget about her. Nonetheless, after being separated for almost two years and noting that his

efforts to communicate with her and to look after her had not stopped, she came to believe that the separation did have benefits. She believed her father did not leave because he wanted to abandon them; instead, he wanted a better life for them. In sum, separated children missed their separated parents, but also learned to appreciate the beneficial outcomes of the separation such as learning new skills, building their confidence, and developing stronger relationships. Although the separated children might have struggled to achieve that in the beginning, with time, they benefitted from receiving support from others.

Surrogate Caregivers

Although surrogate caregivers seemed to struggle the most with the separation because of the multitude of responsibilities they had to navigate, they still shared that through the support of others, the separation brought upon some joys.

Eudaimonic Wellbeing. Given the role of marianismo in Latinx families and the importance of carrying out one's motherly roles, surrogate caregivers felt accomplished in fulfilling their motherly roles. One grandmother, who served as a surrogate caregiver, reported that taking care of her grandson brought new meaning to her life:

> For me, I think I have more will to live for the child. Because when his dad left, I wasn't going to have that connection with him, that would have been bad. 'Mom he is staying with you.' I don't' think that [negatively] affected me. It gave me more strength…God sent me good things, learn, play, talk, those things that I had lost. He (separated child) taught me so much. He lifted my spirits again to relearn how to play, communicate, and dance.

Here the surrogate caregiver explained that she was sad her son had migrated to the United States; however, because she was able to spend valuable time with her grandson, the void

that her son left was not as big. She felt she had a purpose in life, which brought her joy. She continued to share how her grandson looked after her and how they took care of each other. Another surrogate caregiver discussed how fulfilling her role as a mother made her feel good:

> I feel satisfied, it makes me feel good. Now, I really am a good mother for raising them. To have three children under my responsibility, well in that aspect I feel satisfied. (1c, surrogate caregiver to daughter, currently separated)

In sum, surrogate caregivers might not have shared as much positive outcomes as separated children and separated parents because they were under more pressure to effectively manage the separation. However, some of them recognized their efforts and all their hard work which made them feel accomplished about their roles as mothers. Furthermore, for those extended family members that served as surrogate caregivers, being in this role brought upon a new perspective to their life. Although challenging, they enjoyed spending time with the separated child and watching them grow.

Discussion

For various reasons (e.g., undocumented status, political turmoil, economic advantages), some Latinx families make the heart-wrenching decision to live apart. Separation brings about many stressors such as fear of being abandoned, family reconfiguration, dangerous migration journey, and abandoning parental roles (DePalma et al., 2021; Jerves et al., 2018; Schapiro et al., 2013; Solheim & Ballard, 2016). Nevertheless, the extended theoretical model of communal coping (TMCC; Afifi et al., 2020) suggests that when faced with a stressor, families can engage in communal coping by appraising the stressor as a shared problem and by taking joint responsibility to manage the stressor. Thus, this study's goals were to explore how, if at all, communal coping played a role in the

separation and reunification of low-income, Latinx immigrant families. To the author's knowledge this is one of the first studies to systematically explore separated Latinx family's communal coping through a triadic lens.

Overall, it was found that some separated Latinx family members (i.e., separated parents) might engage in communal coping more so than separated children and surrogate caregivers, but only with respect to parenting and not emotional distress. Most separated parents engaged in communal coping; however, they mainly did so during the separation phase and only regarding parenting worries. Although the majority of separated parents described an extremely challenging time in the United States due to being far away from family in an unknown territory, they did not communally cope about this stressor with their loved ones. Interestingly, ownership of the stressor did not emerge from the separated children's perspective, possibly because they viewed the separation as their parents' decision, not their own. Lastly, although most separated parents reported communally coping with surrogate caregivers, the majority of surrogate caregivers reported feeling alone in the separation process. Thus, this section discusses the findings in further detail, as well as provides recommendations for future research while acknowledging its limitations.

Separated Latinx Family's Appraisal Process

The findings of the present study are noteworthy because they contribute to our knowledge of how the different separated Latinx family members (i.e., separated parent, separated child, surrogate caregiver) differed in their perception of co-ownership of the stressor. The first research question explored how separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers appraised the separation. TMCC (Afifi et al., 2020) contends that the appraisal process in communal coping consists of two factors: (1) cognitively affected by

stressor and (2) joint ownership of the stressor. Most separated parents were fathers who migrated to the United States, and most of them inherently believed that the surrogate caregiver should co-own the stressor. They expected them to contribute and make the process easier. The surrogate caregiver was responsible for the wellbeing of the household, help tend the crops, and maintain relationships in harmony. However, most separated parents only expected the surrogate caregivers to help them manage the stressors associated with parenting, but not with the emotional stressors of the separation (e.g., assimilation to a new culture, loneliness).

Separated children and surrogate caregivers were also cognitively affected by the situation, however; they varied in their appraisal of ownership. Separated children felt a void when their separated parent migrated, and some felt that the separation was not necessary because the parent's presence was more important than money. On the other hand, surrogate caregivers felt that they shouldered much of the responsibility of the separation. Most of the surrogate caregivers did not think they co-owned the stressor with the separated parent. Although they benefitted from the economic assistance, this came at a cost. For example, surrogate caregivers reported feeling anxious, sleep disturbance, and change in eating patterns.

Another meaningful contribution of this study is that it grounds the findings within a cultural lens. A plausible explanation for the varied perspectives in ownership of the stressor, may lie in the Latinx cultural values of caballerismo, machismo, marianismo, and respeto. The concepts of machismo and caballerismo in Latinx families pertains to distinct gender roles in the family. Men are expected to look after their family by being the breadwinners, while women are expected to respect the husband's desires and decisions (Ingoldby, 1991).

For this reason, it might be that separated parents have an expectation that their wife and children will honor his decision to migrate because it is seen as his responsibility to be able to provide for his family. Thus, as the man of the house, he expects his family members to support his decision and aid without question. Consequently, their perceptions of communal coping might be altered due to the perceived roles they should enact. Phrased differently, if separated parents believe it is their obligation to sacrifice whatever it takes for the wellbeing of their family, they might be less inclined, if at all, to engage in communal coping because they might perceive it as "my problem, my responsibility" (i.e., individual coping; Lyons et al., 1998).

Similarly, marianismo (i.e., female self-sacrifice for the harmony of the family; Desouza et al., 2004) may help explain why women shouldered the responsibility of maintain a peaceful household, while also simultaneously managing their relationship with the separated parent and child. For this reason, they might perceive the responsibilities associated with the separation as their obligation as wives and mothers. Women in Latinx cultures might see parenting as their problem their responsibility (i.e., individual coping). In turn, surrogate caregivers might not engage in communal coping because they see it as an individual responsibility. Although they might still desire certain support, they might not necessarily assume that others will co-own the stressors associated with being a caregiver.

Lastly, respeto highlights the need to respect and obey one's elders (Calzada, 2010). Consequently, separated parents might expect their separated children to not question their decision to migrate to the United States because it should be assumed that they know what is best for the family, "I always tell her that she has to obey what her dad says. She has to obey and not talk back" (17c, surrogate caregiver to daughter, currently reunited) and "There can't

be any other priority that they must do, it has to be my way, it has to be my way" (1a, separated father from daughter, currently separated). Thus, separated parents might have the expectation that the children will take on the responsibilities that their parents give them (e.g., look after surrogate caregiver; obey surrogate caregiver). Although children might be respectful of their parent's decision, they might not necessarily co-own the stressor because they perceive it as their parent's choice. In other words, although they might respect their parent's decision to migrate, they might not take ownership of that stressor.

Separated Latinx Family's Individual or Communal Coping

A main contribution of this study was its ability to identify individual and communal coping among the different family members. TMCC holds that the appraisal of the stressor will dictate whether people tackle the stressor together or individually (Afifi et al., 2020). Interestingly, some family members perceived that they were communally coping with the separation, while others thought they were on their own. For example, most separated parents reported communally coping with the surrogate caregiver to help parent the separated child. However, the surrogate caregivers did not share the same sentiments. Many of them reported feeling alone during this process and resorted to individual coping. Furthermore, separated parents did not perceive themselves as communally coping for all the stressors associated with being separated. Separated parents communally coped with the surrogate caregiver related to parenting (e.g., keeping updated with separated child's wellbeing). In contrast, separated parents reported coping on their own with their emotions and depressive symptoms associated with being alone in a foreign country.

The differences in reported individual and communal coping highlight the importance of the cognitive dimension in communal coping. One member may perceive that they are

engaging in communal coping, while the partner may not have the same perception. Consequently, this might result in relational dissatisfaction and negatively affect the individual's wellbeing. For example, in the context of separated Latinx families, spouses who are serving as surrogate caregivers might feel overburden which might discourage them from waiting for their husband to return as one surrogate caregiver shared, "I'm not living with you anymore. I'm leaving…I'm tired of waiting three years. What am I doing here alone?" (13c). As Afifi et al. (2020) suggest, cognitions are best captured through self-reports, which is noteworthy of the present study because it sheds light on three different perspectives.

Change in Coping Style throughout the Separation Process

The third research question investigated how, if at all, separated Latinx family's coping shifted along the separation process (i.e., pre-separation, during, and if applicable, after separation). The most noteworthy finding from this question was that separated parents shifted their coping most drastically between pre-separation and during separation. Before the separation, separated parents were reserved with their thoughts and avoided coping with others to avoid unnecessary stress on themselves and others. Similarly, separated children also reported not confiding in others or sharing their feelings about the separation with loved ones because they did not want to contribute to the distress of being separated. This is consistent with previous work that has found that although individuals might benefit from communal coping, some avoid engaging in communal coping as a protective mechanism (Afifi et al., 2006; Basinger, 2018). This manner of coping has been labeled as *protective buffering* or *parallelism* (Afifi et al., 2006) because although the stressor might be perceived as shared, and individual might choose to navigate it on their own to protect others. For example, Fisher et al., (2016) found that mothers and daughters might avoid disclosing the

status of their breast cancer to protect each other. It is important to note that although separated parents' decision not to disclose information ahead of time might have been enacted as a protective mechanism, it did not always benefit the separated child. Separated children shared that they felt betrayed and resented suddenly learning of the separation.

By contrast, during the separation, separated parents resorted to communal coping with the surrogate caregiver about parenting. This makes sense because especially for younger children, the surrogate caregiver is the only means for the child and parent to maintain in communication (Schapiro et al., 2013). Consequently, the separated parent relied on the surrogate caregiver for information regarding the child. A majority of the separated parents did not rely on the surrogate caregivers to help them cope with challenges of feeling isolated away from family in the United States. Again, this could be perceived as a protective mechanism to not worry family members, but it might also be in due part to machismo or caballerismo because most separated parents were Latinx males who might have been socialized to conceal their feelings (Falicov, 1998).

This study offers another noteworthy contribution to the role of normalcy surrounding the separation. On several occasions, the different parties described that the separation as a necessary process for survival and that they were often left with no other choice but to live separated from their family. In turn, several families perceived the separation as a routine occurrence that was necessary for the vitality of their family. For example, several separated children noted that they were accustomed to their parent being gone because that is the only family structure that they know. Similarly, separated parents and surrogate caregivers noted that this was a normal process, that although painful, was necessary if they wanted to have food on the table. Here, separated Latinx families normalize the situation as a form of coping.

This is in line with Buzzanell's (2010) theorizing of resilience, in which she argues that individuals develop resilience by crafting a normalcy of their situation. Individuals speak normalcy into existent to help navigate the current hardship. She found that individuals in her study discussed that life was "back to normal" or that things had not changed, yet at the same time individuals discussed the negative state of their mental health. Yet, this type of thinking allowed individuals to feel better about their current family situation (i.e., job loss). Similarly, the current study found that surrogate caregivers attempted to normalize the situation by sharing that their relationships had not changed yet simultaneously discussing how anxious, sad, worried, and alone they felt because of the separation. Separation among these families is an incredibly heart-wrenching experience for all the involved individuals, however due to structural barriers (e.g., poverty, lack of jobs, food inequity) individuals must normalize the separation to navigate this stressor.

Functionality of Communal Coping

Lastly, the present study contributed to our knowledge of communal coping by exploring the functionality of communal coping and more generally, at support provision for separated Latinx families in terms of Feeney and Collins (2015) five indicators of thriving: (1) hedonic wellbeing (i.e., subjective well-being), (2) eudaimonic wellbeing (i.e., meaningful life goals), (3) psychological wellbeing (i.e., positive self-regard), (4) social wellbeing (i.e., deep human connections), and (5) physical wellbeing (i.e., good health status. It is worth noting that hedonic wellbeing (i.e., subjective well-being) was not a function of communal coping for separated Latinx families. A potential explanation for this is that Latinx families place a high value on family unity and loyalty (i.e., familismo; Calzada et a., 2013),

Thus when the family unit is disrupted, they might not experience that genuine happiness because there is a void in their everyday life.

However, eudaimonic wellbeing was noticed among all three parties. Through collective sensemaking and coping of the separation, individuals were able to acknowledge and fulfil of their life goals. Separated parents felt they were accomplishing their role as breadwinners, surrogate caregivers felt efficacious about their motherly roles despite the challenges, while separated children were able to make educational goals by coping with their family members. It makes sense that all family members experienced eudaimonic wellbeing because the separation was challenging for all parties involved. Thus, to offset the challenges and pain of the separation, separated Latinx families might try to find meaningful life goals to justify being separated. Furthermore, an outcome of communal coping for separated children was social wellbeing, that is they fostered meaningful relationships in their lives. This is consistent with Jervis et al., (2018) who found that Nicaraguan separated children develop meaningful relationships with individuals around them to help them navigate through the emotional toll of being separated. Lastly, only one type of wellbeing emerged within the surrogate caregivers: eudaimonic. This highlights the toll that being separated has especially on the surrogate caregiver who must shoulder multiple responsibilities all at once.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the findings provide a better understanding of the role of communal coping in separated Latinx families, the findings should be cautiously interpreted. Most participants identified as Mexican; however, Latinxs are a heterogenous group with varying characteristics (Gonzalez Burchard, 2005). Thus, the findings should be carefully considered

when applying them to other separated Latinx families. For example, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2002) found that Mexican children were separated from their parents for shorter lengths of time as compared to children from other Latin American countries. Future research would benefit from having a more diverse heterogenous Latinx sample.

Furthermore, TMCC (Afifi et al., 2020) emphasizes the role that various factors, specifically in marginalized communities, play in the functionality of communal coping (e.g., cultural values, structural barriers). Although the present study considered relevant Latinx cultural values such gender roles (i.e., marianismo, caballerismo, machismo), familismo, and respeto, other factors would be important to consider. The current cultural values provided insights into the expectations and desires of communal coping within separated Latinx families. However, future research would benefit from considering factors such as stigma, severity of stressor, and communication quality. These factors might make the stressor more, or less, suited for communal coping. For example, the current sample mostly consisted of separated fathers, whose migration was deemed acceptable. However, in accordance with previous literature (e.g., Dreby 2006) mothers might be judged more harshly for leaving their children behind. In turn, communal coping for separated mothers might be more difficult to enact.

Practical Implications

Despite this study's limitations, the findings offer many practical contributions and add to our understanding of communal coping in Latinx separated families. TMCC (Afifi et al., 2020) emphasizes that through communal coping positive outcomes are possible despite the presence of severe stressors. Consequently, the findings can be insightful for community organizations that work with Latinx families, therapists, school counselors, mental health

professionals, and any other individuals or organizations interested improving wellbeing for separated families.

A major theme across the findings was the children often felt blind sighted by their parent's departure either because they were not given enough time to prepare for the separation or were simply not told at all. If possible, separated parents might inform their children of the separation ahead of time, so that the children may adapt a coping mechanism. Phrased differently, separated children may begin to pool in resources to help them make sense of the upcoming change. This might help eliminate feelings of being dismissed and resentment. Furthermore, surrogate caregivers shared that they did not communally cope with the separated parent during the separation for various reasons. One of the reasons included not wanting to burden the separated parent who was living in a foreign country by themselves. To avoid feeling overburdened, surrogate caregivers may resort to extended family members for assistance.

In addition, some separated parents expressed the challenging time that they experienced on their own while being separated from the rest of their family. Many of them shared that there were moments went they felt extremely anxious and felt lost and hopeless. Others shared that they counted down the days until they would be reunited with their family. However, a large number of separated parents shared that they did not express these feelings to their loved ones because it was not in them to share their feelings. To help improve their mental health, community organizations can expand their efforts to normalize Latinx men expressing their feelings to loved ones. Furthermore, surrogate caregivers expressed a similar attitude upon reunification. They also felt helpless and insignificant to the family. They felt that upon the return of the separated parent, they were no longer need in the family or that the

separated child loved the separated parent more than they loved them. However, again, caregivers refrained from sharing this with their family members. Community organizations and therapists can help by teaching individuals effective ways to communicate their feelings and experiences to their family members. For example, some separated parents shared that when they disclosed their decision to extended family members, those family members tried to discourage them. Although these family members might have intended well, this made some of the separated parents refrain from sharing other news about the separation, in fear that they would be further rejected. Thus, it seems that it might be more effective for family members of separated parents to engage in supportive communication rather than attempt to discourage the migration. When separated parents decide to disclose their decision to family members, usually their final decision has already been made even though they might be filled with uncertainties and fears, thus; discouragement would probably only make them more fearful of the migration.

Theoretical Contributions

The present study's findings extend theorizing about TMCC (Afifi et al., 2020) in a separated Latinx family context in various ways: (1) the multidimensionality of a stressor, (2) exploring factors that may contribute to coping, (3) providing multiple perspectives, and (4) identifying changes in coping.

The present study highlights the importance of considering a stressor as multidimensional. Because a stressor may consist of different facets, communal coping might be enacted for one challenge but not the other. The findings noted that separated parents endured a multitude of stressors associated with the separation such acculturation stress, loneliness from being far away from family, and worrying about the separated child's

wellbeing. From the data, it seems that separated parents engaged in communal coping with the surrogate caregiver about parenting needs; however, separated parents did not partake in communal coping to alleviate their acculturation and emotional distress. This helps exemplify the need to investigate stressors from a multidimensional state.

Furthermore, TMCC (Afifi et al., 2020) notes that various factors may predict communal coping or individual coping, this study explored cultural and structural barriers that might exacerbate or impede communal coping. In the context of separated Latinx families, familismo might play an important role in their family structure, which may lend itself for a more communal approach to navigating the stressor. That is, because of cultural values such as familismo, caballerismo, and marianismo, family members might have certain expectations of everyone's roles and contributions to the separation. Separated fathers might expect their wives (i.e., surrogate caregivers) to respect, accept, and support their decision to migrate. Women might inherently accept the fact that they will stay with the children and expect no help with parenting. Children might adhere to respeto and consequently not question their parents' decision. But that might mean that although they will accept the decision, they might not necessarily co-own the stressor and engage in communal coping.

Moreover, Afifi et al. (2020) recommended that when studying communal coping, researchers should take a multiple perspective approach. This study found that indeed perception of communal coping between individuals is important to consider. Separated parents not only heavily depended on the surrogate caregivers to meet their parenting needs, but they also perceived that they both co-owned and managed the stressor jointly. On the contrary, most surrogate caregivers did not have the same perception, they often felt alone and abandoned during the separation. In sum, the findings shed light on the importance of

exploring individual perception of communal coping because one party might engage in communal coping, other parties facing the same stressor (separation) can feel alone and individually cope.

Lastly, by investigating communal coping habits before, during, and after the separation among three different parties, this study was able to shed light on the processual nature of communal coping. This study discovered that communal coping is dynamic even across the same family. Given the circumstances and the individual involved, coping style seemed to shift in this context (e.g., separated father shifting from individual coping before the separation to communal coping during the separation).

CHAPTER FOUR:

CONCLUSION

By focusing on a sample of separated Latinx immigrant family triads with limited resources and with unique cultural perspectives, the two studies in this dissertation offer a more nuanced way of thinking about relational maintenance and communal coping in long distance relationships. The triadic perspective was paramount to this dissertation because it uncovered distinct perspectives on family separation, relational maintenance, and coping for separated parents, separated children, and surrogate caregivers. Some perspectives overlapped, while others diverged, which emphasizes the importance of considering more than one interpretation when studying communication processes such as relational maintenance and communal coping.

Chapter 2 provides several theoretical contributions to the relational maintenance literature by incorporating the Theory of Resilience and Relational Load (TRRL; Afifi et al., 2016) and Merolla's (2010) Long Distance Maintenance Model (LDRMM) in the context of separated Latinx families. At the core of TRRL (Afifi et al., 2016) lies the assumption that routine relational maintenance behaviors will help develop emotional reserves, which in turn, will help build resilience under stressful conditions. The current study highlights the importance of building emotional reserves before a stressor. In this case, before the separation occurs (i.e., prospective relational maintenance strategies). Yet, it was noted that most children were not provided with the opportunity to build emotional reserves before the separation. Thus, to fill the gaps Merolla's (2010) temporal relational maintenance strategies helped fill in the gaps to uncover relational maintenance strategies while apart. This helped demonstrate that relational maintenance strategies may be dynamic across temporal space

(i.e., before, during, after separation) and might also change depending on who is enacting the maintenance behavior.

Through the lens of Extended Theoretical Model of Communal Coping (TMCC; Afifi et al., 2020) Chapter 3 offers several theoretical contributions that extend our knowledge of communal coping. Afifi et al., (2020) call for several theoretical considerations and this study helped bridge that knowledge gap by: (1) conceptualizing separation as multidimensional, (2) considering various factors that help predict coping (individual or communal), (3) offering multiple perspectives, and (4) identifying changes in coping behaviors through the different stages of the separation. The findings in this chapter show that family separation can be a multidimensional stressor. Family members might choose to communally cope with one aspect of the separation (e.g., parenting) but individually cope with another dimension (e.g., emotional distress). This study also shed light on how cultural values (e.g., familismo, caballerismo, machismo, marianismo) may contribute to the expectations of co-ownership and individual or communal coping. Furthermore, the findings revealed the importance of considering multiple perspectives. One family member might perceive that they are engaging in communal coping, while the other family member might feel alone. Lastly, the result revealed that while communal coping can occur during one stage of the separation, it does not necessarily happen across all three phases (i.e., before, during, after separation. The study uncovered that most separated parents engaged in individual coping before the separation; however, engaged in communal coping during the separation.

Coupled together, both studies presented in this dissertation offer practical insights for separated Latinx families. Although incredibly challenging to withstand family separation, on top of structural barriers and adapting to a new country, families might be able

to lessen their stressors by engaging in certain types of relational maintenance and engaging in communal coping. Specifically, most separated parents shared the hardship of adapting to a new country by themselves and the severe loneliness that they experienced while living in the United States. Nevertheless, separated parents did not disclose this information to family members back home. Separated parents might benefit from communal coping and engaging in dyadic interactions particularly during the separation when they might feel the most isolated from their family members. The majority of separated children reported not being in the know about their parent's decision to migrate and later harboring resentment against their parent or surrogate caregiver. It might be beneficial for the parent-child relationship if separated parents discuss their plans with the children or at a minimum letting them know of the situation. Lastly, surrogate caregivers noted that they shouldered much of the responsibility on their own. Similarly, to separated parents, they might benefit from dyadic interaction and communal coping with the separated parent during the separation. However, they should try to engage in dyadic communication that concerns the separated parent-surrogate caregiver relationship instead of only focusing on parenting needs.

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Appendix A: Tables

Table 1. Separated Parents' Relational Maintenance

Prospective (Copresence)	Introspective (Copresence)	Retrospective (Copresence)
Intrapersonal	**Intrapersonal**	**Intrapersonal**
• Feared the journey • Thought about doubt and uncertainty regarding the migration success • Reflected on family time • Thought about what will get done during time apart	• Reflected on the past and future • Looked at photos and videos • Thought about future separations • Thought about making up lost time • Thought of returning • Thought about the guilt	• Thought about how much they missed family
Dyadic with Separated Child	**Dyadic with Separated Child**	**Dyadic with Separated Child**

• Limited communication
• For those who told the children about the upcoming separation, they:
  • Discussed future plans
  • Discussed the benefits to separation
  • Provided reassurance
  • Discussed being obedient for the surrogate caregiver
	• Talked about school progress, animals, benefits to the separation, future plans
	• Provided false hope
	• Provided hope
	• Everyday talk
	• Provided reassurance
	• Shared stories about the United States
	• Sent gifts to the child
		• Focused on the benefits of separation
		• Discussed basic needs
		• Discussed future separations

Network with Surrogate Caregiver	**Network with Surrogate Caregiver**	**Network with Surrogate Caregiver**
• Discussed their decision making • Discussed childcare plans • Exchanged reassurances • Discussed living arrangements • Discussed finances	• Avoided topics about going out or the separation • Reassurance that they are working • Talked about the house, work, future plans to return • Everyday talk • Sent remittances	• Focused on the benefits of separation • Discussed basic needs • Discussed future separations
Network with Extended Family and Friends	**Network with Extended Family and Friends**	**Network with Extended Family and Friends**
• Limited communication • Friends/family discouraged separation • Family matters, not friends' business	• Limited ("no time" for network maintenance) • Privacy (A family issue)	• Avoided talking about the separation

Appendix A: Tables

Table 2. Separated Children's Relational Maintenance

Prospective (Copresence)	Introspective (Copresence)	Retrospective (Copresence)
Intrapersonal	**Intrapersonal**	**Intrapersonal**
• Few were told of the impending separation • For children who knew about the upcoming separation, they thought about their sadness • Tried to understand the separation	• Compared their own situation to other kids who did or did not experience separation • Missed parent	• Happy to be together • For children who were not relationally close to the separated parent, children reported indifferences about reunification
Dyadic with Separated Parent	**Dyadic with Separated Parent**	**Dyadic with Separated Parent**
• Limited communication because few were told of the impending separation • For children who knew about the upcoming separation, the children asked their separated parent not to leave	• Talked about future plans • Talked about visiting the United States • Asked when the parent would return	• Spent as much time as possible with the separated parent • Asked about the United States
Network with Surrogate Caregiver	**Network with Surrogate Caregiver**	**Network with Surrogate Caregiver**
• Asked to explain the separation • Coped together—surrogate caregiver tried to help reduce the child's sadness	• Focused on day-to-day activities • Avoided talking about the separation • Focused on future plans (school)	• Not much change • Everyday talk
Network with Extended Family and Friends	**Network with Extended Family and Friends**	**Network with Extended Family and Friends**
• For children who knew about the upcoming separation, they talked to their grandmother to help them make sense of the separation.	• Spent time with extended family • Talked to friends with similar experiences	• Showed off separated parent to friends and teacher

Appendix A: Tables

Table 3. Surrogate Caregiver's Relational Maintenance

Prospective (Copresence)	Introspective (Copresence)	Retrospective (Copresence)
Intrapersonal	**Intrapersonal**	**Intrapersonal**
• Focused on their fear of being alone, forgotten, abandoned, unsafe • Afraid for the separated parent • Feared parenting alone • Tried to be optimistic	• Compared their situation to other families • Felt abandoned	• Felt excluded by the separated parent and child • Felt relieved not to have to parent alone • Accustomed to husband being back
Dyadic with Separated Parent	**Dyadic with Separated Parent**	**Dyadic with Separated Parent**
• Talked about the benefits of the separation • Discussed whether the separation was worth the sacrifices • Tried to convince separated parent not to leave	• Avoided certain topics (e.g., child being sick) that would worry the separated parent • Talked about the child's school progress, child's milestones, money, the house • Everyday talk • Talked about obtaining documents to join the separated parent	• Focused on the benefits of the separation • Reflected on material things • Avoided separation talk
Network with Separated Child	**Network with Separated Child**	**Network with Separated Child**
• Co-constructed the meaning of separation • Primarily responsible for informing child of the separation	• Discussed school work, future plans, obedience, life skills • Shared activities • Provided reassurance • Negative talk about separated parent	• Avoided separation talk • Focused on everyday talk
Network with Extended Family and Friends	**Network with Extended Family and Friends**	**Network with Extended Family and Friends**
• Talked to friends with similar experiences • Discussed concerns with parenting alone and missing the separated parent • Discussed living arrangements with family • Co-constructed the meaning of the separation • Focused on the benefits of the separation • Exchanged tips for managing the separation	• Friends encouragement • Shared similar stories • Stayed at family's house • Talked to family about the separated parent • Family helped surrogate caregiver with basic needs	• Network maintenance strategies seemed to stop

Appendix B: English Consent Form for Separated Parent

1) <u>What's the goal of this survey?</u> My name is Roselia Mendez Murillo. I am a PhD student from the University of California, Santa Barbara. This study explores separated Latina/o/Hispanic immigrant families' experiences with being separated from each other. You can help us by filling out a 15-minute phone or online survey and by participating in a one-on-one telephone discussion. Your answers and other separated families' answers can help us inform the development of resources for separated immigrant families like yours.

2) <u>What do you have to do for this study?</u>

You will only need to fill out a 15-20 minute online or telephone survey and participate in a one-on-one interview discussion over the telephone. The interview discussion will take about 2 hours, depending how much you share with us. Participants will answer questions about how being separated has affected their lives and how they have managed any challenges related to the separation.

3) <u>Eligibility to participate in this project</u>: To participate in this project, you must: (a) have lived in a different country than your child (for at least 3 months) due to immigration reasons; (b) child between the ages of 9-17 must be willing to participate; AND (c) the child's surrogate caregiver must also be willing to participate.

4) <u>How will your answers be kept secret?</u>

- Your interview will be audio recorded, but we will not use your full name in the interview. The recordings will be deleted at the end of the study after they have been typed out word-for-word without any identifying information.
- We will separate your answers from your name and email address.
- We will NOT share your individual answers or audio recording with anyone outside the research team.
- We will be the only ones who will see the list of participants' names, telephone numbers, and e-mail address, but that list will be destroyed at the end of the study (unless you state that we can contact you for future studies).
- We will combine your answers with many other participants' answers, so that no one will know how you personally answered the questions.
- The electronic versions of the surveys, audio recordings, and transcribed audio recordings will be kept on the researchers' password-protected computers, password-protected Box/Dropbox account online, or password-protected external hard drive.

5) <u>What do I get for participating in this study?</u> You will receive $75 through an Amazon e-gift card or Venmo, depending on your preference. If your only option is to receive payment through the United States Postal Service (USPS) mail, we can mail you a $75 gift card from Walmart, Target, or Costco; however, you will need to provide a mailing address. If outside of the United States, we will wire you the money via the company or

organization of your choice (e.g., Xoom, MoneyGram). We will not share your personal information with anyone outside the research team.

6) <u>Can anything good happen from participating in this study?</u> You may not directly benefit from this study, but your answers may help other separated Latinx immigrant families like yours. For example, information resources may be created from this research that can help separated families.

7) <u>Can anything bad happen from participating in this study</u>? You may have difficult feelings surface like sadness or worry when telling us about your experience. There may also be a little risk of feeling slightly awkward when answering some of the questions, but no more than what you might face in everyday activities (e.g., interacting with friends, employers, or family members). If you feel like you need to take a break during the interview, please let me know, and I happy to pause the interview.

8) <u>Do you have to participate in this study?</u> You don't have to participate. You can say yes now and change your mind later. You can skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You can stop at any point without getting in trouble.

9) <u>What if you have questions?</u> Please contact Roselia Mendez Murillo at {email} or at {phone number}. If you feel upset after filling out the survey or taking part in the telephone interview discussion, you can contact the National Youth Crisis Hotline: 800-422-HOPE (4673) in the United States or in Mexico- Sistema Nacional de Apoyo, Consejo Psicologico e intervencion en Crisis por Telefono (SAPTEL): (55) 5259-8121, Guatemala's Emergency Hotline: 1-1-0. Adults can also call National Suicide Depression Hotline (800) 273-8255 if you feel overwhelmed, sad, depressed, experience anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others. You can also call the California line 2-1-1 to find free and confidential services in an area close to you. If you have any questions about your rights as someone who wants to be in the study, please contact the Human Subjects Committee at 805-893-3807 or hsc@research.ucsb.edu. Or write to the University of California, Human Subjects Committee, Office of Research, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-2050. Please let us know if you have questions.

10) <u>Consent</u>: By completing this survey and taking part in the interview discussion, you are agreeing to participate as a research subject in the study described above.

Appendix C: English Assent Form for Separated Child

1) **What's goal of this survey?**
We are from UC Santa Barbara (UCSB), working to explore separated Latina/o/Hispanic immigrant families' experiences with being separated from each other. You can help us by filling out a short survey and participating in a one-on-one telephone discussion. Your answers and other children's answers can help us improve the lives of other children like you.

2) **What do you have to do for this study?**
You will only need to fill out a 15-20 minute online or telephone survey and participate in a one-on-one interview discussion over the telephone. The interview discussion will take about 2 hours, depending how much you share with us. Participants will answer questions about how being separated has affected their lives and how they have managed any challenges related to the separation.

3) **Eligibility to participate in this project:**
To participate in this project, you must: (a) have lived (within the past 2 years) or are living in a different country (at least 3 months) than your parent due to immigration reasons; (b) be between the age of 9-17; AND (c) the person who primarily is taking care of you and the parent you lived separated from must also be willing to participate.

4) **How will your answers be kept secret?**
- Your interview will be audio recorded, but we will not use your full name in the interview. The recordings will be deleted at the end of the study after they have been typed out word-for-word without any identifying information.
- We will separate your answers from your name and email address.
- We will NOT share your individual answers or audio recording with anyone outside the research team.
- We will be the only ones who will see the list of participants' names, telephone numbers, e-mail address, and addresses, but that list will be destroyed at the end of the study (unless you state that we can contact you for future studies).
- We will combine your answers with many other participants' answers, so that no one will know how you personally answered the questions.
- The electronic versions of the surveys, audio recordings, and transcribed audio recordings will be kept on the researchers' password-protected computers, password-protected Box/Dropbox account online, or password-protected external hard drive.

5) **What do I get for participating in this study?**
You will receive $75 through an Amazon e-gift card or Venmo, depending on your preference. If your only option is to receive payment through the United States Postal Service (USPS) mail, we can mail you a $75 gift card from Walmart, Target, or Costco; however, you will need to provide a mailing address. If outside of the United States, we will wire you the money via the company or organization of your choice (e.g., Xoom, MoneyGram). We will not share your personal information with anyone outside the research team.

6) **Can anything good happen from participating in this study?**
You may not directly benefit from this study, but your answers may help other separated Latinx immigrant families like yours. For example, information resources may be created from this research that can help separated families.

7) **Can anything bad happen from participating in this study**?
You may have difficult feelings surface like sadness or worry when telling us about your experience. There may also be a little risk of feeling slightly awkward when answering some of the questions, but no more than what you might face in everyday activities (e.g., interacting with friends, employers, or family members). If you feel like you need to take a break during the interview, please let me know, and I happy to pause the interview.

8) **Do you have to participate in this study?**
You don't have to participate. You can say yes now and change your mind later. You can skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You can stop at any point without getting in trouble.

9) **What if you have questions?**
Please contact Roselia Mendez Murillo at {email} or at {phone number}. If you feel upset after filling out the survey or taking part in the telephone interview discussion, you can contact the National Youth Crisis Hotline: 800-422-HOPE (4673) in the United States or in Mexico- Sistema Nacional de Apoyo, Consejo Psicologico e intervencion en Crisis por Telefono (SAPTEL): (55) 5259-8121, Guatemala's Emergency Hotline: 1-1-0. You can also call the California line 2-1-1 to find free and confidential services in an area close to you. If you have any questions about your rights as someone who wants to be in the study, please contact the Human Subjects Committee at 805-893-3807 or hsc@research.ucsb.edu. Or write to the University of California, Human Subjects Committee, Office of Research, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-2050. Please let us know if you have questions.

10) **Consent:**
By completing this survey and taking part in the interview discussion, you are agreeing to participate as a research subject in the study described above.

Appendix D: English Consent Form for Surrogate Caregiver

1) **What's the goal of this survey?**
We are from UC Santa Barbara working with Roselia Mendez Murillo, a PhD student from the University of California, Santa Barbara. This study explores separated Latina/o/Hispanic immigrant families' experiences with being separated from each other. You can help us by filling out a 15-minute phone or online survey and by participating in a one-on-one telephone discussion. Your answers and other separated families' answers can help us inform the development of resources for separated immigrant families like yours.

2) **What do you have to do for this study?**

You will only need to fill out a 15-20 minute online or telephone survey and participate in a one-on-one interview discussion over the telephone. The interview discussion will take about 2 hours, depending how much you share with us. Participants will answer questions about how being separated has affected their lives and how they have managed any challenges related to the separation.

3) **Eligibility to participate in this project:**
To participate in this project, you must: (a) have taken care of a child between the ages of 9-17 who lived (within the past 2 years) or are living in a different country (at least 3 months) than their parent due to immigration reasons; (b) the child between the ages of 9-17 must be willing to participate; AND (c) the separated parent must also be willing to participate.

4) **How will your answers be kept secret?**
- Your interview will be audio recorded, but we will not use your full name in the interview. The recordings will be deleted at the end of the study after they have been typed out word-for-word without any identifying information.
- We will separate your answers from your name and email address.
- We will NOT share your individual answers or audio recording with anyone outside the research team.
- We will be the only ones who will see the list of participants' names, telephone numbers, e-mail address, and addresses, but that list will be destroyed at the end of the study (unless you state that we can contact you for future studies).
- We will combine your answers with many other participants' answers, so that no one will know how you personally answered the questions.
- The electronic versions of the surveys, audio recordings, and transcribed audio recordings will be kept on the researchers' password-protected computers, password-protected Box/Dropbox account online, or password-protected external hard drive.

5) **What do I get for participating in this study?**

You will receive $75 through an Amazon e-gift card or Venmo, depending on your preference. If your only option is to receive payment through the United States Postal Service (USPS) mail, we can mail you a $75 gift card from Walmart, Target, or Costco; however, you will need to provide a mailing address. If outside of the United States, we will wire you the money via the company or organization of your choice (e.g., Xoom, MoneyGram). We will not share your personal information with anyone outside the research team.

6) **Can anything good happen from participating in this study?**
You may not directly benefit from this study, but your answers may help other separated Latinx immigrant families like yours. For example, information resources may be created from this research that can help separated families.

7) **Can anything bad happen from participating in this study**?
You may have difficult feelings surface like sadness or worry when telling us about your experience. There may also be a little risk of feeling slightly awkward when answering some of the questions, but no more than what you might face in everyday activities (e.g., interacting with friends, employers, or family members). If you feel like you need to take a break during the interview, please let me know, and I happy to pause the interview.

8) **Do you have to participate in this study?**
You don't have to participate. You can say yes now and change your mind later. You can skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You can stop at any point without getting in trouble.

9) **What if you have questions?**
Please contact Roselia Mendez Murillo at {email} or at {phone number}. If you feel upset after filling out the survey or taking part in the telephone interview discussion, you can call National Suicide Depression Hotline (800) 273-8255 if you feel overwhelmed, sad, depressed, experience anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others. You can contact in Mexico- Sistema Nacional de Apoyo, Consejo Psicologico e intervencion en Crisis por Telefono (SAPTEL): (55) 5259-8121, Guatemala's Emergency Hotline: 1-1-0. You can also call the California line 2-1-1 to find free and confidential services in an area close to you. If you have any questions about your rights as someone who wants to be in the study, please contact the Human Subjects Committee at 805-893-3807 or hsc@research.ucsb.edu. Or write to the University of California, Human Subjects Committee, Office of Research, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-2050. Please let us know if you have questions.

10) **Consent:**
By completing this survey and taking part in the interview discussion, you are agreeing to participate as a research subject in the study described above.

Appendix E: Sample English Demographic Survey (Currently Separated Parent)

Please enter your study identification code:

_____

What country were you born in?

- o Argentina
- o Bolivia
- o Brazil
- o Colombia
- o Dominican Republic
- o Ecuador
- o El Salvador
- o Guatemala
- o Honduras
- o Jamaica
- o Mexico
- o Peru
- o Venezuela
- o Uruguay
- o Other (please specify):

_____

What is your marital status?

- o Married
- o Single
- o Separated
- o Divorced
- o Widowed
- o Other: _____

How old are you? (in years)

_____

What gender do you identify with?

- o Man
- o Woman
- o Gender Non-Conforming (your gender identity does not conform to society's gender norms)
- o Other (please specify): _____

What language do you primarily speak with your family?

- o English
- o Spanish
- o Other (please specify): _____

What language do you primarily speak with your friends?

- o English
- o Spanish
- o Other (please specify): _____

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- o No schooling completed
- o Kindergarten to 6th grade (Primary)
- o 7th to 9th grade (Secondary)
- o 10-12th grade (Preparatory)
- o College degree
- o Postgraduate degree

Excluding yourself, how many family members live at your current home or residence?

- None
- 1 family member
- 2 family members
- 3 family members
- 4 family members
- 5 family members
- 6 family members
- 7 family members
- 8 family members
- 9 family members
- 10 or more family members

What kind of employment/work do you have?

_____

What is your current work situation?

- o Work part time (up to 39 hours per week)
- o Work full time (40 or more hours per week
- o Self-employed
- o Don't work but am currently looking for work
- o Don't work and am not currently looking for work

What is your annual household income level?

- o Less than $10,000
- o Less than $15,000
- o Less than $20,000
- o Less than $25,000
- o Less than $35,000
- o Less than $50,000
- o Less than $75,000
- o $75,000 or more
- o Not sure

How many children do you have?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 or more

How many children did you live apart from?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 or more

What country do you live in?

_____

How old were you when you first moved to the United States?

- o Less than 20 years old
- o Between 20-25 years old
- o Between 26-30 years old
- o Between 31-35 years old
- o Between 35-40 years old
- o I did not move to the United States
- o Other: _____

How many years have you lived in the United States?

- o Less than 1 year
- o Between 1 and 5 years
- o Between 6 and 10 years
- o Between 11 and 15 years
- o More than 15 years
- o I do not live in the United States

When answering the following questions, if you are separated from multiple children, please think about the child who is also participating in this study.

What parent does your child live apart from?

- o Mom
- o Dad
- o Both
- o Other _____

What country was your child's other parent born in?

- o Argentina
- o Bolivia
- o Brazil
- o Colombia
- o Dominican Republic
- o Ecuador
- o El Salvador
- o Guatemala
- o Honduras
- o Jamaica
- o Mexico
- o Peru
- o Venezuela
- o Uruguay
- o Other (please specify):_____

What country was your child born in?

- o Argentina
- o Bolivia
- o Brazil
- o Colombia
- o Dominican Republic
- o Ecuador
- o El Salvador
- o Guatemala
- o Honduras
- o Jamaica
- o Mexico
- o Peru
- o Venezuela
- o Uruguay
- o Other (please specify):_____

How old is your child?

- o 10
- o 11
- o 12
- o 13
- o 14
- o 15
- o 16
- o 17
- o Other (please specify):_____

What gender does your child identify with?

- o Boy
- o Girl
- o Gender Non-Conforming (your gender identity does not conform to society's gender norms)
- o Other (please specify): _____

What grade is your child in?

- o 3rd grade to 6th grade (Primary school)
- o 7th to 9th grade (Secondary school)
- o 10-12th grade (Preparatory School)
- o College
- o Other (please specify) _____

What country does your child live in?

_____

How old was your child when they first moved to the United States?

- o 8
- o 9
- o 10
- o 11
- o 12
- o 13
- o 14
- o 15
- o 16
- o 17
- o Child did not move to the United States other (please specify):_____

How many years has your child lived in the United States?

- o Less than 6 months
- o Between 6 months and 1 year
- o 1 year
- o 2 years
- o 3 years
- o 4 years
- o 5 years
- o More than 5 years
- o Other (specify): _____
- o Child did not move to the United States

How long have you and your child lived apart?

- o Less than 6 months
- o 6-12months
- o 1 year
- o 2 years
- o 3 years
- o 4 years
- o 5 years
- o More than 5 years

Who primarily takes care of your child?

- o Your child's other parent
- o Maternal grandmother
- o Maternal grandfather
- o Paternal grandmother
- o Paternal grandfather
- o Aunt or uncle
- o Other: (please specify) _____

How often do you communicate with the person who is primarily caring for your child?

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- A few times a year
- Once a year
- Less than once a year
- Almost never

How do you communicate with the person who is primarily caring for your child? (Check all that apply)

- o Visited in person (face-to-face)
- o Through a family member _____(please specify):_____
- o Telephone
- o E-mail
- o Cards or letters
- o Text message
- o Video chat (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, etc.)
- o Social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
- o Other (please specify): _____

What type of communication do you use most often to keep in touch with the person who is primarily caring for your child?

- o Visited in person (face-to-face)
- o Through a family member _____(please specify):_____
- o Telephone
- o E-mail
- o Cards or letters
- o Text message
- o Video chat (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, etc.)
- o Social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
- o Other (please specify): _____

How often do you and your child keep in touch?

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- A few times a year
- Once a year
- Less than once a year
- Almost never

How often do you and your child keep in touch?

- Every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- A few times a month
- Once a month
- A few times a year
- Once a year
- Less than once a year
- Almost never

What type of communication do you use most often to keep in touch with your child?

- o Visited in person (face-to-face)
- o Through a family member (please specify which family member): _____
- o Telephone
- o E-mail
- o Cards or Letters
- o Text message
- o Video chat (e.g., Facetime, Skype, WhatsApp, etc.)
- o Social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram)
- o Other (please specify): _____

The End

Appendix F: Sample English Interview Protocol (Separated Parent)

INTRODUCTION:

1) Dial #

2) Hello, is this _____ (*name of participant*)?

3) I'm _____ (*your name*). I'm a student at the University of California in Santa Barbara. I'm working with Doctoral Student Roselia Mendez Murillo.

4) You're scheduled to have a telephone interview with me right now. Are you still available to talk? *(Allow participant to respond in the affirmative)*.

5) Great! Thank you for your time. We really appreciate it.

6) Before we begin our interview, I want to summarize a few key points about the study. Feel free to interrupt me any time if you have questions.

7) Today, I want to talk to you about your experience managing your relationship with your child, while you two live in different countries. You may not directly benefit from this study, but your answers may help other separated Latinx immigrant families like yours. For example, information resources may be created from this research that can help separated families.

8) Please know that we are NOT interested in telling on you or getting you in trouble. Instead, we know that family members may face certain challenges when they live in separate countries. That can be really stressful. Our goal is to learn how separated immigrant families stay connected despite living in separate countries.

9) We plan to combine your answers with everyone else's answers and find ways to provide more resources and services for separated families.

10) We will not share your answers with other family members. What you tell me will not get back to them.

11) The interview will range from around 1-2 hours, depending on how much you share with us. You will also need to complete a short survey. For filling out the short survey and taking part in this interview discussion today, you will receive $50 (if international participant, state money in their currency). You only need to participate once.

Rights

12) "During the interview, if at any time you feel uncomfortable or don't understand a question, please stop me and let's talk about it. If you want to, you can stop the interview

at any time. There is no penalty to stopping the interview. The questions we're going to talk about don't have right or wrong answers. We just want to hear about your experiences."

Consent to Record the Interview

13) "Before we begin, I want to remind you that this conversation will be audio recorded, but only so you can talk as fast and as much as you want to without worrying about whether I'm able to write it all down. Only the research team will know that the comments are yours. We will delete the audio recording at the end of the study. Are you still okay with me audio recording the conversation?" [***If the participant indicates s/he does not want to be recorded, then terminate the interview.]***

Interview Begins

"Thank you. Ready to start the interview?"

Option 1: For Parents who Migrated to the U.S.

1) Let's begin by having you tell me a little about yourself. Can you start by describing what your life was like before you came to the United States? Maybe you can tell me about the town or city you lived in, and what it was like, what your life was like at the time.

2) What made you decide to move to the United States?

3) As you know, the focus of our study is to understand about you and your child's (the one participating in this study) experiences living in two different countries.

4) Can you tell me more about your decision to have your child stay in _____ [insert town or country that child stayed in]? I know this was probably a very difficult decision to make, so can you tell me how you made that decision?

5) Prompt: Can you tell me about any conversations you had with other family members when trying to decide whether to bring your child with you or leave your child in _____ [insert town or country that child stayed in]? Please try to describe your conversations with as much detail as possible.

    a. How did this conversation make you feel toward the relationship with your family?

6) What did your family say or do to make you feel better about you and your child living in different countries?

    a. Did you feel unified with your family? Why or why not?

Explain (So, can you explain what you mean?)
Example (Can you give me an example when...)
Elaborate (Can you elaborate? Tell me more)
Extend (What happened before…?)
Look (what does that look like?)
In what ways are they…?
What does that mean to you…?

b. Did you feel that you could count on your family?
c. Did you feel like you had a good relationship with your family? Why or why not?

7) What, if anything, did your family say or do to make you feel bad about you and your child living in different countries?

a. Did you feel unified with your family? Why or why not?
b. Did you feel that you could count on your family?
c. How did this conversation make you feel toward the relationship with your family?

8) When you moved to the United States, who was responsible for taking care of your child, while your child remained in _____ [insert town or country that child stayed in].

9) Prompt: How did you decide who would take care of your child, while you were away? Can you describe how you chose that person to take care of your child?

10) Prompt: What were your concerns, if any, about choosing this person?

11) Before the separation, what was your relationship like with this person?

a. Did you feel like you had a good relationship with this person? Why or why not?

12) Can you describe, in detail, what your conversation was like when you asked this person to look over your child? Please try to describe the conversation like a movie script with as much detail as possible.

Explain (So, can you explain what you mean?)
Example (Can you give me an example when...)
Elaborate (Can you elaborate? Tell me more)
Extend (What happened before…?)
Look (what does that look like?)
In what ways are they…?
What does that mean to you…?

a. Where did the conversation take place?
b. Were there other family members or other people around when you had this conversation?
c. How did that person react when you asked them to look after your child?
d. How did you feel during the conversation?
e. How did you feel after the conversation ended?

13) Do you have other children that stayed behind, as well?

14) If not, how did you decide which children would stay with your family and which children would come with you?

15) When deciding to have your child stay with _____ [insert surrogate caregiver], what were your original plans for moving to the United States and bringing your child to the United States later? How long did you think you would live in separate countries? Did you have plans for reuniting?

16) If applicable, can you describe to me the conversation you had with your child about having them stay with _____ [insert surrogate caregiver]? Please try to describe the conversation like a movie script with as much detail as possible.

   a. Where did the conversation take place?
   b. Were there other family members or other people around when you had this conversation?
   c. How did you try to explain the separation to your child?
   d. How did your child react when you told them that you would be going to the United States and having them stay with _____ [insert surrogate caregiver]?
   e. How did you feel during the conversation?
   f. How did you feel after the conversation ended?

17) How, if at all, did the conversation change your relationship with your child?

18) In what ways was your child accepting or not accepting of your decision to live apart? What did your child say or do that made you feel like your child accepted or didn't accept your decision?
   a. How did this make you feel?

19) Before the separation, did you have conversations with your child about how you were going to manage the separation? For example, how long you would be separated for, how you would stay in touch, how much you would miss each other?

20) Before you learned that you and your child would be living apart, what was your relationship like with your child?

   a. Did you feel like you had a good relationship with your child? Why or why not? [important]
   b. Were there aspects that you liked?
   c. Were there aspects that you didn't liked?

21) Can you describe any conversations you had with friends or other family members about going to the U.S., while your child remained with _____ [insert surrogate caregiver]? Please try to describe the conversation like a movie script with as much detail as possible.

   a. How did they react when you told them that you would be going to the United States and having your child stay with _____ [insert surrogate caregiver]?
   b. How did you feel during the conversation?
   c. How did you feel after the conversation ended?

Coping Probing Questions:

Can you describe how you've managed the challenges that being separated has created for you…?

How have you been getting through those challenges?

What has helped you feel better about the separation?

How has family helped you manage these challenges, if at all?

How have your friends helped you manage these challenges, if at all?

Are there other people that have helped you manage these challenges? If so, how have they helped?

22) In what ways were friends or family member supportive of your decision about going to the U.S., while your child remained with _____ [insert surrogate caregiver]? What did they say or do to support you or to make you feel good about that decision?

23) In what ways were friends or family member unsupportive of your decision about going to the U.S., while your child remained with _____ [insert surrogate caregiver]? What did they say or do that made you feel bad about that decision?

24) Can you describe to me if you thought that you would be able to handle the separation? Why or why not?

25) Can you describe to me what the process of saying goodbye to your child looked like?

   a. How, if at all, did you prepare for this moment?
   b. What did the conversation look like?
   c. What were your reactions like? Theirs?

26) How old was your child when you moved to the U.S.? How long have you lived in different countries?

During Separation
Child Focused: During Separation
Change tense of questions depending if reunified.

27) When you left _____ [insert town or country that parent stayed in], can you tell me what your migration journey to the U.S. was like? How many days did it take you to get to the U.S.-Mexico border (if applicable)? Did you have any communication (e.g., telephone calls, texting) with your child during that time?

   a. How long were you at the border? How did you cross?
   b. What worries did you have?
   c. Did you have any contact with your child while at the border?
   d. How were your initial conversations like with your child?
   e. Who picked you up or dropped you off at your destination?
   f. Who did you move in with? What was that like?

28) Can you describe what the communication between you and your child is like?

   a. Who usually initiates the contact?
   b. How frequent?
   c. Do you ever feel that your child tries to avoid your communication efforts?
   d. Do you to try to avoid their communication efforts?
   e. How do you communicate (e.g., cell phone, smart phone, the Internet, or social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram)?
   f. Do you contact them directly or do you contact their caregiver first?

29) Can you describe to me a typical conversation between you and your child?

    a. What do you usually talk about?
    b. Do you discuss future plans?
    c. Do you find these conversations helpful? Why or why not?

30) How would you like your conversations to go with your child?

31) How do these conversations make you feel?

32) What do you remember them doing? What do you wish your child would've done? Why? How did you express that? Why or why not?

33) What communication behaviors make you feel the most connected to your child? The least?

34) Can you describe in what ways, if any, that communication (or a lack of) amongst you and your child, has impacted your emotional, mental, or physical health?

35) What does your child tell you about their caregiver? How does this make you feel?

36) What is your relationship like with your child?

    a. Do you feel like you have a good relationship with your child? Why or why not?
    b. Are there aspects that you don't like? Try to describe some things about your relationship that you'd want to change.
    c. What aspects do you like?
    d. How satisfied are you with your relationship?

37) What is your thought process during this time?

38) How does being separated make you feel?

39) What are the challenging aspects of living apart from your child?

40) I know that separation may be extremely difficult, but are there any good things you've experienced because of it?

41) How, if at all, do you think that your role as a parent is jeopardized?

42) Do you think that you and your child will be able to withstand being apart? Why or why not?

43) What are some of the hardest parts to living in a separate country from your child?

a. How, if at all, does living separately from your child affect your relationship with other family members?
b. How, if at all, does living separately from your child affect your relationship with people at work (e.g., boss, coworkers)?

44) What do you do to make yourself feel better?

45) What do you and your child do to make yourselves feel better?

46) How do you think you and your child will overcome this challenge?

a. Do you ever lose hope?
b. What motivates you?

47) If your child was in front of you, what would you like to tell them about the separation?

48) Can you describe any conversation you had with friends or other family members about the challenges of being separated? **[PROBE]**

a. What did these conversations look like?
b. How did they react?
c. Did you find these conversations helpful? Why or why not?
d. How did this conversation make you feel toward the relationship with your family/friends?

49) What do your family or friends say or do to make you feel better about you and your child living in different countries?

a. Did you feel unified with your family/friends? Why or why not?
b. Did you feel like you could count on your family/friends?
c. Did you feel like you had a good relationship with your family/friends? Why or why not?

50) What, if anything, did your family say or do to make you feel bad about you and your child living in different countries?

a. Did you feel unified with your family? Why or why not?
b. Did you feel like you had a good relationship with your family? Why or why not?
c. How did this conversation make you feel toward the relationship with your family?

51) Can you describe to me a specific memorable time when you felt the most negative about the separation? Can you be please be as specific as possible?

a. How did you overcome this negative experience?
b. Who, if anyone, helped you overcome this experience?

52) Can you describe to me a specific memorable time when you felt the most positive about

the separation? Can you be please be as specific as possible? **(PROBE)**

53) In what ways are friends or family member effective or ineffective at supporting you during the separation?

54) In what ways, if any, is the separation affecting your relationships with your friends or other family members?

Caregiver Focused: During Separation

55) Can you describe what the communication between you and your child's caregiver is like?

   a. Who initiates the contact?
   b. How frequent?
   c. Do you ever feel that the caregiver tries to avoid your communication efforts? ***[PROBE]***
   d. How do you communicate (e.g., cell phone, smart phone, the Internet, or social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram)?

56) Can you describe to me a typical conversation between you and the caregiver?

   a. What do you usually talk about?
   b. Do you discuss future plans?
   c. Do you find these conversations helpful? Why or why not?

57) Can you describe in what ways, if any, that communication (or a lack of) amongst you and the caregiver, has impacted your emotional, mental, or physical health?

58) What does the caregiver say about your child? How does that make you feel?

59) In what ways, if at all, does the caregiver ever make you feel hopeful and optimistic about reuniting with your child?

60) What is your relationship like with the caregiver?

   a. Do you feel like you have a good relationship with the caregiver?
   b. Are there aspects that you don't like? Try to describe some things about your relationship that you'd want to change.
   c. What aspects do you like?
   d. How satisfied are you with your relationship?

61) How do you think you and the caregiver will overcome this challenge with being separated?

   a. Do you ever lose hope?

b. What motivates you?

62) In what ways has the caregiver been effective or ineffective at supporting you during the separation?

63) What has the caregiver said or done to make you feel better about you and your child living in different countries?

a. Do you feel unified with the caregiver? Why or why not?
b. Do you feel like you can count on your caregiver?
c. Do you feel like you had a good relationship with your family? Why or why not?

64) What, if anything, did the caregiver say or do to make you feel bad about you and your child living in different countries?

a. Do you feel unified? Why or why not?
b. Do you feel like you had a good relationship with your family? Why or why not?

65) What do you remember them doing? What do you wish your child would've done? Why? How did you express that? Why or why not?

During Separation: Effects on Health and Wellbeing

66) How, if at all, has the separation affected your physical and emotional/mental health? ***[PROBE]***

67) Do you have any concerns about your physical health and well-being during the separation?

68) Are you and your child now reunited? If yes, continue with questions. If not, skip to concluding remarks.

Reunification: (if applicable)
Child Focused: Reunification

69) Can you describe to me the decision process in reuniting? ***[PROBE]***

a. Who made the decision?
b. Did the child have a say?
c. Did the caregiver have a say?
d. Who joined who?

70) Prompt: If child migrated to the U.S., prompt about their journey. When your child left _____ [insert town or country that parent stayed in], can you tell me what their migration journey to the U.S. was like? How many days did it take them to get to the

U.S.-Mexico border (if applicable)? Did you have any communication (e.g., telephone calls, texting) with your child during that time?

a. How long were they at the border? How did they cross?
b. What worries did you have?
c. How were your initial conversations like with your child?
d. Who picked them up or dropped them off at their destination?
e. Who did they move in with? What was that like?

71) Can you describe to me the conversation you had with your child about the decision to reunite?

a. How did this conversation make you feel?
b. How did they react?

72) How long have you been reunited for? How has reuniting been for you and your child? Can you tell me more about your interactions with your child?

73) What expectations did you have about living with your child again? What did you expect that to be like? How did you expect you and your child to interact together?

a. How were those expectations met or not met?

74) What is your relationship currently like with your child?

a. Do you feel like you have a good relationship with your child?
b. Are there aspects that you don't like? Try to describe some things about your relationship that you'd want to change.
c. What aspects do you like?
d. How satisfied are you with your relationship?

75) Can you describe what the communication between you and your child looks like?

a. Who initiates the conversations?
b. How frequent?
c. Do you ever feel that your child tries to avoid your communication efforts? **[PROBE]**

76) Can you describe to me a typical conversation about the separation between you and your child?

a. What do you usually talk about?
b. Do you discuss your time apart?
c. Do you find these conversations helpful? Why or why not?

77) Can you describe in what ways, if any, that the communication (or a lack of) between you and your child, has impacted your emotional, mental, or physical health during the separation?

78) What were some challenges that you faced when reuniting with your child?

79) How have you or your child handled the challenges that came with reuniting?

80) What kind of uncertainty, if any, did you experience leading up to your reunion with your child? By uncertainty, I mean things that you were unsure about or things you worried about because you did not know what would happen.

81) What kind of uncertainty, if any, do you experience now that you and your child live together again?

82) How did you deal with the uncertainty?

Caregiver Focused: Reunification

83) Can you describe to me the conversation you had with the caregiver about you and your child reuniting?

    a. How did this conversation make you feel?
    b. How did they react?

84) How did your reunion with your child affect your relationship with the caregiver?

85) Did the caregiver also join? If so, how did this impact your relationship with your child?

86) How, if at all, did your reunion with your child affect your relationship with other family members? How did it affect your family life?

87) Has anyone else (e.g., caregiver, another family member, a friend) helped you with the reunion? In what ways have they helped?

88) I know that family separation may be extremely difficult, but are there any good things you've experienced because of it?

89) What would you tell someone who is going through what you went through?

    a. What tips would you tell them?

END OF INTERVIEW- CONTINUE TO CONCLUDING REMARKS

CLOSE ***[For participants who completed Online-Survey]:*** Thank you for having a conversation with me today. I really appreciate you sharing your experiences with me. I've

had the chance to ask you all the questions for this study, but is there anything else you'd like to tell me about related to this interview?

If you have any questions, please contact Roselia Mendez Murillo at _____ (email) or at _____ (phone number).

For the next few minutes, I have several last points that I need to go over with you before we end our phone call. First, please remember that your answers to these questions are completely private. To thank you for taking the time to talk with me today, we will give you $50 (Currency will reflect country). The money will be sent via *[insert participant's preference]* as you previously indicated. We send the money out every Friday.

Snowball Sampling Script

1) To be most effective in improving services and resources for separated immigrant families, we need to talk to more separated families to really understand their experiences. If you know anyone who can participate in our study, can you please tell them about this opportunity to talk to us, receive $50, and help separated immigrant families? [***Optional***: *You can email them the flyer, take a photo of the flyer and text it to them, call them and tell them about it, and give them Roselia's contact information.]* We'd really appreciate you telling others about this opportunity. We're hoping to interview many more people.

Permission to Retain Contact Information to Recruit for Future Studies

2) Before we end our conversation, I'd like to ask if we can contact you in the future and invite you to participate in our other studies.

3) If you allow us to keep your contact information, you will always receive payment for participating in our studies, and when we invite you to participate in the future, you can decide at that time that you don't want to accept our invitation.

4) If you agree to let us contact you in the future, we will keep your email address and telephone on file; however, that data will be kept in a password-protected university folder that only the lead researchers will have access to. They will not share your contact information with anyone else.

5) You can also contact us at any time and ask us to delete your contact information.

6) Can we contact you in the future?

   Yes
   No (If no, assure that it's ok)

   [this agreement will be audio recorded and transcribed for documentation]

7) Do you have any questions before we end our meeting?

8) Thanks again for your time. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Roselia Mendez Murillo.

   Bye.