COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AND CONFLICTS
THAT SOJOURNER CHILDREN EXPERIENCE WITH PARENTS,
PEERS AND TEACHERS DUE TO ACCULTURATION
WITH THE AMERICAN CULTURE

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This thesis entitled

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AND CONFLICTS THAT SOJOURNER
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ACCULTURATION WITH THE AMERICAN CULTURE

BY

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The study attempts to analyze, interpret, and understand sojourner parents’ perceptions of the communication changes and conflicts that their younger children experience with peers, teachers, and family members as a result of the process of adaptation to the US. This thesis seeks to adopt a communication perspective in examining the dialectical tensions and conflicts that emerge as sojourners strive to negotiate the preservation of their native values, behaviors, and communication styles while simultaneously adapting to their new cultural environment. Sixteen families of international graduate students with children between 5 to 12 years of age were interviewed. In addition, two interviews with school personnel and observations of a children’s playground were conducted. Results suggest that sojourner children acquire many communication changes during their stay in the US. Some of those changes are perceived positively by their parents while others are considered disrespectful to family and collective values.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

During the last two decades, and partly as a result of some of the changes globalization has brought, the world has been witness to the emergence of cross-cultural conflicts due in part to a rapid growth of sojourners. Sojourners are temporary immigrants who move to a new country for a specific objective with plans to return to their home country once that objective has been accomplished. Sojourners generally move abroad from their countries of origin to more developed countries to pursue better employment and educational opportunities.

The process of moving to a new culture can bring complex and problematic situations for sojourner family members (Sluzki, 1979) as they have to deal not only with the acquisition of a new language but with different cultural values, beliefs, and customs that, in many situations, contradict the values, beliefs, and customs of their home culture (Berry, 1990). That collision seems to be inevitable if the sojourners want to acculturate to their new cultural reality. An additional complication emerges in the fact that family members can display considerable dissimilarities in their pace and form of acculturation to the host culture with consequent outcomes for the family as a whole (Sue & Wagner, 1973; Wakil, Siddique & Wakil, 1981).

It seems reasonable to expect that these differences in adaptation will be strongest between parents and their children. The reason for those differences is because parents might experience the need to preserve some elements of the elder
memory of their native culture, while their offspring might not experience that same need, instead more easily adapting to the new situation of living in another culture due to their rapid integration with their peer group (especially as a product of their interactions at school) (Rosenthal, 1984; Zivkovic, 1995).

These intercultural and intergenerational conflicts are probably stronger for sojourner families than for immigrant families. That is because sojourner families will eventually be subsumed in a dual culture shock. The first shock will come in their efforts to adapt to their new host culture. The second shock will come when they return to their native country and attempt to readapt to their home culture (Sueda & Wiseman 1991). Communication styles can change during the sojourner stay in the new cultural environment. This is especially true for children who have to adapt to a new language, new school, and new peer relationships. These changes in communication behaviors can impact the parent-children relationship, with the consequent emergence of tensions within that relationship.

An important body of research has focused on both immigrant and sojourner adjustment to a new culture. However, little research has focused on sojourner children under 12 years of age. This lack of research on the effect of acculturation on children is probably due to the influence of psychological approaches to this topic. Those approaches, which have tended to emphasize the mental and emotional stress involved in adjustment, have privileged adolescent conflict with parents over the conflicts experienced by young children. Few of these studies have emphasized a communication perspective with respect to the intercultural and intergenerational
conflicts that can emerge within a sojourner family. The studies that have emphasized communication have generally explored communication skills that can help in coping with stress produced by the process of acculturation, as well as reducing the impact of culture shock (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993), with a focus on individuals, not family groups.

Studies of sojourners point not only to the complexity of the process of adapting to a new culture but also to the challenges involved in sojourner reentry into their home country and culture (Martin, 1986). This is a complexity that cannot be understood by focusing only on a very few of the communication skills needed to adjust to the new situation. Rather, what is needed is an exploration of the dynamic and tension filled interaction of communication and culture.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore more deeply the communication changes and conflicts that arise due to the acculturation process among sojourner children and their families. In particular, this study will critically examine the dialectical tensions and conflicts that emerge as sojourner families strive to negotiate the need to preserve the values, behaviors, and communication styles of their native culture, while also confronting the need to adapt to their new cultural environment.

This study was conducted with the assistance of Ohio University international graduate students and faculty/staff whose children, at the time of the study, were between 5 to 12 years of age. The focus of the research is on understanding those
parents’ perceptions of the communication challenges and conflicts that their younger children have experienced with peers, teachers, and family members as a result of the process of adapting to the American culture. I also examined parents’ perceptions of how they manage these conflicts with their children and the ways in which differences in communication strategies and styles for handling interpersonal conflicts in the US are anticipated as causing problems for their children upon their return home.

In order to accomplish the aforementioned purpose, I start with a review of literature on immigrants. While my focus is on sojourners, the analysis would be incomplete if I did not consider relevant literature on immigration. One of the reasons for this inclusion is that sojourners share with immigrants some of the same tensions and challenges that emerge due to the acculturation process. Changes in language, communication styles, and family crises are also part of the migration process of adapting to a new culture. As is true with sojourners, immigrants confront the tensions involved in preserving at least some of their native traditions and communication patterns while, on the other hand, adapting to their new culture.

Another reason for including literature on immigration is the fact that there is little research on sojourners compared to the profuse literature that focuses on migration. In that sense, research on immigration provides a background for exploring how sojourners weather the acculturation process.

A second body of literature reviewed in the next chapter is the work mentioned earlier which employs a psychological perspective to look at how sojourners cope with
the stress of culture shock. Only a few of the studies of sojourners have offered communication insights by focusing on the competencies that an individual has to have in order to adapt to a new culture. Finally, I review literature on the sojourner reentry process. Reentry involves the problematic situations that sojourners experience once they return to their home countries as they seek to readjust to their native culture.

Definition of Terms

Before getting into the literature that is relevant to the present research, it is essential to provide a definition for the terms that will be used in this work.

Throughout this thesis, I will be using terms like “emigrant,” “immigrant,” and “sojourner.” To avoid possible misunderstandings, I have drawn some distinctions from The American Heritage Dictionary. Emigration is defined as “the departure of persons from their native lands” while immigrant is an individual who “leaves a country to settle permanently in another.” Thus when using the word “emigrate” (and its variants) in this study, I am employing a broad term which includes all the different types of departures of people from their own lands, departures that could be permanent, as with immigrants or, in some instances, refugees, or temporary, as with sojourners (and, again, in some instances, refugees).

The intention of the present research is to focus on sojourners. According to Berry (1990), sojourners are “temporary immigrants who reside for a specific purpose and time period [in a different country], and who intend to return eventually to their country of origin” (p. 242). Sojourners bring with them their own worldview
and cultural features, a fact that will determine the frame they will use for analyzing the host country.

Deborah F. Atwater (1998) defined culture as “…the values, symbols, interpretations and perspectives that distinguish one group of people from another” (p.368). This definition is completed by Triandis (1996), who pointed out that culture consists of “shared elements that provide the standard for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting among those who share a language, historic period, and geographic location” (p. 408). Living in a new culture results in sojourners confronting innumerable changes in language, customs, behaviors, etc. Furthermore, sojourners have to deal with differences between their native country and their host country in order to adjust or acculturate to their new cultural environment.

Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) pointed out that acculturation always “comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149). There are some important features to be considered in the acculturation process. Berry (1990) explained that, for acculturation to be brought into being, we must first have contact “or interaction between cultures that is continuous and firsthand” (p. 236); second, “the result [of this interaction] is some change in the cultural or psychological phenomena among the people in contact, usually continuing for generations down the line” (p. 236); and finally, Berry (1990) emphasized that acculturation is a dynamic process but is also “a result of processes that can be ‘relatively stable’” (p. 236).
Communication lies at the base of many of these intercultural encounters. As already mentioned, the acculturation process that sojourners experience brings many changes, some of which have their roots in adopting different communication strategies and styles. Communication constitutes a process in which two or more people elaborate and transmit a message containing information, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs. In fact, Donald Cushman (1998) pointed out that the main “… purpose of human communication is to share symbols, information and commitments in order to establish, maintain and terminate relationships among people and their social institutions” (p.8).

Sojourners experience innumerable communication problems when entering a new culture. Their basis for considering what constitutes shared meaning usually disappears as new patterns, modes, and communication behaviors appear in the host country. These differences in communication also operate within sojourner families. In fact, those dissimilarities seem to be more pronounced between parents or adults and their children—defined here as between the ages of 5 to 12. While all differences are problematic, we can reasonably expect that at least some of the differences experienced will be conducive to conflict.

Conflict, according to Wilmot and Hocker (1998), is “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources and interference from others in achieving their goals” (p. 34). David W. Augsburger (1992) defined these incompatibilities in terms of a “crisis that forces us to recognize explicitly that we live with multiple realities and must negotiate a
common [reality]….” (p.11). Different values, customs, and behaviors constitute some of the incompatibilities a sojourner experiences with members of the host culture.

When those differences involve two or more cultural parties, Ting-Toomey (1998) said that we are in the presence of an **intercultural conflict**. Intercultural conflict exists when both parties (two cultures) perceive that there is an “incompatibility of values, norms, processes or goals…. over identity, relational, and/or substantive issues” (p. 401). These intercultural incompatibilities or conflicts, can impact not only impact dyads but appear within sojourner families. In that sense, Detzner (1992) defined **family conflict** as “disagreements or perceptions of differences between members of an extended family about goals, resources, and roles” (p. 91).

**Summary Chapter One**

In this first chapter I introduced information concerning the sojourner family experiences of adapting to a new culture and reflected on the problematics that arise as a consequence of the changes that they are subjected to during this process. A review of the literature reveals that there has been a lack of communication-focused research dealing with how sojourner families weather their experience of living abroad and of having to adapt to a new cultural environment. There is also a lack of research focusing on sojourner children under 12 years of age and the conflicts they experience with parents, family members, peers and teachers during their stay in a foreign country.
as well as during the reentry process. Key terms, including sojourners, communication, culture, acculturation, and conflict have been defined. The brief explanations offered for some of the key terms to be used in this study can help us in understanding the literature that focuses on the process of acculturation.

The next chapter will review important literature on the migration process and acculturation. I will then examine research with a focus on immigrant family conflict, sojourners, and the reentry process as well as literature on cultural differences. Research on sojourners has been conducted from a communication competence perspective but has primarily focused on teenagers or adults dealing with culture shock and adaptation to a new culture. Following the review of literature, I will pose the questions that guide the present research effort.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A majority of the literature, mainly quantitative in nature, relevant to this research effort deals with three topics: immigration, sojourners, and reentry of sojourners. All three bodies of work offer valuable insights as we seek to understand the complex and problematic challenges that sojourner’s families face when confronting a new cultural environment. Additionally, studies of cultural differences will be examined in order to shed light on potential areas for conflict. Once the analysis of previous literature has been completed, the research questions will be posed, followed by an explanation of the contextual theory I will use and an acknowledgment of my philosophical approach to this research.

Immigration

The research on immigration focuses: first, on the process and the crises that immigrant families face during different stages of the migration process; second, on an analysis of the different levels and types of acculturation that individuals display in a new culture; and finally, on the perceptions of conflicts between parents and children (mainly adolescents) due to differences in acculturation. This section will briefly examine each of these three topics.

Immigration Process and Crises

Sluzki (1979) described five different psychological stages that people pass through during the migration process: preparatory stage, migration, period of
overcompensation, period of decompensation, and transgenerational phenomena (p. 380). Each stage involves certain characteristics, types of crises, mechanisms for coping, and conflicts within the family. The preparatory stage involves a number of different documents and/or activities required by the family in order to migrate: visas, passports, moving, etc. Family members experience euphoria followed by moments of tension and anxiety. These changes reflect what Sluzki calls the “up and down” (p. 380) of immigrant families’ lives. This stage brings new rules and definitions about family roles that are negotiated among family members.

The second stage, migration, is considered by Sluzki as a period of transition. The modes of this migration vary across families: legal/illegal migration, forever or temporary migration, etc.

The third stage is the overcompensation period. This is a very task-oriented moment marked by a clear division of family roles, all focusing on “survival [in] and adaptation [to]” (p. 383) an alien environment. According to Sluzki (1979), even though this stage of overcompensation can generate many crises within the family, especially if the family lacks organization, a majority of the “conflict and symptoms tend to remain dormant” (p. 384).

The fourth stage is the period of decompensation or crisis during which families experience difficulties and conflicts as they confront values and rules that were useful in their home country but are no longer effective in their new environment. Sluzki provided some examples that illustrate these types of family crises, e.g., parents’ discussions concerning their daughter’s decision to take contraceptives. Crises like the
one just mentioned oblige the family to redefine new rules, a fact that Sluzki (1979) saw as a very difficult and problematic objective to achieve.

The last stage reflects a transgenerational impact. Even though each family defines “their specific view of the world and of their own history” (p. 386), Sluzki (1979) asserted that every topic that was avoided within the family reappears in the discussions of the next generation.

Sluzki’s reflections about the crises and ways for coping with conflicts that immigrant families develop during these five stages can also be partially applied to the sojourner experience. As Sluzki’s focus was only on immigration, and not on sojourners, missing from his stages was attention to the challenges that families confront during the process of leaving their host culture in order to return to their own native culture. However, Sluzki’s five stages have to be scrutinized in relation to sojourner adaptation or acculturation processes, specifically the moments and problematic situations families face when moving to a new cultural environment.

Acculturation Processes

When migrating to a new culture, individuals experience many changes, from language to religion to habits that undoubtedly challenge their responses to daily life. In that sense, migrants have to adjust themselves to all these new changes. Responses to this adjustment vary completely from person to person due to personality traits and personal background. Triandis, Kashima, Shimada, and Villareal (1986) shed light on the different levels of the acculturation process that are present in the migrant
experience. Triandis et al. studied different levels of acculturation between Americans and Hispanics (immigrants) in the US through the use of acculturation indices. Triandis et al. (1986) identified three types of adaptation: *accommodation*, *overshooting*, and *ethnic affirmation*. *Accommodation* is displayed when individuals from culture A show similar responses to the responses made by individuals native to culture B. *Overshooting* is manifested when individuals in culture A have more exaggerated responses than individuals who are native to culture B. And, finally, *ethnic affirmation* occurs when individuals from culture A have opposite responses from individuals who are native to culture B.

Triandis et al. (1986) believed that immigrants are more willing to adopt (and accommodate to) roles, perceptions of behaviors, and behaviors of another culture that occur in public while, at the same time, keeping private values, attitudes, and stereotypes, and showing “less accommodation or even ethnic affirmation” (p. 47) when the behaviors in question are non-public in nature. Triandis et al. (1986) confirmed in their study that behavioral intentions and role perceptions are the first things that change in the direction of the new culture.

Berry (1990) went a little bit further than Triandis et al., explaining that, even though immigrants’ general attitudes toward a new culture can be characterized as *acceptance, interpretation, or denial*, this process of acculturation should be examined on two levels: the *population level* and the *individual level*. Berry referred to the population level using the unmodified term *acculturation* in order to refer to changes that occur when two cultures enter into contact. For example, acculturation changes at
the levels of the economy, political structure, and social organizations. On the other hand, Berry (1990) used the modified term *psychological acculturation* (coined by Graves) to refer to the individual level. Psychological acculturation includes not only the individual developments that take place when a person interacts with another culture, but also the developments that are a product “of being participants in the general acculturation changes under way in [a person’s] own culture” (p. 235). Changes at this level involve modifications of behaviors, values, and identity as well as attitudes. Berry considered that this distinction between population level and individual level is important because, in the second case, the acculturation process entails the preservation of individual, traditional psychological features. He also pointed out that most disciplines have analyzed only the population level while failing to include the individual level. He argued that studies should consider both levels as being interrelated.

At the same time, Berry (1990) alerted us to the fact that acculturation can vary considerably and have different effects on an immigrant’s adaptability especially when taking into account the type of migrant group. Berry et al. (1987) distinguished among five types of groups: immigrants, ethnic groups, refugees, native people, and sojourners. This classification is important because it takes into account the degree of willingness and general attitude an individual has toward adapting to a new cultural situation. Sojourners are expected to have a higher degree of willingness due to the fact that they voluntarily move abroad from their home countries for a specific purpose.
In addition to distinguishing between levels of acculturation and types of emigrant groups, Berry and Kim (1988) identified four varieties of the process of acculturation, a classification that improves on the one offered by Triandis et al. (1986) and contributes to a better understanding of the adjustment process. The four varieties of Berry and Kim are: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. According to Berry and Kim, integration represents the maintenance of cultural identity and, at the same time, the strengthening of interpersonal relationships with other groups from the mainstream culture. Assimilation seeks to erase the past cultural heritage of individuals in order to establish and maintain relationships in the new culture. In the separation style, individuals do not pursue relationships with groups from the mainstream culture, trying instead to preserve their cultural identity. Finally, marginalization involves complete alienation where individuals no longer practice their original cultural values but also do not maintain relationships with groups from the new culture.

If, according to Triandis et al. and Berry, immigrants and sojourners are more willing to change certain public behaviors, attitudes, and roles in the direction of a new culture and if, at the same time, family members acculturate differently, those differences can operate within families to produce conflictive and problematic situations. Along that vein, Ying (1999) voiced concerns about the intercultural and intergenerational conflicts that emerge in immigrant families as a result of differences in acculturation between parents and their children. Ying (1999) explained that those differences end up developing, most of the time, into “generational and cultural gaps”
Parents retained values and beliefs that tie them to their home cultures while children adopted values and behaviors that corresponded to the mainstream of the host culture. Ying (1999) presented evidence that these gaps can result in negative mental health consequences for both the parents and their children.

In previous research along this same line, but specifically examining Chinese- and Japanese-Americans, Sue (1973) clearly showed intercultural and intergenerational differences in acculturation. Sue’s study demonstrated that values from Asian cultures collide with European American values. Asian Americans seem to be more subject to parental control and more respectful of parental authority. The general attitude of the Asian-American child is submissive, obedient, and compliant. This characteristic, according to Sue (1973), sharply contrasts with Western ways, which emphasize “spontaneity, assertiveness, and informality” (p. 144). Sue (1973) argued that parents’ expectations for the behaviors and values that they think their (Asian-American) children must have sometimes collide with the values that the youngsters have already acquired from the European American culture.

In that sense, I believe that the emergence of communication conflicts and problematic situations that sojourners pass through needs to be examined and understood in relation to the different levels of acculturation that family members have obtained. An understanding of these differences in adaptation/acculturation among sojourner family members will be relevant to reconstructing the meanings individuals attach to those communication conflicts as well as the solutions members bring to the conflicts.
Intercultural Conflicts: Parents Versus Children

Some interesting literature on immigrants reveals the appearance of conflicts between family members due to dissimilarities in the process of acculturation to the new culture. Along that vein, Wakil et al. (1981) analyzed the socialization patterns of adolescents from Indian and Pakistani immigrant families who settled down in Vancouver, Canada. Their study scrutinized both sides: first the values and ideals that parents tended to transmit to their adolescents during the process of socialization, and second, the adolescents’ reactions to these values. The authors interestingly note that, in general, these immigrant families preserved what they called “core values” (p. 939) and, at the same time “accepted changes in more pragmatic values” (p. 939). Core values are those values related to conjugal roles, dating behavior, outside socializing behaviors, and child rearing practices.

Participants in this study considered the mother tongue and religion to be important symbols of their identity. The tendency of parents to preserve these core values produced several conflicts with their young adolescents who looked at Western values in a more positive way. For example, teenagers in this study demonstrated concern and frustration when parents did not allow them to attend parties with their peers or when parents did not “allow [their children] to mix with the opposite sex” (p. 934). Language was another reason for conflict between parents and teenagers. Wakil et al. (1981) mentioned children tended to answer in English even when their parents spoke to them in their mother tongue.
On the other hand, these immigrants registered some slight changes in what the researchers called “pragmatic values,” such as the adoption of more Western ways of dressing and food preferences as well as some social customs like Thanksgiving, Halloween, or Valentine’s day. The gap appears here when children recognize and understand the meaning of these festivals more than the festivals of their native culture.

Along a similar line, Rosenthal (1984) analyzed the process of acculturation of Greek and Italian immigrants who settled in Australia. In this research, Rosenthal took a sample of Anglo-Australians as a comparison group in order to examine how the above-mentioned groups of immigrants acquired values and beliefs that were typical of the mainstream Australian culture. For that purpose, Rosenthal raised some issues of potential conflict between parents and adolescents, like drinking or smoking, going out, occupational goals, personal freedom, and social behaviors. Her purpose was to look at the adolescents’ perceptions of their conflicts with their parents, and vice versa, as a product of differences in acculturation. She discovered that Greek and Italian adolescents perceived stronger and more significant conflicts with their mothers than did Anglo-Australian teenagers. This tendency was also stronger for male and younger adolescents than for older and female teenagers’ conflicts with their fathers. Additionally, the study showed significantly less conflict between Anglo-Australian parents and their daughters than existed in the Greek and Italian families. The Rosenthal (1984) study displayed a clear example of research where gender constitutes an important variable. The parents in the Greek and Italian groups have
different gender expectations than the parents from the Anglo-Australian culture. For the first two groups, males are expected to be rebellious while girls are expected to be more passive and “tolerant to controls” (p. 72). As a result of these gender role expectations, the high levels of conflict that Greek and Italian parents had with their daughters make sense. Rosenthal (1984) also pointed out that adolescent conflicts in those groups were attached to differences in adaptation to the mainstream culture. According to Rosenthal, conflict appears when teenagers adopt attitudes and behaviors from the Anglo-Australian culture and oppose their parents’ adherence to traditions.

In later research, Rosenthal, Demetrios, and Efklides (1989) explored the level of conflict attributable to cultural variation between groups. Their idea was to capture the meaning of conflict and determine similarities and differences between families of different cultural groups in order to shed light on the process of cultural assimilation. Their study focused on analyzing the influence of culture on three aspects of conflict: behavior, style of resolution, and beliefs about the consequences of conflict between parents and adolescents. The study involved Greek-Australians, Anglo-Celtic Australians (all residents of Melbourne), and a group of Greeks living in Greece. They found common behaviors in conflict situations across groups (aggression, avoidance, and discussion) but differences in the ways family members emphasize some behaviors and beliefs. The differences were seen particularly between the Anglo-Australian and the Greek group as well as the Greek-Australians and the Greek-group. Greek-Australian adolescents clearly assimilated responses to conflict similar to Anglo-Australian adolescents, showing also a difference with the Greek
group. Anglo- and Greek-Australian teenagers reported that they discussed more in conflict situations. They compromised, and they perceived conflict in positive terms. Greek immigrant parents, by comparison, showed responses to conflict that clearly reflected characteristics of their Greek origin and the influence of the country of residency (in this case Australia), as a result of the process of assimilation to the host culture.

Coinciding with Wakil et al. (1981), Rosenthal, Bell, Demetrios and Efklides (1989) found that acculturation was more likely to directly affect individuals’ behaviors rather than their “core values” (p. 57). Rosenthal et al. conducted research involving Anglo- and Greek-Australian immigrants in Australia and compared them with Greek families living in Greece. The purpose of the research was to determine if Greek immigrants in Australia have retained collectivistic values and to explore the extent to which Greek-Australians have integrated with the Anglo-Australian culture. At the same time, the study examined the gap in values and behaviors that existed between parents and adolescents in the Greek-Australian group. Rosenthal et al.’s findings serve to confirm that there are differences between Australians and traditional Greeks in their values. The former are more individualistic and the later more collectivistic in their values. Some Greek core values (like being family concerned, being a respected and respectable member of a community) were still preserved in the Greek-Australian group even after immigration. The Greek-Australian group values their cultural heritage with Greece as well as the respectability of the family and members of the community. These values were not of concern for Australians who
appreciate “independence, material security and individual happiness” (p. 67).

Greek and Greek-Australian adolescents held similar values to those of their parents. Those values were different from the values of their Australian peers. Even though adolescents in the Greek-Australian group displayed differences with their parents, teenagers expressed “similar expectations about their behavior towards parents” (p. 69). The main difference between Greek-Australian adolescents with their parents was that teenagers had assimilated to the Australian culture in their perceptions of appropriate behaviors.

Zivkovic (1995), who examined the adaptation patterns of parents and teenagers of three Croat communities in the US and Canada, noticed similar insights in terms of immigrants’ retention of core values. He analyzed three Croat immigrant communities that developed different mechanisms of adaptation affecting patterns of values, attitudes, and family relationships. The first community was composed of immigrants from the same island in Croatia. Zivkovic considered this group as constituting an example of a “close” (p. 88) acculturation pattern because they kept more strongly with tradition and developed community strategies that maintained them as a group.

The second group exemplified “intermediate adaptation” (p. 98) in which people adopted individualistic patterns but still kept ethnic contacts through maintaining cultural and social links with their community. The third case was an example of an “open” (p. 89) adapted community, where values and patterns from the individualistic host culture were rapidly adopted. Contrary to researcher expectation, adolescents in open communities displayed the highest levels of ethnic identity while teenagers in the
closed communities showed the lowest. One possible reason for these results is the fact that the adolescents who were part of the open communities had traveled to Croatia to visit their grandparents and stayed with them all summer. Zivkovic (1995) argued that differences in ethnicity could be the result of variations in perceptions. In his view, if adolescents in the closed communities identify with their ethnicity as opposed to their American peers’ lifestyles, their attitude would be to reject the American culture. On the other hand, teenagers in the other two communities (intermediate and open) were “more likely to perceive Croathood as symbolic ethnicity” (p. 99) of which they are proud and live together in harmony within the mainstream culture. Zivkovic (1995) found that, in general, the level of conflict in the three communities was very low. However, in comparing the three communities, the intermediate community showed the highest levels of conflict, with the parents expressing the greatest levels of concern about the values their teenagers had assimilated from the mainstream culture.

In a similar vein, but later in time, Fatemeh (1997) seemed to confirm these findings in a study of Iranian immigrant families in the US who experienced “a significantly greater amount of intergenerational conflict than indigenous American families” (p. 37). The conflicts seemed to be based in intergenerational differences due to the acculturation process. This study sought to examine cultural beliefs, values, and differences in customs between Iranian parents and their first born American adolescents as compared to American adolescents. At the same time the study analyzed Iranian parent’s conflicts with their children as compared to the conflicts
present in American families. The author discovered that Iranian parents tried to teach their youngsters to preserve some things that they considered core values, e.g., the Farsi language. Fatemah’s (1997) findings suggested that the tensions between Iranian parents and their adolescents were stronger “when the parents insist[ed] on teaching their children the Iranian values” (p. 52) while their children’s attitude was to object to some of those values and adapt to the mainstream values of the host country, where most of the youngsters had been born.

**Intercultural Conflicts: Adolescents’ Perceptions of Conflict**

Another way of examining intercultural conflicts within immigrant families is by focusing on adolescents’ perceptions of conflict with their parents. In a very extensive research project, Rosenthal and Feldman (1989) conducted two important studies in Australia and the United States. They sought to explore the differences in family patterns between Chinese-American and American families, and Chinese-Australian and Australian families, with the idea of examining whether immigrant families keep traditional patterns of their collectivistic culture or reflect any shift in their patterns to more individualistic values over time. In order to obtain a more precise picture of Chinese family patterns, the study took a sample of Hong Kong residents as an example of a collectivistic culture as opposed to the individualistic American and Australian cultures. Rosenthal and Feldman (1989) selected immigrant adolescents of Chinese descent who live in the US and Australia. These Chinese descendant groups were first and second generation Australians and Americans. This
distinction between first and second generation is important because Rosenthal and Feldman (1989) discovered some differences in the family patterns between these two generations of Chinese-Americans in the US.

The authors found differences between Hong Kong families and Anglo-Australian and Euro-American families. The Hong Kong families reinforced interdependence and were more self-contained, while the Anglo and Euro-American families encouraged adolescents to be more autonomous and outer-directed. Chinese immigrants perceived their parents as demanding more conformity and stressing achievement more than Anglo-Australian families did. The stress on achievement and control is characteristic of Chinese traditional family patterns. However the study revealed some subtle changes that show Chinese immigrants’ tendencies to accommodate “the autonomy-promoting norms of their new environment” (p. 511).

This acculturation to Western norms was also seen in first generation Chinese immigrants in the US. In that sense, first generation Chinese Australians displayed more traditional family organization patterns, than did the second generation. Second generation Chinese-Americans perceived family in more regulatory terms than did the first generation. The authors concluded that, even when immigrant families have been in a new country for a long time and have acculturated to individualistic norms, certain traditional values of Chinese culture still remained present.

Focusing on adolescents’ perceptions of their own and of their parents’ values, Rosenthal, Rainieri and Klimidis (1996) examined Vietnamese immigrants in Australia. The aim of the study was to scrutinize possible discrepancies in values as
well as intergenerational conflict within this immigrant group. According to Rosenthal et al. (1996), the Vietnamese culture tends to establish very close community relationships. Members are expected to not interact too much with the host culture, and they still preserve a very patriarchal structure in their family. In contrast to other immigrant groups, like Indians, Pakistanis, Greeks, and Italians, Vietnamese have emigrated primarily as political refugees. This fact, according to Rosenthal et al., can exert some influence on the preservation of traditional family values during their process of acculturation.

Another important consideration involves differences in the roles of boys and girls. Rosenthal et al. (1996) noted that there is a clear role for girls in Vietnamese society. That role involves taking care of children and grandparents, marrying and having children in order to keep family harmony. Boys, on the other hand, “are more directed towards leadership, higher education and pursuit of a career” (p. 83).

The results of this study suggested that the length of the immigrants’ stay in the new culture could influence the progressive loss of traditional cultural family norms. Vietnamese who spent more time in Australia tended to endorse less highly their traditional culture values than did recent arrivals. The difference was higher for females than for males. Rosenthal et al. (1996) attribute that result to the fact that Australians value more egalitarian and independent roles for men and women. These egalitarian roles would probably be an ideal value for immigrant adolescents to acquire through the acculturation process. In that sense, Vietnamese girls looked with dissatisfaction at the traditional place reserved for them in Vietnamese society, even
though the correlation between intergenerational conflict and dissatisfaction with their role was relatively low. This result is consistent with how important obedience is for Vietnamese families.

For Rosenthal et al. (1996), this is clearly a point of conflict between female adolescents and their parents. Although, adolescents (both males and females) in this study in general perceived that they were more independent and less traditional than their parents, they still believed their parents’ traditional values were of some importance for them. One limitation of this study, according to the authors, is the lack of comparison groups from the host culture as well as from the Vietnamese culture. Thus, clear, unquestioned claims about the impact of immigration on family dynamics could not be offered.

Siefen, Kirkcaldy, and Athanasou (1996) explored German, Greek and second-generation Greek immigrant adolescents in Germany. Their study focused on teenagers’ perceptions of parental attitudes towards responses to authority and social situations (p. 836) and which of the above mentioned attitudes change during cultural adaptation and which remain the same. Essentially, the study addressed the second-generation Greek immigrants in Germany through a comparison with Germans and Greeks. Siefen et al. (1996) found that Greek immigrants partially acquired new parental attitudes from the new culture but also maintained attitudes from their country of origin. The responses were a little bit different for second generation Greek immigrants who exhibited attitudes more similar to those of their host country.
Despite this accommodation process of second generation Greek immigrants, they still preserved other elements of identification with their home countries. A confirmation of that is that these adolescents expressed pride in being Greek more than Germans expressed pride in being Germans. Parental involvement was different between Greek non-immigrants and immigrants. In the first case, parental involvement was perceived as very strong while, in the case of second generation Greeks, their responses were similar to Germans, showing a high degree of integration. Greek immigrants also showed a low degree of family cohesion, a fact that stands as a contrast with Greeks and Germans. However, in terms of adolescents’ freedom, the first generation of Greeks showed a zone of conflict due to the impositions and restrictions of their parents, a problem that does not exist in the second generation which had acquired the German “style” and integrated into that culture. The authors noted some limitations with respect to their research. Specifically, there is a need to replicate these findings using other attitude measures that can account for generational differences. Finally, these findings need to be explored across other cultural groups.

In a study that preceded Siefen et al., Yau and Smetana (1993) brought a different insight to acculturation conflicts between parents and adolescents. They focused on second generation Chinese-Americans as well as recent Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants in the US. The main focus of their study was on examining “adolescents’ reasoning and judgements about cultural issues that cause conflict with [their] parents” (p. 419) due to teenagers’ age and differences in acculturation. Yau and Smetana (1993) pointed out that both parents and adolescents reason about and
conceptualize conflict in a different manner. Parents give strength to issues of social
customs related to socially accepted behaviors and moral concerns, whereas
adolescents look at these as issues of maintaining personal jurisdiction that has
“consequence[s] only to the actor” (p. 420).

Their study showed that Chinese-American adolescents, regardless of their level
of acculturation, give priority in a conflict to social conventions in order to meet
parental expectations. The justification for this choice is based on pragmatic and
psychological reasons. They do not want to make their parents upset, and thus, they try
to avoid any possible conflict. That explains their subtle and indirect manner when
approaching conflicts with their parents. This approach, at the same time, constitutes
one of the main characteristics of a collectivistic culture. This adherence to
conventions decreases with age, causing Yau and Smetana (1993) to conclude that
intergenerational conflict between Chinese-American parents and adolescents might
increase as teenagers get older. At the same time, the study revealed that American-
acculturated adolescents emphasize personal considerations more when making
judgements than do Asian-acculturated teenagers, despite the fact that the sample
showed adolescents becoming more bicultural than American or Asian-acculturated
adolescents.

Yau and Smetana acknowledged some limitations to their research. First, the
adolescents’ responses focused on a hypothetical conflict; it would be important to
assess how adolescents reason about a real family conflict. Second, the study did not
assess parents’ assimilation to the American culture. It would be interesting to see the
differences between parents’ and adolescents’ reasoning about conflict. Third, the sample was composed primarily of middle class adolescents. Yau and Smetana (1993) wondered about possible differences that might have emerged with a more economically diverse sample. Finally, it would be relevant to analyze a sample with more varied levels of acculturation than the one involved in this study.

**Intercultural Conflicts: Children’s Behavior**

In a very interesting qualitative study, Sung (1985) examined bicultural conflicts involving Chinese immigrant children and adolescents in the US and tried to understand “how children weather the immigrant experience” (p. 255). She looked at children and adolescent intercultural conflict, but also sought diverse perspectives by soliciting information from not only children but teachers, social workers, ministers, and guidance counselors, etc. as she sought to shed light on children’s bicultural experiences. Sung (1985) used participant observation and interviews, selecting student participants from elementary and junior high schools in the US. Sung (1985) analyzed the meaning that concepts like aggressiveness, sexuality, sports, tattling, affection, education, thrift, dependency, authority, heroes, individualism, and marginality had for Chinese immigrant children as well as for Americans (teachers, counselors, etc.) and tried to gain an understanding of their interpretations of bicultural conflicts. Sung found Chinese immigrant children experienced innumerable dilemmas due to bicultural conflicts. These children struggled between the preservation of traditions transmitted by their parents and the values encouraged by the American
society. Sung thought teachers and parents should be aware of these cultural
differences in order to not exacerbate dissimilarities but, rather, to show respect for
diversity.

All the literature that has been reviewed on intercultural conflicts between
immigrant parents, adolescents, and children shows a remarkable point that new
research has to continue to explore. Specifically, scholars need to examine the
relationship between the values and behaviors that parents want their children to
preserve from their original culture and the values/behaviors parents think that their
children have adopted from the mainstream culture. This relationship will be even
more significant when the potential exists for a clash of cultures when sojourners
return home. This tension between preservation and change of values, behaviors, roles,
etc. needs to be examined more deeply. The tension is clearly exposed by Sung, who
examined the dilemmas immigrant children face in their adaptation processes. With
the exception of Sung’s study, the rest of the literature has focused primary on
adolescents and, specifically, their conflictive relationship with their parents.
However, immigrant and sojourner children are more likely to adapt rapidly to new
cultural values, behaviors, and communication styles etc. so that they will be accepted
and included within peer relationships at school. These changes might very well have
an impact on the child’s parents and on family communication in general. These
communication changes and conflicts should be examined more deeply in light of the
dialectical tension that exists between the preservation of parents’ traditions and the
forces that encourage the child to adjust to the new cultural environment. The research
on intercultural conflicts cited in this section shows another limitation. Most of the researchers have analyzed immigrant family intercultural conflicts from a quantitative stance, looking at parents’ or adolescents perceptions of the behaviors, values, and styles that seem to provide the reasons for important disagreements within the family. Additionally, most of this research focuses on behaviors from a psychological perspective while not exploring the communication styles and patterns that change during the process of acculturation. Qualitative research can exhibit a different insight into the matter while allowing for the recovery of multiple perspectives and voices about the conflictive episodes experienced by sojourner families.

Sojourners

Psychological Perspective

Most of the literature on sojourners focuses on the process of adaptation and the reentry of sojourners to their home countries. In that vein, Verthelyi (1995) conducted qualitative research exploring how culture shock was experienced by spouses of international graduate students at one US university. Verthelyi explained that this topic has been ignored by scholars, as well as by university services for international students. Verthelyi’s (1995) study sought to explore how spouses of international graduate students perceive sources of information and obstacles that have influenced their adaptation to their new environment. At the same time, the study analyzed spouses’ expectations and needs, as well as gender role orientation. The study illustrated that there were diverse responses among spouses. The diversity in their
responses indicates, according to Verthelyi (1995), that they are influenced more by “personal variables over situational factors” (p. 403). Personality as well as previous preparation for change was more important than cultural or racial background. In that sense, flexibility seems to be a key for a more positive and less traumatic way of coping with cultural stress. This research revealed how gender-role orientation and family values are a clue to understanding the impact and degree of culture shock.

Offering a different perspective, Ward and Searle (1991) studied predictors of psychological (mood disturbance) and sociocultural (social difficulty) adjustment, predictors of cultural identity, and value discrepancies adjustment among sojourners, as well as the relationships among these variables. Their study was conducted at a university in New Zealand among international students from 42 countries. The authors found that “cultural dissimilarity and loneliness predict psychological distress in sojourners” (p. 218) while sociocultural adjustment could be predicted by knowing the host culture as well as the home culture identity. This later result confirmed that sojourners with a very strong cultural identity are less willing to adapt to new customs, beliefs, etc. and that it is more difficult for such a sojourn to socialize with people from the host culture. The study also revealed that values were neither predictors nor responsible for adjustment to the host culture. Ward and Kennedy (1993) reexamined these two dimensions: psychological and sociocultural factors that contribute to sojourners’ adjustment to a new culture. In their research, Ward and Kennedy (1993) engaged in a comparison study of Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand and Malaysian students in Singapore. According to Ward and Kennedy
psychological adjustment involves individuals’ experience of stress and focuses on the process of coping with that stress (p. 223). On the other hand, sociocultural adjustment is influenced by skills and “ability to fit in” (p. 223) the host culture. Their study looked at culture-specific and culture-general effects as predictors of both dimensions. The results revealed no significant differences in the psychological adjustment of both groups. However, there were differences in sociocultural adjustment. Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand experienced more problems than did Malaysian students in Singapore. The reason for this, according to Ward and Kennedy (1993), could be that Singaporean and Malaysian cultures are more similar to each other and, by comparison, more dissimilar to the New Zealand culture. Ward and Kennedy found that “personality, life changes, and social support” (p. 241) affected psychological adjustment, while the length of residence in the new culture, the similarity and differences with their home culture, “acculturation strategies,” and mood disturbance (p. 241) can account for sociocultural adjustment. Ward and Kennedy also found that culture-specific and culture-general differences are directly tied to adjustment and are related to “the nature of host-guest interactions” (p. 244).

Verthelyi’s and Ward and Searle’s studies revealed that sojourners’ experiences are as complex as the experiences of immigrants. In that sense, it would be significant for my research project to take into account the cultural values and traditions of sojourner families in order to understand the relationship between the acculturation process and the impact that American values can have on their communication.
A Communication Perspective

There is little literature referring to sojourners from a communication perspective. One reason for this could be that the primary research focus has been on the psychological effects produced through the acculturation process. Brein and David (1971) developed one of the pioneer articles stressing the importance of looking at the sojourners’ adjustment process from a communication perspective. Brein and David considered that, besides personality, social interaction background, and other aspects, that contribute to and influence the process of adjustment for sojourners, effective intercultural communication is one of the more crucial and integrative factors. This last factor includes verbal and non-verbal communication as the basic exchange that occurs during interpersonal encounters. Brein and David emphasized that interpersonal communication can account for the effectiveness of a sojourner’s adjustment.

Ruben and Kealey (1979) explored this a little bit more by analyzing the relationship between success and failure in cross-cultural adjustment and interpersonal and social communication skills. Their study focused on determining whether it is possible to predict communication skills that can account for a better adaptation to a new cultural environment. For their purposes, seven communication skills were selected: “respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, role behavior, interaction management, and ambiguity tolerance” (p. 16). The research followed the process of a group of Canadian people from their training in cross-culture issues before departure to Kenya through the adaptation process after a year of living
in Kenya. Results demonstrated that “interaction profile, task role behavior, orientation to knowledge, self-centered behavior and ambiguity tolerance predicted effectiveness” (p. 38), while respect was a predictor of adjustment. Their study also showed that culture shock is very different from adjustment and effectiveness. These last two terms seem to be functionally related.

Chen (1992) continued the examination of the effect that communication adaptability and interaction involvement have on cross-cultural adjustment. He explained that communication adaptability and interaction involvement are two components of communication social competence. Communication adaptability focuses on behaviors while interaction involvement refers to cognitive aspects of communication ability, in this case “perceptiveness and attentiveness in the process of interaction” (p. 34). His study, conducted with a large group of international students (sojourners) in the US, revealed, first, that there is a positive correlation between these two aspects of communication ability and sojourner ability to cope with the new culture. Second, results showed that formal relations, relationship management, and initiating contact are the three dimensions that best predict adaptability and responsiveness to a new environment. Chen suggested that these two measures (communication adaptability and interaction involvement) not only justify the communication competence of an individual but can also provide an explanation of the adjustment process in a new cultural situation. Chen acknowledged some limitations to this research, including the need to explore these dimensions in another
culture, instead of just the US, as well as examining other dimensions that affect communication adaptability and interaction involvement.

Following a similar approach, Redmond and Bunyi (1993) analyzed the relationship between intercultural communication competence, stress, and effectiveness in handling stressful situations. Their research was conducted with international students at a large Midwest university in the US. Even though intercultural communication competence includes several skills, their study examined only selected components of intercultural communication competence. Specifically, Redmond and Bunyi (1993) scrutinized five components: “communication effectiveness, adaptation, social integration, knowledge of the United States culture, language competence, and social decentring (empathy)” (p. 235). They found that sojourners experienced stress no matter how communicatively competent they were. Nevertheless, communication skills can predict how well sojourners will cope with their stress. At the same time, the study revealed that adaptation and social decentring best predict the amount of stress experienced by these students, while communication effectiveness, adaptation, and social integration predict how effectively sojourners handle stress.

These studies of sojourners (Brein & David, 1971; Chen, 1992; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Ruben & Kealey, 1979) underscore the important role that communication plays in reducing culture shock as well as predicting a better level of acculturation. Nevertheless, this literature is limited in that it brings an individualistic point of view to the discussion of communication, while focusing on a very few
communication skills that sojourners have to develop for more successful adaptation to the host culture. It is important to explore the communication changes that occur due to the process of acculturation within sojourner families.

**Sojourners Reentry**

Martin (1986) theorized about the role of communication in the reentry process of sojourners. In his work, Martin focused on student sojourners’ perceptions of positive and negative changes in their relationships with parents, siblings, and friends during three stages: home environment before departure, host culture, and reentry. The focus for this research was US students who were back after being part of an AFS exchange program with Germany and Turkey. Results showed sojourners have a more positive relationship with parents and siblings, but more negative or problematic relationships with their friends. Martin (1986) hypothesized that communication with parents and siblings facilitates the understanding and interpretation of the changes to which sojourners have been exposed. However, communication seemed to be important for maintaining friendships across the distance. Friendships in which communication was stressed as an important factor remained strong while friendships characterized by weak lines of communication were harmed by the separation. However these studies did not examine how the communication changes experienced in the host country would affect the individual relationships with family, extended family, peers, and teachers.
With a different perspective on reentry and focusing on children’s readjustment problems, Sueda and Wiseman (1991) examined Japanese children who lived abroad for a year during their parents’ business assignment. Findings showed that one of the most serious challenges for those children was in adjusting to Japanese schools. Schools are not equipped to support reentry sojourners and force them to fit into their system; they lack special classes and counseling services that can help students in their readjustment process. Another important consideration is that sojourners have to readapt themselves in order to internalize Japanese patterns of behavior and unlearn Western styles.

What is particularly relevant from this literature on sojourner reentry (Martin, 1986; Sueda & Wiseman, 1991) is the fact that the return to their home countries seemed to bring about complex and conflictive situations partly due to communication changes during their stay on the host country. The return to one’s native country will undoubtedly trigger challenging changes that sojourner families will have to deal with in advance in order to prepare family members to readjust to their own culture.

**Cultural Differences**

An interesting way to examine sojourner adaptation to a new environment is by analyzing differences among cultures. The more different a sojourner culture is from the values, communication behaviors, and styles of the host culture, the more complex the process of acculturation will be for family members. Hofstede (1984) argued that cultures can be distinguished from one another in terms of whether they reflect
attitudes of individualism or collectivism; whether they subscribe to low or high power distance; what their tolerance is for uncertainty; and whether they reflect masculinity or femininity. Hofstede (1984) stated that every culture will influence individual responses and behaviors towards conflict according to the values and beliefs promoted by that culture. He argued that cultures can be generally characterized according to their emphasis on personal goals and autonomy, referred to as “individualistic cultures,” or group goals, collective needs and interdependence relations, referred to as “collectivistic cultures.”

Hofstede (1984) also distinguished between high and low power distance cultures. The main characteristic of high power distance cultures is that there are marked hierarchical relationships between bosses and subordinates, with relationship inequality stressed. In contrast, low power distance cultures stress a more egalitarian and democratic relationship between a boss and his/her subordinates. I believe the differences can also be applied to the analysis of sojourner family relationships. There are some cultures within the collectivistic spectrum in which families stress more distant and hierarchical relationships between parents and children. In those families, children are supposed to comply with certain rules and follow adults’ orders in a very passive way. However, in other cultures families encourage more egalitarian relationships between the parents and their children.

Uncertainty avoidance is another category used by Hofstede (1984) in order to distinguish between cultures. The author stressed that, even though uncertainty is a “basic fact of human life” (p. 110), every culture will determine the degree of
tolerance for uncertainty. In that sense, individualistic cultures (in general) tend to
demonstrate a low degree of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity due to their
preference for a direct mode of communicating and handling things. Collectivistic
cultures tend to display a higher degree of tolerance toward ambiguity, also expressed
in their more indirect style of communicating and handling of interpersonal conflicts.
Finally, Hofstede (1984) claimed that “the duality of sexes is a fundamental fact with
which different societies cope in different ways” (p. 176). He explained that the
masculinity/femininity duality is learned by socialization and serves to determine a
person’s “place in society” (p. 180).

This duality is translated into differences within family roles, differences that
continue into peer and school relationships. Some cultures encourage more traditional
values than others stressing, for example, a more independent role for men who are
considered to be in charge of decisions, while women are expected to assume a
nurturing role within the family. I believe all these categories pointed out in
Hofstede’s works can shed light on the communication conflicts that parents and their
children have when acculturating to a culture which is different from their home
culture. These differences are very important to consider when trying to understand
cultural dissimilarities because they are also present and structure the type of family,
peer relationships, and out-group relationships of sojourners.
Research Questions

The review of relevant literature for the topic of this research helped me in defining the research questions that will guide the present study. Those questions are:

1. How do cultural differences in acculturation influence parents’ perceived communication with their children?
2. From the parent’s point of view, how has acculturation within the host culture affected the communication strategies and styles employed within their family?
3. What concerns do parents voice about the abilities of their children to return to their native culture and re-adapt to the communication/relationship practices of that culture?

Summary Chapter Two

Relevant literature dealing with the migration process, acculturation, immigrant family conflict, sojourners, the reentry process, and cultural differences has been reviewed. The first topic analyzed the different stages of the migration process in immigrants’ lives and demonstrated the appearance of several types of conflict within immigrant families. A second topic, the notion of acculturation, was scrutinized with the aim of shedding light on the different levels and degrees of acculturation that individuals, even in the same family, might display. Differences in acculturation level are thought to be one of the main sources of conflict within immigrant families. As a third topic, we reviewed the primary literature on immigrant family conflicts, with a
focus on adolescents and the little work that has included younger children. This literature clearly shows that language, styles of communication, and some behavior changes are the main focus of conflict between youngsters and their parents. Teenagers, in general, strive to adapt to the new language, values, and customs of the culture in which they are living while their parents want them to preserve some elements of their home culture. None of these studies explored the communication and behavior changes of children under 12 years old.

In addition to this literature on immigrants, we also explored studies on sojourners. We found that most of the studies on sojourners were centered in a psychological perspective examining how individuals cope with the stress of culture shock when entering a new culture. Only a little bit of the research on sojourners has offered any communication insights. Instead, the focus has been on the competencies that an individual has to have in order to adapt to a new culture.

Another relevant literature reviewed examined the sojourner reentry process, but this work has primarily concentrated on the individual experiences of teenagers who have studied abroad or on children from sojourner families. No relevant studies of sojourner families have been found nor does much research on children’s acculturation-based conflict with parents, peers, and teachers seem to exist.

Finally, we reviewed literature on cultural differences and how sojourner family experiences have to be examined and understood in the context of a specific culture. The research questions that will guide the present study were the posed.
The purpose of the next chapter is to clearly describe the methodology, assumptions and contextual theory used to pursue the present study. A rationale for the use of qualitative methodology, a description of the methods used, information concerning research subjects chosen, and an explanation of the way the data analysis was conducted are also provided.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

Contextual Theory

The present study takes a dialectical perspective on interpersonal communication as a frame of reference. This perspective, as Baxter and Montgomery (1997) pointed out, is not “a theory in the traditional sense” (p. 326) but “a set of conceptual assumptions” (p. 326) that brings an interesting and useful frame from which to analyze the complex and intertwined relationship between interpersonal communication and the acculturation process for sojourners. The dialectical perspective holds the idea that social life and especially, interpersonal relationships are made of contradictions. Those contradictions are the dynamic interplay of opposites. These oppositions are so varied across cultures and time that it is not possible to offer generalizations. However, Baxter (1988) noticed that there are some basic contradictions that are present in all personal relationships: autonomy versus connection; novelty versus predictability; and openness versus closedness. These contradictions reflect the tensions between stability and change that Baxter and Montgomery (1997) saw as invariably present in all social systems. The manner in which relationship members manage the tensions in their relationship is, by nature, indeterminate, which means that any changes can be either cyclical or linear.

Along a similar vein, Turiel (1999) provides interesting insight and sheds light on how cultural differences, even when those differences occur among the co-cultures that exist within a culture, can produce profound tensions that can lead to cultural
change and how these tensions are at the core of cultural practices. This dialectical perspective on interpersonal relationships helps in understanding the complex process of interpersonal communication in the context of two cultures and the processes of acculturation and re-acculturation that sojourner children and their families experience when living abroad. In that sense, this perspective facilitates the exploration of communication practices, interpersonal relationships, and the changes that appear in the symbolic dialectical interplay or tension between a sojourner’s cultural inheritance and their exposure to a new cultural environment. These tensions are experienced within the family, as well as in relationships with peers, teachers, and neighbors, as a result of the children’s assimilation to behaviors, beliefs, and values of the American culture.

**Interpretivist Approach**

An interpretivist approach was adopted for this study. This perspective enables the researcher to understand the ways sojourners construct meaning for their communicative actions in certain moments of their lives. The interpretivist approach, while focusing on the production of meaning, allows the researcher to ask “how” questions (Leeds-Hurtz, 1995) referring to the process of communication, as well as to the conflicts that emerge due to cultural differences. These questions helped me to explore people’s communication as that communication was perceived and experienced by sojourners. Nevertheless, none of this could have been achieved unless I actively involved myself as a participant researcher. Assuming an interpretivist
approach enables the researcher to work as a facilitator who, in interaction with parents, children, teachers, and friends of these families, is capable of reconstructing the logic and processes of attributing meaning given by individuals. This interactive link between the researcher and research participants is so essential that Guba and Lincoln (1994) observed that “the findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds” (p.111). With that claim, Guba and Lincoln (1994) show that reality is not something “objective” and unique, as positivists aver but, rather, something relative that individuals define and construct in a never-ending process.

Another important reason for assuming an interpretivist approach to this study is that, as Gaskins et al. (1992) claimed, we cannot understand the creation of meaning unless we examine it through the lenses of a specific culture. In that sense, this approach assumed that social phenomena have to be scrutinized in a manner that allows us to take into consideration the subjects or participants as well as their cultural context. The reason for that is that participants are part of a whole cultural system (p. 9) that attaches specific meaning to things and activities. Gaskins et al. (1992) argued that we could not examine, in this case, sojourner children’s experiences separately from the culture in which they were raised. This orientation sustained that “all children grow up to be culture [sic] beings” (p. 6) but also in a specific culture “with specific beliefs, practices, and interpersonal frameworks” (p. 6). Even though the present study focuses on sojourner children, their communication changes, and their conflicts, those experiences are analyzed through the lenses and frames of reference that each specific culture provides.
Language is definitely another important key for understanding meaning creation in these sojourners’ experiences. Language is, according to Gaskins et al. (1992), a tool to negotiate and construct realities as well as to “gain entry into the interpretive frameworks of [a person’s] culture” (p. 13). Methodologically, this paradigm encouraged me to use qualitative research methods, such as individual and collective in-depth interviews and participant observation. All these techniques help me in reconstructing and interpreting “the way individuals and groups organize their interpretations, including the way they attach meaning to behavior” (Holstein & Miller, 1993, p. 54). At the same time, these techniques help me in reconstructing sojourner parents’ perceptions of the conflicts that they have had with their children in this dialectic process of acculturation to the U.S. culture and preservation of their own cultural values, as those values are constructed and perceived by the children’s parents.

Methodology

Rationale for Research Subjects

At the time this research was launched, a report from the Institute of International Education (1996/97) in the US, showed that of a total of 14,286,483 US higher education enrollments in 1996/97, 457,984 were international students. Of these figures, Ohio represents the ninth state nationwide in terms of enrolled for international students. In fact, Ohio University is listed as one of the educational institutions with the largest international student population. The last report from the
Ohio University Office of Institutional Research (1999) submitted by the International Students’ Office revealed that, of the 1,125 non-US citizens enrolled at Ohio University for Fall Quarter 1999, 867 were graduate students, most of them from Asian countries. All this information demonstrates the importance and impact that international students have on higher education at Ohio University. However, no formal reports were available concerning spouses and children of international students at OU. Unofficial records made available through the Office of International Affairs offer estimates of 250 student dependents for Fall 1999, with more than 32 children between pre-school and school age.

The absence of official information about international student families is not surprising. This lack of information is also revealed by Verthelyi (1995), who conducted research on spouses of international graduate students at one US university. Verthelyi (1995) asserted that dependents of sojourners have been ignored by the literature as well as by US university services. At the same time, little research has been done on international student couples and their children.

The present study was conducted with Ohio University international faculty members and graduate students who have children between 5 to 12 years old (information about the interviewees, their children ages and sexes as well as their nationality can be found in Appendix A). The main purpose of the present research was to analyze, interpret, and understand these sojourner parents’ perceptions of the communication changes and conflicts that their younger children have experienced with peers, teachers, and family members as a result of the process of adaptation to the
new culture. A second purpose was to explore the possible problems and conflicts that these parents thought their children might experience when their children reentered their home countries.

Rationale for Methodology

To reach its objective, the present study employed a qualitative research stance that, according to Schwandt (2000), “is built on a profound concern with understanding what other human beings are doing or saying” (p. 200). In accordance with this view, Van Maanen, Dabbs, and Faulkner (1982) emphasized that qualitative inquiry looks for detailed descriptions of what is happening at a certain time and in a certain place. With this insight, the authors proclaimed that the main objective of qualitative methodology is “revelation and disclosure” (p. 16) rather than explanation and prediction, both characteristics that belong to the realm of natural sciences. Such disclosure and openness can be achieved if the investigator assumes an active role, becoming an insider and a witness who can shed light on understanding what other people do. That is probably the reason Van Maanen et al. (1982) claimed that “qualitative research deals with the meaning of things” (p. 32) as a way to provide a natural connection between this inquiry and the type of knowledge one seeks to acquire.

Rationale for the Methods Used

This research used two methods that are characteristic of qualitative inquiry: participant observation and in-depth interviews. Both methods played a fundamental
role in reconstructing symbolic interactions within sojourner families and between sojourner children and outsiders. Lofland (1970) went further expressing that observation “is to orient one’s consciousness and one’s actions explicitly to look, to listen and to ask what is happening…or [the] meaning of” (p. 95) things and events in a certain settlement. That is probably the reason Wolcott (1999) emphasized that participant observation is a way of “experiencing” (p. 46) and reminded us that “everything we know comes to us that way” (p. 46). In that sense, this method constituted a firsthand experience to sense, see, and hear what was occurring with the sojourner children and family life at a certain time of their sojourn experience in the US.

This method had the advantage of connecting me in a firsthand manner with people in natural and informal situations like family meetings, and children engaged in the playground as well as in school environments, breaking some barriers with the researched. With that goal in mind, I engaged in participant observation at the East Elementary school which most of the international children attend and the children’s playground at Mill Street Apartments, where an important number of international faculty members and graduates students live with their families.

In the first case, I was only able to observe interactions at the school’s cafeteria for 2 hours one day in December 2000. There I examined not only children’s interactions, especially the interactions of international students with peers, but also children’s interactions with the adults in charge of the cafeteria. I was a known observer for the adults who run the cafeteria, a fact that brought some advantages to
my job. Lofland (1970) pointed out that known observers are “able to move about, observe, and ask questions unrestricted by the duties and socially defined constructions of an extant role in the setting” (p. 95). Observations in classrooms to see children’s interactions with teachers ended up not being possible.

In the second case, observations were made at the playground of a local apartment complex dominated by international students and their families. I started observing children at play from one to three hours a day during September and continued through part of October 2000, from Monday until Friday, from 5 to 8 p.m. The selection of the time was previously checked with the normal routines that children followed during the fall, winter, and spring quarters of 1999-2000. The researcher, who was also a resident in this complex of apartments, patiently elaborated a scheme of those routines. Children returned home from school activities after 3 p.m. (some of them had lunch at home). They worked at their homework, coming to the playground around 5 p.m. No observations were conducted over the weekends. The reason for excluding Saturday and Sunday in the timetable was due to the fact that parents reserved those days for doing other activities with the children and, in some cases, for traveling to other cities.

The observations were not limited to the playground. At certain moments, the researcher had to follow the children through the whole complex in order to provide a better reference of their mutual interactions and relationships. The casual encounters with parents and neighbors as well as the spontaneous gatherings are reported as part of these observations because they help to provide a picture of the surrounding
environment of the sojourner experience. The researcher observed children’s communication patterns when interacting within groups, playing different roles, as part of different relationships and encounters, and as a “member” of the neighborhood. These criteria, drawn from Lofland’s (1970) thoughts about units of observation, proved to be helpful in organizing and interpreting what I saw, heard and sensed in the playground. Most of the children there knew me prior to my launching this research as I used to be one of the Mill Street residents. That fact probably resulted in more confidence and openness between these children and myself. Even though the study explored issues relating to children, children were not interviewed since the primary focus for this work was on parents’ perceptions of their children’s acculturation efforts and the problems the children encountered.

The second method used in this study was **in-depth interviews**. Wolcott (1999) considered interviews an important complement of participant observation. Silverman (2000) described interviews as an “authentic gaze into the soul of another” (p. 823). I conceive in-depth interviews as a useful tool for reconstructing parents’ perceptions of their children’s communication changes and conflicts with peers and family members. I conducted sixteen interviews with families of international faculty members and graduate students at OU, who were sojourners in the US and interviews with one of the counselor of East Elementary School and one of the teachers.

Sixteen families volunteered to participate in this study. In nine instances, the husband and wife were interviewed simultaneously. Interviewing both parents together had the intention of recuperating the couples’ conversations. As Lofland
(1970) pointed out, the group or conjoint interview has the advantage of allowing “people more time to reflect and to recall experiences” (p. 88) in the sense that something that one person says can trigger memories and opinions from the other person. Cooks and Hale (1992) suggested that this interview technique has the advantage of bringing “access to information in a conversational way … expanding on descriptions provided in individual interviews” (p. 282). At the same time, Sandelowski, Holditch-Davis, and Harris (1992) draw from LaRosa and LaRosa the idea that “conjoint interviews can foster the climate of openness and trust essential to a family study” (p. 306). In that sense, Sandelowski et al. (1992) pointed out that this type of interview allows researchers to “witness how partners acted together, how they sought to help or influence each other, and how they handled disagreements arising in the interview situations” (p. 306).

While the conjoint interview might be ideal, due to cultural differences, some of the participants decided to talk without the presence of the other spouse. That was the case with three wives/mothers, who were willing to participate only after they received consent from their husbands. The husbands, though, did not want to take part in the interviews, themselves. The reasons for their non-participation were not clearly disclosed but seemed to be tied to cultural expectations and values due to the fact that the topic, relating as it did to child rearing, was an issue that “belonged” to the realm of women. In addition to the family just detailed, there were three other families composed only of women, two of them with their husbands still living in their home countries and the third a single mother. There were two other cases in which, even
though the interview had the presence of both spouses, women did not initiate participation, but instead, restricted their involvement was to responding to questions that their husbands posed them.

In all 16 interviews, I explored the parents’ personal experiences, stories, and feelings involved in their children experience of adaptation to the US, focusing specifically on the communication changes and conflicts that they (the parents) found in their relationship with their children. Along with their children’s behavior and communication changes due to the acculturation to the US, I inquired about the main values the parents wanted their youngsters to follow and respect as well as solutions that the parents advised their children to follow when they dealt with conflict situations with peers and family members. I examined the major difficulties that parents thought their children would have back home due to the changes that emerged as a result of children’s acculturation to the US.

Interviews at the school where focused on gaining additional knowledge about the challenges that international children experience when entering an American classroom in terms of communication and interpersonal relationship changes. Questions were also oriented toward understanding the challenges/problems teachers encounter as they try to integrate international students into daily activities. In that sense, those interviews shed light on understanding some of the changes children experience and explicating some of the dilemmas parents have with their children. Both types of interviews (group and individual) were recorded and then transcribed for analysis.
Data Analysis

The collected data in these interviews were analyzed using three phases of phenomenological research (Nelson, 1989a): description, reduction, and interpretation. Nelson (1989) pointed out that “the transcripts constitute the description” (p. 234) itself, so I proceeded to transcribe the eighteen interviews. In the case of Latin American interviews, the description involved not only the transcription but also the translation from Spanish/Portuguese into English. The reduction phase involved isolating general themes from the interviews and grouping those themes according to three significant moments/stages. One stage considered interviewees’ stay in the US, which involved the first moments after arriving in the US. The second stage included accounts of the consolidation of their stay. The third moment considered interviewees’ thoughts about their future reentry into their own culture. This initial phase of the reduction process was aimed at organizing the interviewees’ stories according to significant topics common across interviews. I looked at how meaning was interpreted by selecting common themes that emerged from interviewees’ experiences, like language problems, family and peer relationships, culture shock, behavior, and communication changes and conflicts. As I read and re-read the interview transcripts, I tried to classify the materials according to a list of codes (themes) that emerged through the process of comparing and contrasting interviewee statements. Once the coding scheme was applied to all the transcripts, I went back to examine, again, the similarities and differences that existed across the interviews. I also included in the data being examined all of the information that came from observations conducted in
different settings (the Mill Street Apartments’ playground and East Elementary School). Observations were analyzed following five of Lofland and Lofland’s (1984) thinking units: groups, encounters, relationships, roles, and neighborhood.

In the *interpretation* phase, I tried to critically analyze the data in order to make sense of the dialectical tensions present in the relationships and the communication behaviors of these sojourner children with their parents, peers, and teachers. Particularly, I scrutinized the differences in the values, norms, and customs that youngsters were acquiring in the US as opposed to the values, norms, and customs the parents wanted their children to preserve from their native cultures. These three phases (description, reduction, and interpretation) were combined to produce a hermeneutic structure of understanding that shed light on reconstructing the parents’ perceptions of the communication changes and conflicts their children have experienced in the process of adjusting to a new cultural environment.

**Sample**

The sample of interviewees was a purposive sample. In that sense, I selected those families who met the criteria of being sojourners with children between the ages of 5 and 12 years of age. I used four different methods for obtaining that purposive sample and selecting volunteers for this project. One involved attending a weekly meeting of international students and their families during coffee hour at lunchtime on Wednesdays. There I made contact with students and their spouses who later referred me to other possible participants. From these contacts, two female international
students finally accepted an invitation to participate in the study. The rest of the interviewees were people contacted in the Mill Street Apartments with the help of one of the Managers who pointed out families who met the inclusion criteria established for this research. Another two interviewees were personal contacts and friends of mine who later referred me to another family.

The process of eliciting volunteers for the research took several telephone calls and personal visits to possible participants. In a majority of the cases, between four to five phone calls and an average of two visits were needed before being able to schedule an interview. In the case of residents of the Mill Street Apartments who finally volunteered to participate in this project, I decided to make personal visits to their homes. During those visits, I explained to them the purpose of the study as well as the kind of volunteers I was seeking. These visits were beneficial because, most of the time, families ended up agreeing to be part of the study. I have to admit that there was an obvious bias in doing these visits. As a member of a collectivistic culture, the researcher definitely felt uncomfortable making appointments with strangers over the telephone. I thought a visit would be advantageous and would help in obtaining more volunteers. The reason for that confidence was that all my potential interviewees also belonged to collectivistic cultures, and as the researcher realized later, they also preferred face-to-face initial contact. Once the sample was obtained, the volunteers were asked to provide written consent for their participation in the study. However, some of the volunteers felt more comfortable offering oral consent instead. Cultural
differences operated in this sense, and were undoubtedly present throughout the study. I respected the way participants wanted to give their consent for the study.

In the case of interviews conducted at east Elementary School, I had to follow a formal procedure at the end of which two people contacted me about participating in an interview: one of the counselors and one of the teachers in charge of the language skills program for international students.

Summary Chapter Three

This chapter has described the methodology employed in the present study. Moreover I clearly acknowledged the assumptions of the interpretivist approach employed in looking at sojourner children’s communication with family members and outsiders. This approach encouraged me to use qualitative research methods. Two methods were used in this study: participant observation at the playground of the Mill Street Apartments and at the East Elementary School cafeteria, and in-depth interviews with sojourner parents who have children between the ages of 5 to 12 years. Interviews were completed with 16 international families as well as with two faculty members from East Elementary School. These two methods helped me to understand the sojourn experience of young children and how their communication and behavior patterns have changed due to acculturation to the US. The rationale for the methods used as well as for the target population was provided. In addition, I offered a brief explanation about the dialectical tensions theory that will be employed to analyze the sojourner children’s experiences.
The next chapter will be devoted to examining the data collected through the interviews with parents and teachers as well as the observations at the school and in the playground. The data is analyzed according to three different moments of the sojourn experience: their arrival and first moments in the US, the consolidation of their stay, and the parent’s thoughts about their reentry to their home countries.
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

Interviewee Characteristics

Sixteen families volunteered to participate in this research. The volunteer families were temporarily studying, doing research, or teaching at Ohio University in Athens, OH and, at the time of this research, had spent from one month up to 7 years in the US\(^1\). Only one family had, at the time of the research, lived in the US for only one month; six families had lived in the US for 6 months; two families had lived in the US for 9 months; one family had lived in the US for 2 years, one for 3 years; two for 6 years, and one for seven years. In nine instances, the husbands and wives were interviewed jointly. Of the remaining seven families, three were composed of “single” mothers, two of them with their husbands still living in their native countries. The last four interviews were conducted with wives who were willing to participate after they had received permission from their husbands. The husbands themselves declined involvement in the interviews, asserting that their wives would speak for both of them.

At the time of the research, ten of the families had two children with ages ranging between 4 to 13 years old. Although there were three families with one child who was 13 years old, the experiences of the older children were not considered for the purposes of this research. Instead the interviews focused only on the children who were younger than 12 years of age. Six interviewees had only one child; the ages of

\(^1\) The appendix provides a list of the interviewees, length of their stay in the US, country of origin, ages and sex of their children.
the children ranged from 5 to 10 years old. The reason for choosing children who were, at the time of the study, at least 5 years old was that international children start to go to elementary school at that age, and this also seems to coincide with the beginning of their schooling systems back home. The interviewees belonged to collectivistic cultures from Asia, Arabia, and Latin America representing the following countries: Korea (4), Thailand (1), Malaysia (1), Bangladesh (1), Mongolia (1), Uzbekistan (1), Yemen (1), Saudi Arabia (1), Brazil (2), Venezuela (1), Argentina (1), and Mexico (1). The interviews varied in duration from one to three hours. For the majority of these interviewees (14), this was their first experience of living abroad while in other two cases children had been previously lived in another cultural environment for three months and up to one year.

General Comments

The experiences recovered through these interviews show a great variety in the parents’ perceptions of the communication changes and conflicts that their children have with family members, teachers, and peers due to their acculturation to the US. The level or degree of those changes and conflicts varied according to the kind of family, cultural values, religious beliefs, and the manner in which the children adjusted to the US. Some of these conflicts, especially with peers, appeared at the beginning of the family’s stay in the US, while other problems emerged as the parents thought about re-entry into their own culture. Most of the children’s conflicts with parents, and in a small number of cases with siblings, appeared a couple of months
after the family had settled in the US. A majority of the conflicts were due to cultural values the parents wanted their children to preserve versus those values that youngsters liked and acquired from the American culture through behaviors and customs that are different. The reentry process is anticipated as bringing other types of problems, mainly with teachers, peers, and family members but, again, as a result of the children’s acquisition of values, customs, and frames of reference that are different from the ones that exist in their home country.

For a better understanding of the dynamics that occur within a sojourner family, I analyzed three different stages in the sojourner process and their problematic within families. The first two stages involve the family’s stay in the US (divided into the beginning stage and a stage involving the consolidation of the family’s stay). The third stage involves the parents’ thoughts about their future reentry into their own culture.

The Beginning Stage

Language Problems

Arriving in the US presents a common problem for younger sojourner children who, in almost all of the cases (13 of the 16 families interviewed), lacked knowledge of the English language. This lack of knowledge of the language produced several communication problems and misunderstandings that the children had to struggle with at the beginning of their stay in the US. These problems were especially apparent with classmates as well as with other peers in their neighborhood. The lack of language management skill developed similar feelings in these children. Three parents
acknowledged that their children’s first reactions were fear, sadness, and anxiety. A Yemeni mother explained:

“[A]t first it was very difficult for them because they didn’t understand the language, they were not used to that environment, and it was a little scary for them. They felt not very comfortable to go to school, especially the youngest one.” (J, p. 40)  

A Saudi Arabian father (#I) confirmed that: “I remember that, the first day of school, he was kind of afraid, scared” (p. 38). “[My youngest daughter] cried all the time saying she wanted to go back to [our country],” added a Brazilian mother (#A, p. 1). One of the teachers at the school shared a similar insight on children’s first reactions. She indicated that she tried to offer emotional support and understanding:

“Some of them are scared. There is a girl who cried for about a month. She would not even join the mainstream classroom. Sometimes this is good in a way and this is bad in some ways, because kids attach to me. Because whenever they have problems they think I can solve them. I am use to communicating with kids with no English. I know that, even if I don’t understand their language, we use universal expressions, so I know what they are going through. So they come to me immediately. And when they come here they do not cry. Teachers ask me ‘why she is not crying with

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2 A letter from the alphabet identifies each interview in the order in which the interviews were conducted. The page number indicates where the quotation was taken from the transcription document and is provided so that the reader might have some idea as to where the comment occurred in the course of the interview.
you?’ I think that children know that everybody who is here has gone
through the stages and all that.” (p. 91)

In three instances, the parents indicated that their children did not experience
problems born of lack of knowledge of English. In two of those cases, the children
were babies when they arrived in the US. A Malaysian couple explained:

“in the case of my son, he came at three years old and what he learned was
English, English, and English, so it is obvious that whenever we ask him in
[our language] he’ll answer us in English.” (#N, p. 63)

One of these children had a sibling who was born in the US while, in the other case the
children had been educated in a British school prior to arriving in the US. The Thai
mother explained:

“They went to a British school so I think that, in that term, it’s not much
different in terms of culture. . . . My kids can speak Thai, but when they are
at school, they speak English.” (#D, p. 17-18)

A third parent told, surprisingly, that her son, who was a baby when they
arrived in the US, has experienced a reverse problem with language since starting
school.

“[B]efore three, he was fluent in Korean. When he entered the preschool he
learned English; from that time he was struggling with learning English,
but now he is forgetting Korean.” (#O, p. 71)
First Communication Changes

The feelings of fear, sadness, and anxiety that some of the children experienced were clearly associated with communication changes experienced mainly at school and within the family. Those changes include aggressiveness, withdrawal from participation in class, passivity, shyness, and refusal to go to school. This initial behavior pattern was displayed by seven of the children, with variations according to cultural values, family relationships, and the way they experienced life in the US. A Venezuelan mother told me that her son reacted very aggressively at the beginning of his stay in the US.

“He didn’t want to play with anybody. If a boy approached him, [my son] pushed [the other boy] back. The teacher sent me several notes saying that he was very aggressive.” (#L, p. 51)

However, other parents mentioned shyness and withdrawal from participation at school as the main reactions that their children displayed during the first moments of their stay in the US.

“My youngest daughter [confessed a Korean father] who is ten years old is very shy. She doesn’t make friends and experienced a strong conflict culture shock. In her case, she rejected participating in an American school for a couple of months.” (#C, p. 12)

Another mother from Korea also confirmed this reaction on the part of her daughter who, in this case, did not volunteer for any activity at school.
“[My youngest daughter’s] teacher said that she didn’t volunteer for anything in the class; she acted very passively. If the teacher says ‘write’, she just writes, [does] not volunteer [for any] activity for her own.” (#B, p. 9)

This lack of willingness to participate in activities was also manifested in children not talking to teachers or peers at all. As a Korean mother described the situation: “Mostly for six months he didn’t speak much, because he didn’t know how to talk” (#O, p. 71).

Sometimes this suffering that children were experiencing turned into anxiety and unhappiness. This is how a Brazilian mother described her daughter’s response to their move to the US:

“My youngest daughter didn’t want to go to school. She had headaches every day and lost more than 12 pounds and didn’t go to school for almost a month.” (#A, p. 1)

For an Uzbek mother, her son displayed unhappiness the first moments after their arrival in the US: “He didn’t go to school with the happiness that he experienced later. I made him go to school” (#K, p. 45). A Mexican mother, perceived a similar anxiety on the part of her oldest daughter: “She had a very slight problem yesterday at school when she cried. They called me from school saying that they didn’t know what she had” (#P, p. 80).

Parents’ reactions to these changes in their children’s behaviors were to reinforce and obligé them to go to school. Children at this stage experienced a very strong culture shock, which can be seen in open disclosures like: “what am I doing
here?” “I want to go back”; “this is not my house”; “this is shit”; “I won’t learn anything here”; “I speak Spanish--why do I have to speak English”? And so on. A Venezuelan mother told me that her son constantly rejected being in the US: “He didn’t understand the reason he was in the US. He always said ‘what am I doing here’, or ‘I don’t want to be here; I want to go back to our country’” (#K, p. 49). A similar response was exhibited by one of the daughters of the Brazilian parent. The girl started to reject everything from the new environment: “She didn’t want to live here, didn’t like anybody here, and didn’t have friends” (#A, p. 1). This rejection of being in the US was also a product in part of lack of understanding of the English language: “[A]t the beginning, [a Brazilian father told me] my children complained that they didn’t understand anything. They said ‘I don’t know anything’, ‘I won’t learn anything’” (#F, p. 26). In another case, a Korean mother acknowledged that her daughter did not experience rejection at the beginning of their stay; however, later on, her child realized that school was different.

“At the beginning [commented a Korean mother] it seemed to be kind of fun. [My daughter] didn’t know English at all, but when time went on, she realized that something at school was very different from [our country]” (#H, p. 35).

These rejections were clearly culture shock reactions that were translated into problems of understanding and rejection of school. A Mexican father, who had just arrived in the US, went a little bit further and stressed his concerns about the shock his children were experiencing, especially at school:
“I asked my daughter what she did at school and her answer is ‘I understood just half of it’, and my son says he doesn’t understand anything at school. I understand and interpret in some way their feelings but to be in their shoes must be very difficult and hard, because they experience an internal pressure on them.” (#P, p. 81)

In two cases, the culture shock reactions that the children experienced were hidden from the parents’ eyes and took the form of a total lack of expression of their feelings. These parents admitted that their children did not express anything to them. The Argentinean mother confessed:

“My children never told me ‘I’m sad’ or ‘upset’, or ‘why did we come’... [The first moments after arriving in the US, my son] spent all morning at school without understanding a word of English, but he never complained; he never said ‘I don’t understand’ or ‘I’m bored’, nothing.” (p. 30)

“[Nonetheless] I imagine that [my son] has had some conflicts and fears inside.” (#G, p. 32)

This lack of expression on the part of some of the children seemed to have a different wrinkle as described by a Korean mother: “I don’t know much about my youngest daughter; she doesn’t speak much about school” (#B, p. 9).

Another facet of culture shock appeared when children started to compare everything with the things, places, and people they had left in their home countries. In fact, they began to idealize those memories. Two South American parents remembered
the way their children reacted to the new cultural environment by finding ugliness in the US as opposed to the beauty in their home countries.

“My two daughters [said a Brazilian mother]… think that everything is bad, ugly so they say ‘why do I have to be here.’ I have intended everything. I told them that we were going to travel all over the country, etc.; but they respond that the mall is awful, the persons here are ridiculous, ja, ja, ja. The other problem is with the food. McDonald’s is the same in Brazil, and they still criticize the flavor of food there so we go around from one restaurant to the other, and we finally end up eating at home because they don’t like anything”. (p. 3) “The problem with my daughters is that they are not receptive to this experience and they spend all the time making comparisons with [our country].” (#A, p. 5)

That was also the case experienced in with a Venezuelan family:

“[My son] also started to compare ‘here there is no beach; this is horrible’ [said a Venezuelan mother]. I tried to convince him saying, ‘daddy, this country is also chebere (nice)’; ‘there are also beautiful reservoirs and parks’, but his answer was ‘no; this has no beach’. ” (#L, p. 50)

In some other cases, culture shock took another shift. In four interviews, parents confirmed that their children’s culture shock was due to firsthand contact with diverse people. For one Korean interviewee, contact with foreigners and people from different races created a cultural conflict for his daughters.
“Our children’s problem was the cultural conflict. Our country has only
one type of people; America has many different people with different
nations too, so my children were very confused. . . . Our children never
knew people from another country. They never had the experience with
foreign people.” (#C, p. 12)

A Brazilian mother noticed that, in the case of her daughter, the culture shock took the
form of rejection of her Arab classmates.

“[My daughters] had two Arabian classmates in her class. My daughter
doesn’t like Arabs. I don’t know why. I tried to make them understand that
Arab countries are very different from us, that they are very closed and
conservative in some respects. I think that my daughter experienced a great
culture shock mainly with Arabs because, in [my country], we can express
ourselves freely and speak whatever you want” (#A, p. 6).

A Mongolian mother was, instead, quite surprised by the way Americans talk about
racial issues and make distinctions, something that, in her culture, would be
inadmissible. In her country people do not draw any differences based on skin color or
ethnicity or “[r]acial issues, like African-American or Asian-American because, in my
country, we wouldn’t have such distinctions” (#E, p. 20).

The experience of living close to people from other races and cultures was
problematic for some parents who found it difficult to manage these issues with their
children, but at the same time, these issues were seen as a challenge in terms of their
children’s adaptation to the US.
“…[T]he adaptation to other people was also complicated, because people are different [a Brazilian mother warned]. . . .We live here surrounded by neighbors from other cultures, and children have to learn to respect those cultures. Children have to learn about the American culture as well as cultures of all over the world in order to respect other people.” (#F, p. 25)

Peer Relationships

Language problems in some cases were associated with difficulties in forming friendships with Americans and other international children. One common problematic among the interviewees seemed to be that their children’s main concern upon arrival in the US was “I don’t have friends”, a fact that was probably at least initially due to communication problems. In that sense, the children’s first impulse was to play with children from their same country and/or who spoke the same language.

“My daughters didn’t speak English so had no American friends [said a Korean mother]. My eldest daughter has a Korean friend. She came here at the same time. We didn’t know she was coming, but we met at East Elementary School. They always play together and speak in Korean. Her friend returned to Korea last February so my daughter was really, really sad because she had no friends. After that, she tried to make American friends. I think it was good for her because, when she was with her Korean friend,
she couldn’t make many American friends. She just played with Koreans.” (#B, p. 9)

An Arabian parent referred to a similar experience on the part of his sons at the beginning of their stay in the US: “… [t]hey couldn’t have any friendships because they couldn’t communicate with other students. When we lived in Mill Street, we used to have Arab kids so they had friends…” (#J, p. 41).

In a majority of the cases, children experienced a lack of friends and a deep loneliness in their new environment as a result of communication problems.

“[m]y daughter wants to make friends with the other children in Mill Street [said a Korean mother who has a five-year old daughter] … I think it is not that easy because they can’t really communicate their feelings and their thoughts.” (#H, p. 35)

For another Korean mother, the problem of making friends was also a reality in her sons’ experience: “The first six months he didn’t make any friend. . . . He was just playing alone at school” (#O, p. 71).

One of the teachers commented in a similar vein that international children were somehow isolated the first weeks at school so she encouraged them to be close to children of the same language, a decision that, in her view, sometimes carries disadvantages:

“I have seen the first few weeks maybe [they are] isolated but most of the time what I do is to buddy them up. For example, if the child is Korean and there is another Korean in the class, I try to buddy them up.
Sometimes I don’t do that a lot because they tend to speak in their language in the classroom and that is one of the complaints of teachers.” (p. 93)

Observations in the Mill street apartments were revelatory with respect to those problems. The observations served to confirm that, in the beginning, newcomer children tended to play with siblings or other children who speak the same language. That was the case of the two Mexican siblings who arrived at the complex at the beginning of the Fall quarter (2000), a case that I followed closely. The Mexican siblings played together and talked to each other only in Spanish as a way to cope with their lack of knowledge of the English language. This lack of knowledge of English, especially on the part of the boy, reinforced the segregation of these new children from pre-existing groups of peers.

I noticed during the observations in the apartments’ playground that all the newcomer sojourners were excluded at the beginning from the older groups of peers, so they ended up playing among themselves. Members of the old residents’ group interacted with each other only in English, with the exception of the Brazilian siblings who talked with each other in Portuguese, but only when no other foreign children were involved. The arrival of the Mexican boy seemed to disturb this rule of speaking only English within the peer group, a fact that was clearly confirmed during my observation at the playground. The Mexican boy never spoke English. He only spoke Spanish as though he were still living in Mexico. This observation was confirmed by his mother during the interview: “[My son] does not force himself to speak English. He
doesn't make an effort to understand the others. He tries to make the others understand him” (p. 78).

Language seemed to be the most important barrier in the Mexican boy's relationship with peers. He tried to communicate with the other boys through the translation services of his sister and, eventually, a Venezuelan boy who also spoke Spanish. The problem started when the Venezuelan boy denied the Mexican boy help and began to talk to him in English in the same way he (the Venezuelan boy) communicated with the other boys. That is probably the reason the mother of the Venezuelan boy commented to Mexican boy’s mother that her son needed to play with other international children because that would help him improve his knowledge of English: "It's good for your son because he won't have my son as a translator forever" (Observations, p. 16).

One basic rule in the Mill St. playground was that English was the common language to communicate within groups of peers. The Mexican boy (Pedro) did not keep this pattern, a fact that contributed to this being excluded from the rest of his peers. Pedro followed the rest of the boys but was never integrated into their group, so he ended up riding his bike alone or playing with his sister as a way to cope with his loneliness.

“Again Pedro, Guadalupe and the Mongolian girl road their bikes along the playground followed later by Daniel. Fabian, who was helping Ramiro in taking care of the Brazilian baby, called Pedro from the playground. Daniel yelled at Fabian in Spanish. He [Daniel] seemed to be very, very
angry with him [Fabian] and constantly repeated ‘I'm not your friend anymore’. Fabian replied, ‘what's the problem of calling his name?’ Daniel replied, ‘I don't want’. Fabian seemed to be disappointed with Daniel.” (Observations, p. 10)

“Pedro arrived on his bike but was never integrated with the other children. Pedro tried to play with them. Then he stood aside, watching the other children play.” (Observations, p. 24)

Pedro’s loneliness was also a preoccupation for his mother, as was reflected during our interview.

“[My son] feels rejected by other children because language is the first obstacle. My son doesn’t speak any English at all…[so he] follows [the other children] like a little dog.” (#P, p. 78)

In contrast to Pedro, there were three cases in which parents mentioned that their children played with neighbors from a different country and communicated with them by using gestures.

“Of course, at the beginning, they didn’t have friends, especially at Kansas City [said a Saudi Arabian father]. But we were some kind of lucky because we had a neighbor from Chile. This family had two sons of the same age as our children, so they started to play together even though they could not speak English; they speak Arabic, but they started playing together without any communication.” (#I, p. 37)
A Brazilian father and a Mexican mother also agreed that, even though their children did not know any English upon arrival, they employed nonverbal gestures in order to communicate and play with other international children:

“[m]y children did not know any English upon arrival. They easily found the way to communicate with other children, and my children communicated with other kids with gestures, jumps.” (#F, p. 25)

“There is something curious with my son. He communicates with other children with mimicry or gestures. He brings them and asks them to jump, etc. with him or he runs and then makes a signal for the others to reach him.” (#P, p. 79)

When doing observations in the Mill Street playground, I noticed that the first days after the Mexicans arrived at the US, their daughter tried to play close to other, younger children and help them without talking to them. The Mexican girl stopped by the playground after riding her bicycle all through the complex. She left her bike and got close to two small African children. The three children shared the same game. She helped the youngest one to climb a slide and to slide down on it. She did not talk to them, just helped them slide.

Talking with parents about problems their children had in making friends with classmates and peers, four interviewees mentioned that, apart from the language problem, cultural differences and expectations also contributed to misunderstandings between their children and peers. That was the case of a Mongolian mother who found that American children were not respectful.
“[My son] had some problems with his classmates. In my culture, children are not allowed to listen to adults talk or interrupt the talk or play jokes with adults. Not many people in my culture would like that. Here, everybody does, and then somehow, I found some American children too spoiled because everything here allows those patterns that in my culture are not allowed. The kind of problems he found out was these spoiled children, maybe I can say.” (#E, p. 21)

For a Thai mother, the cultural differences also operated against her son’s ability for establishing relationship with peers.

“My son had some difficulties in understanding people at the beginning because of the cultural contexts… He said I don’t have friends or something like that and that there were people who were not nice to him… But at the beginning, they don’t know them and the cultural context….

Even when you speak the language, because of the culture and the differences when you are an outsider, you might have something that people consider strange and that’s the point. Later, [he] learned the expectations of the society here. So it’s okay now. They don’t have problems any more.” (#D, p. 16)

Cultural differences were present in the communication style or way of doing things with other children, as referred to by a Bangladeshi father:

“[T]here are some cultural differences. I noticed that she experienced some problems because some kids wanted to do things in a certain way
that she knew that she had to do things in a different way. But she is also learning the other culture.” (#M, p. 59)

These cultural differences or differences in expectations were referenced by a Yemeni father as something that caused confusion for his children.

“I don’t know if it was a conflict but it was more like a confusion because of different culture, different religion. Sometimes, when they came back from school, they asked us about some issues to clarify not only with their classmates but also with the teacher when she told them something contradictory and they asked to clarify this issue. We told them that there are different cultures, religions, and conceptions.” (#J, p. 41)

Sometimes these cultural differences with outsiders can have an influence on parents’ perceptions of the incidents that their children face in their relationships with peers. A Korean mother recalled a problem that her daughter had with a Latin American classmate.

“[The incident was] with a child from [a Latin American country]; he is very active and is in my eldest daughter’s class. He is very active and sometimes very intrusive. My daughter said that he always interrupted her and called her names and she really doesn’t like him because he doesn’t speak English very well, but he usually speaks [in his language] and sometimes he uses swear words… it was not serious, but in the US that boy was bothering my daughter who was very annoyed and distressed because of this boy.” (#B, p. 9)
Victims of Bullying

Another problem, revealed by two interviewees, was that, at the beginning of their stay in the US, their children were victims of bullying by neighbors due to their lack of knowledge of the English language. In one case, the child was called “stupid” and harassed by other international peers in the neighborhood. In the second case, the child was rejected. While my conversation with two Venezuelan parents was growing, the mother told me very painfully that her son came back home telling her: “[S]ome children said that I’m stupid because I don’t speak English” (#L, p. 49). Her husband continued, “[They said this because] he was in contact with international kids who learned the language or were born here.” “They spoke English and my son didn’t,” added the mother. “And that was the problem. One of the problems was when two girls of his age told him ‘go [back] to your [own] country’, and both children were from Russia” said the father. I asked both parents, “when did that problem happen to your child?”

“What we are talking now is about his first contacts because we arrived before classes started. He was still not receiving any English training, so his friends were all neighbors. So I told him that he would go to school and would learn English and then he wouldn’t have any communication problems with anybody. He would be able to play with Chinese, Russians, American children, etc. I tried to make him realize that these girls that were telling him to go back home were not from this country. I gave him with the example of the same situation when two girls are playing in a
neighbor’s house, and they tell you to leave the house. They are not the owners of the house so they don’t have any right to ask you to go out of the house. So I told him that they could not ask him to leave the country because it is not their country” (p. 50) the mother ended.

In the second case, the Mexican mother disclosed a problem of rejection that her son experienced with peers in the neighborhood due to his lack of knowledge of English.

“[My son], who is 7 years old, feels rejected by other children because language is the first obstacle. My son doesn’t speak any English at all, so he tries to find the company of a child who is from Venezuela and speaks Spanish. The problem is that this child doesn’t want to speak Spanish because his friends all communicate in English. My son follows them like a little dog. The problem is that sometimes the other children play jokes on him; for example, they hide from him, so my son runs after them and then comes to our house feeling very sad because his friends don’t want to play with him.” (#P, p. 78)

Relationships with Teachers

The children’s relationships with their teachers were generally considered positive. Parents described the American teachers’ relationship with their children as supportive, egalitarian, informal, and more friendly than similar relationships in their home countries, a fact that was confirmed by the counselor and one of the teachers. This fact was also described as something very positive for their children. Some
interviewees stressed the importance of personal visits from teachers to their homes, others to the kind of egalitarian relationship that the teachers had with their children, and still others liked the close communication that teachers had with parents. “[One of my daughter’s teachers] came to visit our home a couple of times to talk to my daughters and teach them. She also called a couple of times to see how they were doing” (#A, p.2). “[Teachers] were all very nice people” (p. 3), commented a mother from Brazil.

For a Korean father, what was obviously different was the American education system, in which “[t]here is a respect for human beings, safety and more egalitarian relationships between teachers and students” (#C, p. 12). Similarly, a Malaysian mother commented that: “We really praise the teachers in the US because teachers here are very helpful, positive and really concerned about the kids. . . . I really admire that teachers here are the children’s friends” (#N, p. 67).

This egalitarian relationship with children was observed during lunchtime in the cafeteria at school. Adult personnel and teachers who engaged the children in conversation displayed a friendly and egalitarian attitude. These features could be inferred from the way they both joked with each other and the informality of their conversations. The counselor admitted that part of their philosophy at school is to make children feel that the faculty members are their friends.

“You will see every morning the teacher is outside the room and greets each child with a handshake and says ‘good morning’, ‘how are you?’ or
maybe gives them a hug depending on the age of the child. We want to be their friends.” (p. 88)

Other parents praised the fact that American teachers kept a permanent open channel of communication with them. “I think I like more . . . here [asserted a Venezuelan mother]. Teachers are all the time communicating with parents about what’s going on with the child” (#L, p. 54). Another mother from Mexico stressed the importance of the very close relationship that the teacher has with her son.

“He has a very good teacher, very comprehensive. She tries to follow my son’s time and she is in permanent touch with us. I really like that preoccupation of her’s very much. She is concerned about the evolution of my child and how he is adapting and learning what she taught him in class. It seems to work quite well.” (#P, p. 79)

At this point in my conversation with the parents, I became quite intrigued about how different or similar their children’s relationships were with their teachers in the US as opposed to their countries. So I asked them: “Is it similar, the relationship that your kid has with her teacher here as compared with your country?” “No”, said a Bangladeshi mother. “So, how is it different?” I asked.

“For example, one day her teacher called her and told her that she wanted to visit her. This is something unthinkable in our country. Teachers won’t do that unless you are a very close relative of her. This couldn’t happen in our country.” (# M, p. 60)
In fact, this affirmation contained one of the most common disclosures parents made during the interviews. For them, the relationship between their children and their children’s teachers seemed to be quite different back home, more authoritarian, hierarchical, and formal. “[The teacher in my country] has more authority because she is the teacher. She is supposed to be controlling the kids, but here the teachers cannot do this,” (#J, p. 41) pointed out a Yemeni mother.

Clearly agreeing with the former parent, an Uzbek mother went further in her explanation of the differences that teachers in her country have as compared with American teachers. Stressing that children are not expected to discuss, argue, or challenge a teacher, the Uzbek mother explained: “We live in a pretty authoritarian society. A child should respect his professors and teachers. In Asian culture, this involves not to discuss and argue with a teacher” (#K, p. 46).

In most of the interviewees’ countries, to be respectful toward teachers is still a very important value that children learn to keep. Teachers in some of those countries try to maintain that respectfulness through employing punishment, including physical punishment, something still allowed in many countries. Two Venezuelan parents debated about that in our conversation.

“Teachers in my country [said the father] don’t hesitate to hit a child if it is necessary”.

“That is forbidden nowadays [argued the mother]. Many years before, in Venezuela, children were reprimanded and struck with a ruler, ‘reglazos’ as we say, etc. but that is forbidden nowadays”.
The father disagreed with his wife’s opinion, stating:

“No, no, excuse me, that happened in all Latin America. I remember there was a rule that said ‘the alphabet is learned with blood’ (p. 54)” [the telephone rang and the husband left the room for a minute]

The mother continued the conversation, saying:

“Teachers in Venezuela are still very strict. I can say that they are rude with children when they do something wrong. I noticed that, here in the US, teachers are softer with children. . . . On the other hand, in Venezuela, teachers shout four times to the children, ‘I said sit down!’ or ‘you won’t have break’ or ‘go to the corner’.” (#L, p. 54)

One of the ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers at school noticed that international children come with another vision of how they should relate with their teacher and how they are supposed to behave in a class. “They have more freedom in the classroom [here] than in their countries.” “What does it mean ‘they have more freedom’?” I asked her

“…they have a lot of choices, okay, you can do this, you need to choose whether you want to color with markers, you want to color with crayons or you want to read or you want to work in a computer. . . . We give those choices here because when children go back to their classroom they will be given several choices and they need to make up their mind. They think that I need to tell them everything they have to do. They expect from me to say ‘first you have to do this; second you need to do that,’ you know?”
But here you give the instruction, they have a choice, and then they go into groups sometimes. That is one of the problems too is that they go to a group like they have a project maybe, and they are expected to share their ideas and a lot of the international kids are not used to, because they are used to their teacher saying them everything. In classrooms there is not right answer. It is more the working together that the teachers are after. Sometimes kids do not know how to handle that. Here we do want them to learn that.” (p. 91)

Another comment closely tied to the idea that international children experience more freedom in American classrooms than back home was pointed out by the counselor. He observed that, the first day of school, American teachers set the rules for the class with their students. In his experience, this is something definitely not common in the interviewees’ countries.

“…from the very first day you say to the kids in your classroom, ‘what rules do you think we should have in our room so that our room is safe, so that we respect each other, and so we can have our work done, that why were are here, we are here to learn.’ When you empower kids to help you make those rules, they are more likely to live by those rules, and that is the way I always did it. People talk all year long about issues like respect, responsibility, caring, courage etc. all these life skills are constantly reviewed with kids. And we try to reinforce all those words that we use to teach respect.” (p. 88)
In only one case did parents refer to the fact that their child initially had problems with a teacher. That teacher had continually compared the child to other international classmates. As a result, the child developed a resistance to learning the language and to adapting to school.

“That teacher compared him with another international child who arrived at the same time as my son. I think that, probably, the other child didn’t experience the problems he [my child] had with our neighbors. So the teacher compared my son with this child by saying that this child was cooperative. ‘He learned English faster than your son who still did not speak’, or ‘your son did not know the alphabet’. That was not true because I taught him the alphabet … and every time I asked him about the alphabet, he answered me correctly. Every time his teacher asked him the alphabet, he did not respond; the same happened with the numbers. My son felt that she compared him with the other boy. So the teacher wanted to change him to kindergarten. The new teacher had an appointment with me, and she told me that my son knew the alphabet and the numbers quite well, and that she observed him playing with other kids as well as speaking English with them. With this teacher, we noticed the progress of my son at school.” (#L, p. 51)
Conflict between Parents and Children

The first moments of a sojourner’s stay in the US do not seem to produce conflicts between parents and children. Nevertheless, one interviewee clearly disclosed that she experienced several conflicts with her children at the beginning of their stay. Those conflicts not only involved parents and children but siblings as well. This is how that Brazilian mother recalled the problem:

“Everything was a total conflict at home. She shouted all the time saying she couldn’t stand the situation anymore but without clearly saying the reason for her conflict. Both daughters showed very negative reactions to everything we were talking about. They fought between each other all the time and also with us but especially with my mother. The conflict with my mother was more intense, perhaps because she spends more time with my daughters and is very close to them. I didn’t know what to do.” (#A, p. 1)

However, some of these conflicts within the sojourner family tend to smooth as parents and children adapt to the new cultural environment, as is going to be seen in the next moment which is the consolidation of their stay in the US.

Consolidation of Their Stay

The consolidation stage in the sojourner settlement in the US brought several communication changes in children’s behaviors. They started to manage the English language with greater proficiency and easily adopted the American style of communication represented by “free speaking,” “interrupting adults’ conversations,”
“arguing,” and “straightforwardness.” During this stage, children consolidated their friendships with peers and established good relationship with teachers. Parents acknowledged that their children acquired some other American behaviors, customs, and values that varied from conversation styles to clothing to demonstrations of affection. Conflict emerged when those communication and behavior changes contradicted the values of their parents. Those conflicts varied according to the family relationship as well as the characteristics of parents’ native culture. Surprisingly, teachers also complained that international students become disrespectful, a fact that brings another perspective for understanding some of the main concerns parents have.

English Proficiency

After the culture shock experienced at the beginning of the stay, interviewees noticed the appearance of many communication changes on the part of their youngsters. The acquisition of spoken English skills was the most common communication change that parents perceived. In some of those cases, even though children showed resistance to learning the language, they clearly demonstrated an acquisition of spoken language skills.

One common reaction among those children was “I don’t know English; I cannot speak,” answers that surprisingly were given in English. That was the case of two Brazilian siblings who constantly told their mother about their lack of capacity to speak and understand English: “If you ask her ‘do you know how to speak English’, she would say ‘no’ ” (# A, p. 3). Then the grandmother, who was seated in the kitchen
next to us, added: “Both girls can communicate in English very well. When we go
to a store, [the youngest one] is very outgoing and is the first who speaks with the
employees or asks them questions” (#A, p. 4).

Changes in terms of English becoming a dominant tool for communication
usually came after the second month of residence in the US. That is how an
Argentinean mother perceived her children’s language changes.

“In the second month, they understood almost everything, and at the third
or fourth month, they spoke the language. Now they correct my English.
…. My daughter gets mad when she hears me because I have a very
marked accent, and she says ‘mom, that is not the correct pronunciation’,
and she pronounces perfectly well. They have adapted very well and they
speak English perfectly well.” (#G, p. 30)

Along with fluency in English, children began to express a preference for speaking
English more than their native languages, a fact that, in some cases, did not make
parents very happy: “[H]e naturally speaks English. When he first answers, he does it
in English. Yeah, just English” (# E, p. 21) angrily replied a Mongolian mother.

“[W]e talk to them in both languages [acknowledged a Malaysian mother]
but most of the time they will answer in English. The reason could be that
they go to school, they watch the TV that is all in English language and I
think that, for them, it will be more convenient to talk in English than in
my language.” (#N, p. 63)
It is also true that, with the increasing acquisition of English language skills, children started to enjoy their stay in the US as their relationship with the new cultural environment improved. A Yemeni mother commented to me: “But then the more they acquire the language the more they enjoy going to school. It is a big difference because they can speak English very well” (#J, p. 41).

Mixing Languages

In other cases, parents perceived that, along with the management of spoken English skills, their children started to mix English with their mother tongue. Some parents (5) perceived this fact of mixing in positive terms because it involved the mastering of two different languages.

“But then the more they acquire the language the more they enjoy going to school. It is a big difference because they can speak English very well” (#J, p. 41).

In most of the cases, children identified English as the language to speak outside the limits of their homes, while keeping their native language to communicate with family members.
“When they talk about their friends, games and songs, everything is said in English because they experience that in English. Now if they have to talk to me or to my husband, or about some more routine things at home they speak only in Spanish,” [convincingly argued an Argentinean mother]. (#G, p. 34)

However in some cases, the mixing of the language could be seen as a disadvantage, as when children tried to communicate in English within the family environment. This is how a Brazilian father explained the problem:

“Sometimes they speak in English rather than in Portuguese...They speak English sometimes with me, but they try to do the same with their mom, but she doesn’t know English and they know that.” (#F, p. 27)

Communication Changes with Siblings and Parents

Three parents reported that the communication between siblings shifted almost completely to English after having spent some years living in the US. The reasons for that change seemed to be related to the topics of conversations between children. School and common friends are themes that children clearly experienced in English. An Argentinean mother, who has spent more than two years living in the US, brought the following insight: “Both (my son and my daughter) communicate to each other in English, when their talk is related to school because school means English for them” (# G, p. 34). A Yemeni father observed a similar communication pattern for his sons:
“[W]hen they are playing they use English; the same when they talk to each other
… Maybe this is because of school and TV” (#J, p. 41).

My observations at the Mill St. playground also served to confirm that, when
siblings talked about games and friends while they interacted with other children, their
conversations were completely in English. That was the case for the two Brazilian
siblings. However both children talked to each other in Portuguese when they played
alone.

Mother Tongue as a Value

Language played a very strong feature of cultural identification within
sojourner families. When children started to answer in English to their parents’
queries, a focus for conflict clearly emerged. Three interviewees acknowledged that
their children were forgetting their mother tongue and replacing it with English,
generating some conflict with those parents who wanted their children to preserve
their home language. In that sense, these parents believed that maintaining their native
language constituted a very strong cultural feature that they wanted their children to
preserve. In our conversations, three parents emphasized the importance of keeping
their language. “What are the main communication changes that you have noted in
your child?” I asked them. For a Mongolian mother, one of the main changes for her
son was language, basically the acquisition of English and its subtle replacement of
their native language. She seemed to be bothered by this change in her son:
“...[T]he problem is that he is forgetting [his own] language; he is not talking his own language, and all is in English, English, and English. Yeah just English. I encourage him to learn English but not to forget his own [language].” (#E, p. 21)

Two Venezuelan parents and a Korean mother agreed with the above comment. They also experienced a similar problem with their children.

“He thinks in English first and then tries to think that in Spanish. He used to think first in Spanish and then translated that into English, but that has changed. He is speaking Spanish very bad, for example he says ‘el blanco perro’ which in Spanish is the dog white. . . . He is obliged to speak Spanish at home because he knows that our language is not English. . . .” remarked a Venezuelan mother.

“English is natural for him, it is like his mother tongue right now. Every time he passes through that door [the main entrance door of their house] his world is in English, at school, with his friends, watching TV, etc.” (#L, p. 52) asserted a Venezuelan father.

For a Korean mother, the problem was similar: “He is struggling with Korean. We are using our language at home, but he is not following us” (#O, p. 71).

Communication and Behavior Changes: Conflict with Parents

In conversations with the interviewees, the communication and behavior changes of their children emerged as another common topic. Almost all the
interviewees found that some changes were positive for their children. At the same time, some parents were concerned about other changes that they perceived contradict their own cultural values and customs. These conflicts between parents and children varied in intensity as well as in general features. Some of these conflicts are very strong at the present moment of their stay in the US, while others are thought of as causing a future disruption in the family relationship.

Adoption of American Style of Conversation

One of the changes that parents noticed was their children’s adoption of the American style of conversation, primarily the use of some expressions and accents. In three cases, interviewees saw those changes in positive terms, as something natural due to the management of the language and the influence of school, TV, and American friends. I asked the parents how they thought their children have changed with respect to adopting an American style?

“[T]heir conversation style . . . has changed due to the acculturation with American culture. I think sometimes they try to copy their friends . . . I didn’t know that my daughter speaks so well but when I look at my daughter and her friends playing I notice that she speaks very good, English with her American friends,” said a Korean mother. (#B, p. 10)

Two other parents detected that their children have acquired expressions and gestures typical of an American style of conversation. “They have adopted some American expressions like, when I order something, they answer ‘Yeah!’ or ‘you’ve got it!’ even
if I talk to them in Arabic” (#I, p. 38) responded a Saudi Arabian father. “They learned to do some gestures. Their speaking styles show some vocabulary they have picked up the American accent like ‘Oh man!’” (#D, p. 17) added a Thai mother with respect to her children.

However, one interviewee (a Saudi Arabian father) manifested concerns about some of the American expressions that his children had picked up. For instance, the use of the expression “bless you” would contain, in this interviewee’s view, an American feature that contradicts his family’s religious beliefs:

“Well, normally I always just try to get them not to mix everything…

There are also some American behaviors that I don’t want them to do, not because they are bad, but I don’t want them to mix the culture. Like when you sneeze, in American culture they say, “bless you” and I try to teach them not to say this. We have to say Ala blesses you and forgives you and cares for all of us, but in the Arabic language” (#I, p. 38).

Another characteristic of the American style that constituted an important change was the way children spoke. Parents referred to “speak freely,” “argue,” “talk back,” “interrupt,” and “straightforwardness” as the main changes in their children’s communication style which they associated with the American culture. Of all these changes, “speak freely” seemed to provoke dissimilar responses in parents. Some of the parents agreed that speaking freely constituted a very positive feature that their children have acquired in the US. But other interviewees considered this change a focus of conflict between their children and themselves.
Three parents thought speaking freely was a positive change for their children, as it was a feature not developed in their native countries. Despite the fact that these three parents agreed that speaking freely was positive, they revealed slightly different perceptions of this feature. For one Korean interviewee, speaking freely was seen as the ability to freely engage in conversations with people of different sexes and with family members:

“The other thing is that my daughters are used to Korean schools in which girls and boys are separated only at the university level, men and women are together. . . . In Korea, men and women are not free to speak to each other. In American culture, both men and women speak to each other and interact normally. This is very strange for a Korean. As I mentioned before, children study separately, so the custom is that men and women don’t talk to each other. In that sense, my daughters are now speaking freely and naturally to boys. At the beginning, the conversation was not naturally free.” (p. 13) “In Korea, children and parents’ conversation is little; in America, in our family’s case the communication is large. In Korea, children don’t really converse with their parents.” (p. 14)

Other parents, from Malaysia, considered that their children have learned to speak up in class or in public places, a characteristic that implies they are active communicators wherever they are.

“I think I look at it positively. I think that here they are more open like. Our kids now, compared to the Malaysian kids, they are more open. They
are more brave. They are more confident, and their public speaking
skills are much better as compared to back home. In our classrooms in
Malaysia, kids are really not allowed to speak up any time.” (#N, p. 68)
This feature of speaking freely triggered, in a Korean mother, the idea that her son
would be able to defend himself from the possible aggressiveness of other children.
“He just expresses himself very freely and that is kind of constantly. I
think he is not good at defending himself so this attitude of expressing
things freely would help him.” (#O, p. 76)

However two other parents showed concern that their children’s “speak free
style,” adopted from the American culture, gave the impression that the children were
independent from their parents. Interviewees perceived this change as problematic and
as producing conflictive situations within the family, especially in the parent-child
relationship. The reason for these conflicts seemed to be based in cultural values that
parents wanted their children to keep, such as the expectation that children should
“obey a parent’s order”, while their children’s responses were completely the opposite.

“Our society [said an Uzbek mother] is a traditional society, a deep
traditional society based on the Islam religion. We have something we
respect that is social hierarchy, family and society, but he (my son) is very
free. He never respects that” (p. 45). “Yes, sometimes I feel that my son is
becoming too free. He frequently doesn’t obey me like in my country in
which he did everything I asked him to do. But here… I understand it is
my fault because I leave my kids for a long time because I go out in the
morning and come back at night and we have a lack of communication. Probably this is the main reason they don’t hear me, and they prefer to do what they want to do. It’s probably that they started to forget me.” (#K, p. 47)

This feeling of being too independent from parents was also a great concern for the Venezuelan couple, who noticed the use of an alien expression in their ten-year-old son’s speech. “What is conflictive is an expression that I think represents the influence of American culture when he says ‘I have rights’” confessed a worried Venezuelan father. “Yes he says he has many rights. Well, in fact, Americans give rights to children,” supported the mother who also seemed to be disturbed. The father went further saying, “In Latin America, it is unthinkable that a child speaks that he has rights.” “That is not from us. In fact, we use to say to our child ‘you don’t have any rights until you reach certain age’”(#L, p. 52), the mother angrily added.

The above examples also relate to another common focus for conflicts due to adopting American communication features. Specifically, children were described as engaging more in “argument,” “interrupting adults,” “talking back,” and, finally, being “disrespectful toward adults.” These four main areas of parental complaint had their roots in cultural values the parents wanted their children to keep. Six interviewees explained that these particular communication changes were interpreted as contradicting cultural values like “children are not allowed to argue with adults” or “children have to respect older people.” That is the way some parents perceived their
children’s changes. One of my interviewees from Korea clearly stated that his children argued more than before:

“My children have changed in that respect, for example they argue to me about their problems and they also argue to me about my own behavior.”

“What was your reaction to that change, as well as your wife’s reaction?” I asked.

“My wife ignores the situation and tries to advise them to be quiet. I really respect my daughters and always try to listen to them…”

“Your wife’s case is different. She doesn’t want to hear them?” I intervened.

“My wife wants to model my daughters’ behaviors and actions according to the Korean model. So, she has some conflicts with my daughters who are changing some things due to acculturation with American culture. My daughters try to imitate American students who are freer in their actions.”

(#C, p. 14)

In a similar vein, a Yemeni mother who has spent more than four years in the US showed concern about one of her sons:

“[H]e wants to be like Americans and in using things that they say, discussing things too much, not discussing because we allow them to discuss, but in a way that we are not used to and get surprised.” (#J, p. 42)

What surprised me most was when I discovered teachers at school also found international children were disrespectful. One of the ESL teachers confessed that this
was a primary complaint of American teachers. The problem of being disrespectful seemed to be rooted in a lack of ability on the part of the child to code switch in a timely manner according to the context.

“…here they can speak their minds and they can argue with the teacher, not argue but debate and ask questions; in other countries if you question a teacher means you question the integrity of the teacher. Here it is ok to have a discussion with your teacher. Parents told me that they are concerned about that. Sometimes international children don’t know how to handle that to the point that they do become disrespectful. They want to try out something. Basically they see the freedom of discussing with the teachers and all that, and then they want to try it. Not only at home but even in the school they try to say the same things that their classmates are saying. But then when they try it, is not the right context maybe, or maybe it is not in the right moment, in the right way to the point they to come across as disrespectful. One example is that some of the children say a lot of words in their classrooms sometimes, how do I say it? Like questioning the teachers and then when my international students use the same words in a different situation it comes across as not good, I can’t think of an exact example right now. Even the way they use words sometimes, and it is just not the right time and it comes across as ‘what are you saying?’”(p. 94)

“Does it sound disrespectful also for American teachers?” I asked
“Yes, because it is not in the right context. It is not in the right time and the right environment. It sounds bad and seems to be disrespectful… I just told the teachers that they are just practicing what they have heard from their classmates but it sounded bad. I had to explain a lot of times because one of the teachers says ‘so and so say so and so’ and I say ‘oh that came from previous things’ cause they want to try the language and its idiomatic expressions but they don’t fit the conversation or the right time, so I have to explain to the teacher.” (p. 95)

As the complaints became stronger and stronger, I ended up asking one of the parents what principal or rule she reminded her son not to forget.

“Not to behave with me like American children and not to argue with me, just to tell him what he thinks and why he is doing this kind of thing. As a Mongolian, I’m trying to be harder with him,” said a Mongolian mother.

“Harder? What do you mean ‘to be harder with him’?” I asked her.

“I don’t hit him. I just try to maintain what he has to do and why he doesn’t have to do certain kind of things. And I try to remind him that it’s because of me he is here.” (#E, p. 23)

The conversation with parents shifted a little bit and turned to an analysis of the reasons the interviewees saw their children’s communication changes as disrespectful of adults.
“Children feel here that they have a lot of rights [commented a
Venezuelan mother]. This is something we don’t have in our country. This
right seems to be over the parents’ authority. I think that is absurd.” (p. 53)
“He has to learn that the way he behaves with his friends is completely
different from the way he has to behave with adults. I was taught that
adults should be respected, a child had to ask for permission to talk ... I
intend to teach him to respect adults; every person, who is older than you,
deserves your respect” (#L, p. 54), added the Venezuelan father angrily.

What seemed to be conflictive is the way children talked to their parents. This was
very clear in the case of the Mongolian mother; she found specific changes that were
considered disrespectful in her culture.

“He caught all these American styles, for example, how to talk to people.
When he comes back home, he’ll have a lot of problems because, in
Mongolia, children are not allowed to play jokes, interrupt, or talk to
adults” (#E, p. 21).

Sometimes parents perceived that their children will have to return to their former
behaviors in order to readapt to their native culture values.

“In Korea, my wife strictly tutors my daughters. She doesn’t want my
daughters to argue with her when she or any other person is speaking” (p.
15) “... My daughters’ behavior and communication style is more
liberal...” explained a Korean father.

“Do you want your children to change?” I asked him.
“Maybe yes. In Korea, the education environment is different from the American style, so my wife wants my daughters to change into the Korean style.” (#C, p.15)

At this point in the conversation, I started to ask myself what was implied when parents said that their children should respect adults or elders. To what extent was this topic connected to cultural expectations about how a child should behave and act within the family, with peers, teachers and neighbors? Some of the interviewees clearly displayed those expectations but others still repeated part of the internalized norm “children should respect older people.” “…I had corrected him on some things, for example, that he should respect elder people, but sometimes he didn’t hear me. He is a child” (# K, p. 46), commented an Uzbek mother. However, two Yemeni parents went a little bit further in providing an explanation for why they considered their children as having violated their rules:

“Maybe sometimes with my older son, you know, we use in our culture from the children to be very respectful for older people, sometimes in a passive way. Sometimes I feel he is getting, he wants to be like Americans and in using things that they say”, said the mother.

“We notice that our kids are getting away from our culture respecting older people [added the father]. We think it is not too far away. Sometimes when we respond when they have behaviors like this, we tell them that is not good for them.” (#J, p. 42)
A Korean mother brought up another cultural issue that, in her view, clearly explains when parents considered their children as being disrespectful to parents and adults in general.

“In Korea, we have to comply with the parents’ orders, but in America, it is not like that. My son can say anything he wants, even to call the name. Sometimes he is doing badly. He didn’t respect. His behavior is different from Korean children. He doesn’t comply with his father. He is not respectful to his father in the way we do in Korea. His father didn’t say anything to him, but to me he says that my son is Americanized. It’s a very sensitive thing, not that bad; it’s not a behavior, but his manners, the way of his expressions.” (#O, p. 75)

Another feature some parents discovered in this Americanized conversation style of their children was “talking back.” This attribute of talking back seemed to be connected with a way of arguing.

“One of the things I noticed is that sometimes my child talks back to my husband when my son doesn’t like something [said one of the Korean mothers]. This is not always. For example my husband says something and my kid responds ‘so what?’ He just expresses himself very freely and that is kind of constantly. I think he is not good at defending himself so this attitude of expressing things freely would help him. Talk back is something impolite in Korea.” (#O, p. 76)
There is another feature that some interviewees linked to the American style of communication, but in this case, the interviewees differed from each other in their perceptions. One interviewee considered that Americans shout at each other, while another interviewee thought Americans, especially at school, were very quiet and never spoke up. In both cases, parents were analyzing the same feature through their own cultural lens. In the first case, two Malaysian parents identified the American communication style of “speaking up” as “shouting” between people. They also manifested that this American cultural feature was causing some problems with their children who had started to imitate this style in their communication with siblings. “They like to shout at the family. They are not allowed to raise their voice to their parents,” said the mother. “[I]n our religion it is not allowed”(p. 64) added the father.

As their statement was not very clear, I inquired if their children had sometimes shouted at each other or at them.

“They don’t shout at the parents but shout to each other. Every time I see them shouting, I tell them ‘don’t shout. That is bad. He is your brother. When we are gone, you are going to live together without our presence, so don’t shout. Respect each other.’ It’s a little fine to control them. We try; we try” (#N, p. 65) the father claimed.

Another couple interviewed, from Argentina, found that Americans “never speak up” or “shout,” and in that sense, they acknowledged that their daughter has acquired the behavior of being “quiet” during her stay in the US. The parents also admitted that this cultural feature is unthinkable in their home culture. In the course of
the conversation with both spouses, the Argentinean mother remembered the following anecdote:

“One day I went to pick up my daughter and the secretary told me to go directly to the classroom. There was an extreme silence in the classroom, and I opened the door to talk to the teacher and found she was not there. This would never happen in our country. Children are very noisy, especially when the teacher is not in the class”.

“But I think this has another explanation [her husband intervened]. This is a society of fear. There are many things you are not allowed to do, not drinking in the street, not partying because it bothers our neighbors, etc.”

“I was telling you about my daughter’s school [said the mother]. Even when the teacher was not in the room with them, children were mute and doing what they had to do. I couldn’t believe that because in our country, children will throw things at the air”.

“Here, nobody shouts”, her husband emphasized.

“Yeah, people here speak very slowly. They don’t speak up. Children are, for that reason, more quiet here than in our schools. I think that if we compare American culture with Argentinean culture, we are two extremes in some aspects” (#G, p. 32) firmly expressed the Argentinean mother.
Adoption of Customs that Contradict Their Parents’ Customs

With the adoption of some features of the American communication style, children indirectly acquired American customs that, in certain circumstances, contradicted their native customs. These American customs varied from conversations and family meetings to language and other social conventions. Three interviewees expressed concerns about the changes in customs that their children had experienced:

“Probably the easy going life they have here, the way they eat, the way they talk changed. When we go back to Thailand, we will have to have dinner together at the same time with the family. When we eat together, we have to finish together, and if my son finishes first, he cannot leave the table. He has to ask for permission. But now he eats in front of the television, and I cannot do anything,” noticed a Thai mother. (#D, p. 17)

The Mongolian mother predicted that her son would confront a lot of problems when return home due to some of the changes he has experienced in the US:

“We have very strict customs. For example, when you give something to someone, you have to use your right hand, and when you receive, you have to use your right hand, and he doesn’t care. He is going to have a lot of problems” (p. 21)…. “I try to tell him not to forget his customs…And the problem is that he is forgetting the language, he is not talking his own language” (#E, p. 21).
“Just not to forget his language, customs. In any way, he is Mongolian.
He shouldn’t forget about that. I’m trying to give him things of our
culture. Maybe I’m forgetting some of them as well but…” (p. 23)

“What changes in communication style have you noticed in your relationship with
your child?” I asked the Mongolian mother. “I really don’t remember right now. Let
me think. For example, not to put their feet on my table. This is something that he is
not allowed to do” (#E, p. 23). The Bangladeshi mother was even more determinate
and closed in her response: “We want to preserve our culture not the culture of the
Americans.” At the same time she acknowledged that her daughter “can learn good
things from the American culture” (# M, p. 61).

Other interviewees clearly stated that their children felt freer in the US than in
their home country. This is how the Mexican father envisioned his children’s feelings
of freedom:

“In Mexico we cannot leave our children out of the house for two minutes
because there many dangers like traffic, people, insecurity, etc. and
everybody knows that in my country. It doesn’t threaten us because we
were born in that environment. But, here, that is different and my children
feel that difference. They have told us that they feel freer. ‘Mom, we like
to live here because we can go out and play’ that is what they usually say.
We know that the apartment complex is all surrounded by a fence and
protected; you’ll never find strangers. My children are like free birds
without a cage. We think this is a great advantage for them.” (#P, p. 80)
Even though the parents thought this was an advantage for their children, they also expressed fear that this feeling of liberty could jeopardize the family union.

“I really would like to keep our unity as a family. We noticed here that, as we live in a very secure place in which nothing happens, children try to stay much time with friends and far away from home” warned the Mexican mother. (#P, p. 81)

Clothing and Hair

Clothing was another aspect of personal communication style that our interviewees perceived as different in the US from their home culture. Some of the interviewees indicated that their children had changed the way they wanted to dress due to acculturation to America. For one of the interviewees (a Korean mother) the change in clothing and hairstyle seemed to be positive:

“Sometimes my daughters want to use some special fixing materials for their hair when, in my country, my daughter never used any special product for her hair. She bought something to comb her hair because other friends wear this product.” (#B, p. 10)

For five other interviewees, the changes had a negative side with the subsequent appearance of differences between parents and children. They emphasized that dress style was an important custom of their culture; therefore, their children should not forget their native way of clothing. In the eyes of a Korean father, the way women
dress in the US is scandalous. His daughters were not allowed to imitate the American style of clothing:

“One of the things that constitutes a problem for them was the types of clothing women wear here in the US. Women seem to be almost naked compared to Korean women ... My daughters do not understand these things and ask me lots of questions. ... She [my wife] doesn’t like my children to wear small clothes or be almost naked, or to wear earrings and tattoos. All those things are not accepted in our culture.” (#C, p. 13, 15)

I recalled the first visit I made to this professor’s home. His wife attended me very politely. While we talked in the outside hallway of her apartment, their youngest eleven-year-old daughter came outside wearing only her underwear and a very tight and short shirt. The mother immediately reacted. She shouted something in Korean at her, slapped her on her behind, rubbed her arm, and obliged her to enter the house.

This problem with clothing and nakedness was also of concern to a Yemeni father:

“...and maybe going outside naked or with small piece of clothes, you are not allowed to do this, and my children understand. Maybe to act like adults...” (# J, p. 42).

Expressing a different perspective on American clothing, one of the Brazilian mothers explained that her daughters complained about and disliked the way Americans dress:

“‘Why do I have to wear big clothes instead of showing my body like in Brazil?’ my daughter says. In Brazil, only very religious groups are so conservative with the clothing, and we found that people here in Athens
are very close and conservative. In Brazil, you cannot wear the type of
clothes people wear here because they would be ridiculed for all your
life.” (#A, p. 3)

Two other Asian parents found that their children rejected the type of clothing they
wore in their countries. The Thai mother explained the way her daughter adapted the
American style of informal clothing:

“The way they dress [has changed] too. I bought some beautiful and
typical dresses for my daughter. She doesn’t want to wear them, saying
‘oh mommy, I’m going to school’, or ‘mommy, I will play in this area so I
don’t dress up’. In Thailand, we wear beautiful clothes when we go out,
but here, I noticed that I got a lot of clothes she didn’t really wear them
except when we have a party. Even when she goes to school, she doesn’t
want to wear beautiful jeans because she says that is too beautiful to go to
school.” (#D, p. 17)

With a similar insight, the Mongolian mother recalled an experience she had with her
son, who finally started to reject the formal clothing from Mongolia that she wanted
him to wear for school:

“Usually in my country, for the first day of school, they have to wear very
formal clothes, and I brought some clothes for him, but during the
summer, he grew up. They were too small for him. And then, I couldn’t
find something around here to make him much better. Anyway he went to
school with his books around. He felt uncomfortable with the formal
clothes because children don’t wear those clothes here. They were wearing T-shirts and shorts. So then he was asking me why he was wearing formal clothes.” (#E, p. 21)

Another interviewee expressed concern about the practice of wearing costumes for Halloween. He thought this festivity and its customs were against the religious principles of Muslims. “Is there anything your kids do that you don’t want them to do?” I asked a Saudi Arabian father.

“Only related to our religion. Like at Halloween, I always ordered them not to act like the other children. I did not want them to wear masks or put something on their faces. Muslims are not allowed to do that.” (#I, p. 38)

Kisses, Demonstration of Affection in Public Places and Sex

The open demonstrations of affection as well as the freedom to talk about sex were other topics that three interviewees found problematic. Even though their children were really young, the children constantly asked questions and surprised their parents about topics that had a different treatment in their countries. Differences in the demonstration of affection, for example, generated levels of conflict that parents tried to address by imposing their authority and reminding their children of their customs and values back home.

“Another source of conflict [explained a Korean father] is that many American students kiss and embrace each other openly in the streets…My daughters smile and discuss that with me. They ask me about these things
that are strange for them. In Korea kissing and embracing only have to be displayed in secret, in privacy… My daughters don’t understand all these.” (#C, p. 13)

Especially for Muslim people, the free demonstration of affection that Americans display contradicts their customs. “If there is a kiss in a movie [said a Malaysian Muslim mother], they have to close their eyes because they are not allowed to see anything. I mean, if you are not married, you are not allowed to kiss.” “Is that for men or women?” I timidly asked. “For women. They are not allowed to kiss or stay together, and if you have children before getting married, it is a sin. Until recently they obeyed—except for that girl, she is always tricky,” said the mother. The father added: “She closes one eye, but opens the other one [laughs!]” (#N, p. 64).

The mother went further, saying:

“I don’t know but the oldest sometimes asks a lot of questions about the American culture. We try to teach them values that we have back home, for example, like kissing. ‘Why Americans love to kiss?’ Or ‘why all the girls like to have boyfriends?’ [laughs!] It’s her favorite question! [looking at her daughter] This is a very sensitive topic.” (#N, p. 69)

The father looked at his daughter with an inquiring look in his eyes.

For two other Yemeni parents the problematic of sex was raised when children received classes on sex and related materials at school. A Yemeni father complained that: “For our customs, you don’t have to do anything you wish to do, like sexual materials; we don’t allow them to have these.” “Maybe this sexual topic or questions
because of TV and because of school, we think. . . .” The mother added: “It’s more than their age. It’s not useful. Their mentalities are not compatible to receive or understand or discuss this topic. So these things, we get surprised when they asked us about these things” (# J, p. 42).

Relationships with Peers

After the children began to master the English language, some of them (11) who did not manage the language upon their arrival started to acquire international and American friends. Here are some examples of how some parents perceived the improvements in their children’s relationships with peers, especially at school:

“Girls started to talk to her … She started to feel much better at school. She started to understand English” (#A, p. 2) said a Brazilian mother.

“American students did not make friends with my daughter. After one month, she made a friend and the problem is solved. Now this problem doesn’t exist anymore,” explained a Korean father. (#C, p. 13)

“When we lived in Mill Street [said a Yemeni father], we used to have Arab kids so they had friends there, but in school, they didn’t have because of the language. But now they have a lot of friends and they enjoy going to school. I think now they don’t have problems.” (#J, p. 41)

“He was better in kindergarten [explained a Korean mother] and much better at school…He is making more friends.” (#O, p. 72)
Nevertheless, the Argentinean father argued that making friends in the US was a very difficult task for international children.

“Here it is very difficult to make friends unless you participate in a group. My son always likes to play sports; at the beginning, it was difficult for him to continue practicing these sports because he couldn’t find friends with whom to play.”

I inquired, “you mean all your children’s friendships were due to sports?”

“Yeah, in the case of my son, but it was different for my younger daughter. She made friends at school.” (#G, p. 30)

During the observations at Mill St. playground, I recognized that two newcomers, a Mexican and a Mongolian girl, improved their knowledge of English, becoming more and more fluent as time passed. This fact contributed to their improving and establishing new relationships with other groups of girls within the neighborhood.

“Guadalupe and Teresa, were nicely engaged in a conversation. Guadalupe taught Teresa some words in Spanish” (p. 23).

“On the other side of the playground Guadalupe, Teresa and Sheila are talking” (p. 25)

“The other group of girls (Teresa, Sheila, Monica, and eventually the American siblings) went closer to Guadalupe and the Mongolian girl. They first started with short conversations and the sharing of some of the games in the playground. Later on, Guadalupe and the Mongolian girl began to adopt some of the games that the other girls shared like listening
to music with their walkman and, in some cases, performing different
dance steps. But listening to music for some of these girls was an essential
activity shared by the group. This simple activity of listening to music
seems to be another way these girls are acculturating to the American
culture. She is singing an American song that she is listening to on her
Walkman. ‘You break up my heart…’ she sings. Guadalupe also comes by
on her bike with a Walkman on. She saw me and came next to me. 'I like
this music' [says that in Spanish]. ‘This is not mine (indicating the
walkman). It's from my friend, the Chinese’ (There is no Chinese girl at
Mill Street but a Mongolian girl).” (p. 26)

“The Mongolian girl has her Walkman on and sings, ‘I'm not that
innocent…’ She is now talking to Guadalupe again. Guadalupe says that
the batteries of her walkman are off, then she picks up her bike and leaves
the playground saying goodbye to me but in Spanish.” (p. 27)

Strategies to Make Friends

In two cases, interviewees acknowledged that their children have changed their
strategies for making friends as compared to the approach they used in their home
countries. Even though both strategies seemed to be different, both were oriented
towards the same effect: drawing the attention of peers. In one of the cases, drawing
the attention of classmates was accomplished through wearing make up and changing
the color of the child’s hair. A Brazilian mother narrated this story for me:
“Things for [my youngest daughter] got better one day when she dyed part of her hair red. She went to the hairdresser with my mother to cut her hair and then, when she arrived there, she asked them to dye her hair. The next day when she returned from school, she told me ‘I have made 6 friends today. Everybody liked my hair color very much’. Girls started to talk to her due to the new color of her hair. She started to feel much better at school. She started to understand English. She wore lipstick sometimes, and all the classmates approached her, asking her if her mother accepted her to wear makeup etc.” (#A, p. 2)

In the second case, the child’s strategy was different. She gave small and strange gifts to her classmates in order to gain their goodwill.

“In America, she had no American friends [a Korean mother told me about her daughter]. She had to try to make friends and she had to give something special for the American friends. I think she changed her strategy to make friends in America because she didn’t speak English very well, had no other friends, so she planned some special strategy to have some friends. She gave kids very small and special Koreans’ things, like dolls. Many American children really like those gifts; they have favor for my daughter” (#B, p. 9).
Conflicts with Peers

When asked about the conflicts that their children experienced with peers, most of the interviewees did not give significance to them. Parents thought that the kinds of conflicts their children had with peers were of a universal type that would be the same in the US as in their home countries.

“Children argue over everything, because of the ball, the bicycle [explained a Brazilian father]. They argue, and in half an hour, they are playing again. They come crying saying somebody did something to them; so my response is to go and talk to the other child, and later they are together again.” (#J, p. 27)

“Sometimes [they experience conflict] due to misunderstanding, some fighting [added a Saudi Arabian father]. There was nothing very serious or important to remember.” (#I, p. 38)

However some parents identified a couple of conflicts between their children and peers which seemed to have their roots in different cultural expectations and values.

“Yeah, he had some problems with his classmates. In my culture [said a Mongolian mother] children are not allowed to listen to adults talk or interrupt the talk or play with adults' joke. Not many people in my culture will like that. [My son] doesn’t like [his classmates] because he also thinks these children are spoiled more than in Mongolia.” (#E, p. 21)

For a Thai mother, her son also revealed to her some differences in understanding other children:
“I remember that my son had some problems at the beginning with boys here in Mill Street. He wasn’t really friends with other boys, and I had to help him a little bit in keeping contact with the other boys. When they got to know each other, they fight, they play, no problem.” (#D, p. 16)

The ELS teacher echoed a similar view. She thought that sometimes language could act as a cultural barrier in children’s communication with peers, generating conflict situations:

“At the playground sometimes I have to explain to them why so and so are fighting. I have some teachers coming and calling me ‘what is happening here?’ I said well, this is one point of view, and another one. It is basically a language barrier. She is also right and he is also right. I can’t give specifics right now, but I’ve done that before.” (p. 89)

Parents’ advice for solving their children’s conflicts with peers in the US varied. Some parents (4) admitted that they gave their children the same advice here on how to solve a conflict with another peer that they would give them in their home countries. However strategies for solving the conflict varied. For some parents children have to learn to solve their own conflicts. A Brazilian mother expressed that view. The Brazilian mother’s opinion was shared by most of the Latin American parents.

Other parents emphasized the use of an avoiding style for solving a conflict. That was the case of some Asians’ parents.
“I would give her the same advice just forget it and never mind, just do your job, never mind him” explained a Korean mother. (#B, p. 9)

While one of the Arab parents seemed to prefer a more paternalist style:

“Actually, as Muslims we have to teach our sons basic behavior even in the United States or back home. We always teach them,” said a Saudi Arabian father (#I, p. 38).

Eight interviewees indicated that their advice would be completely different if the conflict between their children and their children’s peers occurred in their native countries. Responses to conflict varied even within cultures that are supposed to be closer in values, etc. to each other. For a Korean father as well as a Yemeni mother, a conflict with a classmate in their countries would be addressed and solved by the teacher, who has a great influence over children.

“My advice would be different. In Korea, the teachers intervene in solving a conflict with a classmate” (#C, p. 13).

The Yemeni mother recognized that, in the US, children are more aggressive and teachers more passive, which made her children more vulnerable to their peers. Her advice here was “defend yourself” while, in her country, the teacher would manage every dispute.

“Maybe it is a little bit different here. We also noted here let’s say violent children and we used to tell them defend yourself. In my country, I don’t remember that I gave them this advice because the teacher has an important role. Here the teachers have very passive roles in the conflicts
between children because they don’t want to interfere. So we use to teach them defend yourself. In my country, you can speak to the teacher. You can tell her that somebody is bothering my child, and she can do anything because she has more authority because she is the teacher. She is supposed to be controlling the kids, but here the teachers cannot do this; so we tell them ‘defend yourself, do not begin, but if somebody bothers you, just react.’” (#J, p. 41)

Some Latin American parents (3) had a completely different perception of Americans’ behaviors. They found that their native cultures were much more aggressive than the American culture. Children in their countries tend to fight more in and out of school because this seemed to be the way to naturally solve a conflict with a peer.

“Because our culture is different, Brazilian culture is different. If a child fights with another child and punches him here, people will immediately call the police, so you have problems of process. It is something very complicated. In Brazil, children fight at school, and they fight when they go out of school. If another child punches my son, I’m not going to call his father asking him about the situation between our sons. Both children were fighting because both wanted to fight, so both are responsible for the consequences. Here it is completely different. People have to know the culture of other people. People here, if two children are fighting, they ask the police to intervene. My children know that they cannot physically respond in a fight here,” argued a Brazilian father. (#F, p. 27)
The Mexican mother offered a similar comment on how people solve conflicts in her country.

“I don’t think the advice would be the same. …[P]eople in the US are more prudent with conflicts. I noticed that, here, when you get into a conflict it means that the situation couldn’t be stopped somehow. In Mexico is totally opposed; you can have conflict at every time and for whatever reason. Children in Mexico are more aggressive than here. Children here are educated to be more polite and not aggressive. In Mexico, it is totally different. If you have a problem, almost immediately they solve it fighting. Children (in Mexico) see that adults solve their problems with punches and they try to imitate this custom.” (#P, p. 83)

However, the Venezuelan interviewees debated, each parent offering a different solution to the child’s problem. In one case, the father suggested that his son would rather ignore the conflict or fight. He would give the same advice in the US as he would in his country. The mother argued that she would try to be more rational and explanatory here than in her country where her advice would be to ignore the problem.

“There are two types of advice you can give your children. One is a more rational way to explain things and the other is a more emotional reaction to it. My advice is most of the time ‘kick that ass’,” said the Venezuelan father.

“Would that advice be the same if the problem were in Venezuela?” I asked him.
“Of course. The advice would be the same. Our language (Spanish) is so rich that you can say things in very different ways that do not mean exactly the same. In English, if you say, ‘kill him’ you are truly saying kill that person. In Spanish you can say, ‘kick him in the ass’ and you don’t mean that your child has to follow that action…All depends on the emotional emphasis that you give to those words. For example, if my child comes from school every day reporting some classmates bother him all the time, that they take his books, or his food, etc., you have two alternatives. One is to go to school and talk to the other children, but this sometimes could be counter-productive for your son. The message you are giving your child is that he is incapable of solving his own problems. The other advice would be that, if children hurt him, he has to punch them. There are two intentions in saying this. One is ignore them, run away from them, or in effect, punch them. In English, the interpretation would be different. If you tell your child that phrase, for the American laws, you are encouraging him to do [the specified action]…”

“[Y]ou are the intellectual author of his behavior,” added the mother.

“Here I give him very rational explanations and take time to explain the situation. In my country, I would tell him ‘sacudetela’ ignore them.” (#L, p. 51)

Three Asian mothers (from Korea, Thailand, and Bangladesh) thought that their advice in their countries would be different and show more concerned for the group
and cultural context of the conflict. The Korean mother thought that, in the US, she would blame her daughter first because she [the mother] lacked understanding of the context.

“Let’s say that my daughter argues with a peer. Here I would probably blame my daughter because I wouldn’t know exactly what happened, but in Korea I would have acted different. In Korea, I would try to understand the situation more. Here it would be difficult for me to understand the situation. I would say to my daughter ‘try to be more careful.’” (#H, p. 36)

The Bangladeshi mother was more worried about the fact that they were aliens who had to follow certain rules that sometimes were different from the ones they had in countries of origin.

“No it would be different definitely…One of the things to consider is that we are international students, so we are aliens, foreigners, so we have to be very polite. We have to maintain certain rules. That doesn’t mean that in our country I would teach my daughter to be different. Here we have different treatment, but in our country, we are citizens. We have different treatment and have different rules for us. We have different rights and duties. If you compare that from that point, the advice would be different.” (#M, p. 60)

The Thai mother emphasized that, in her country it was more important to save face and keep the harmony of the group, as opposed to the straightforwardness of Americans when dealing with a conflict situation.
“In Thailand, we have what we call ego-orientation. You might have to teach them to handle the conflict differently, but here in the US, you can say something straight if you are not satisfied. In Thailand, you have to be considerate before saying anything. They have a way to say things. Otherwise, you cause people to lose face and you have to repair the relationship.” (#D, p. 18)

Other Behavior Change

There were other behavior changes that four interviewees perceived in their children during the consolidation stage in the US. These changes were aggression, fear, individualism, and politeness. One interviewee found that her daughter is still experiencing aggression towards family members and a fear of being alone as a result of her adjustment to the new environment in the US. In conversation with Sue, one of the Brazilian mothers, her boyfriend and her mother, Sue finally confessed:

“[My daughter] has a fear of everything. She doesn’t go to the bathroom alone, she sleeps with my mother, and cries all the time. She is so afraid that she cannot sleep with the lights out and cannot get out of the house alone. I really don’t understand why she has that fear.” (p. 4)

“I believe that the younger one has become very aggressive,” said her boyfriend.

“In what sense do you think she is aggressive?” I asked him.
“Because she is nervous [he answered]. I think the reason is that she is a very smart girl, and outgoing person. She likes to go out, to ask, to meet new people, but here she is inside the house the whole day. Her escapes are aggression. For example, I’m reading something and she comes and tickles me without any reason. I asked her to stop several times, but she starts again and again. This communication is bad due to the reason that she is closed in her own house all the time instead of having the house full of friends.”

Sue interrupted her boyfriend and added: “When my house is tranquil you can expect that a war will begin soon.”

“Another thing that I noticed [her boyfriend followed] is that when the girls are with their grandmother, she can control if they are both fighting, but when their mother arrives, they start to fight. It’s a war to obtain their mother’s attention. I think that the reason for these behaviors is that they don’t practice any sports or physical activities because, after a day of physical activity, everything is going to be different.”

“Both girls vie for the attention of their mother” added the grandmother. “[Joking] yes, every night I’m taking the pieces of mother and trying to make a complete person. [Laughs]”, said the boyfriend.

Sue: “My daughters have not adapted to anything.”

Grandma: “They are here because their mother obliges them.” (#A, p. 4)
Two other interviewees noticed that their children have become more individualistic and selfish. A possible reason for those behaviors could be that, as a result of their assimilation to the American culture, these children have increased in their individualistic attitudes. A second possible reason is that these behaviors are characteristic of their own personalities. This change of being more individualistic collides with parents’ cultural values. In that sense, these parents thought that their children’s tendency to think of themselves first instead of thinking of others was causing present as well as future conflicts within the home.

“My eldest daughter is too selfish [explained a Korean mother]. She only cares about herself, only herself; my other daughter is very different, nurturing. She is quite young, but she always takes care of other people in the family. I sometimes say to my daughters that they always have to think about other people, not just yourself but other people in our family as well as others. I think that, if my daughters have good intelligence and many abilities, all that is not very important if they don’t have empathy for other people. I usually concentrate on the ability to help other people and empathize with other people.” (#B, p. 10)

“First of all, we should respect other people and support each other. We have no individual society. Individualism is condemned in our culture. People usually don’t respect individualism or features of individualism. We should be collectivist…(p. 46). [My son] is becoming very
individualistic. He prefers to do what he wants…..,” said, very sadly, the Uzbekistan mother. (#K, p. 47)

Two other interviewees, a Bangladeshi couple, recognized that their daughter has become more polite in her communication style. They considered that change to be very positive and thought that the explanation for the modification was acculturation to the American custom of greeting people on the street and behaving politely toward others.

“[H]ere everybody is so polite. Everybody says hello. You are walking in the street; you approach another person, and she/he will say hello. We don’t have this kind of politeness. I have to admit it” (p. 60) said the Bangladeshi mother.

“[S]he is more friendly and polite and says all the time ‘hi’ and ‘hello’ [added the father]. In our country this is not a custom. She is like more sociable.” (#M, p. 61)

Values that Parents want Their Children to Keep

As was mentioned before, some of the conflicts that emerged between parents and children of the sojourner families had their roots in cultural values that interviewees wanted their youngsters to preserve. I ended up inquiring about the values that they were really concerned about transmitting to their children. There were some values that almost all the interviewees mentioned as core values that they wanted
their children to keep, but not necessarily all of these values represented the same level of conflicts within the family or were challenged by family members.

**Family first.** Almost all of the interviewees (12) considered that one of those core values was the importance of family, extended family, and relatives. The main idea of this value was that family was always first. This is how some parents described the “family first” value:

“In my culture, [said a Korean mother] traditionally we emphasize the group, not the individual. For example, family is more important than individual family members are. Sometimes we sacrifice individual values for the group and family values, and we teach our children to accept that value. Family is more important than you.” (#B, p. 10)

“It’s very family oriented [said a Mongolian mother]. It’s parents and child, but also uncles, aunts, and everybody. It’s also for adults, too. You have to be connected. Not only to support them emotionally but financially. It’s a very family and respect-oriented society.” (#E, p. 22)

“People are tighter to values like the family [explained a Brazilian father]. Family in the US is different. At a certain age, children go out of the family’s house to live alone. In Brazil, children stay with their parents longer, unless children have to go to study in another city. Here, children don’t live with their parents. Brazil doesn’t have the custom. I don’t know if that custom that they have here is favorable or not.” (#J, p. 28)
The concept of family as a value also contains the idea of respect for parents, a fact that was portrayed when interviewees explained that children had to take care of parents until they die. This custom seemed to be tied to the value of respect for parents.

“We Koreans are family oriented [commented a Korean mother]. We are all together… In Korea, very few people go to the nursing home. They are with their children until they die.” (#H, p. 36)

“Family relationships and bonds are very important values to preserve, and also to respect parents,” confirmed a Yemeni father. (#M, p. 61)

A Malaysian couple provided a very clear insight on how these values are perceived in their culture. They emphasized not only the importance of family but also how fundamental is the idea of respecting and taking care of parents.

“One of the values that we try to emphasize to them is that family is number one. Wherever you go, whenever you go, family is first. You’ll always have to remember that your family will come first. Because your mother and father won’t do something bad to you but maybe people will do something bad to you. In our culture you live with your parents until you get married”, said a Malaysian mother.

“Just imagine, we are successful because of our parents. They give everything for you: care, health, and education. It’s like a cycle. First you (parents) take care of me, and now I have to take care of my parents until
their death. That is the kind of value that I try to emphasize my children to learn,” added the Malaysian father. (#N, p. 63)

The family net constitutes a safe place for raising children. A place where children can learn what is right and what is wrong under the vigilant custody of parents who watch with jealousy the invasion of the outside world. Along that line of thought, the Mexican mother reinforced the importance of the unity of the family.

“I really would like to keep our unity as a family. We noticed here that, as we live in a very secure place in which nothing happens, children try to stay much time with friends and far away from home. I think that, away from home, children learn things that we are not used to. . . .” (#P, p. 81)

Problems emerged when parents started to perceive attitudes and behaviors in their children that endangered this family value. This was one of the main concerns of three Asian mothers who acknowledged that their children have adopted certain customs and attitudes from Americans, like becoming more individualist within the family.

“We have something we respect that is social hierarchy, family and society but is very free [sadly observed an Uzbek mother]. He never respects that (p. 45). [My son] is becoming very individualistic; he prefers to do what he wants….,” (#K, p. 47)

“When we eat together, we have to finish together, and if my son finishes first, he cannot leave the table [acknowledged a Thai mother]. He has to ask for permission. But now he eats in front of the television, and I cannot do anything.” (#D, p. 17)
“I usually say that my eldest daughter is too selfish [recognized one of the Korean mothers]. She only takes care of herself, only herself; ...I sometimes say to my daughters that they always have to think about other people, not just yourself, but other people in my family as well as others” (#B, p. 10).

Respect and Politeness. Another value that emerged as the impetus for certain conflicts between parents and children was “respect for elders”. A value that seemed to be very important in all of our interviewees’ cultures and that parents perceived as very different from the way Americans behave.

“My home culture shows respect for older people [said a Korean father]. I want my children to respect older people. My wife is very strict with my daughters in that sense…My wife wants to model my daughters’ behaviors and actions according to the Korean model. So, she has some conflicts with my daughters who are changing some things due to acculturation with American culture. My daughters try to imitate American students who are freer in their actions.” (#C, p. 14)

“In Thai culture [said a Thai mother], the kids need to respect adults.” (#D, p. 18)

Respect for other people in some Asian and Arab cultures also means to respect siblings, even when they are one year older.

“It’s very family oriented and respectful. Children should respect adults… Even when brother and sister have a month of difference, they have to
respect each other, to respect the elder. You always have to respect people older than you. And you have different words for older people. I don’t know how many we have; without saying ‘you,’ we have other ways to refer to older people” (#E, p. 22).

“He caught all these American styles, for example, how to talk to people. When he comes back home he’ll have a lot of problems because, in Mongolia, children are not allowed to play jokes, interrupt or talk to adults. We have very strict customs,” observed a worried Mongolian mother (#E, p. 21).

Agreeing with the above mentioned ideas that respect for elders and adults means not only not interrupting adults but not playing jokes or talking to adults, the Mexican mother disclosed that those features represent how much freedom Americans have in everything, a freedom that, in her opinion, goes against the value of respecting others.

“Another thing is that people here speak in a very easy way. Instead, we teach our children basic rules of urbanity, trying to encourage them to be respectful of others. I think that, here in the US, there is a lot of freedom in everything.” (#P, p. 81)

The other important component of this value that was also acknowledged by some of our interviewees was age. One of our Korean interviewees agreed that, in her culture, the age of a person is very important, even when the difference seemed to be insignificant for other cultures. The fact that her son came to the US when he was a baby and lived almost all of his seven years here made her preoccupied with the
thought that he lacked those values. Her fear was that this would definitely constitute an obstacle when he returned to Korea.

“I don’t know if it is culture or not. It’s more like a formal thing. We have to show some respect for old people. We don’t call names in Korea. We are very strict with age. If he had a brother who was one year older, he would have to show respect for that one year of difference. We didn’t teach him that much about those kinds of things, so he doesn’t know how to show respect for older people. He doesn’t know that much about Korean culture.” (#O, p. 73)

The idea of respecting older people also implied being obedient even when the child disagrees.

“My sons [asserted an Yemeni mother] should be very respectful, very obedient. Even if they disagree, the priority is for the elders’ wishes and commands. This is, in general, what we have in our culture.” (#J, p. 42)

To be nice and polite to other people was another value that emerged during the interviews, somehow associated with respect for other people. This is how a Malaysian mother talked about the importance of being polite.

“[O]f course he/she has to be polite; you have to be polite to your parents, to the elders and you always have to give a hand. You have to be helpful to everything they want to do, even if it is a plate that you have to take to the table.” (#N, p. 66)
For most of the cultures represented in this project, children were taught to behave with courtesy and politeness in relation to other people. Parents, in that sense, stressed the importance of keeping good relationships with other people, which is one of the clues for understanding the expected communication behavior of the children.

“We expect, in Korea, that our children will be very nice to other people,” said one of the Korean mothers interviewed. (#B, p. 10)

“In Korea, many people notice other people’s actions. This is not the same in American culture. Social environment influences our behaviors,” admitted a Korean Father. (#C, p. 13)

For most of the interviewees’ cultures, even when a person dislikes somebody or has a different opinion on a topic, it is still important to be nice and polite in order to maintain the social harmony of the collective group. That affirmation specifically appeared in the conversation with the Thai mother.

“In Thailand, you have to be considerate before saying anything. They have a way to say things, otherwise you cause people to lose face and you have to repair the relationship… The most important cultural feature for Thai people is social harmony. You want to have a good relationship with people, be considerate. You save face for other people. You don’t do things that can be noticed, and because we have the social harmony so we are a collectivistic people. “ (#D, p. 18)

Religion. Some interviewees (3) demonstrated how the Islamic religion constituted a cultural value they wanted their children to follow. Some parents’
expressed concern about their children mixing religious ideas, in part due to the influence of the American culture.

“The religion and not to mix the religion [added a Saudi Arabian father]. I teach them what is Islam and what is Christianity and how to know the difference between these two” (#I, p. 39).

“I don’t know if it was a conflict, but it was more like a confusion because of different culture, different religion. Sometimes when they came back from school, they asked us about some issues to clarify not only with their classmates but also with the teacher when she told them something contradictory, and they asked to clarify this issue. We told them that there are different cultures, religions, and conceptions” (p. 41), said a Yemeni mother.

“And also the religion. Our religion is Islam. For us, it is a way of living. Everything in our life, not only praying, social family, social life, family life, relationship with other, should be according to our religion. In our life everything should be according to our religion. Some people don’t behave according to their religion most of the time, for example, Christianity,” said a Yemeni father. (#J, p. 42)

“[Islam] teaches us Muslims that you have to be proud and unique. Even if you are in a very different environment, you should respect the others’ cultures or beliefs but you have to maintain your own. So, we all the time, try to make them feel proud of their culture and not to be shy or why am I
different, why can’t I do like them, because you are a Muslim and you should understand that that means this and this and this” (#J, p. 43)

Parents were also concerned about giving their children too much freedom and that this fact could jeopardize their religious beliefs. However, interviewees asserted that everything was still under their control.

“I’m afraid if I give too much freedom [said a Malaysian father], sooner or later it will jeopardize my son, and I don’t want that. He doesn’t have to forget that he is a Malaysian and that he is Muslim. Whatever he does in the future will be ruled by his religion. If I give them too much freedom, they communicate with other Americans or friends. You know, my son is very smart, and he is willing to exchange everything. Now that you have Internet or whatever, I’m afraid that he can start comparing religions or whatever.” (#N, p. 63)

The ELS teacher acknowledged that Muslim parents showed some concerns about their children taking music classes or clapping. The reason for that concern is based on religious principals, which should be respected and followed.

“There is another concern especially with Arabic parents is that they do not want their children to take music classes. They think that we are corrupting them with our music. Because, in the Arabic culture, they listen (I don’t know if this is honestly true to everyone) to liturgical music connected to the reading of Koran. ‘Well they are playing instruments, and for us, the only instrument they can play is sitar or something like that.’
We tell parents that music is part of the curricula and that children need to participate. Part of appreciating a culture is to appreciate the music. ‘You come and sit down, if you think clapping is bad, then it’s okay. You don’t have to clap, or if dancing is bad, they don’t have to do that’ but just appreciate the music and see what is going on. Yes some of their concerns are due to culture and religion.” (p. 92)

**Warm Relationships.** Two Brazilian interviewees clearly disclosed that warmer relationships and friendship were a value that they wanted their children to preserve from their home culture, and they thought these values were completely different in the American culture.

“I think that, here, relationships are colder than in Brazil (p. 6)…our warmthness, our happiness, our spontaneity to speak, touch, kiss, and hug other people, as well as talk to other people while looking at their eyes. When you look at the eyes of some Americans, they rarely look at you. I have that I look at people in their eyes and gesticulate when talking,” said a Brazilian father. (#A, p. 7)

“More friendly. If you go to Brazil, in a little time, you’ll have lots of friends. People are tighter to values like the family. Family in the US is different,” admitted Sue, one of the Brazilian mothers. (#F, p. 28)
When interviewees disclosed their fears about the reentry process and the conflict situations that they thought their children would face when going back home, parents mentioned the potential emergence of certain kinds of problems in relationships with family members, peers, and teachers. Most of their concerns were focused on the communication problems that their children would encounter due to mixing English and their native language, or lack of management of their native language, adoption of freer ways of communicating, difficulties in relationships with family members or peers and teachers due to the acquisition of different perspectives, frames of reference and customs. The acculturation with the American culture seemed to have resulted in some behaviors that parents perceived as potentially causing conflicts of adaptation when back home.

Language

One of the most important issues that interviewees (9) considered as potentially causing conflicts back home was that their children would face communication problems due to lack of management of their native language. Even though parents thought language would be hard for their youngsters in the reentry process, they also acknowledged the importance of their children being fluent in English. This is the way parents expressed their concerns about the matter. “Yes, probably language is also going to be a problem for them” commented a Korean father.
“How do you think the reentry will affect your children?” I asked him.

“My children will benefit because they will be able to have conversations in English. They speak English very well; this is also very important in Korea to be able to speak English fluently.” (#C, p. 14)

Despite the fact that writing and grammar would be the most difficult problems that interviewees thought their children would face with their mother tongue, parents felt confident that their children would catch up in their language skills in a short period of time.

“Language is a big problem…[said a Mongolian mother]. Even one week ago, he talked to my mom. He spoke to her in English, and I warned him that his grandmother didn’t know English. He concentrated very hard to speak with her in Mongolian, but he just forgot it, only in one year. I’m happy he is learning English, but Mongolian is his language and probably he is going to catch it up very quickly, but writing, and grammar is going to be difficult for him.” (#E, p. 23)

“My [youngest] son …is learning to read and write in English [admitted another Brazilian mother], so when back home, he’ll have to learn to read and write in Portuguese. [My oldest son]… is starting to forget some words and expressions in Portuguese.” (#F, p. 29)

“Of course, language. If you can hear them, they are talking all the time in English,” said a Yemeni father.
“Maybe the writing and reading in Arabic. It will be difficult for them to be in an Arabic school in Yemen. It will be difficult to be used to Arabic materials because they are used to writing and reading in English. At least for the first time, it won’t be easy for them to adapt there,” added the Yemeni mother. (J, p. 43)

“Well, normally, I always just try to get them to not mix everything [warned a Saudi Arabian father], like especially when they go back home, my uncle or their grandfather talk in Arabic to them, they cannot answer in English. I always try to keep them informed about this.” (I, p. 38)

 “[O]f course in terms of languages is a big problem, especially for my eldest son [confessed a Malaysian mother]. As my husband told you that the first child is very important… Children can easily adapt to a new language and easily forget their language. The experience that my sister faced was that, when they came back to Malaysia, all the subjects are taught in our language. Their kids only pass with high grades English and math. So I think that my children will face the same situation.”

“But I don’t want them to forget English” added the Malaysian father.

“Because English is very important. It is a world language,” said the Malaysian mother. (N, p. 67)

“Language [answered fast and without doubt a Korean mother]. The basic thing will be language because if he doesn’t speak Korean he won’t be
able to learn the culture there, and he won’t be able to interact with other people.” (#O, p. 74)

Relationships with Peers

Three of the above mentioned interviewees recognized that this language problem would generate some conflicts for their youngsters’ in their relationships with peers because their native language speaking skills would be poor or different from the rest of their friends. This difference has the potential for engendering problems and misunderstandings.

“The first difficulty he’ll have upon arrival will be limitations communicating with his friends. He has now a very limited vocabulary in Spanish,” said one of the Venezuelan parents. (#L, p. 58)

Another interviewee was concerned that his son could be a victim of bullies due to the accent he had when speaking their native language, as well as the fact that his son was more open to volunteer and cooperate in the classroom with his teacher.

“The only thing I think [said a Malaysian father] is that peers there in Malaysia will probably make fun of my son.

“Why?” I asked

“Because, one, he can speak English,” continued the father.

“The way my son speaks our language is funny. So they will make fun of him,” added the mother.
“Another thing is that, here in his class, he is very cooperative, good leader, and likes to try everything. So if the teacher asks who is going to do this, he will offer, and that will be considered too show off at home,” pointed out the father.

“Because here at school [said the Malaysian mother] they are taught to be more open. Like in terms of volunteer, you don’t have to worry, everybody will volunteer. He will also bring some envy to other children. Maybe, we don’t know for sure.” (#N, p. 68)

The emergence of conflicts between their children and peers was another area of great concern for six parents. The reason for those conflicts could be rooted in different frames of reference or perspectives of the world held by their children and peers in their home country. That idea was clearly stated by Sue, a Brazilian mother who argued that nobody could be the same person after living abroad.

“One of the problems would be their encounters with people. When we move to another country, we change even when we don’t perceive that change. When we come back, things are not going to be the same…Things would not change significantly for the ones who stayed in the country. But, for us, that would change ourselves, things would seem the same in Brazil, but we would be different… Their re-adaptation to Brazil, I perceive, is going to be terrible.” (#A, p. 7)

Other respondents found that the over-exposure to other cultures and to the American customs that their children experienced in the US would trigger different lenses and
values from which to analyze reality as well as the relationships with other children, a fact that was seen as problematic for their children’s re-adaptation process back home.

“When he’ll start talking with the Mongolian children [argued the Mongolian mother], he’ll have another frame of reference and that, I think, will produce some problems.” (#E, p. 24)

“[My son, offered an Uzbek mother] will have problem of communication at home, with his friends, in the street, in the yard, but not at school.” (#K, p. 48)

On the other hand, two mothers acknowledged that space and friends could be problematic for their children’s re-adaptation. The environment where these children lived in the US was thought by their parents to have triggered the idea that they were free, something youngsters shared with other peers in their neighborhood.

“I think maybe is about the space and the friends. They have a lot of friends here because we live here in a complex where there are a lot of kids so when we are going back to Bangkok, it is going to be different. There is no other neighbor. They won’t have friends to play with like here. I think they will have a big problem because they won’t have friends. Before coming, that was not a problem because they were used to not having friends around. But now that they have experienced other reality, it is going to be difficult for them when they come home because my
However, children’s experience of living in an open and free space was something of concern for a Mexican mother, who saw that liberty could jeopardize their customs.

“One of the problems would be that they would live again like bird in a cage. In Mexico they would not have the same liberty that they have experienced here. They would want to continue with the customs that they have acquired here of going out to play, customs that they could not follow any more in Mexico.” (#P, p. 82)

In conversations with other mothers about the possible problems their children would face back home, two parents reflected on attitudes their youngsters have acquired in the US that are different from the attitudes prevalent in their countries. One of the interviewees, a Malaysian mother, commented that her daughter seemed to be more alert than children back home.

“She is only four years old, but if I have to compare her with kids of her age back home, I think she is more mature in terms of many things in this world. She is very alert.” (#N, p. 69)

The other parent expressed her concern that her son would be deceived and hurt in her country by other children. According to this mother, her son has internalized certain American customs and values that are not considered in the same way in her culture. My conversation with her went as follows:
“Korean children think more like adults. Korean children in America are more naïve [said one of the Korean mothers].”

“What do you mean by ‘ naïve’?” I asked her.

“More strict by rules; they follow rules. In Korea there are less rules to follow so I think my son can be deceived easily”.

“Could you give me an example here and how would it be in Korea?” I tried to clarify her point.

“For example, if a child tells my son ‘I will call you later’ then he will call, but in Korea, the child would never call. The other problem in Korea is that almost all children have to go to private institutions to learn something--like two or three things: piano etc… it is very competitive. In Korean culture, education is very emphasized by parents. Education is more knowledge based, not ethical or group oriented. Parents have to teach these other values but in the context of a competitive society.”

“Why do you think this is going to be difficult for your child?” I insisted.

“He doesn’t know about competition. He likes challenges and to be challenged. He likes to learn new things, but he doesn’t know to hurt others.” (#O, p. 74)

As part of these areas of possible conflict with peers, two parents expressed fear of victimization of their child due to cultural differences in topics like courtship and self-defense. In both cases, the interviewees perceived that the American customs were quite apart from the model encouraged in their country. While in the US, children
were taught to be indifferent toward the opposite sex and to avoid physical fights among children. The message in their country was totally different.

“I’m concerned that, when we go back to Venezuela, my son, compared to children of his age, is going to be ‘quedadito’—slow or quiet. While the rest of the children have had more than three girlfriends, my son hasn’t had any. I have asked him several times if he likes any girl from school or if he has a girlfriend and his answer is ‘no’ but with an ugly face,” the mother said.

“[F]or example, he’ll experience that, in Venezuela, a boy has to court a girl and tell her beautiful words” (p. 55), the father added.

The mother continued, “another thing is his self-defense. In Venezuela, children solve their conflicts with their fists. That would be a disadvantage for my son because, here, he has to avoid a fight. I teach him not to fight with violence unless the other child is bothering him all the time, and my son tried to solve the conflict in different ways and he couldn’t. In that case, I told him to defend himself. What I cannot support is that idea they have here that you cannot fight. This could be an advantage for other children to humiliate my child or hurt him. In Venezuela, at his age, he would have had a minimum of five fights with punches and hits. Children in Venezuela usually come with broken shirts due to small fights at school; the reason could be that one kid tells the other that his mother is stupid. That is a mortal sin in our culture. A child has to defend the honor
of his mother. Here in the US, everything is quote end quote love and peace. I said quote end quote because later you see in the news a child who is so repressed that he takes a gun and kills everybody at school. That love and peace means repression, repression, and repression with the consequence those children cannot throw up all their constrained feelings in any way. In my country we are freer to express our anger and ourselves… In that sense, we as a society are not so repressed. If I have a problem, I punch you, and then the problem is solved. I’m concerned that, when we come back [home], my son would be considered stupid compared to the rest of his classmates. Classmates would be used to fight and solve their problems fighting, and my son would be peace and love. People in Venezuela are very aggressive, and my son will have to confront this situation in order to be able to survive in that environment.” (#L, p. 56)

One interviewee expressed fear that her son’s re-adaptation with peers would be conflictive in some ways due to the adoption of an American style of communication. That style of communication was viewed as, for example, not reflecting a respect for older people. This American feature was thought to cause conflict in relationships with neighbors and peers who are older than her son.

“He should respect his neighbors, older boys, older women and men, but now he prefers to argue with my husband and me [said sadly and worried
an Uzbek mother]. He feels like he is an adult already. He should
realize that he is a child.” (#K, p. 47)

Another reason for conflict between their children and peers back home, according to
the perceptions of three interviewees, was that their children have acquired the
American custom of asking their parents permission for bringing a friend to play at
home. This feature would be interpreted in their countries as impolite or even an
insult.

“Her friend called my daughter to see if she could sleep here, something
we don’t ask in Brazil,” said Sue the Brazilian mother. (#A, p. 6)

“They have an American kid neighbor with whom they play. When he
wants my children to come to his house, he asks first his mother are they
allowed to come to our house. Then they come ask me if they are allowed
to go to his house. This is unusual in our culture. You don’t ask your
mother if you are allowed; they just go and play with their friends. Maybe
they have to ask me if they can go to another house, but it is kind of a
shame for them to say ‘wait, I will ask my mom if you can come to my
house.’ My children are doing the same with him, ‘mama, can Alec come
to our house,’ this will be strange if they do the same in Yemen, ‘wait
please I will ask my mother if you can come,’ this will be considered like
an insult,” confessed a Yemeni mother. (#J, p. 44)
Culture Shock

When talking about culture shock, some parents clearly disclosed their fears that their children would experience it upon arrival to their home countries. This culture shock would be the result of their youngsters’ exposure to American behaviors, customs, and values that they are now taking as normal and would not be the same back home.

“For example, some American customs, like kissing in a public place or women wearing small clothes, are completely forbidden in public [expressed a Korean father]. My daughters will probably experience culture shock due to differences between these two cultures. We are going to stay here only one year, so I don’t think is going to be problematic for my daughters.” (#C, p. 14)

“Yeah, it’s a problem [said the Mongolian mother], a different country, different culture and he doesn’t want to go back. He will have cultural shock. In my country, children’s behavior is different, so that’s why I think he’ll have some problems.” (#E, p. 23)

Nonetheless, others thought that, after the first impact of being back home, children would normally return to routines and friends.

“After the shock of the first moments there [admitted the Argentinean mother] in which they won’t know what to do, they will renew contacts with old friends, and they will start the routine of visiting friends’ houses, playing sports.” (#G, p. 33)
On the other hand, one mother clearly stated that her children would not experience any kind of culture shock upon returning. The reason for that disclosure was that her children were educated in a British school where the system did not differ very much from the American system.

“They went to a British school so I think that, in that term, is not much difference in terms of culture [commented E. the Thai mother]. The way they behave might be a little bit different, but apart from that, I don’t see very big differences because they are not with the Thai people either.”

(#D, p. 17)

Relationships with Teachers

One of the major problems parents found that their children would have back home was their relationship with teachers. Interviewees provided several examples of the differences in the communication styles of teachers in their countries as compared with the US. The focus of conflict seemed to be that their children have acquired a freer communication style in the US, which includes interrupting adults, joking with adults, expressing their opinions, arguing and having a more egalitarian relationship with teachers. All these features were completely opposite to their home cultures and in children’s relationship with adults, specifically teachers. This conflict has its roots in different cultural values encouraged in the communication styles of their home countries versus the US.
“The teacher in Korea [observed a Korean father] doesn’t know the name of all the students in her class, only 10 per cent. In American education, there is a respect for human beings, safety and more egalitarian relationship between teachers and students. In Korean education, the teacher is the authority. She owes respect from her students. She is like the king, and everybody has to follow her instructions. Students have to respect the teacher because she is the authority. They cannot argue with her but only follow her instructions. In American education, students argue with their teachers in many respects (p. 12)… one of the most difficult issues would be my daughters’ adaptation to Korean’s education system. Here they are free and individuals are respected,” (#C, p. 14)

Teachers in most of the interviewees’ countries seemed to be authoritative and stricter than in the US, a view shared by many of the parents.

“Teaching style is very different here [added a Mongolian mother]. My son was complaining about the behavior of his classmates, something that would be different in my country where children follow the commands of the teacher.” (#E, p. 24)

“Teachers in Venezuela [said the Venezuelan mother] are still very strict. I can say that they are rude with children when they do something wrong. I noticed that, here in the US, teachers are softer with children. The reason could be probably that suits against them and the fact that children have a lot of rights here that they have to respect. Teachers here try to talk first
with the parents. If it is necessary to have the intervention of a
psychologist, teachers talk to the psychologist. On the other hand, in
Venezuela, teachers shout four times to the children, ‘I said sit down!’ or
‘you won’t have break’ or ‘go to the corner’.” (#L, p. 54)

What surprised me were comments parents made about teachers’ common use of
physical punishment. This was part of my conversation on that topic with the
Malaysian couple:

“In our classrooms in Malaysia, kids are really not allowed to speak up
any time. The teacher is the one who controls the class, and she
determines the amount of active questions for a limited time period, but
here, whenever you don’t agree or whenever you don’t understand, you
can always raise your hand and say” (p. 68). (Mother)

“Teachers in Malaysia are different”. (Father)

“They are very hard”. (Mother)

“They are very hard. If teachers have to cane they cane all of them.”
(Father)

“You know what cane is?” (Mother)

“No?” I answered surprised.

“Public punishment.” (Father)

“Is it allowed in your country?” I asked.

“But not bad as before I guess.” (Mother) (#N, p. 68)
Harder Education System

Some parents perceived that the education systems back home were harder and more strict compared to the system in America. They also mentioned that contents and treatment of information were quite different as well as the general profile of learners. Six interviewees shared concerns that their children would face difficulties in their countries’ school system.

“Maybe the school adaptation problem. In my country, they have a lot of skills in mathematics, but in the US, is a very low level [noted a Korean mother]. Mathematics here is too easy for my daughters. Actually, I brought some books for mathematics for my daughters, but I think they will have some problems with mathematics. There will be a difference in the skills that friends of my children have compared to my daughters. It’s going to be only one-year gap, but it is a very big problem for Koreans living in America and then going back to our country… The other thing is that, in Korea, they go to school on Saturday so my daughters don’t like the idea of going back to Korea because they know they will have to go to school on Saturday.” (#B, p. 11)

“They say this is kind of a vacation because learning is very light, and then they say ‘mommy, when we go back to Thailand, we will have a lot to catch up.’ This also could be a problem because they will have to work harder than their classmates do in order to catch up with everything,” opined the Thai mother. (#D, p. 19)
“It will probably be more difficult for them, their adaptation to our schools [confirmed the Argentinean mother]; schools in Argentina are more strict with children. My son told me that it would be very difficult for him because he feels he doesn’t learn anything at school here; he said that his friends would be advanced with respect to him… I don’t like from here is that they don’t receive a general culture at school; contents are very specific. For example, in an academic year at school, children only learn the state of Ohio, and everything they know, it’s from Ohio, you cannot ask them which is the capital of the U.S. because they don’t know. Students don’t have an idea where they are living. We receive a more general education. I think school is going to be the most difficult problem they will have upon arrival (p. 33)… The problem of adaptation will be towards the school system, evaluations are different and more complicated than here.” (#G, p. 34)

“The main problem will be the Arabian school [said the Yemeni father] because there is a difference between Arabian and American schools especially in the way of teaching, and maybe they will find some difficulties there. But I don’t this will be a problem for them they will adapt themselves to school.” (#J, p. 39)

“Our educational system is better than the one in this country. The levels of exigency are higher in my country than here,” observed the Venezuelan father.
“In our country education is more general and here is more specific. If you tell a kid here to show where certain country in the world is situated and most of the children won’t know where that country is. In my country, children know the geography of our country and the world,” added the mother. (#L, p. 58)

“The school system here is very concrete. In Korea is very changeable [acknowledged one of the Korean mothers]. My husband and I are worried about his school in Korea because he has to adjust easily. We are thinking about a private school or an international school.” (#O, p. 74)

Even though the majority of the interviewees thought that their children’s adaptation to their home school system was going to be difficult, two interviewees offered a different view. In their opinion, their children would not have any problem in adapting to the school system again. The reason for that opinion seemed to be based in the types of schools those children attended which had Western educational features similar to the American system.

“I don’t really see that problem because, when they were in Thailand, they were with foreigners. They went to a British school, so I think that, in that term, is not much difference in terms of culture” claimed the Thai mother. (#D, p. 17)

“No, school is not going to be a problem for him [responded the Uzbek mother] because he is studying in a Russian school not in an Uzbek school.” (#K, p. 47)
Relationship with Extended Family

The relationship with extended family when back home was a common topic among interviewees. Two interviewees perceived that the reentry process would affect their children’s relationships and family bonds in very positive terms, while others demonstrated concern about the emergence of possible misunderstandings and conflicts between their youngsters and other family members.

“From an affective point of view, [said a Brazilian father] returning will be very positive for [my children]. Family is very important for us. My children miss their grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.”

“My mother calls from Brazil every Sunday [added the Brazilian mother]. We are very tight to our family and friends.” (#F, p. 29)

“[M]y family is very warm, sociable and talkative [reported a Mexican mother]. We call them every week. We don’t want to lose those relationships. When we go back we would integrate again to family life and to our meetings. In Mexico, we devote a lot of time to family relations. My children don’t need many friends because we have a big family” (#P, p. 82).

However, three other interviewees manifested their anxiety about possible problems when their children interact with extended family members. In one case, a Mongolian mother thought that problem would emerge if her child behaved like Americans and played jokes or interrupted adults, behaviors that, in her culture, are not allowed.
“It’s very family oriented. It’s parents and child but also uncles, aunts, and everybody. It’s also for adults too you have to be connected to. Not only to support them emotionally but financially. It’s very family oriented and respectful to adults. Children should respect adults” (p. 22)… In my country children’s behavior is different, so that’s why I think he’ll have some problems.” (#E, p. 23)

In another case, the interviewee found that the mixing of language and cultural customs would cause some problems with extended family members.

“Well, normally [said a Saudi Arabian father] I always just try to get them not to mix everything like especially when they go back home. Like my uncle or their grandfather talk in Arabic to them. They cannot answer in English. I always try to keep them informed about this. There also some American behaviors that I don’t want them to do, not because it is bad, I don’t want them to mix the culture.” (#I, p. 38)

Parents were more concerned that their children would have to get used to living with extended family again. Because children would have to follow orders from their relatives and accept that they have their own responsibilities within the family.

“I think (confessed a Yemeni mother) that [my children] are used to living in our small family [so] they will have to deal with everyone in the extended family; maybe this will make some kind of pressure on them. They will be happy but, as I told you, the obligations are always with the rights so they will have to obey many people. They have to live in
accordance to the large extended family values and requirements. . . .”

(#J, p. 43)

Potential Conflicts with Parents

Two parents clearly perceived that they would face some problems with their children due to their adoption of certain American features, like “feelings of freedom and independence.” In these two cases, the interviewees thought that their children had experienced a very important change, becoming more free and independent from parents, a fact that was perceived as potentially causing conflicts after they returned home.

“Yes, sometimes I feel that my son is becoming too free... [responded a Uzbek mother](p. 47) I think that is due to both, the adaptation to the American culture and because I’m working all day long. I think that adaptation is going at any rate without our willing or our presence. I never try to pressure them. I’d like my son to be free at OU and I’m satisfied with some changes that have occurred here to him, but I think he’ll have some problems in my country when we come back and especially I will have this problem.” (#K, p. 47)

The Venezuelan couple anticipated a variety of problems due to their son’s acculturation to the US.

“I’m more concerned of the scale of values he has received here. He was learned that he has rights. He is convinced that he is the owner of his
body, so he can later tell me ‘daddy I want to make a tattoo here or put a ring in his nose’ and that can be a conflict,” said the worried father.

“My son has told me when he was 7 years old that he wants to have a tattoo. Of course, I banned him to do it (p. 56)… My fear is to tell him that his dad has finished now let’s go back to Venezuela and he doesn’t want to leave the country,” commented the mother.

“There is something else. The problem is if he says I don’t want to go,” added the father.

“Does he have the right to say that?” I asked both parents.

“Yes.” (Father)

“Not for us.” (Mother)

“Not for us, but he can because I’m sure he will receive advice.” (Father)

“In this country he has rights; not from us. Do you understand? I’m sure that if he looks for his teachers’ help and receives assessments from them and he argues that he has all his life here and wants to continue studying in his high school here, I’m sure he will find help to stay here,” claimed the mother. (#L, p. 57)

In dialogue with another parent, the interviewee admitted that her child would have to adjust to some values of her home country, like respecting older people, a value that can also be seen as causing problems within the family.

“He didn’t get in touch with his relatives much so he didn’t learn the respect for older people and the family interaction… We didn’t teach him
that much about those kinds of things, so he doesn’t know how to show respect for older people, he doesn’t know that much about Korean culture. His father is very strict.”

“In which sense do you think he is strict?” I inquired her.

“In many things, he is very Korean. Actually he could not be acculturated to the US”.

“Do you say that your husband hasn’t really acculturated to the US?” I replied

“He hated to live here…”

“[My son] doesn’t comply with his father. He is not respectful to his father in the way we do in Korea. His father doesn’t say anything to him, but to me he says that my son is Americanized.”

“It’s a very sensitive thing; not that bad--it’s not a behavior but his manners, the way of his expressions.” (#O, p. 73, 75)

I Don’t Want to Go Back

Among four interviewees there was a shared concern that their children’s first reactions when going back home would be “I don’t want to go.” The idea of their children’s rejection of reentry generated fears of difficult moments and tensions for parents. These are some examples of how parents anticipate experiencing that moment in their lives.
“We are supposed to go back to Korea in August, but [my daughters] don’t want to go to Korea because they like to be here and they have a lot of free time here, not much work…. [a Korean mother pointed out]. My daughters are really happy here because they have a lot of free time and many friends and two holidays every week. In Korea, Sunday is the only day without school, but we have church early in the morning. My daughters don’t have any free time in Korea. They don’t like Korean education. Here they don’t go to school on Saturday, and they just go to church in the afternoon so they enjoy oversleeping” (#B, p. 11).

For the Venezuelan couple things seemed to be a little more complicated. They feared of their son’s rejection of living again in Venezuela and his missing of life in the US.

“I’m preoccupied that he is dreaming of a Venezuela that is not the same he’ll find,” indicated the Venezuelan mother.

“[T]here is an additional preoccupation that I never told anybody, even my wife. I’m concerned that he will probably start missing life in the US, and he’ll start thinking of coming back,” replied the Venezuelan father.

“I was going to tell you the same fear! This is something that we both feared and we didn’t tell each other. My fear is that he will not find the country that he left, his friends grew up, the places will be different, etc. My fear is that he will want to come back to the US,” said the mother.

“[H]e didn’t leave any friends in Venezuela. He has his friends here. At ten years old, to change friends is not a big deal, but if he goes to
Venezuela later, after 12 years old, it will be more difficult for him,” said the father. Because he’ll have stronger feelings. My fear is to tell him that his daddy has finished now let’s go back to Venezuela and he doesn’t want to leave the country.

“There is something else. The problem is if he says I don’t want to go,” told the father worried. (#L, p. 57)

It is true that the re-adaptation to their native countries would expose children to a process of intense anxiety. One of our interviewees reflected on a preliminary trip back home with her son. It was the first time her son had been back to Korea since leaving the country when he was a little baby. The mother expressed that even though he seemed to be happy and liked Korea, her son started to express a desire to go back to the US because he was “homesick.”

“He likes Korea [said the Korean mother]; he likes to meet new people and likes to care about his family, relatives. He made some new friends there and learned to play tae chuan do but his base is here. We just went there temporarily, but he wanted to go back to the US about half of our trip.” (#O, p. 73)

**Summary Chapter Four**

This chapter examined the data collected through 16 interviews with sojourner parents and observations of their children in the playground as well as at school. The
data analysis was organized around three different stages in the sojourn experience: (1) their stay in the US, which involved the first moments after their arrival in the US, (2) the consolidation of their stay, and (3) their parents’ thoughts about reentry to their home countries.

The data showed that in the first stage, at the beginning of their stay in the US, children confronted with some basic changes that affected and challenged their previous communication behaviors. A different language was seen as one of the first issues children had to deal with when arriving in the US. The lack of knowledge of the English language prevented children from establishing relationships with peers and communicating properly with classmates and teachers.

During the consolidation of their stay in the US, the most important communication changes and conflicts within the family were observed. Along with mastering the English language, these youngsters acquired other communication changes and behaviors that were characteristic of the American culture. Children started to argue more than usual, interrupted adults’ conversations, and displayed a more free style of communication with adults. Those changes produced conflicts within the family as parents perceived those changes as contradicting their values and customs. In most of the interviewees’ societies, children are taught to be more passive and to respect adults’ commands and orders without any complaints. Interrupting adults, disagreeing, engaging in discussion, joking, and talking back are disrespectful according to the parent’s view. However, some parents perceived that the free communication style acquired by their children was positive. This communication
style help their children to defend themselves from other children’s aggression and to develop public speaking skills that otherwise they wouldn’t be able to acquire in their countries. At this consolidation moment, most of the children started to forget their native language, a fact that also worried parents because they considered the maintenance of their mother tongue as an important value they wanted their children to maintain. Relationships with peers were consolidated and improved as a result of the sojourn children mastering the language. Along the same vein, their relationships with American teachers was perceived in positive terms.

The final section of the analysis included parents’ thoughts about their reentry into their home countries. Thoughts of this stage triggered anxiety and concerns on the part of the parents who view their children as having acquired some communication habits that would definitely affect their relationships with peers, teachers, and extended family members. The lack of ability to manage their native tongue was anticipated as producing misunderstandings with peers and possibly even resulting in the children being the target of taunting and teasing. Different perspectives and world views were anticipated as further distancing these sojourner children from peers back home.

Difficulties in adapting to their native school system were a point of concern for most parents. The relationship with teachers was seen as another important focus of conflict. In their home cultures children would have to re-adapt to the hierarchical and more formal relationship with teachers, who have to be respected and complied, a
feature that was completely different with the American teachers. American teachers had a more egalitarian and friendly relationship with them.

The communication with extended family was anticipated as being a site of problems. Relatives, back home, expect a child to obey and respect their rules and orders, something that most of the sojourner children in this research apparently did not follow in the US. Language was also considered to cause some problems in the communication with relatives, as children were used to speak English more than their native languages. However, parents, in general, perceived some changes of their children’s behavior and communication style in positive terms.

The next chapter covers the interpretation and discussion of the data analyzed in this section, under the light of the dialectical tensions experienced by sojourner families and of the literature reviewed at the beginning of this study. In addition, the next chapter discusses the limitations of the present study as well as offering recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to explore the communication and relationship changes among sojourner children and their families as a result of their acculturation to the US. Even though the length and kind of the sojourner experience varied from one family to the other, there are still some similarities in terms of the communication changes and tensions that family members are exposed to as they adapt to the new cultural environment.

Living abroad triggered several changes in the communication styles and behaviors of these children, who had not only to adapt to a new language, customs, and values but also to new peer relationships. Findings in this study seem to suggest that all the above changes are partly a result of children’s main concern of becoming accepted by peers at school and in their neighborhood. Their parents, however, were not only concerned about their children’s acculturation but also about encouraging their children to preserve the customs and values that were essential to developing their cultural identity. Results of this study did not suggest any significant communication differences among sojourner children in relationship to their length of time spent in the US.

This chapter will be devoted to providing a deeper explanation and interpretation of these changes. The goal is to shed light on the challenges that sojourner children and, by extension, their families experience as they confront and
seek to acculturate to (or resist) the social practices of the US. In order to accomplish this goal, I will analyze their experiences in terms of the dialectical tensions that emerged within the parent-child relationship as a result of the child’s exposure to the new culture. Baxter (1988) identified three contradictions that are present in every relationship: autonomy versus connectedness, novelty versus certainty/predictability, and closeness versus separation. Even though I will be working on these three contradictions, I will also identify some others contradictions that emerged through the data. At the same time, I will examine what it is to be learned within this study under the light of extant literature on the topic. Finally, I will conclude by addressing some of the limitations confronted in this study, as well as some considerations for future research directions.

The Dialectical Tensions of Sojourner Families

As has been stated before, the sojourner experience brought important communication and relationship changes and challenges for family members, especially for the children. Parents perceived some of their children’s changes positively, while other changes were thought of as being disrespectful to their family and collective values. In that sense, the whole sojourner family experience can be explicated in terms of the dialectical tensions (Baxter, 1988) that appear in the child’s relationship within family members. The dialectical tensions perspective holds the idea that all social life and especially, interpersonal relationships consist of contradictions. These contradictions are, essentially, the dynamic interplay of
opposites. According to the present study, the sojourner experience brought up the existence of several contradictions between the parents and their children. These contradictions were present in the researcher’s conversations with parents when they referred to the changes/challenges their children experienced with the family due to children’s adaptation to the US. When analyzing the parents’ interviews what clearly emerged was the fact that the children were caught by the novelty of some of the communication changes acquired in the US, from free speech, to disagreement, to the use of American expressions and gestures. The children were apparently caught up in the “novelty” of the interactional practices they were witnessing/experiencing at school and in the neighborhood. Parents, on the other hand, paid closer attention to the significance of those changes based on their cultural lenses. In this interplay of opposites, parents placed great importance on certainty and expressed more concern about being able to “predict” the behavior and the communication changes of their children. In this context, parents’ concern signified their desire that their child’s behavior not run away from the established values of the family’s culture.

The mentioned contradiction between novelty and predictability seemed to be integrated with another contradiction that I perceive is more crucial in understanding parents’ reaction to their children communication changes: “acculturation” versus “cultural preservation”. Children’s necessity to fit in with other peers at school and in the neighborhood pushed them toward rapid integration and “acculturation” with the mainstream culture. This integration was demonstrated in the rapid acquisition of language, styles, gestures, and behaviors typical of the mainstream culture. Parents, on
the other hand, were more preoccupied with keeping—at least in the family environment—the customs, beliefs and values that conform to their cultural identity. This dialect can be seen in the following interview quotations:

“He caught all these American styles, for example, how to talk to people. When he comes back home he’ll have a lot of problems because, in Mongolia, children are not allowed to play jokes, interrupt or talk to adults. We have very strict customs,” observed a worried Mongolian mother (#E, p. 21).

“My wife wants to model my daughters’ behaviors and actions according to the Korean model. So, she has some conflicts with my daughters who are changing some things due to acculturation with American culture. My daughters try to imitate American students who are freer in their actions.” (#C, p. 14)

Another relevant contradiction found was that children seemed to have acquired a sense of autonomy and independence from parents’ control while the adults struggled to re-establish their control and connection over the children. These struggles and contradictions between children’s autonomy and parental control can be seen in the following interviewee’s comments,

“Yes, sometimes I feel that my son is becoming too free... [stated a Uzbek mother]. I’d like my son to be free here and I’m satisfied with some changes that have occurred with him, but I think he’ll have some problems in my country when we come back, and especially, I will have this
problem...He feels like he is an adult already. He should realize that he is a child.” (#K, p. 47)

This type of parental struggle was also revealed when adults reminded their youngsters to respect rules and values from their cultures.

“He has to learn that the way he behaves with his friends is completely different from the way he has to behave with adults. I was taught that adults should be respected,” argued another parent. (#L, p. 54)

Youngsters changed their communication styles and adopted a freer way of expression. That “free” form of expression allowed them to engage easily and fluently in conversations and discussions with peers and adults. In fact, children adopted a more aggressive and direct style, which, in most cases, went against the style used by their parents and members of their native cultures. This is another contradiction that clearly emerged from the data: freedom versus obedience. Even when, in some cases, parents admired their children’s ability to speak up in public, to engage easily in conversations, and to become more independent, parents did not like when that freedom on the part of their children meant disobedience to adults’ commands and family obligations. This is how an interviewee put it:

“I’m afraid if I give too much freedom [said a Malaysian father], sooner or later it will jeopardize my son, and I don’t want that. He doesn’t have to forget that he is a Malaysian and that he is Muslim. Whatever he does in the future will be ruled by his religion. If I give them too much freedom, they communicate with other Americans or friends. You know, my son is very
smart, and he is willing to exchange everything. Now that you have
Internet or whatever, I’m afraid that he can start comparing religions or
whatever.” (#N, p. 63)

Closeness and separation in communication was another contradiction present
in the parent-child relationship as a result of children’s changes due to acculturation.
An example of this type of contradiction can be seen in some of the parents’
comments including this one below:

“In Korea, children and parents’ conversation is little; in America, in our
family’s case, the communication is large. In Korea, children don’t really
converse with their parents.” (#C, p. 14)

As is true in this case, the communication between parents and children
changed due to youngster’s acculturation to the US. This type of contradiction
(closedness- separation was present in several parents’ accounts when dealing with
expression of affection, sex, clothing, self-defense and dating customs; customs that
their children were exposed to and that parents perceived as contradicting values
sustained in their native cultures. These contradicting values came out of parents’ talk
about present issues that they thought would be conflictive by the time they went back
home.

Some of the tensions parents experienced with their children started to appear
in the present while others were projected as causing possible conflicts in the future
when the family returns to their countries of origin. The next section will explore in
more detail some of these tensions that emerge within the sojourner family and will draw connections to previous studies on similar issues.

**What is to be Learned**

As it has been stated from the beginning of this chapter, we found that sojourner children experience important communication changes that impact on the parent-child relationship producing some tensions. These communication changes started to become stronger after the children had passed their first three months of living in the US. It is apparently at this time (after three months of residence) that parents as well as the ELS teacher perceived these children as having acculturated to the American culture. When children’s changes contradicted parents’ values, customs, and beliefs, the appearance of conflict was inevitable. We arrived at that interpretation as a result of comparing interviewees’ comments with the core values they acknowledged they wanted their children to preserve. In that sense, interviewees revealed that the main value for they wanted to preserve was the importance of nuclear and the extended family. In the parents’ view, family is always a priority and along with that, family goals are more important than individual family member’s interests. Respect for elders (adults in general) and politeness were generally mentioned as core values tied to family bonds. In the context of these two values (priority of family and respect for elders and adults), children have to respect a traditional hierarchy in which elders give orders that youngsters obey. This obedience to adults also implies
compliance with family obligations. In this environment, a child is expected to behave very politely and passively without arguing or discussing elders’ commands.

These values are important in order to understand why parents perceived that their children’s changes towards a more free communication style were jeopardizing the traditional behaviors expected in their cultures. Parents clearly identified the American style of communication, with features like free speech, argument, interruption of other’s talk, and discussion of topics in a straightforward way. Interviewees perceived that their youngsters’ changes towards the mentioned style were sometimes positive and sometimes negative. From all those features, free speech was positively accepted by most of the parents. They felt proud of their children’s communication skills and ability to speak up without fear in public. Arguments, interruption of other’s talk, and in some cases, straightforwardness in children’s communication style were considered negative outcomes. The reason for these perceptions is that, with these changes in communication, children have challenged and denied parents’ cultural values. Furthermore, children have incorporated behaviors that are opposed to the parents’ cultural values, such as obeying parents’ orders and respecting all elders.

At this point, some explanations can be drawn from Hofstede’s (1984) characterization of the differences between cultures. Interviewees faced conflict with their children when their children adopted some features of the American style of conversation, which in parents’ view drastically collided with characteristics endemic in collectivistic cultures. This idea of disrespecting adults and parents went against
collectivistic needs and the interdependent relationships encouraged in collectivistic cultures. At the same time, when analyzing those collisions in terms of what Hosftede (1984) catalogued as a power distance relationship, the interviewees’ cultures stimulated more formal and hierarchical relationships within the family as well as outside of the family. However, this concept of power distance relationship seemed to be slightly different in Brazil from Mexico or even Korea. Brazilians have more egalitarian relationships that were evident in the interactions of Brazilian children with adults. Even though Mexico and Korea showed more hierarchical relationships within the family and with outside elders; Koreans had more hierarchical relationship within the family and their children have to address parents, especially to the father, in very formal and distant way. As a result of children’s adaptation and acculturation to the US culture, children started to get used to more informal and egalitarian relationships with peers and adults. This is also the case when parents reflected on their youngsters’ relationships with teachers at school, relationships that adults catalogued as friendly, egalitarian, and informal. As a result of these changes in communication styles as well as the ways in which they relate to peers and adults in the US, children also experienced a change in their styles of communicating with their parents. Interviewees admitted that their children had started to use a more direct, open and straightforward manner of communication with them, which was sometimes sharply opposed to their parents’ ambiguous and indirect styles.

However, a complementary interpretation to the tensions that emerge due to the communication changes that children experienced was offered by ELS teacher. In
her view, problems with parents could be rooted in children’s lack of ability to
determine and differentiate the context of their communication/relationships what
makes them use certain American expressions inappropriately. The inability of
children to differentiate the use of a specific code was also considered disrespectful by
most of their grade teachers. A possible explanation to this situation can be drawn
from Bernstein’s (1975) differentiation between restricted and elaborated codes.
Bernstein explained that individuals who operate with a restricted code fail to adapt
to the perspectives, needs, and characteristics of the listeners, while individuals who
use an elaborated code are able to make those distinctions and adapt to their listener.
Piaget (1926) explained a little bit more about these concepts when he commented that
the shift from one form of code to the other is sometimes achieved after the children
develop and acquire a level of maturity.

Language was another factor promoting conflict between parents and their
children. This was the case of those families where native language was taken as
another core value to preserve. Previous research has confirmed these findings
(Fatemah, 1998; Rosenthal, 1984; Wakil et al., 1981). However, in general, parents
were proud of their children’s skills to speak English fluently as well as the adoption
of some American expressions and gestures. Those changes could be grouped in what
Wakil et al. (1981) called “pragmatic values” as opposed to core values.

The fluency of the language, which improved considerably as children resided
longer in the US, brought up some clear benefits for sojourner children. First, when
language stopped being a problem or barrier to communication with other people,
youngsters improved their relationships with classmates and peers. Fundamentally, they started to have friends with whom to play and share things, something that parents mentioned as an important problem children experienced at the beginning of their stay in the US. In previous research, Gil and Vega (1996) also acknowledged the fact that younger emigrant children decreased their language conflicts the longer they resided in the US. Improved their communication skills seemed to be crucial for the process of adjustment to the new cultural environment (Brein & David, 1971) and reduced their initial stress (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993).

Coinciding with some of the findings in Rosenthal, Bell, Demetriou and Efklides’s research (1989), I found that sojourner children were willing to produce changes in their behaviors mainly in their relationships outside the family. However, I perceived that some of those behavior changes that these sojourner children experienced in the US implied a challenge to the core values sustained in their native cultures and by their parents. The question that should be posed is: How tied are communication styles and behaviors to cultural expectations and values? It seems to be that the connection between both things is quite strong. One example to illustrate this assertion can be seen when adults perceived that their children mixed languages or stopped speaking their native language as well as when they started to express themselves as freely as Americans do. In both cases, according to the adults’ view, children were forgetting core values, like native language and respect for adults.

However, the emergence of this type of tension between parents and children could also be explained and understood by considering the differences in the level of
acculturation to the US that both youngsters and adults experienced. Youngsters seemed to have accommodated to the American culture in terms of what Triandis et al. (1986) mentioned as one of the adaptation types called “accommodation”. While some of the parents seemed to have slightly accommodated their communication styles and customs to the American culture, they have affirmed their ethnicity much more with respect to core values from their native cultures. Furthermore, some interviewees manifested that their spouses, especially those who were not graduate students or faculty members at the university, could never integrate with the American culture nor did their spouses have any American friends. Contrary to their parents, children seemed to have assimilated to the host culture more rapidly. This means that youngsters were more concerned with establishing and maintaining relationships with the new culture than with preserving their own cultural heritage. This subconscious assimilation to the US was evident during the observations at school and on the playground, especially when the children dealt with their peers.

As a result of this difference in the process of acculturation between parents and their children, the latter began to modify some behaviors and attitudes in the direction of the American culture. The problems started when these changes collided with the expectations and values that their parents had. Nevertheless, there were other cases, mostly children who were in the US for less than 6 months, whose parents perceived small changes in their communication styles but did not disclose any specific conflicts or problems with their children. It is also true that when the question concerning any conflicts/tensions that parents experienced with their children was
posed, adults immediately denied any problem existed. Nevertheless, a fine reader could notice the presence of several areas of concern for these parents. Conflicts seemed to hide under expressions like “we have problems”, “I don’t like that”, “I don’t want my children to do this and this”, “I’m afraid of” etc. The researcher specifically noted the emergence of those comments when talking with parents about the core values they want their children to preserve.

One of the reasons parents might have denied the existence of conflicts with their children could be due to cultural expectations. Detzner (1992), who studied family conflicts among Southeast Asian refugees, reported similar denials among family members: “Despite the reluctance of informants to discuss conflict directly, there is evidence of conflict in almost every life history case, across the four cultural groups and at each major stage of the life course” (p. 92). In another study, Guerra-Lynch (1997), who focused on family conflicts between immigrant Portuguese mothers and their daughters, found that participants underreported “real” levels of conflict. I asked myself (as a member of a collectivistic culture) how would I answer this question, and found that my response would probably be similar to that of my interviewees. A possible explanation to that kind of response would be a common attitude, present in most of the collectivistic cultures, which views conflict in disruptive terms. Thus to confess the existence of conflicts within the family, and especially in front of a stranger, would be difficult if not impossible in some cases.

With respect to the reentry process, parents perceived that their children would experience similar problems to the ones they had upon arrival in the US. In that sense,
the lack of management of their native language, plus an initial culture shock, would make difficult the re-establishing of relationships with peers and classmates at school. The adoption of customs, values, and an American communication style would affect these children’s relationships with extended family, peers, and teachers. Parents anticipated that these problems could critically impact their children’s adaptation to their native culture, which has different styles of relationships and communication from the ones learned in the US. However, all the parents agreed that they would help their children face these differences. Some of the parents also recognized that these initial problems held the potential to produce conflicts between them and their children. Confirming some of the findings of Sueda and Wiseman (1991), parents in our study reported that the more serious challenge for their children would be in re-adapting to their native school system. Schools in the sojourner’s countries are perceived to be quite different from those in the US. Furthermore, the native educational system is thought of being much harder and demanding in their countries than it is in the US. Along with the degree of difficulty of their native education, interviewees went further reflecting on differences in communication styles that children would encounter at schools back home. On the one hand, children would find teachers who emphasize hierarchical and more formal relationships with them. In this schema, teachers would expect children to respect and never argue with them. On the other hand, these children would have to unlearn the internalized American style of communication with teachers, peers, and adults. This last fact would definitely cause some inconveniences to children until they relearned the styles of communication and
relationships of their native country and, with that, start to think in terms of the customs, beliefs, and values held by their native culture.

To sum up, we can say that children experienced many changes in communication and relationship style due to their acculturation to the US. Parents perceived some changes positively while others are thought of as producing negative outcomes in the parent-child relationship. The communication changes were perceived as negative by parents when they contradicted customs and values held back home.

**Implications and Directions for Future Research**

As in any other interpretive study, the findings outlined here constitute one possible reconstruction of how actors make sense of their communicative actions in a specific moment of their life and specifically within the context of collectivistic families. In that sense, the researcher does not know what would have emerged had the study focused on the experiences of sojourners from individualistic cultures. The present study aim was to describe, explain, and understand the communication changes and challenges sojourner children experience with their parents, peers, and teachers as a result of their acculturation to the US. This study addresses one specific moment of some sojourner family experience while living in the US. This specificity posed some advantages as well as disadvantages. The main advantage of scrutinizing one specific moment of these families’ lives lies in the manageability of limited data and the scope of the study. Money and time were two factors that operated as important restrictions to the present research. However, the main disadvantage of the
present study is the incapability of providing an account for the whole process of
these families, beginning with their travel to the US and continuing through their
reinsertion back home. Another limitation can come from my personal biases as a
researcher due to my being a member of a collectivistic culture and studying
collectivist people. However, it can also be argued that, as a collectivistic member, I
am better able to interpret and understand their situation due to the fact that some of
their concerns are part of my personal experience as a sojourner as well.

Future research should address some of the limitations of the present study. In
that sense, studies should include an exploration of the whole process in order to shed
light on understanding the sojourner experience in the US as well as their re-encounter
with their native culture, family, teachers, and peers. Reports of the whole process
would also be improved with more follow-up interviews during different times of the
sojourner experience. The updated interviews would be helpful for understanding the
different moments, crises, and communication changes that children faced during their
experiences with parents, peers, and outsiders.

Another limitation of this study rests in the fact that a purposive and
convenience sample was used. The decision to employ purpose/convenience sampling
techniques might very well have resulted in a sample that was more homogenous than
would have been true had a different sampling procedure been employed. Nonetheless,
the way sojourner families weather their experience ended up being different.

Another important limitation is that the research was mostly based on what
sojourner parents have told us. The study would undoubtedly be enriched if it included
a wider perspective on the matter, with accounts from teachers, counselors, relatives, and the children themselves. Subjects’ participation in this study could also be improved. Even when some of the interviews were conducted simultaneously with both spouses, we still had some partners who sat in silence. It would be ideal if both parents engaged in the conversation about the communication changes and conflicts that they face with their children. Parents discussions of their children’s communication changes and conflicts would also be enriched by focus group interview techniques with four to five parents interacting with each other. A discussion of this sort would provide more interesting insights into the matter as it would encourage the telling of similar and different stories. Future research should also include participants from different African countries, which could not be included in the present study, in order to account for the multiple varieties of voices within collectivistic culture.

As I observed at the beginning of this study, changes and tendencies of the world market show that, in the future, we will witness increasing migration across the globe. As a consequence of that tendency, it is also expected that the number of sojourner families moving abroad will increase due not only to education purposes but also job opportunities associated with working in multinational corporations. I believe that the experience of living in a foreign country will undoubtedly burden sojourners’ worldviews but, at the same time, will challenge the type of communication and relationship within the family and with outsiders. A fact that constitutes an important topic that communication scholars should be committed to addressing.
REFERENCE


### APPENDIX A: INFORMATION CONCERNING INTERVIEWEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Letter assigned</th>
<th>Member/s. of the family interviewed</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Children’s ages</th>
<th>Children’s sex</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Length of stay In the US</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Single mother, boyfriend and grandmother</td>
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<td>8-13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>6 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Mother (father in Korea)</td>
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<td>8-11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>6 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Father and passive mother</td>
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<td>11-13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Korea</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
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<td>Mongolia 9 months</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
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<td>11-13</td>
<td>Female – Male</td>
<td>Argentina 2 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Mother (father did not participate)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Korea 6 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Father and passive mother</td>
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<td>1,7,11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia 6 years</td>
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<td>J</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
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<td>6-7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Yemen 3 years</td>
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<td>K</td>
<td>Mother (father did not participate)</td>
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<td>Female – Male</td>
<td>Uzbekistan 9 months</td>
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<td>Korea</td>
<td>6 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
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<td>7-10</td>
<td>Male – Female</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1 month</td>
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APPENDIX B: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Note: Below are written some of the possible questions that I am interested in asking participants in this research project. The questions must be understood as subject to change. It is probable that new questions will come out during the flow of the interview, according to the type of experience narrated as well as the characteristics of the interviewees.

1) What is the main reason for coming to US?

2) How did you prepare yourself and your family for this trip?

3) What were the primary problems you encountered upon arrival? What were the main problems for your children?

4) Describe your children’s adaptation to school.

5) How do you think they felt at school at the beginning of the year compared to now?

6) Which do you think were and are the main conflicts between your children and their peers at school? Other kids in the community?

7) Which do you think were and are the main conflicts between your child and his/her teachers?

8) How do you think your kids are adjusting to US culture? Which do you think constitute the main problems in this process of adjusting to the American culture?

9) Which are the main changes you notice in your kids’ communication and behaviors since arriving in the US?
10) Can you remember and narrate a specific example of a conflict that your kid has had with an American peer? With other international kids?

11) How was that conflict solved?

12) What advice did you give to your child about how to handle that situation?

13) Would the advice be the same if the conflict had occurred in your home country?

14) What are the main values of your culture? (Friendship, parent-kids relationships, elders etc)

15) Could describe how a child is expected to behave within in the family, with friends, teachers, and adults in general in your culture?

16) What do you think is the main value you want your child to preserve from your culture?

17) What changes in communication style have you noticed in your relationship with your child?

18) What do you perceive is going to be the most difficult and serious issue to pay attention to when you come back home?

19) How do you think the reentry will affect your children? What problems do you think your child might have in your country as a result of his/her adapting to American customs and values?
APPENDIX C: SAMPLE OF CONSENT FORM

Title of research: **Parents’ perceptions of communication changes and conflicts that their children have with peers and family members due to acculturation with the American Culture.**

Principal investigator: Maria Beatriz Torres

Department: Interpersonal Communication

Federal and University regulations require us to obtain signed consent for participation in research involving human subjects. After reading the statement below, please indicate your consent by signing this form.

**Purpose of the study:** This study focuses on understanding parents’ perceptions of the communication changes and challenges that their younger children experience with peers and family members as a result of the process of adapting to a new culture. It will also examine ways parents manage these situations with their children and how differences in communication strategies and styles in the US can cause future problems for children upon their return home.

**Methods:** To achieve the objective of this study the researcher will first conduct individual interviews with each spouse, and second will conduct a joint interview with both parents. During the interviews, participants will be asked to talk about their personal stories and feelings involved in adapting to the US.

**Risks:** There is a possibility that participants in this study might produce feelings of anxiety and uncertainty due to the fact that you will be asked to think about your
experiences with culture shock. Homesickness could also occur as a result of the nature of our conversations.

**Benefits:** This study can help participants to start thinking about and preparing the family for the reentry process. At the same time, it is possible that our conversation might have the value of allowing you to talk about issues that are not always discussed.

**Confidentiality and records:** The study will be completely confidential and anonymous. The names of participants will never be revealed and possible identifications of subjects will be removed in any form from the final paper or report. I certify that I have read and understand the statement of procedures and agree to participate in this specific research described therein. I agree that risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

/s/ __________________________   Print

______________________________

Date_________________________
Interviewee D.

What is the main reason for coming to US?
To do research; my major is in criminal law.

When did you arrive to the US?
This year in January I came with my family.

What is the main reason for coming to US?
Around six months before coming I contacted through my major department in our university in Korea and a OU professor. Actually we prepared ourselves in two months, in contacting my department, finding a place to live, contacting school for my children.

What were the primary problems you encountered upon arrival?
The primary problem was language. Our family English was very little; my children’s knowledge of English was very poor. Our priority problem was English conversation.

What were the main problems for your children?
Our children’s problem was the cultural conflict. Our country has only one type of people; America has many different people with different nations too, so my children were very confused.

Why were they confused?
Our children never knew people from another country. They never had the experience with foreign people.
Describe your children’s adaptation to school. Describe your children’s adaptation to school.

They first experience culture conflict and the language problem with conversation; now they understand American culture more. My daughters like American culture and customs. In Korea, children education is fresh education.

What do you mean by fresh education?

In Korean education teachers do not understand children individually. Classes in Korea are composed of 50 to 60 children, that is a big difference with American education, which only has twenty students in a class and two teachers.

How is it in Korea?

The teacher in Korea doesn’t know the name of all the students in her class only 10 per cent. In American education there is a respect for human beings, safety and more egalitarian relationship between teachers and students. In Korean’s education the teacher is the authority. She owes respect from her students, she is like the king, and everybody has to follow her instructions. Students have to respect the teacher because she is the authority, they cannot argue with her but only follow her instructions. In American education, students argue with their teachers in many respects.

Do you remember when your kids went to their first day of school, how did they tell you that they felt? Which things did they like or they didn’t like from school?

American education is fun while Korean education is fresh and strict. My children of course now and after the first two months prefer the American education and like it more than the Korean education.
Do you remember any conflict that your kids had with another classmate or another kid of the same age here in Mill Street, any conflict or problem that you think is due to cultural differences?

My younger daughter who is ten years old is very shy. She doesn’t make friends and experience a strong conflict culture shock. In her case, she rejected to participating in American school for a couple of months. American students did not make friends with my daughter, after one month she made a friend and the problem is solved. Now this problem doesn’t exist anymore.

**How do you think your kids are adjusting to US culture? Which do you think constitute the main problems in this process of adjusting to the American culture?**

One of the things that constitute a problem for them was that the types of clothing women wear here in the US. Women seem to be almost naked compared to Korean women. Another reason of conflict is that many American students kiss and embrace each other openly in the streets. My daughters do not understand these things and ask me lots of questions.

**What is your response to those questions?**

My daughters smile and discuss that with me. They ask me about these things that are strange for them In Korea kissing and embracing only have to be displayed in secret in privacy. The other thing is that my daughters are used to Korean schools in which girls and boys are separated, only at the university level men and women are together. My daughters don’t understand all these.
Which are the main changes you notice in your kids’ communication and behaviors since arriving in the US?

In Korea men and women are not free to speak to each other. In American culture both men and women speak to each other and interact normally, this is very strange for a Korean. As I mentioned before, children study separately, so the custom is that men and women don’t talk to each other. In that sense, my daughters are now speaking freely and naturally to boys. At the beginning, the conversation was not naturally free. American men and women rights are equal; it is not the same case in Korea, men give the order and women only obey to them, they (women) even don’t speak to men. The custom for women is to remain silent in front of the men. In American education men and women are taught to have the same rights. For example here men and women smoke in Korea only men can smoke. The only women that smoke are those who work in a Saloon. In that sense I think American education is free.

Do you remember any other change in children behavior that you think it’s due to adaptation to the American culture?

They are naturally changing their behavior and thinking. In Korea many people notice another people’s actions, this is not the same in American culture. Social environment influences our behaviors.

Would the advice be the same if the conflict had occurred in your home country?

My advice would be different. In Korea the teachers intervene in solving a conflict with a classmate.
Imagine that one of your daughters has a conflict with a classmate, would you give her the same advice here than in your country?

Korean education has many problems.

I think that my children will have some problems at school when they come back home.

**What are the main values of your culture? (Friendship, parent-kids relationships, elders etc).**

The main value of our culture is the parent-child relationship. In Korea many parents think that their child is the king, but only our child, the rest of the children from other people are strange. The main goal is to educate that child with high quality and in high position. Another problems are not mentioned.

**How do you have to behave with older people?**

The main value of our culture is the parent-kid relationship.

**Could describe how a child is expected to behave within in the family, with friends, teachers, and adults in general in your culture?**

Koreans have to follow the same education model that I have already explained in which kids have to respect their teacher and follow her instructions without arguing with her. The same model is applied to family, friends and adults.

**What do you think is the main value you want your child to preserve from your culture?**
My home culture shows respect for older people. I want my children to respect older people. My wife is very strict with my daughters in that sense. She wants my daughters to follow the same model of Korean education.

**What changes in communication style have you noticed in your relationship with your child?**

In Korea children and parents’ conversations is little; in America in our family case the communication is large. In Korea children don’t really converse with their parents. My children have changed in that respect, for example they argue to me about their problems and they also argue to me about my own behavior.

**How is your reaction to that change as well as your wife’s?**

My wife ignores the situation and tries to advice them to be quite. I really respect my daughters and always try to listen to them.

**In your wife’s case is different, she doesn’t want to hear them?**

My wife wants to model my daughters’ behaviors and actions according to the Korean model. So, she has some conflicts with my daughters who are changing some things due to acculturation with American culture. My daughters try to imitate American students who are freer in their actions.

**What do you perceive is going to be the most difficult and serious issue to pay attention to when you come back home?**

We are going to be here in the US for one year; one of the most difficult issues would be my daughters’ adaptation to Korean’s education system. Here they are free and individuals are respected.
Do you think language is going to constitute a problem for them?

Yes, probably language is also going to be a problem for them.

How do you think the reentry will affect your children?

My children will be benefit because they will be able to have conversations in English, they speak English very well; this is also very important in Korea to be able to speak English fluently.

What problems do you think your child might have in your country as a result of his/her adapting to American customs and values?

For example some American customs like kissing your couple in a public place or women wearing small clothes are completely forbidden in public. My daughters will probably experience the culture shock due to the differences between these two cultures. We are going to stay here only one year so I don’t think is going to be problematic for my daughters.

Interview with his wife

In Korea my wife strictly tutor my daughters. She doesn’t want my daughters to argue with her when she or any other person is speaking.

Do you notice any change, while you are here, in the communication style of your children?

My daughters’ behavior and communication style is more liberal.

How do you feel when they argue with you?
My wife says that she accepts arguments from my daughters in a favorable way. She likes these changes. She is afraid that as their daughters will face some problems with Korean teachers. Korean teachers are very strict, they teach children not to argue.

**Do you want your children to change?**

Maybe yes. In Korea, education environment is different from the American style so my wife wants my daughters to change into the Korean style. She wants my daughters to study in the famous university in Korea so that is the reason my wife wants my daughters to change according to the Korean style. My wife wants my daughters to be housewives like she is.

**Do you think that the experience to live in the US can help them?**

She thinks this experience is very important for her daughters’ life.

**What do you perceive is going to be the most difficult and serious issue to pay attention to when you come back home?**

School and study because the education is completely different.

**Do you remember any discussion that you had with your daughter due to a behavior that you think is not appropriate for Koreans?**

I think everything is good. My daughters have some American attitudes that are accepted also in my culture. She doesn’t like my children to wear small clothes or be almost naked, or to wear earrings and tattoos; all those things are not accepted in our culture.
Do you have any discussion because of this with your children?

No, I think it is maybe because they are very young.

Husband: My daughters don’t deny my wife’s orders.