SALVADORIAN ETHNIC PRIDE

A Bridge for Reducing Mother–Daughter Conflict Due to Acculturation Into Canadian Society

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Abstract: This article examines acculturation conflict between Salvadorian mothers and their daughters living in a mid-sized Ontario city. Six joint interviews with adolescent and adult daughters and their respective mothers were conducted. Sixteen individual qualitative interviews with mothers and separately with their adolescent or adult daughters were carried out as well (N = 32). A grounded theory approach was employed to explore emergent acculturation themes. Findings highlight how Salvadorian immigrant mothers in Canada guide their adolescent daughters through the acculturation process, how the daughters respond to their mothers’ guidance, the nature of the conflict that emerges in this process, and the conditions under which the conflict is increased or reduced. It appears that tension is eased when daughters come to understand and accept the ongoing relevance of Salvadorian heritage to their lives in Canada.

Abrégé : Cet article examine le conflit d'acculturation entre les mères salvadoriennes et leurs filles qui habitent une ville ontarienne de population moyenne. Nous avons mené six entrevues durant lesquelles les mères et leurs filles adolescentes ou adultes respectives étaient ensemble. De plus, nous avons mené 16 entrevues qualitatives durant lesquelles les mères et leurs filles adolescentes ou adultes étaient séparées. La théorie ancrée fut employée pour explorer les thèmes émergents d'acculturation. Nous avons observé comment les mères salvadoriennes immigrantes au Canada guident leurs filles adolescentes au long du processus d'acculturation, comment les filles répondent aux conseils de leurs mères, la nature du conflit qui émerge de ce processus et les conditions sous lesquelles ce conflit augmente ou diminue. Il semble que la tension s’apaise lorsque les filles peuvent comprendre et accepter le maintien de la pertinence de leur héritage salvadorien par rapport à leur vie au Canada.
THE PROCESS of acculturation is a complex process that varies among immigrant groups. This article focuses on the Salvadorian community. All mothers and daughters in this study immigrated to Canada as part of a family unit, with the exception of two daughters who were born in Canada. Some mothers and their families travelled under Canada’s refugee program; others travelled under the family reunification program. Some mothers came directly from El Salvador and some had lived for some time in transit countries such as the United States, Costa Rica, and Mexico. The mothers’ education included completion of elementary school \( (n = 8) \), high school \( (n = 8) \), trade/college \( (n = 3) \), and university \( (n = 2) \). Their time in Canada varied from five to 20 years. The main emphasis of this article is to discuss the negotiation process in which Salvadorian mothers and daughters engaged when facing the process of acculturation. Mothers were committed to encouraging the acculturation as well as the economic incorporation of their daughters into Canadian society, but at the same time, these mothers wanted their daughters to maintain a strong sense of their Salvadorian raíces [roots], including the core value of familismo, which is the privileging, by all family members, of the connections within and across generations. Familismo includes spiritual unity among family members, both at home and across borders and also across the family life span to include family members who have died (Carranza, 2007, p. 116). Although tensions intrinsic in these acculturation plans often led to conflicts between mothers and daughters, mothers were able to successfully draw on ethnic pride to overcome these conflicts.

This article examines the findings of a qualitative study in which 22 daughters and 21 mothers of Salvadorian heritage were interviewed. It discusses the mothers’ acculturation plans and strategies, and their focus on the importance of familismo, as well as their use of ethnic pride to reduce intergenerational conflicts and to help shape their daughters’ behaviour. It also discusses the daughters’ views on acculturation, including their struggles as they integrate into Canadian society, all while ensuring they each maintain a connection to their family and their social/ethnic identity as Salvadorians.

Understanding acculturation

Acculturation refers to the social and psychological exchanges that occur when there are continuous contact and interaction between individuals from different cultures (Berry, 2006). These exchanges can involve attitudes, values, behaviours, sense of cultural identity (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000), and movement toward biculturalism (LaFrämboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Berry’s (1992) conceptualization of acculturation emphasizes the struggles and stresses that immigrants experience in these areas when arriving and settling in a new country. These stresses include
Intergenerational conflicts that arise between various family members during the process of acculturation (Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000).

Immigrant parents face the task of transmitting family values in a new context and environment. Several models have been proposed to describe this process. Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen’s (2002) cultural transmission model proposes three methods of value transmission within immigrant families: (a) vertical transmission, which locates immigrant parents as the main agents of their children’s socialization; (b) oblique transmission, which involves other adults (both within and outside the ethnic group of the immigrant family) as socializing agents of the immigrant children; and (c) horizontal transmission, in which the immigrant children’s peers are active agents in socializing the children into the values of the settlement country.

Authors of this cultural transmission model focus on the child as the recipient of the values transmitted by their parents and others in the community in a unidirectional process (Flor & Knapp, 2001). In doing so, these theorists fail to consider the active rejection or acceptance of such values by the children. Others have proposed a transformational model (Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993), otherwise known as a bi-directional model, whereby both parents and children are perceived as actively involved in the value negotiation process (Kuczynski & Navara, 2006). Grusec and Goodnow (1994) proposed a two-step process of value negotiation: (a) children take in the values endorsed by their parents, and (b) children accept these values as their own. During the first step, the perception stage, the child may or may not accurately perceive the parents’ values. In the second step, the child may choose to endorse or reject the values taught by the parents. Thus, value similarity between parents and their children would occur when children accurately perceive the value transmissions made by their parents and then adopt them as their own.

Maintaining core values while encouraging acculturation is a difficult task. Despite these difficulties, some immigrant youth are able to attain bicultural competencies (Falicov, 1998). They are able to achieve a sense of cultural fluidity and navigate between the two cultures successfully (Harwood & Feng, 2006), perhaps even attaining a sense of ethnic pride. According to Hardy and Laszloffy (2002), ethnic pride is understood as the positive feelings that members of ethnic minority groups develop in relation to their race and ethnicity. The research findings presented in this article offer some insights on the role of ethnic pride in the resolution of conflict between Salvadorian mothers and their daughters.

**Intergenerational cultural conflict or dissonance**

Intergenerational cultural dissonance is understood as a clash that occurs between parents and their children (Choi, He, & Harachi, 2008, p. 85).
Much of the conflict that occurs between immigrant parents and their children is due to acculturation gaps between them (Berry et al., 2002). Gaps may result from miscommunication among family members, such as when a child interprets for the parent (Chao, 1999), as well as from value negotiations within a new context (Driscoll, 1999) such as when immigrant parents try to maintain the values of their home country while their children may succumb to the influence of the new context (Castro, Boyer, & Balcazar, 2000). Thus the youth are living between two worlds (Menjivar, 2002). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) conducted a quantitative study with immigrant parents and youth from diverse groups living in the United States and concluded that the resources available mediated the intensity of immigrant parent–youth conflict. For example, when parents belonged to higher economic strata and had more resources available to them, the intensity of the conflict tended to decrease. It appears then that socio-economic status has an important effect on how well immigrant parents and their adolescent children get along.

Limited financial resources combined with limited parental supervision, due to demands of the workforce in the new country, add to the intensity of parent–child conflict (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). Some authors argue that parent–child conflict occurs as a result of parenting style (Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, & McCabe, 2009). Bacallao and Smokowski (2007) indicated that Mexican parents living in the United States became authoritarian as a means of dealing with the limited time they had to spend with their children and as a result of their worries regarding their children’s assimilation. In fact, many authors argue that conflict between immigrant parents and their children needs to be regarded as a normative experience (Giguère, Lalonde, & Lou, 2010). Normative or not, numerous explanations have been offered to clarify the causes of acculturation conflict; however, few studies have examined how families manage this conflict.

Salvadorians come from a collectivist and communal society where the value of familismo is embedded in day-to-day culture (Baron, 2000). Migration to North America presents them with many challenges, such as familial conflict due to acculturation gaps. Parent–child conflict is often intense and results in negative consequences for the family members involved (Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005; Menjivar & Abrego, 2009). This intensity and fear of disconnection may help family members move toward resolution. Successful transformational changes in families are more likely to occur when members share a legacy of acute poverty (Lopez-Mira, 2007) and an agricultural heritage (Romano, 2007). These strong historical factors lead to stalwart connections and family loyalty across generations, creating a survival strategy to overcome poverty and oppression (Martin-Baro, 1996). We need to understand how familistic features of Latin American families influence the acculturation of individual family members’ paths of acculturation, and cultural dissonance
among generations (Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). Also needed is an understanding of how the effects of acculturation influence the family dynamics and family processes in the settlement country. This research addresses this gap.

The results of the present study must be considered in light of two important limitations. First, the sample of participants was from a particular immigrant group (Salvadorians) that lived in a specific socio-geographical context (a medium-sized city in the southeastern region of Canada) and, who arrived in this country during a unique historical period. The Latino community in the area where the interviews were conducted is relatively small compared to the Latino communities in Canadian metropolitan centres (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) where the majority of immigrants and refugees from Latin America have settled. The second limitation relates to the fact that all the participants were women. Therefore the findings may not apply to Salvadorian fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, or fathers and sons. There is substantial literature indicating gender differences in the acculturation of adults (Suarez-Orozco & Qin, 2006).

**Methodology**

A purposive sample (Patton, 2001) was chosen to provide some diversity in the range of the accounts regarding mother–daughter negotiation. The sample provided richness along various dimensions, such as socio-economic status, political and religious affiliations, and migration paths. The sample design involved three sets of participants. Each set included mothers and their daughters. Participants in the first two sets were interviewed individually: (a) The *Mother–Adolescent Daughter Set* included Salvadorian immigrant mothers and at least one of their adolescent daughters between the ages of 15 and 17 who were born in Canada or abroad (*n* = 8); and (b) The *Mother–Adult Daughter Set* included Salvadorian immigrant mothers and at least one of their adult daughters between the ages of 19 and 30 who grew up in Canada or arrived before becoming an adolescent (*n* = 8). The third set, (c) *Mothers and Their Adolescent Daughters and Mothers and Their Adult Daughters*, were interviewed together (*n* = 6). The purpose of the third set was to explore how socio-historical markers were perceived and how other contextual factors influenced the relationships between mothers and daughters while they integrated into Canadian society.

A total of 32 individual in-depth interviews were conducted; 16 with mothers and 16 with daughters. Additionally, a total of six joint mother–daughter interviews were carried out. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and were usually two hours long. These in-depth interviews “provided the possibility to learn to see the world from the eyes of the person being interviewed” (Ely, 1991, p. 58). All interviews were audio-recorded with
the participants’ permission. In addition to the initial interviews, follow-
up interviews were carried out in order to integrate the data in two ways:
(a) to add to the theme categories of the first set by providing more in-
depth information; and (b) to clarify answers given by the participants
(Ely, 1991). Interviewing stopped once the researcher had gathered thick
descriptions for each category and theoretical saturation had been
achieved (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Grounded theory was chosen for this study. In this process the data
was systematically gathered and analyzed, and a “bottom up” analytical
strategy using theme analysis was followed in the development of theory
(Charmaz, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theme analysis provided the
range of experiences for the sets of mothers and daughters in regards
to how they positioned themselves as members of a minority group in
order to successfully settle into Canadian society (Ely, 1991).

The process of data gathering and analysis was recursive. Data analy-
sis began after the first few interviews, and the results of this analysis
informed the direction of the following interviews (Patton, 2001). The
categorization of themes evolved as data from new interviews were added.
As concepts were constructed and themes were identified in the analytical
process, they were compared, contrasted, and grouped following the
open coding procedure described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Axial
coding was also employed to construct conceptual schemas that reflected
the relationship between categories. In this process categories were
changed, dropped, and organized hierarchically (Ely, 1991).

Several methods were used to ensure the reliability and authenticity
of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The author’s association as a member
of the Salvadorian community enhanced credibility. However, potential
biases related to her “insider” perspective (i.e., knowledge taken for
granted) were kept in check through exchanges with an “outsider” (Can-
dian of European ancestry). The “outsider” listened to the initial inter-
views, read, and independently coded some of the transcripts as a validity
check, and also engaged in ongoing dialogue with the author about the
emergent themes and concepts. Three Salvadorian consultants, who
were not participants in the study, acted as “sounding boards” and pro-
vided feedback at various points. The author called back selected par-
ticipants to verify the meaning of what they had said. She also engaged
in personal and theoretical note taking throughout the study. Long con-
joint interviews with an additional six mother-daughter pairs provided
triangulation with the data from individual interviews (Janesick, 1994).
Following the tradition of qualitative research, long quotes have been
included from the interview conversations. These will allow the reader
to assess the credibility of the analysis. Names and other identifying fac-
tors have been changed in order to protect the identity of all participants.
The “Findings” section presents the themes mothers and daughters per-
ceived to be the most significant in their negotiation processes.
Findings

Ensuring their daughters’ successful integration and financial independence through the pursuit of higher education

Most Salvadorian mothers were acutely aware of the opportunities Canada offered their daughters, such as the possibility of pursuing higher education by obtaining government loans and scholarships. Thus they encouraged and supported their daughters in obtaining a higher education. For some mothers this appeared to have become a major goal after migration, as higher education in El Salvador was only available to those with financial resources. For other mothers, it was the continuation of a plan already established prior to their migration. Regardless of when they came to the realization, all the mothers perceived that by obtaining a higher education, their daughters would be ensured employment in Canada’s mainstream economy. This in turn would provide their daughters with personal financial independence and a sense of belonging in Canadian society.

Attaining higher (than parents’) education

All the Salvadorian mothers stated the importance of supporting their daughters in obtaining higher education. For most mothers, higher education meant obtaining a high school or college diploma. Only a few talked about the importance of attending university. For some mothers, schooling was essential in order to maintain or recover the social prestige the family had enjoyed before migration. For other mothers, it was a way to ensure a better future for their daughters. Lorena, a mother of two, had only been able to study up to Grade 2, as the school was far from her village. Her comments capture the key elements of the theme.

I want her to get an education. I want her to be somebody so when she is older she has a better future. That way she can help our community. She has not turned out rebellious. I tell her, “You have to keep on studying so you can be an example to others.”

Lorena was vigilant and mindful of her daughter’s acculturation and the need for supervision. It was important her daughter not disappoint her and follow Lorena’s desires for what she considered successful acculturation—that is, obtaining higher (than her) education but also refraining from taking on certain unwelcome Canadian practices (e.g., sleepovers and premarital sex). For these mothers in particular, their daughters’ academic success also meant attaining a higher status within the Spanish-speaking community. It is noteworthy that Lorena was acutely aware of the struggles faced by members of the Salvadorian community (i.e., prejudice and underemployment). Her worries could be attributed to the elevated high school dropout rate among Spanish-speaking youth in
Ontario (Carranza, 2008b). Thus, obtaining higher education may be a way to push back against exclusion and marginalization within Canadian society.

*Developing Canadian social networks.* Mothers talked about encouraging their daughters to participate in an English-speaking church congregation as a way of integrating into Canadian society. This included promoting friendships with Canadian-born children. Lidia, a mother of three, an active Catholic and a former lawyer, talked about her decision to join an English-speaking congregation in order to support her daughter’s integration and instill in her a sense of belonging.

I don’t attend a Spanish-speaking church. We attend an English-speaking congregation for one reason only: to incorporate ourselves into Canadian society. We have had good experiences there. My daughter participates in the church rituals every Sunday. We decided to do that after we came here. Everybody there is Canadian.

Her impetus for joining an English-speaking congregation stemmed not only from her desire to support her daughter’s need to belong, but also to replace their sense of religious community and social connection that was lost after migration. Lidia’s relatively high socio-economic class and high education prior to migration enhanced her awareness of the need to join Canadian social groups. Joining such groups makes it easier for the family to learn how to navigate Canadian society and regain their social status.

Mothers like Lidia talked about making a conscious decision to mainly remove themselves and their daughters from their ethnic group and immerse themselves in an English-speaking environment. Not only did this decision force their daughters to learn the English language, but the mothers themselves were also actively exposed to the Canadian way of life with people who share their Christian values.

At the same time, other mothers who participated in English-speaking congregations commented that going to a mainstream Canadian church and fostering friendships with “White” children heightened mother–daughter conflict, given that their church congregation and their daughters’ friends did not understand the Salvadorian way of life taught at home. With frustration in her voice, Dina, a former nurse assistant and a mother of three, elaborated further:

I allowed her to have Canadian friends. It’s not easy. I think it depends on the age. She would tell me some of the things that her friends were doing, ah, and of course I did not agree with it. We’d start yelling at each other. She accused me of things. I accused her of things. We would get mad for 20 minutes or so ’cause I would say, “that’s not the way we do things.” She didn’t want me to get to know her friends.
Dina acknowledged the conflict between her and her daughter increased when she supported her daughter in socializing with Canadian friends. This conflict was one of the costs of fulfilling her original intention to support her daughters’ integration into Canadian society.

**Entering the Canadian workforce.** Many mothers encouraged their daughters to work part-time at a young age. They did so as a proactive step to help their daughters feel as though they were part of the Canadian culture, where adolescents often have part-time jobs, and to prepare them for their future life in Canadian society. A homemaker and mother of five adult children commented about her daughter’s acculturation process:

> She has adapted well, she’s working … it’s easy to work here. She’s made some good friends…. She speaks English well. She works and goes to school. She feels good here. I like that.

In this mother’s view, encouraging her daughter to work at a young age gave the daughter an opportunity to strengthen her English skills, make friends, and feel a sense of belonging, because she was doing what other people her age were doing.

While these mothers were actively committed to the educational and economic success of their daughters, they maintained significant aspects of their ethnic heritage at home; this included diet, language, and the key value of familismo.

**“Familismo” as Salvadorian heritage**

The participants’ comments revealed they considered familismo part of their heritage and an important cultural marker for Salvadorian people. They referred to familismo as a value that is “deeply embedded in Salvadorian traditions and culture” and supported by “spoken and unspoken rules about the necessity for maintaining connections between family members.” Spoken rules were found in comments frequently made by mothers and other family members, such as “family comes first.” Unspoken rules were the “relational practices that are modeled for the child from birth.” These rules and practices are transmitted across generations to ensure the survival of each family member because “they are supported by the other.”

According to all the Salvadorian mothers in this study, familismo was a core value that “guaranteed that their family would remain a close-knit unit,” thus ensuring the “survival of the family across time and across generations.” Mothers perceived this as even more imperative in a new country because of the threats posed by acculturation and cultural differences. Soledad, a mother of three, a self-proclaimed atheist and former paramedic, provides an example of this thinking:
Well [familismo] is one of the markers of our culture. We are brought up and taught to value our family, to be close to our family, it’s our race. It’s like there is more warmth and emotional connection between us than Canadian families…. Familismo is like the legacy that I leave to my children. So they know what to do when I am no longer [alive]. So they continue to teach the same values to their children.

Soledad’s words highlight the idea that familismo must endure the challenges of migration and the passing of time. For these mothers, familismo became even stronger after migration. The women saw it as a cultural marker that made Salvadorians a distinct group within a new context. They had taken on the responsibility of transmitting this value to the next generation.

All the mothers in this study stated their commitment to their daughters’ successful acculturation. According to them, this entailed their daughters’ financial independence through the pursuit of higher education while concurrently maintaining strong family ties and embracing their Salvadorian heritage. Thus there is an implicit tension in the mothers’ acculturation goals for their daughters.

**Tensions in the mothers’ acculturation plans for their daughters**

All the mothers talked about wanting their daughters to integrate economically into Canadian society. However, at the same time, they expected their daughters to remain separate from what the mothers perceived to be Canadian women’s practices. Their expectations included exclusion from activities such as dating without the mother’s approval, sexual activity before marriage, going to bars, and acting in ways viewed as selfish (e.g., daughters prioritizing their own wishes over the family’s needs and the family’s reputation). The following quote reflects this kind of dual position. This mother encouraged her daughter to obtain higher education and to work as a teenager, in order to enhance her daughter’s integration and financial security. However, her stance regarding “appropriate” behaviour continued to be rooted within Salvadorians’ culturally prescribed gender behaviours for girls:

For example, here the kids grow up with a lot of freedom. I often say to [my daughter], “We are in Canada, but our culture is the Salvadorian culture. Our customs and traditions are different. It is not part of our customs that our daughters go to sleep in houses that we don’t know and with people that we don’t know.” Yeah, it’s hard for the kids [here], but I tried to maintain our custom of not too much freedom for her.

This comment summarizes some of the complexities mothers and daughters faced in their daily lives as they set out to negotiate the daughters’ acculturation into a new context. The tension between maintaining
heritage and promoting financial security through the pursuit of higher education involved a lot of strategizing on the part of the mothers. Despite these efforts, such tension often led to intense mother–daughter conflict. However, the conflict between them diminished when mothers emphasized their shared Salvadorian identity and heritage (ethnic pride).

Instilling Salvadorian identity: Ethnic pride

In this study, ethnic pride involved valuing Salvadorian identity, feeling honoured to be Salvadorian, and remaining connected to the broader Latino community. Ethnic pride was expressed in messages mothers gave to their daughters. Mothers talked about their pride in their skin tone, language, literature, music, and food. Two main strategies for teaching their daughters about ethnic pride emerged in the analysis: consciousness raising and speaking Spanish.

Consciousness raising. All the mothers except one talked about not wanting their daughters to become disconnected from their roots, culture, and heritage. To this end, mothers discussed the importance of fostering a connection and a sense of belonging to their country of origin and the Latino culture. Some mothers discussed their pride in having their daughters know their racial ancestry as Indigenous or as mestizos (Indigenous and Spanish mixed). Mothers who had participated in the Salvadorian political uprising specifically talked about teaching their daughters about El Salvador’s legacy of oppression, which began in the times of the conquista [conquest] by the Spaniards. They considered “la toma de conciencia de su historia de opresión” [consciousness of their history of oppression] to be a distinguishing aspect of being Salvadorian. For them it was imperative their daughters know not only the culture and their family roots, but also their history of suffering, poverty, subjugation, and most importantly the resistance of the Salvadorian people. The following comment from Ana, a former teacher, highlighted this theme and its importance to the mothers:

I feel that if she knows [about her roots] she will be able to feel that she comes from a larger family because she belongs to a special place. I think that this [knowing about her ethnic roots] has helped her to feel proud of our ethnic roots, our strength and resistance. An example is... my father-in-law was kidnapped and murdered during our country’s civil war... She knows that he fought and died for social justice, for peace in El Salvador. She values that a lot. She feels very proud of her ancestors.

A legacy of recent political violence, loss, and trauma is part of the mothers’ teachings to their daughters. Ana elaborated further about her reasons for teaching her daughter about this history:
I think that we’re never going to be Canadians, because we are the first
generations and also because of our ethnic features. I always tell them,
“Nosotros tenemos la tortilla en la frente” [We have the tortilla on our
forehead] [laughter]. [Canadians] are always going to see it. We are
going to be Salvadorian for many, many generations and we’re different
because of our features, our colour, our height, our diet. [Canadians]
are one race, we are another…. So, if we are going to live here, we need
to be happy and proud of who we are, our culture, our family, our ances-
tors, and their fight for social justice.

The above quote highlights not only Ana’s ethnic pride, but also her
heightened awareness of having to deal with being labelled as the “other”
by many within society at large, given her skin colour and ethnicity. She
seemed aware that “race” was a significant factor in her daughter’s accul-
turation process. Her political ideation and ability to articulate her ideas
appeared to have helped her prepare herself and her daughter to deal
with issues of prejudice and discrimination in Canadian society.

Another mother, a former nurse and militant in the Salvadorian
movement, also spoke about the importance of teaching her daughter
about Salvadorians’ history of oppression and resistance, and her own
indigenous roots:

Even though my daughter was born here, she is learning Nahualth. She
knows of her mixed roots [Indigenous and Spanish]. Her grand-
mother is an Indigenous woman from Izalco [a place where Indigenous
traditions predominated, including speaking Nahualth, as a resistance
despite the genocide that took place in 1930]. [Her grandmother] is
pure blood. I told her the story about the resistance and the Indigenous
revolution in the 30s. We have history books. She has begun to be aware
of our history too.

One woman, a stay-at-home mother of three who left El Salvador at
age 18 to escape political persecution, articulated the importance of
retaining these aspects of culture and history. Two of her children were
born in the United States. Her youngest daughter, who is 15 years old,
was born in Canada. The mother noted:

We try to have a lot of family get-togethers so she doesn’t feel that she’s
missing out. We tell stories and have our traditional foods. My parents
are here, and that is a benefit because they also get involved in telling
all the kids about our roots. I believe that it is important that she knows
our roots.

Regardless of education, the mothers who had been involved in the polit-
ical resistance in El Salvador believed that teaching their daughters about
this history of colonial oppression and indigenous resistance was important
for nourishing their daughters’ ethnic pride and sense of belonging. Their strategy involved passing historic memories on to their daughters. This in turn is then internalized as part of the repertoire of collective memories that mothers share with their daughters, even if they have been born or raised across borders. Hence mothers are actively replicating aspects of the Salvadorian oral tradition and popular acts of resistance: “El pueblo que olvida su pasado está condenado a morir” [A people that forgets its past will die].

*Speaking Spanish.* Many of the mothers in this study talked about their pride in maintaining the Spanish language despite the challenges of living in an English-speaking country. Seven mothers talked specifically about the great significance of their daughters learning “la lengua de su madre” [their mother’s tongue]. Their reasons varied. For some it was about having more employment opportunities in Spanish speaking countries. For others, it was about the importance of communicating with the elderly and with family members left behind. The following quote from Leticia, a former clerical worker, highlighted this theme further:

> Even though she speaks English with her brother, I demand that she speak Spanish with me and in the house so she doesn’t lose it. There can be so many opportunities and a better future for her.... She also needs to speak Spanish with her grandparents when we go for visits to El Salvador.

Norma, a stay-at-home mother, was also committed to teaching her daughter about her heritage. She explained:

> Even though all my daughters were born in these countries [the United States and Canada] I have raised them as Salvadorians. They assure me that they will continue to speak Spanish and that they will teach it to their children even if their future husbands speak English. I don’t want them or my grandkids to lose their Salvadorian roots.

Finally, Consuelo, another stay-at-home mother, talked about her daughter’s verbal abilities when speaking Spanish:

> Even though she was born here, she speaks Spanish very well in comparison to other people, even those born in El Salvador. She speaks perfect Spanish. We talked to her in Spanish since she was a baby so she wouldn’t lose it.

It seems that for the mothers in this study, teaching the Spanish language to their daughters is an important aspect of their ethnic heritage that needs to be passed down to generations and across contexts. Speaking Spanish is what connects daughters to other family members who are
still living in El Salvador and who do not speak English, and links them to their Salvadorian roots in general.

*Evoking ethnic pride to reduce mother–daughter tension.* Some mothers in this study talked about how instilling ethnic pride in their daughters tended to reduce the conflict that occurred between them. A former engineer, the mother of four adult daughters, noted her strategy:

Yes, [evoking ethnic pride] did help, because when I told her that she was Salvadorian and that our traditions and culture were different, she understood and stopped pushing to do those things [sleepovers] that she was not supposed to do. She knew that I was trying to protect her from the dangers of Canadian society…. I mean she stopped giving me grief about why she was not allowed. She accepted my reasoning and obeyed me then. It always worked because my parents helped too. They also talked to her until she understood that we were just watching over her. She stopped resisting my wishes and accepted the fact that she ... we were different.

However, attaining the daughters’ acceptance and understanding about their race and ethnicity was not always an easy process. A mother of four—a former pharmaceutical technician and militant—commented about the difficulties:

Although she [daughter] took pride in her heritage, she “tomó conciencia” [her awareness was raised] of her roots. She accepted it. It was not easy at the beginning. I think it was my fault though because I was not explaining myself. Like she would get mad…. It was worse when she was 15 years old, when she had her first boyfriend. I would say, “No, you do not stay out late with him because you’re Salvadorian.” Of course, she would resist me. It was not until I took the time to explain like, “Mire mi’ jita [Look my little daughter] the thing is that if you are out alone with your boyfriend or out too late with him ‘va a empezar el que dirán de la gente’ [people will begin to talk about you] and your decency and reputation will be on the line. People will begin to question your decency. People will point at you in the street and will label you as ‘niña de la calle’ [street girl]. It is my job to teach you and to protect you from those things.” So when I took the time to explain myself she understood. She accepted it and trusted me. She knew that I wanted the best for her…. She respected my wishes when I told her that she couldn’t do certain things because our culture and traditions were different.

Hence just calling on their daughters’ race and ethnicity was not enough; mothers (and other family members) needed to reflect upon their reasons for prohibiting specific behaviours or practices. Then they had to take the time to explain to their daughters the meaning of being Salvadorian and the behaviours expected of someone with this ethnic identity. The
mothers remarked that as their daughters accepted their explanations, the girls stopped resisting and the tension between them was significantly reduced.

It is also noteworthy that all the mothers were committed to encouraging ethnic pride in their daughters and to name it as such. However, their practices or strategies for doing so differed. Mothers with progressive political ideation and former militants of the Salvadorian political movement drew upon their experiences and intellectual resources to teach their daughters about their historical issues, such as the legacy of colonization and oppression. Mothers with conservative ideations drew upon family get-togethers that included storytelling, cooking Salvadorian traditional foods, and opportunities for their daughters to learn and practise their Spanish. Regardless of their political ideation, the mothers maintained a sense of positive difference. This was achieved by highlighting the “dangers” that Canadian society presented in terms of eroding Salvadorian traditions, such as “too much freedom” for women, which included sleepovers, going to bars, dating without the mother’s approval, premarital sex, and individualistic practices in general.

Daughters’ views of their acculturation process in the Canadian context

The daughters’ perspective, although different, overlapped with that of their mothers. Three significant themes emerged in the analysis: acculturation as a reciprocal process, belonging in both cultures, and ethnic pride as a means of reducing mother–daughter conflict.

Acculturation as a reciprocal process. An important theme in the data was the daughters’ perception that they influenced their mothers’ acculturation as much as the mothers influenced theirs. For example, daughters agreed that their mothers encouraged them to maintain key Salvadorian values and to behave in accordance with Salvadorian traditions, but also to do well in school as a means of achieving economic success. The daughters, in turn, stated they were influencing their mothers in terms of understanding the English language, the Canadian way of life, and the challenges the daughters encountered in the “outside world” (at school and with friends). The following comment by a 15-year-old highlights what most of the daughters said about this process:

I taught my mother how to read the school’s report cards. She didn’t know that, because in El Salvador the system is 1–10, and here it’s out of 100. My mom did not understand that, but now she knows. The only problem with this is that she asks me questions about it and sometimes I get in trouble!

The daughters noticed their mothers became empowered when the daughters helped them to learn about the Canadian educational system.
In this reciprocal process, daughters opened the space for their mothers to regain their sense of authority in the mother–daughter relationships.

_Belonging in both cultures._ Although daughters did acknowledge the tension and conflict that mothers talked about, most expressed a sense of belonging to both Canadian and Salvadorian cultures. Daughters’ sense of belonging varied but was closely related to what their mothers supported. In fact, most daughters felt that although they went to school or worked in mainstream society, they belonged more to Salvadorian culture. Others felt a strong sense of connection to both Salvadorian and Canadian culture. This sense of belonging did not involve embracing every aspect of each culture. Rather, the daughters talked about appreciating some specific dimensions of each.

With respect to Canadian culture, daughters commented favourably on belonging to a society where women’s and children’s rights, safety, freedom of speech, and opportunities for education were valued. They felt less appreciative of the distance they perceived to exist between family members in many Canadian families. They also expressed concerns about the sexual freedom of young people in Canadian culture. With respect to Salvadorian culture, they expressed a sense of belonging to the wider Latino community, and they appreciated the strong loyalty among family members. The connection with each culture was not always equal. For most of the daughters, their sense of belonging to the Salvadorian culture was greater. Only two daughters expressed more connection to Canadian culture. In all cases, the daughters appeared to have developed a kind of double consciousness and cultural fluidity regarding their place in the transnational world.

_Canadian sense of belonging._ A few daughters talked about their strong sense of loyalty to Canada and feeling of belonging in Canadian society. They did so because they felt confident with their education and in knowing their way around Canadian society, but most of all they felt that their mothers supported them in their endeavours. Nora, a college student, highlighted this issue:

My mom always said, “You should be able to do whatever Canadian girls your age are able to do.” She also said, “Why should you expect less of yourself when you see all these people getting ahead.” Like she was also trying to say “study, go to school, don’t stay behind.” School has always been important for my mom. I am Canadian all the way! I come from a different culture and I value that culture, like my family. My family is the most important thing in the world for me…. I do treasure the fact that there are a lot of hard-working people there [in El Salvador]. I still have family there and therefore I do feel attached to it.

Nora has embraced her mother’s teachings about valuing education while at the same time remaining rooted in her family and culture. Her sense of pride in belonging to Salvadorian culture is evident. Yet she also
identifies as “Canadian all the way.” Her double consciousness has allowed her to draw upon both her Salvadorian heritage and her Canadian sense of belonging to get ahead in Canadian society, and thus to gain a sense of fluidity in both cultures.

All the daughters commented on the importance of obtaining higher education in order to belong in the Canadian culture. They noted how finishing high school and attending college not only allowed them to learn about Canadian life, but also provided them with a better income. Rosa, an adult daughter, described how participating in the rapid pace of Canadian society contributed to her sense of belonging:

I tried to [belong] by getting an education. The way life is here, like work and life here is go, go, go, go…. Like I went to college and I went to live there because it was three hours from here. Also here one has more independence and freedom to go to parties and all…. I have a career that allows me to have flexible hours and a decent living.

Rosa’s narrative highlighted the feelings of several adult daughters. Their sense of successful acculturation emerged not only from attending college, but also from being employed in the Canadian mainstream economy and achieving middle-class status. It is important to note that Rosa’s mother supported her in going away to college. As daughters became exposed to education, they also welcomed practices that supported their freedom, personal growth, and sense of belonging. Several daughters appreciated their newly gained awareness of children’s rights and women’s rights—but for them, women’s rights tended to stop short of sexual freedom.

Salvadorian ethnic pride and sense of belonging. Most daughters had a sense of pride regarding Latino culture in general. Several daughters talked about eating Salvadorian traditional foods and learning to dance to Latino music. For most daughters, the presence and active role of other family members was a positive feature in developing pride and a sense of belonging. An adult daughter commented on how she learned about her Salvadorian roots from her grandmother:

I think I learned to be proud of my roots from my grandmother. She was so strong in her beliefs that even though we were growing up here, we continued being Salvadorians. We grew up knowing that we were Salvadorians. We all feel 100% Salvadorian!

Grandmothers’ support was significant in instilling Salvadorian pride across generations. Other daughters noted being connected to the Salvadorian community locally and abroad as a way of maintaining ethnic pride. An adolescent daughter observed that her connection to El Salvador came through her emotional bond with family members and friends living in Canada and in their country of origin:
I do feel very Salvadorian because I am. I wouldn’t want to feel any
other way. I love my family. I love my country because that’s where I
was born. I have many Salvadorian friends here [Canada] and there [El
Salvador]. We hang out together and go to the Salvadorian activities
together too. I talk very often with many of my friends in El Salvador
too.

For this participant, being connected to and socializing with members of
her ethnic community was key in developing her sense of Salvadorian
ethnic identity. As noted in the quote, her transnational sense of identity
is beginning to emerge.

Most daughters interviewed indicated a desire to teach their future
offspring about their ethnic roots. The following comment is an example
of how another adolescent daughter foresees the fostering of ethnic
pride in her future children:

If I ever get married I’d like to tell my kids the stories that my mom
told me, like the Salvadorian legends La Ziguanaba or El Zipitio. I’d
try to bring them to El Salvador so they would know where they came
from, our land…. So they’d get to know the family too. I’d teach them
Spanish too so they would have two languages.

Daughters developed a sense of urgency regarding their own lives and
the aspects of their heritage they would pass on to their children. Story-
telling seemed to be a very important aspect of fostering ethnic pride
across generations. It is noteworthy that this particular daughter is plan-
ing to replicate some key aspects of Salvadorian oral traditions, hence
participating in the construction of collective and historical memory
across generations and geographical contexts.

Ethnic pride: Reducing mother–daughter conflict. With one exception,
all the daughters were aware that being Salvadorians set them apart
from the rest of their peers. They talked about how mothers evoked their
ethnic pride in order to settle their disagreements about “inappropriate”
behaviours. One 15-year-old daughter remarked:

It used to happen during the summer, [conflict] like, “Why can’t I be
outside longer, everybody else is out.” When she didn’t let me go back
out like the other kids, she would tell me that I couldn’t do that because
I was Salvadorian…. I got mad because I saw the other girls going out
until 12…. It got better once she explained it to me and I understood
what she meant and why she was doing it. Like she is only trying to pro-
tect me from rumors about me. Like people would start talking bad
about me…. It got better after that. I don’t ask anymore, so we don’t
argue about it anymore.
One adult daughter noted the mother–daughter conflict that occurred with regard to socializing in “questionable places”:

At that age [adolescence] I used to babysit a lot because this woman used to go out at night a lot…. I remember that sometimes that was the only sleepover that I had…. Like some of my friends used to go play billiards, but I couldn’t do that…. My mother did not like that. She said, “You’re Salvadorian, remember that.” So I didn’t. She was very strict…. I didn’t understand, but when she told me why she was doing it—like she said, “In our culture women don’t do those sorts of things because they look bad. People will think that you are an indecent woman”—I didn’t like it, but I understood it.

Daughters viewed their mothers’ references to their ethnic heritage as a way to remind them they were different from their Canadian-born peers. This difference was constructed as something positive that they needed to hold on to; something that set them apart from their Canadian peers. When daughters accepted this difference as positive, they embraced their ethnic roots and resigned themselves to letting go of some aspects of Canadian culture. They realized some of the practices that are considered normal and acceptable for young women in Canadian society are not necessarily appropriate for “decent” Salvadorian women. At the same time, they embraced the many opportunities to pursue higher education as a way to achieve social and economic integration into Canadian society.

*Daughters’ views: “Familismo” as a core value.* The daughters’ comments regarding familismo provide a complex picture regarding value transmission across generations. Daughters saw themselves as active participants in carrying on the value of familismo to future generations born in Canada. All 22 daughters appeared to be as committed as their mothers to this generational transfer. Daughters commented that their strong views on familismo were the result of their mothers’ teachings. Several adult daughters I talked with, who were mothers themselves, indicated they also wanted to teach their children the value of family unity, closeness, and loyalty. Elizabeth highlighted the commitment of all daughters in my conversation with her:

I’d say that I have a lot of values that my mom taught me. She taught me about familismo, and I’d definitely teach my daughter about familismo. I value my family. I’d teach my daughter that, but I’d like to have strong communication with her. I want to be close to my daughter.

Elizabeth, like other daughters, echoed what the mothers had said about familismo as a resource for family members. They too viewed familismo as a survival mechanism in times of hardship that allows the family unit to bounce back when it is threatened, whether by economic, emotional, or societal challenges.
Discussion

The findings confirmed that migration to a new country brings struggles and stresses due to the multiple changes an individual can experience while integrating in the new country (Berry, 1992, 2006). Moreover, they highlight the intergenerational conflict that tends to occur during this time (Phinney et al., 2000) as a result of value transmission. However, the findings indicate that this process is not unilinear (Berry et al., 2002) or a step-by-step process (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). It is multidimensional and filled with nuances, and can bring about tensions and frustrations to all the people involved and across generations and the family lifespan.

Gender appears to permeate this process. Tensions seem to be crucial in the attainment of a double consciousness for second-generation Salvadorians who are female. The practices that mothers defended as “cultural customs and traditions” were in line with maintaining the gender dominance of their country of origin. They were all related to keeping the daughters’ “decency” intact by reducing “el que dirán” [what people will say]. Thus to this extent “el que dirán” keeps both mothers and daughters from challenging gender prescribed practices, and serves as a means of controlling Salvadorian women’s behaviours and promoting gender exclusion.

The findings indicate that mothers’ political ideation, shared ethnic pride, and support networks are important mediating factors in the mother–daughter negotiation. Mothers with progressive political knowledge and militant experience in the Salvadorian uprising were more articulate and passionate in labeling the process. The strategies they used could be described as political, such as raising their daughters’ consciousness regarding Salvadorians’ historical oppression. Mothers with less political involvement and more conservative ideas were still committed to teaching their daughters about historical consciousness, but they did so without politicizing them. These mediating factors not only smooth the process, but also set the limits on the degree of “Canadianization” that is acceptable to both mothers and daughters. Furthermore, the mothers in this study perceived that by obtaining higher education their daughters would have better employment opportunities and higher incomes. Meanwhile, the survival of the family as a unit rested on them maintaining their daughters’ place in the family and enhancing their sense of ethnic pride or positive feelings toward their ethnic group (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2002). There seemed to be a significant tension between the mothers’ two main goals. Economic incorporation through higher education often contradicted the second goal of maintaining strong family connections and loyalties. This tension was reduced by shared ethnic pride in all but one of the mother–daughter pairs who were interviewed individually and jointly. (The remaining pair continued to experience intense, unresolved conflict.)
Overall, ethnic pride seems to have several functions. First, it appeared to reduce the tension between the pursuit of higher education (the freedom and sense of independence this may bring) and familismo, because it supported both of these somewhat contradictory ideals. Second, it supported daughters as they negotiated the process of living between two worlds (Menjivar, 2002), developed bicultural competencies (Falicov, 1998), and acquired fluidity between cultures (Harwood & Feng, 2006). Third, it provided daughters with a sense of belonging and security that prepared them to face the challenges of acculturation, such as prejudice. Fourth, it allows practitioners and researchers to view familial conflict as something beneficial that brings about transformation for both mothers and daughters as they set out to reconstruct their differences as something positive. When daughters were recruited into embracing ethnic pride, it became a shared feature of their relationship. This characteristic joined mothers and daughters together at the core in navigating the hazards of their cultural transition into the Canadian context and in a transnational arena. Ethnic pride and familismo may be experienced differently according to the gender of the individual within the family unit, as both mothers and daughters talked briefly about how boys were accorded more privileges and much more freedom than girls.

The findings draw attention to the importance of religious affiliation in the acculturation process of Salvadorians. Religious congregations, regardless of faith, provided the mothers with specific resources, whose benefits included socializing within the settlement society for both mothers and daughters, as well as the acquisition of language skills. These congregations also allowed them to reconstruct their lost networks after migration and enhanced their sense of belonging to Canadian society, yet they also heightened mother–daughter conflicts. Disparate and contradictory as this strategy may be, the mothers’ sense of agency in ensuring their daughters’ successful cultural transition took precedence over their conflict. Such a strategy highlights their resilience, and the fact that they are not passive recipients of what is to come in their new home.

The findings also draw attention to the relational aspects of acculturation, in particular the primary relationships within the family. Change is negotiated in the context of the family, and at times involves tension or conflicts between family members who are affected by differential commitment to the culture of origin. For immigrants such as the Salvadorians in this study, the family needs to be conceptualized broadly to include not only the nuclear group but also the extended family, and even the deceased. The findings of this study heightened the significant influence that historical markers (e.g., historical oppression and colonization) have on the acculturating family, and suggest that other acculturation researchers should consider the unit of analysis more broadly than just the immigrant parents and their children in the settlement country. The inclusion of a transnational and historical perspective opens
up the possibility of including not only those family members living in the settlement country but also those living abroad.

Implications

The findings of this study bring about some practice implications. Conflict due to acculturation differences is an arduous process for all involved. Depending on the history of the relationship, it can also be a transformative process. In the case of immigrants or refugee families, conflict may be due to differences in the level of commitment to maintaining the gendered practices of the country of origin, and to the parents’ resistance to the receiving country’s way of life. Immigrant youth often find themselves at a difficult junction—their parents’ way or the receiving country’s way, and in some cases an impasse (Suarez-Orozco & Todovora, 2003). The practitioner’s role needs to be geared to the opening of spaces for dialogue, giving special attention to the common threads among individual family members, and thus providing support for the construction of their collective narrative. All the involved family members must have the opportunity to hear each other’s account.

Refugees and immigrants bring trauma, losses, and limited luggage. They also bring an unlimited history of resiliency and resistance to oppressive circumstances (Carranza, 2008a). Immigrant parents’ experiences are filled with stories, which provide them with wisdom and with a sense of continuation. As the findings show, these stories serve as frameworks for their meaning-making process and for developing the necessary strategies to support their children’s integration within the settlement country’s economy. Listening to their stories will provide the practitioner with abundant knowledge about how things came to be and the meaning attached to immigrant youth’s behaviours or actions.

Canadian educational systems need to endorse supportive and understanding educational policies for immigrant children. There is a need for inclusion policies that will decrease immigrant students’ marginalization. These may encompass conceptualizing “difference” as something positive and worthy of being celebrated, beyond ethnic food and cultural competence (Roysircar, 2003). Resources and higher awareness of the extra tensions and responsibilities that immigrant youth bring with them to school are necessary. The students’ successes, struggles, and failures need to be understood in light of the resources (or lack thereof) made available to them in order to attain their goal of pursuing higher (than their parents’) education.

Immigrant parents and their children need access to language support systems such as English as a Second Language classes as a means to ensure their success in higher education and their economic integration into the settlement country. Access to meaningful employment provides the necessary financial stability that help overcome the challenges
that immigrant parents and their children face. Access is pivotal as immigrants face these challenges while simultaneously negotiating their cultural transition and the family’s normal life stages of development in a foreign country.

A potential struggle that we all must face is that of maintaining personal biases in check so as not to impose an assimilationist ideology on immigrant children and their parents. Service users, because of their desperation and vulnerability at the time, tend to bestow service providers with great authority and power. Practitioners must therefore protect against replicating dominant practices in the privacy of the conversations we hold.

NOTE

1 According to the dominant discourse, Nahualth was only spoken in certain parts of Mexico, and became extinct several centuries ago. However, this language has been spoken in El Salvador and other Central American countries in the centuries since the Spaniards’ conquest and colonization. The Indigenous people, however, refuse to speak it with “outsiders.” In fact, the author’s paternal great-grandmother would speak fluent Nahualth only in the privacy of her home and with trusted family members.

REFERENCES


