

Grandparents Across the Ocean: Eastern European Immigrants' Struggle to Maintain Intergenerational Relationships

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INTRODUCTION

Advancements in phone and internet communication, affordable transportation, dual citizenship, and globalization of the world distinguish modern immigrants from those of centuries past when immigration involved the probability that an emigrating person would never see her loved ones again. Indeed, historically speaking, many departures to the U.S. were viewed by families as funerals (Boss, 1999). Today, more and more individuals around the globe are engaged in migration to enhance their welfare, and it is thought that the number of transnational families (families that maintain significant contact with two or more countries) will only continue to increase (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Sherif Trask, Hamon, and Hepp, 2006). Despite the debate over the novelty of the phenomenon of "transnationalism" (e.g., Morawska, 2007), it is indisputable that the integrated economies of today allow for much greater transnational activity, and offer "an attractive, and at times, deceiving, imagined possibility of living with two hearts rather than with one divided heart" (Falicov, 2005, p. 399).

The aim of this exploratory study is to investigate whether this possibility of "emotional transnationalism" is realized by contemporary immigrants. Based on a purposefully selected group of highly educated, middle-class, ethnically white, legal immigrants to the U.S., we seek to understand these families' experiences, as they try to maintain intergenerational relationships across significant distances. The present study offers answers to the following specific questions: How do contemporary Eastern European immigrants define their family? What effect does living in distant countries have on the relationships across three generations? What are some specific strategies the participants employ to maintain relationships with grandparents and extended family? Finally, how do they resolve the losses of immigration, and negotiate living in multiple environments?

Contributions of the Present Study

Most recent studies of immigrants in the U.S. have focused on the two largest immigrant groups, those from Latin America and those from Asia. Little research has been done with the less visible but substantial population of immigrants from Eastern Europe, which increased

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after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Communist regime in Eastern Europe. From 1987 to 2001, there was almost a six-fold increase in the number of Eastern European immigrants admitted for legal permanent residence in the U.S. (Robila, 2007). During that time, four Eastern European countries (Russia, Poland, Ukraine, and Bosnia-Herzegovina) were mentioned on the annual U.S. lists of the top ten immigrant-sending countries. Yet the research on this group of immigrants remains limited.

In addition, "from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, worldwide about one third of all legal immigrants to the U.S." (with the exception of dependents) were high status professionals—"brain drain" immigrants. In 1993 this number was as high as 34% (Rumbaut, 1997, p. 20). Due to their inconspicuous and virtually problem-free presence in the receiving country, the experiences of this "invisible" group of immigrant professionals received little attention from researchers. At the same time, we know much about the experiences and struggles of recent lower income immigrants, most of whom come from Latin America and Asia (e.g., Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The current study is focused on those who belong to *both* of these understudied groups: (a) immigrants from Eastern Europe, who are also (b) in the professional ranks.

EASTERN EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.S.

In contrast to the "huddled masses" coming through Ellis Island over a hundred years ago (Gabaccia, 2007; Handlin, 1951), a large proportion of recent immigrants to the U.S. from Eastern European countries are young, college-educated people searching for economic opportunities that the disintegrated economies of the former communist states do not provide (Ispa-Landa, 2007; Roberts, Clark, Fagan, and Tholen, 2000). Most of these immigrants have succeeded financially and integrated into American society well, while maintaining contact with their families in their countries of origin by exchanging phone calls, e-mails, and visits.

As Ispa-Landa (2007) notes, despite their many differences, people from Central and Southeastern Europe "are united by their collective history of incorporation into the Soviet sphere of influence" and its subsequent collapse (p. 433). The transition from a centrally-planned economy to a market-oriented economy resulted in high rates of unemployment and poverty, leading to the overall deterioration of living conditions. These changes profoundly affected many, especially researchers and scientists, whose educations became obsolete as their planned careers disappeared (Roberts et al., 2000). For example, in 1990, the average monthly wage for professors and researchers in Bulgaria was around \$50 (Ispa-Landa, 2007). Consequently, many people from the former Communist block used their newly acquired freedom of movement to leave their homeland in search of better life elsewhere (Roberts et al., 2000; Robila, 2004).

Although the participants of the present study are highly educated, it is important to note that overall, Eastern European immigrants coming to the U.S. have higher educational attainment than immigrants from other regions; they also have a median income well above the national median for all foreign-born Americans (e.g., Gold, 2007; Ispa-Landa, 2007; Robila, 2007). Gold (2007) provides U.S. Census data from 2000, showing that 60% of former USSR-born immigrants hold a bachelor's degree or higher (versus 26% of all foreign-born people),

and 73% of USSR-born immigrants are in professional occupations as compared to 54% of all foreign-born people. Also, as a result of USSR's egalitarian educational system, 67% of ex-Soviet women in the U.S. "had been engineers, technicians, or other kinds of professionals before migration" in contrast with only 16.5% of American women in similar occupations in the 1980s (Gold, 2007, p. 586). In 2000, 41% of foreign-born Bulgarians and Romanians in the U.S. were occupying professional positions and 18% were in sales and office work (Ispalanda, 2007). Undoubtedly, there are other, less successful stories of adaptation by immigrants from Eastern Europe. However, the hopes for economic prosperity in the U.S. for this group of immigrants have generally materialized. Thus, although the participants of the present study are not representative of all immigrants from Eastern European countries, they are representative of many. In addition, considering that about one third of all legal immigrants to the U.S. are professionals (Rumbaut, 1997), the present study may begin to address the shortage of research on immigrant professionals and their adaptation to life in a new country.

Eastern European Family Values and Practices

From the collection of chapters in an edited volume on Eastern European families by Robila (2004), one can discern that in spite of their diversity, there are many similarities among the families of Eastern Europe in terms of their home lives, their parenting practices, and the high value they place on extended and kin family connection and interdependence. In another volume, Lobodzinska (1995) reminds us that "the nuclear family concept does not pertain to the Eastern European family in the same sense as it is applied to the Western family structure" (p. 271). Family unity and cooperation among family members and across generations were, and continue to be, vital for family survival. Under the Communist regime, many young couples shared a household with their parents, especially in the first years of marriage, because, to be eligible to receive an apartment from the state, one had to be married with children (Marikova, 2004). In some cases, it took years to be allocated an apartment (children born to the couple might well be teenagers by that time), and three generations were often forced to reside together in small apartments (Roberts et al., 2000).

Today, regardless of whether or not married adult children share a residence with their parents, family ties continue to be important (Gold, 2007; Zhurzhenko, 2004). Assistance flows both ways between the generations, due in part to low-quality of childcare, shortage of housing, and a scarcity of services for the seniors, children, and families (Lobodzinska, 1995; Roberts et al., 2000).

Grandparents' Involvement with Grandchildren

Regardless of the political regime and economic situation, Eastern European families have relied heavily on help from extended family and grandparents. In Eastern Europe, as a result of the state's promotion of the "employed mother" ideal (Adler, 2002; Staykova, 2004), the vast majority of families consist of dual-earner spouses. Although the government provided a family support system by means of a network of inexpensive child-care centers, in many families with young children, grandparents took the responsibility for day-to-day childcare (Bronfenbrenner, 1970; Pearson, 1990). A strong tradition of support from grandparents, especially grandmothers, helped and continues to help young parents in Eastern Europe

balance work and family, and simply survive. For example, in the 1970s, in almost 60% of Bulgarian families with infants under 3 years of age, grandparents provided childcare while the parents worked; similar arrangements existed in 45% of families with children aged 3-7 (Staykova, 2004). In the 1990s, during the economic crisis in Ukraine, it was reported that "more than 60% of young families receive[d] regular financial support from the parents, 2/3 receive[d] food and consumption goods, more than 1/3 [got] help in solving housing problem, and 60-70% of the young families [got] regular help in the household" (Zhurzhenko, 2004, p. 196). The continued exchange of services between the generations and the active involvement of grandparents in child care may help explain why no "generation gap" was recorded in studies of intergenerational transmission of social values (Lobodzinska, 1995).

Grandparents and Adult Children

A cultural practice of parents supporting their adult children for as long as they are capable is counterbalanced by a strong tradition in Eastern Europe of respecting one's elders and an "intergenerational obligation of care of older generations" (Robila and Krishnakumar, 2003, p. 31). Also, the pensions that older adults receive are miserably low, and social services and facilities for seniors do not exist in sufficient quantity and quality (Marikova, 2004). Usually, families take care of their aging family members; placing aging parents in nursing homes is considered shameful. Thus, socio-economic conditions, insufficient supports for young families with children and the seniors, and cultural practices all help explain the strong mutual reliance between the generations in many Eastern European nations. Immigrant parents, however, do not have access to this cohesive intergenerational alliance in which they were raised.

It has been well documented that a transition from the collectivistic culture to a more individualistic one is difficult for immigrants but that immigrants' adaptation to a new host country is eased by the availability and use of social support (Bush, Bohon, and Kim, 2005). For immigrants from Eastern Europe, social and childrearing support from the grandparents and extended family is often cited as the most important factor in the process of adaptation (Kovalchik, 1996; Robila, 2004, 2007).

ACCULTURATION AND FAMILY RELATIONS

Maintaining intergenerational relations and family continuity is challenging for transnational families. Immigration has a strong potential to loosen family ties and to disrupt intergenerational relations and the transmission of native language and culture to the younger generation (Becker, Beyene, Newsom, and Mayen, 2003; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Some scholars describe acculturation to the dominant American culture as "the erosion of traditional cultural language, values, and practices" and find that it negatively impacts intergenerational relationships (Silverstein and Chen, 1999, p. 196). Such processes have been documented primarily among groups of immigrants from Asia and Latin America, characterized by collectivistic values which often clash with the more individualistic values of the U.S. (Bush et al., 2005).

Immigrant families represent numerous political, occupational, and religious groups, and may have very different experiences in adapting to the host country (Rumbaut, 1997). Despite diversity among immigrants, however, the majority of them come from collectivistic cultures that value extended family ties (Bush et al., 2005). Although not all transnational families yearn for their countries of origin the vast majority of first-generation immigrants feel strongly attached to their home countries, miss their extended families and friends, and try to maintain connection via phone calls, e-mails, and visits (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002). Many experience the strain and stress of "ambiguous loss," which occurs when physically absent family members continue to be psychologically present in the minds and hearts of the first generation immigrants (Boss, 1999, 2002).

Life-cycle changes involving births, illnesses, and deaths back in their native land may be particularly painful for immigrants who are left to cope or grieve without their family members. Many have feelings of profound sadness, despair, and guilt over not being "home," and not visiting more often (Falicov, 2003). Even positive events such as births may carry an underlying pain without the rest of the family present to share the joy. As Bryceson and Vuorela's (2002) edited volume on transnational families explains, these families are forced to "deal with life-cycle change over a broader geographical space" (p. 266). In spite of their challenges, many transnational families seem to learn to live in an ambiguous situation and try to make the best of living "in two worlds" (Falicov, 2003). The present study investigates some specific strategies these families use to maintain their membership in multiple worlds and how they facilitate intergenerational relationships across significant distances.

METHOD

Many scholars advocate postpositivistic thinking and opt to forgo quantitative measures in favor of qualitative research methods that facilitate the study of culturally diverse families in the *context* of their social environment (Boss, 2002; Patton, 2002). Qualitative methodologies can allow one to paint a vivid picture of the family by presenting narratives that capture the insights, meanings, conflicts, emotions, and motivations of its members (Ambert, Adler, Adler, and Detzner, 1995). Asking research participants open-ended questions gives them a "voice" to describe their lived experience of immigration and parenting (Sussman and Gilgun, 1997).

No one member of any family is a sufficient source of information about that family; we can better understand family life from the perspectives of *multiple* members (Handel, 1997). Our approach of interviewing both spouses allowed us to generate triangulated perspectives (i.e., wife report, husband report, and interviewer's observations) on family life, as recommended by Patton (2002). We used a qualitative, narrative-based approach to interviewing that urged the participants to respond to questions by *telling stories about their lived experiences*, as opposed to simply offering opinions and thoughts. A joint-interview approach also provided the researcher an opportunity to be a witness as couples co-created meaning through narratives. We are aware, however, that many scholars advocate for *individual* interviews to obtain more candid and honest responses, and to minimize issues of gender and power. We see these concerns as valid and address them by having a female interviewer, who encouraged wives and husbands to take turns responding to every question and to add to the other's response.

Sample Description

The purpose of the larger study from which these data were drawn was to examine the experiences of immigrant professionals from Eastern Europe raising children in a new sociocultural environment of the United States. We recruited participants for the study through a combination of newspaper advertising, personal contacts, and snowball sampling. The criteria for participation were: (1) first generation immigrants from Eastern European countries; (2) married couples with children; (3) a professional occupation for at least one of the spouses; and (4) a minimum length of residency in the United States of five years to ensure familiarity with U.S. culture. We purposively sampled because of gaps in the literature regarding both highly-educated immigrants and immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Twenty four immigrant parents (12 married couples) participated in the study. The following Eastern European countries were represented by the participants: Romania (4 couples), Russia (3), Bulgaria (2), Ukraine (1), Belarus (1), and Bosnia (1). These families had resided in the U.S. between 5 and 15 years ($M = 10$ years); and did not migrate serially (in all but two instances, the spouses came to the U.S. at the same time). Participants were geographically mobile and had lived in a total of 17 different U.S. states, but, at the time they were interviewed, the majority of the families resided in a southern state. Fathers were between 34 and 44 years old ($M = 38$); mothers were between 33 and 42 years old ($M = 37$). The couples had been married 10 to 22 years ($M = 14$). Seven families had two children, and five families had one child. In total, these 12 married couples had 19 children (7 girls and 12 boys), 10 of whom were born in the United States. Children's ages ranged from 1 to 21 years old ($M = 9$). Children were not interviewed for this study.

All participants had earned degrees in higher education: 15 PhD, one MD, six MSW/MA/MS/MBA, and two BS degrees. All graduate degrees were obtained at U.S. universities. Half of the participants were professors, instructors, or postdoctoral researchers at universities. The remaining participants were employed in industry (4), business (4), medicine (2), or non-profit organizations (2). All couples except one were dual-career families whose reported combined family income was relatively high—over \$100,000 for eight couples, around \$80,000 for three couples, and \$40,000 for one couple (due to temporary unemployment).

Data Collection and Analysis

In-depth personal interviews were conducted in 2005 and 2006 by the first author. Prior to the interview, each participant signed a consent form and filled out a demographic information sheet. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Both spouses were interviewed together; each spouse gave his/her answer to each question, alternating the order of the first response. Interviews were audio recorded.

A total of 20 open-ended interview questions were asked, although none were specifically about grandparents. The theme of grandparents emerged in the process of the interviews, often in response to the following questions: 1) What would you say your family lost and gained as a result of the immigration? 2) Are there any traditions from your native culture that you find beneficial for your parenting? How do they help? 3) What are the challenges of

having your children grow up in the U.S.? 4) What language do you speak at home? How important is it to you to have your children know your native language?

Following verbatim transcription, the interviews were analyzed in a manner consistent with grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Open coding and axial coding were performed to identify the most salient and frequently mentioned themes. We will present four of these themes in this paper.

Researchers' biases tend to influence data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reported results (Patton, 2002; Sussman and Gilgun, 1997). Accordingly, reflexivity provides an important check and balance. In this spirit, the first author is an Eastern European immigrant (Ukraine) and a married mother. Her "insider" status helped participants feel more comfortable when discussing their experiences and facilitated recruitment of the participants. The second author, a married father, offered an alternative perspective as a U.S. native.

FINDINGS

We will present four core themes from our qualitative data. These themes include:

Theme 1. The definition of "family" and the importance of extended family ties: *"The relationships are tighter knit than those in the U.S."*

Theme 2. The role of grandparents in childrearing: *"Who else do you think is more appropriate?"*

Theme 3. The strategies of maintaining intergenerational relationships: *"I want my son to know his predecessors' language."*

Theme 4. The stress of being torn between two worlds: *"I don't want to be happy at the expense of my extended family."*

Theme 1. The definition of "family" and importance of extended ties: *"The relationships are tighter knit than those in the U.S."*

Consistent with existing literature (Lobodzinska, 1995; Robila, 2003, 2004), our qualitative data indicate that immigrants from Eastern Europe define "family" broadly. They consider their family to include not only nuclear but also extended family members such as parents, siblings, grandparents, cousins, uncles, aunts, and other relatives who often reside in the countries of origin thousands of miles away. The responses of the participants point to the importance and a continued involvement of extended family members. The culture of origin is not relinquished upon immigration to the U.S. and continues to influence these immigrants' values, beliefs, and behaviors. Before answering an interview question regarding the gains and losses of immigration for their family, some participants first elaborated on what "family" meant to them. As Daniel¹ explains below, the gains and losses of immigration depend on the definition of "family."

¹ All names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

In Romania, we understand family as me, my wife, children, *and* our parents and relatives. That's a big family. So, if you include those [family members as well], then the answer would be different [as to] what the gains and losses are.

The gains of immigration turned out to be for the immediate family only: an improved economic situation, a more comfortable lifestyle, obtaining a graduate degree, an opportunity to engage in science, having an interesting job, and providing children with a safe environment and opportunities for the future. At the same time, extended family ties and connections were sacrificed. The participants unanimously cited decreased connection and interaction with extended family, especially their children's grandparents, as the biggest immigration-related loss. The significance of such loss can be better comprehended when we consider the level of involvement of the extended family and the role of the Eastern Europeans grandparents in childrearing. Sergiu said:

The major difference is that in [Eastern Europe], parenting is supported by the extended family. [The relationships] are tighter knit than those in the U.S. Grandparents, godparents, uncles, cousins—they all help in raising children.

Making a comparison between the parent-child relationship in the U.S. and in their home countries, study participants mentioned that an additional cultural difference was that in Eastern Europe, parents' close involvement in children's lives does not end when a child turns 18. Parents continue to support their adult children and are directly involved throughout the children's life. It is expected that adult children in Eastern European countries will ask for help from parents, including extensive childcare. In return, aging parents are cared for by their children and are rarely placed in nursing homes due to the related stigma and a lack of proper facilities (Robila and Krishnakumar, 2003). A mother named Galina explained that

[In Bulgaria] parents are more involved, and for longer than [in the U.S.]. I think we are more informal with our parents. I would never be worried to ask my parents to do anything for me, any time, but here it is different. [In the U.S.], once you grow up you don't ask your parents [for much help].

The U.S. concept of independence, both as an ideal and in practice, is far less central for these families. Another participant shared a story, quite shocking to him, about an American friend who moved in with his parents (after the friend's home was destroyed by a hurricane) and was asked to pay rent. From the perspective of our Eastern European participants who are accustomed to three generations sharing a small apartment, the U.S. emphasis on residential and financial independence is, at best, odd.

Theme 2. The role of grandparents in childrearing: "Who else do you think is more appropriate?"

Traditionally, Eastern European grandparents are deeply involved in the upbringing of grandchildren (Robila, 2003; Zhurzhenko, 2004). Immigrants from Eastern Europe bring to their new country their values of respecting and relying on the support of the extended family and the grandparents. When asked broadly about childrearing traditions from their

home countries, the most frequently mentioned tradition was the involvement of extended family and the central role of grandparents in raising grandchildren. Despite the fact that these families moved thousands of miles away from their countries of origin (only 2 out of 12 families in the study have extended family members residing in the U.S.), many grandparents continue to be heavily involved in early childcare. Typically, when a new grandchild is born, grandparents come to the U.S. from Eastern Europe and stay for as long as their visitor's visa allows (usually 6 months at a time). Often, when a grandmother's time is up and she has to leave the U.S., another grandmother or a grandfather comes in her place. They "take turns," as described by Nicoleta.

Grandparents—that's a big [help in parenting]! Having grandparents involved in the family is so wonderful—for the grandparents, and for the kids. And you know that there is a relationship which is very strong which is forming. To help care for our daughter [when she was born] my Mom came for six months, and then my husband's Mom came for six months. And they took turns until she turned three. Who else do you think is more appropriate? This is it. I grew up with my parents, but every summer I would go to my grandmother, so she played a very important role in my life, and I want to have my Mom do the same for my daughter.

Another mother named Veronica similarly related:

My Mother was here when my son was born.... Then my aunt came, and then my in-laws. They all stayed here for extended period[s], for six months here. Not necessarily [just] to take care of the children, but to be with us. Because I was pretty much all the time at home, helping them, and being there. It was time with all of us, not with the children only.

It is important to note that the relationships with the grandparents are not trouble-free. One mother reported conflict with her mother-in-law and commented that heavy involvement of grandparents in the family lives of their children and grandchildren can be problematic in terms of blurred boundaries. While appreciating the contributions made by the grandparents to childrearing, she spoke about a preference for an American-style, independent nuclear family. As this example illustrates, immigrants' dual frame of reference influences their perceptions and allows them to compare the context of a new culture with the one they left behind. Participants shared their perception that in the U.S., families are valued in general and family reunions are popular but few grandparents provide care for grandchildren on a daily basis. Physical distance between family members, extreme emphasis on independence, a focus on one's own needs, and less integrated family relationships dominate in the U.S., as illustrated by these two quotes:

Ivana: Usually [in Bulgaria] the grandparents are *so* involved with their grandchildren, which is not very typical [in the U.S.]. Here, every immediate family is taking care of their problems and the grandparents are just taking the kids on the weekend for pizza [at] Chuck E. Cheese or something. But they are not so much involved in their daily upbringing.

Valentina: I don't know what is the reason but it seems like [American] grandparents try not to be very involved in the [lives of their children and grandchildren], and I think it's cultural. Usually, the grandparents don't help much with kids in the U.S. [like they do in Russia].

These two quotes represent the overall perception that the participants have of the role and involvement of American grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren. This kind of "recreational caregiving" by grandparents has been labeled as a "companionate relationship" by Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) and was found to be the dominant style in a sample of mostly White participants. Interestingly, the families in our study juxtaposed their collectivistic culture to a more individualistic culture of the mainstream White families, with whom they are often grouped due to a shared skin color. The reality is, however, that in their definitions of and the actions towards extended family, Eastern European families display an emphasis on strong intergenerational ties and interdependence. Subsequently, they are more similar in these ways to: (a) highly familial immigrants from Asia and Latin America, or (b) African American families who have a strong tradition of grandparents acting as parents and/or caregivers to grandchildren (Gibson, 2005).

Theme 3. The strategies to maintain intergenerational relationships: "I want my son to know his predecessors' language."

In this theme, we describe three specific strategies the participants utilize to maintain intergenerational relationships with extended family residing in Eastern Europe. These strategies (addressed here as sub-themes) include: (a) teaching children their native language; (b) exchanging visits and relocating; and (c) communication and story telling.

Strategy 1: Teaching children their native language.

The ability to speak the native language is extremely important because it allows children to communicate with their grandparents and extended family. The meaning and significance of maintaining ties with grandparents for these families cannot be overemphasized. Study participants indicated that maintaining their native language in their children is very important for family communication during occasional visits to their countries of origin, even if there are no other benefits from the knowledge. A mother named Ivana emphasized:

It is important. I've spoken to many other people who are bilingual. [Some say], "Why force [children] to speak [a] language they won't use?" But I disagree with this because maybe [our children] won't use this language, but their grandparents don't know English, and *just for this reason* I think that it is important for them to know Bulgarian. We've been to Bulgaria twice and [the kids] really enjoyed it, because here [in the U.S.] we don't have the extended family. So, just because of the communication when they go [to Bulgaria], they need to know Bulgarian.

Preserving their native language in children means a great deal to these immigrant parents. An "additive" approach to balancing two languages is more likely to be found among the immigrants of higher socioeconomic background, such as the participants in our study (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996). At the same time, the availability of ethnic community, extended

family and friends, and ethnic schools, which all serve as supports for native language maintenance, play very important role. Because many families of immigrant professionals do not reside in ethnic enclaves, their efforts to transmit native language to children often fail (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). In many cases, children increasingly answer in English, which has a profoundly sad impact on parents, as illustrated by the following mother's quote:

We never stopped talking Bulgarian at home, [both our sons] spent all the summer in Bulgaria with their grandparents, and [our younger son's] Bulgarian was pretty good. But since then he hasn't been exposed to too many Bulgarians... it would be easier if we had some other Bulgarian friends to speak with, but right now we don't. He understands everything we talk in Bulgarian, but he answers in English and *this breaks my heart*, because although he was born here in the States, *I want him to know his predecessors' language...*

We found a range of adaptations to native language maintenance among the participants of the study; those will be addressed in detail in subsequent publications. Relative to the current topic, we want to emphasize that participants of the study have a strong desire to keep the native language alive, primarily to stay connected with the grandparents and extended family. However, previous studies found that by age 18, second-generation bilingualism is an exceptional outcome (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

Strategy 2: Exchanging visits and relocating.

As described earlier, when a child is born in the U.S. to a transnational Eastern European family, in the majority of cases Eastern European grandparents are still present (to the degree possible) in the households to help with childcare during the early years. When children grow older, many parents also send children to their home countries for the summer to stay with the grandparents. With some variability due to individual differences and family circumstances, these transnational families and/or their children go to visit their countries of origin. Nicoleta explains:

We always keep in touch. Every year we go home and visit. And we talk a lot on the phone. We send [our daughter] to Romania, and have Grandma come here. [We are also] speaking Romanian and sharing our culture with our daughter so that she can appreciate that.

There were two families in the study whose grandparents and extended family immigrated and lived in the U.S., and the whole extended family chose to live in close proximity. In another family, parents sacrificed better paying jobs and living in a state with fewer attractions to provide their two children with frequent interactions with grandparents and extended family that lived in another region of the U.S.

Diana: In Romania, the family was called a "cell of the society" in the Communist system, and the family is very close back home. This is why we came to Louisiana, to have family for the kids. We could have stayed on the East coast and do[ne] probably better [financially]. We have been in Philadelphia and New York; you have much more to do there than what you have here. [But] the reason why we came here is for our

children to have a family, grandparents, and uncles. Otherwise we would be there alone, visiting things in New York and Philadelphia, not having anybody around for holidays or birthdays [and the] moments you want to share.

The choices that parents in these (and other) families make point to the commitment Eastern European immigrants have to maintaining intergenerational relationships. It is important to remember that travel between the continents is costly and also requires one to maintain legal status. These immigrants in professional ranks have sufficient financial resources to pay for travel expenses for themselves and for the grandparents, and are able to cross borders because they are present in the U.S. legally (initially on student or work visas, and later based on permanent residence, or, as was the case for about half of the participants, U.S. citizenship). Visiting is an effort to keep the ties strong.

Strategy 3: Communication and story sharing.

A third strategy of maintaining intergenerational relationships by the participants was communicating via telephone, e-mail, text messaging, and sending cards. Individual differences have to be acknowledged, with some participants calling or writing home more often than others. However, many shared that their attachment to the family members left behind continues to be strong, and plays a major role in their lives. One mother explained:

The relationships are very, very strong; we like to be very close to each other. Here, with our immediate family, and there, with an extended family. Mom, cousins, uncles, aunts—we do talk to them often, and we exchange e-mails. I want to know what is going on in their lives, and it just makes my day when I get an e-mail. Like my cousin e-mailed me, “This is the dream I had today, we were playing in our grandparents’ house...” My strength is to keep them all very close, to keep very close ties with my [extended] family.

Another way to promote continuity between generations was story sharing. Participants would tell stories to their children to help them better understand what the life was like for them and for their own parents, in the hope of preventing a “huge generation gap.”

Olga: We tell [our] children about what it was like when we were growing up. I tell them a lot of stories about my parents. We watch a lot of old Russian movies that tell them a lot about the atmosphere of when we were growing up, and I think that kind of [helps] a little bit.

By sharing stories about the past, immigrant parents attempt to create bridges with the present, a common ritual in many immigrant families that serves a dual purpose of helping families make sense of their experience, and helping them to postpone excessive Americanization (Falicov, 2003; 2005). Despite many efforts and strategies utilized by the immigrants to keep the extended family and native culture alive in the lives of their children, the process is a challenging one, as described in the following theme.

Theme 4. The stress of being torn between two worlds: "I don't want to be happy at the expense of my extended family."

Maintaining intergenerational relationships and a sense of cultural heritage in families residing in different countries and continents is difficult. The influences of the new host culture are potent and continuous. One of the challenges comes from the difficulty of preserving native language in children. As language is dying, children can become, in a sense, "strangers" to parents, even more so to grandparents. When a child loses his native language it is as if a parent is losing a part of her child and heritage.

Diana: [Our son and daughter] speak English to each other, or half-Romanian, half-English. When we went to visit my family [in Romania], my Mom couldn't understand them, they were talking half-and-half. And I felt so horrible... I saw that through my Mom's eyes, and... *you just don't get to them.* We don't realize it because we understand what they are saying, but for my mother, [the grandchildren] began to look strange.

The efforts of immigrant parents to keep the connections between grandchildren and grandparents may not fully succeed. Many parents expressed sorrow about the limited interactions their children have with their extended family and grandparents residing in Eastern European countries.

Vladimir: A disadvantage of having children grow up in America [is] keeping children so far away from their grandparents. [Although] there are contacts with grandparents; for example, our daughter was two times in Russia, but it was quite a short contact, three months and one month out of seven years. It doesn't really help to build relationships with grandparents; it is not a full relationship... [Unfortunately], there is more influence of the outer world, and less influence of the family world, our world.

In many families, grandparents were able to visit the U.S. and began building a relationship with their grandchildren. At some point, however, the dynamics of family life and changed circumstances prevented them from continued visits. Grandparents may have to deal with health problems. They also may need to help their other children with childcare. Their own aging parents may require care. Thus, immigrant families living in the U.S. tend to lose physical contact and support from grandparents as time progresses. This becomes a poignant challenge for immigrant parents, who are torn between wanting the best for their immediate family in the U.S., while craving contact and connection with extended family in Eastern Europe. Ivana, a working mother of two children, whose mother came from Bulgaria and stayed in the U.S. for several months after a grandson was born, tells about her dilemma of wanting to "keep" her mother:

It wouldn't be fair to my Mother, it wouldn't be fair to my brother and his new family to get [my Mother] here to help us...but we need her *so badly*. It's a double-edged sword. *I don't want to be happy at the expense of my extended family.* It is very difficult. There is so much guilt on my side. I was the person to say, "We can do [it],

maybe we can try to go to the U.S. and to see how it will be.” I feel so guilty; it’s like splitting the family. The attachment is so big there.

Other parents in the study shared their struggles of raising families in the U.S. without the support network they are accustomed to in Eastern Europe. One mother from Ukraine spoke about the daily uncertainty of whether she would be able to go to work or would have to stay home with a sick child. Oleg, a father from Russia, spoke about a lack of time to help children with schoolwork and brought up examples of immigrant families where children did well in school because grandparents *were* in the household. He added:

I think this is the greatest challenge once one comes into another country where you don’t have relatives. We don’t have anybody, so we cannot expect that we will get help from anybody. We have to rely on ourselves, and this takes a lot of time because there are a lot of things that we have to do.

As a response to a less collective lifestyle and diminished social support in the U.S., parents had to make adjustments and learn to become more autonomous and self-reliant. They also spoke about their desire to raise their children to be more independent because they perceived such qualities as especially important for successful adaptation in the United States. A mother named Galina explained:

[In the U.S.] parents take care of their kids, and are relying more on themselves. Back home parents rely more on help from others; to a great extent the grandparents take care [of the grandchildren]. And this changes the whole thing. That’s why here [in the U.S.] you try to make your children more independent, because you want them to be able to do things for themselves, because you don’t have time to do everything for them [and the grandparents aren’t around].

Although the American ideal of strong independence initially conflicts with the interdependent and collective visions of these Eastern European parents, there is some adaptation and accommodation, as we see in these families.

DISCUSSION

Maintaining intergenerational connections is very important for these immigrant parents from Eastern Europe. However, immigration and acculturation to the U.S., the distances between the continents, and family life-cycle changes make it challenging to maintain rich and meaningful relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. Despite their legal status in the U.S. and available financial resources for travel and communication, it is a continuous struggle for immigrant parents to keep their extended families physically and emotionally close. In terms of gender dynamics, the majority of comments about family relationships came from women, who seem to be more involved in maintaining relationships among the generations and countries, or seem more comfortable discussing these relationships. This is consistent with extant research indicating that “immigrant women are often charged with the responsibility of transmitting and maintaining ethnic traditions” and family relationships (Pesar, 2007, p. 265).

Beliefs and norms of the culture of origin continue to influence family processes and relationships of the transnational families. Immigrants accept changes in many aspects of their lives in the host country, but they often acculturate selectively and strive to retain their core values (e.g., Wakil, Siddique, and Wakil, 1981). Although geographic location and country of citizenship for some members of these transnational families change, a close and involved relationship remains, at least among first-generation immigrants. A multi-generational family structure, the co-parenting role of the grandparents, and narrow psychological space between family members found in this and other studies of Eastern European immigrants all represent a valuable resource and strength of these families (e.g., Kovalcik, 1996). Although first-generation immigrants do not relinquish their traditions upon immigration, future studies should look at their children, more assimilated second-generation immigrants, to understand the extent to which this cultural strength dissipates over time.

Overall, for these immigrant families from Eastern Europe, extended family ties are strong and significant. As much as circumstances allow, they continue maintaining relationships with extended family and arrange opportunities for their children to develop relationships with grandparents. In return, parents continue receiving help in childrearing from grandparents. In spite of advances in communication and travel, however, such collectivistic way of life is not always achievable for transnational families due to family life-cycle changes and significant distance. Living in a new environment makes immigrants realize the need to become more independent and self-reliant, and to raise their children that way.

Whether studying transnational families or providing them with services, it is essential to hear their family stories and to consider their lives as lived in multiple geographic locations: in the U.S. and "back home" (Falicov, 2005; Stone, Gomez, Hotzoglou, and Lipnitsky, 2005). Smaller scale qualitative interview research could greatly enhance our understanding of the culturally diverse families like those of the Eastern Europeans immigrant professionals addressed in this paper. When we focus on the participants' interpretations of their experiences and relationships, we gain insight into how these individuals and families create their lives within existing socio-historical constraints.

IMPLICATIONS

Another implication is that the term *Whites* has been and continues to be applied to Eastern European immigrants. However, this monolithic word masks the diversity that exists in terms of cultures, ethnicities, religions, and familial variations in this *non*-homogeneous group (Henderson, 2007). According to the findings of this study and consistent with the extant literature, for Eastern Europeans "the family" constitutes a large network that includes grandparents and extended kin relationships (e.g., Lobodzinska, 1995; Robila, 2004; Robila and Krishnakumar, 2004). In many ways, Eastern Europeans are quite similar to populations with strong intergenerational relations and extended family ties such as immigrants from Latin America and Asia (Becker et al., 2003; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) or African Americans (Hunter and Taylor, 1998; Taylor, Jackson, and Chatters, 1997). In fact, Eastern European immigrants are probably closer (in terms of familial values) to the aforementioned groups than to "White" Americans, with whom they are often grouped due to a shared skin color.

Gaining greater understanding of transnational families will assist human service professionals in their work and help create programs and interventions that would better suit these families' needs (Falicov, 2003, 2005). Family life educators may find the narratives shared by the participants to be effective teaching tools with various audiences, to help understand how immigrants' native language and ethnic identity dissipate through time and over generations, and what it means to them (Sherif Trask and Hamon, 2007).

In connection with families like these, mental health professionals should be aware of the existence of extended family that is more often physically absent, but psychologically present in the minds and hearts of many immigrants, thus representing an "ambiguous loss" (Boss, 1999). Practitioners should be aware of the frequent exchange of lengthy visits from the grandparents and visits of children to the parents' country of origin in many immigrant families. Viewed through a cultural lens, such active involvement of grandparents in the upbringing of grandchildren is not a sign of enmeshment or dysfunction, but rather a normative family practice for these families. When clinical intervention is needed, family-centered therapy is recommended over traditional, Western individual-focused therapy (McGoldrick, 2003; Pinderhughes, 1995).

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that, despite advances in communication and travel, and a strong desire for continuation of intergenerational relations in immigrant families, emotional transnationalism is an elusive goal. Participants shared that one of the biggest regrets of immigration was not having their extended family members around and not being part of the "big" family. These immigrant parents miss the instrumental and social support of the grandparents; moreover, they long for a comprehensive relationship across the generations to ensure family continuity. To compensate for this loss, immigrant parents strive to teach their children the native language, tell them stories about grandparents, and stay in touch via phone calls, e-mails, and visits to and from their countries of origin. However, these limited interactions do not allow for deep and continuous intergenerational relations, and they leave many immigrant parents disappointed.

Consistent with extant literature, this study illustrates that immigrant families are particularly vulnerable to the weakening of intergenerational ties because of cultural assimilation and change of values, as well as the gradual loss of native language and traditions in succeeding generations (e.g., Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Although transnationalism and advances in communication and travel may help slow traditional losses of immigration by promoting emotional transnationalism and intergenerational relationships (Falicov, 2005; Morawska, 2007), the phenomenon warrants further investigation with diverse populations.

In their classic study of American grandparenthood, Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) state that the three most important factors influencing the frequency of grandparent-grandchild contact are "distance, distance, and distance." Applied to the current study, we would like to add that "distance" can be manifold. More expressly, *geographical* distance, *linguistic* distance, and *cultural* distance are major challenges to the maintenance of intergenerational relationships among transnational Eastern European families. Immigration to the Land of

Opportunity expands some opportunities while it compresses others. In both cases, the context of family life (nuclear and extended) is altered in a complex interplay of gains and losses. Indeed, "every step forward is a step away from home" (Handlin, 1951, p. 258). These families are fighting a battle, sometimes winning, sometimes losing, to preserve close ties across generations, across languages, across cultures, and ultimately, across an ocean.

In the musical corpus of Peter Tchaikovsky, a gem of Eastern European culture, one finds both joyous waltzes written in major keys and sorrowful compositions in minor keys. Similarly, the story of the families in this study blends the hope-filled music of novel opportunity and freedom with that of a sorrowful familial and cultural loss. This blend leaves the listeners with a very distinct chord ringing in their ears—a dissonant and unresolved one.

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