HOW CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS USE MEDIA TO CONNECT THEIR FAMILIES TO THE COMMUNITY
The case of Latinos in South Los Angeles

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Past research on children and media exploring embedded patterns of domestic media connections has generally been limited to majority culture, middle-class families. This study explored how these dynamics are different in immigrant families, with particular focus on ways these children "broker" new and traditional media forms to connect their families to local resources and ultimately, contribute to their families' settlement. Utilizing Livingstone's domestic infrastructure as a heuristic tool, interviews with forty-two parents and children in an immigrant Latino community in Los Angeles revealed how families connect with and make sense of information about community resources and services, as a precursor to deciding where to go and who to trust in their local area. Understanding how children's media brokering activities link their families to their communities has wider application to the study of children, family, and media practices in other urban centers as population diversity continues to increase worldwide.

Introduction

Media researchers have long explored how individuals and families form everyday connections to media forms (Silverstone, 1994, 2005; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002), and how new media and communication technologies are introduced and integrated into existing media connection patterns (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Wilkin, Ball-Rokeach, Matsaganis, & Cheong, 2007) in public and private spaces. Livingstone (2002) emphasizes that families' interactions with media in their homes have become an enduring feature of modern life. She characterizes the home as a *domestic infrastructure*, proposing that:

> The diffusion and appropriation of media into the practices of everyday life plays such a key role in defining the home, in spatial terms, and daily life, in temporal ones, that domestic media have become part of the infrastructure of family life (p. 67).

Considering the family home as a domestic infrastructure highlights family members' agency with regard to their media use, while also acknowledging that there are structural constraints, opportunities, and conventions that can lead to embedded media practices over time. This paper employs the domestic infrastructure as a heuristic tool to explore media practices that children of immigrants initiate on behalf of their families, and considers how these activities can affect overall family functioning and settlement.

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I use the term *media brokering* to refer to the ways that children facilitate their parents' connections to and understandings of traditional and new communication technologies. These brokering activities are often dynamic interplays between parents and children. Children may have the dexterity to use new gadgets, but bring less real-world knowledge to the media environment. They may also lack the experience and critical capacities needed to decode and evaluate media content (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). Parents contribute to children's media brokering activities with their adult understandings of how the world works, and their capacities to teach their children how to decode media messages. Media brokering activities can therefore be opportunities for parents and children to interact around media in ways that enable learning on all sides.

Children's media brokering activities take different shapes in different families, and occupy more central roles in some families than in others. For example, in high-income, majority culture families where parents are comfortable to independently interact with new and old media forms, children's media brokering may be confined to occasionally being asked to program the TiVo or show a parent how Facebook works. In low-income, immigrant families, however, children's media brokering activities are often more central to family functioning and an important part of daily life (Katz, 2007). For parents who are unable to interact in the majority language, children broker connections to media to compensate for their parents' limited traditional and new media literacies. For these reasons, children in these families broker connections not only to new communication technologies like cellular technology, computers, and the Internet, but also to traditional, "old" communication technologies like telephones and mailed materials (Katz, 2007; Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido, 2003; Tseng & Fuligni, 2000). These media brokering activities often serve as crucial links between the family home and the local community, as children can use these media to connect their families to local resources their families need to fully integrate into their new local area.

Research on Children's Media Use: Issues of Race, Ethnicity, and Class

Studies on children's media-related skills and capacities to date have largely focused on the experiences of children from middle-class, majority culture families (James, 2001; Kearney, 2007; Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). Research on racial/ethnic minority children's media use remains primarily confined to the effects of media portrayals *on* these children (Goodman, 2002; Johnson, David, & Huey-Ohlsson, 2004; Rivadeneyra, Ward, & Gordon, 2007), rather than the ways that these children may actively engage with media (cf. De Block & Buckingham, 2008; Durham, 2004; Katz, 2007, 2009; Mayer, 2003). These considerations lead to questions of how the media environments of racial/ethnic minority children may differ from those of middle-class, majority culture children. For example, ethnically targeted media may be important components of ethnic/racial minority children's day-to-day engagement with media (Durham, 2004; Mayer, 2003), and for children from immigrant or language minority families, proficiency in another language may enable access to bilingual media environments (Matsaganis, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2010; Mayer, 2003).

However, evidence suggests that even though ethnic media may widen the media environments of ethnic/racial minority children, other realities may constrain them. Access to new communication technologies in particular can be limited by socioeconomic conditions. In the US case, 78 per cent of White school-age children have a computer at home, compared with 48 per cent of Latino and 46 per cent of African American students.

Thirty-seven per cent of children with family incomes below $20,000 use computers at home, compared to 88 per cent with household incomes over $75,000. Parental education levels reveal similar discrepancies: 35 per cent of children with parents who did not complete high school use a computer at home, compared with 88 per cent of children with at least one parent who attended graduate school (DeBell & Chapman, 2006, p. 25).

Access to new communication technologies is a necessary precursor to children developing masteries of these technologies. Low-income children often have irregular or no access to computers and Internet access, making them less likely to develop the media literacy required for the range of media brokering activities the literature indicates their wealthier, middle-class counterparts are able to do (Rideout, Roberts, & Foehr, 2005). Limited access to new communication technologies may be compounded in immigrant communities by linguistic and cultural constraints. To understand how ethnic/racial minority children may engage in media brokering differently to their majority culture counterparts, linguistic and cultural concerns must be considered integral to children's efforts to facilitate their immigrant families' media connections.

Since it would be impossible to account for all, or even most, of the ways that families negotiate media, this project focused on children's media brokering efforts to connect their immigrant parents with mediated information about the local community and its resources. Meaningful connections to community goods and resources, such as local clinics, food assistance programs, or even a local library, are often important precursors to feeling "settled" in a new community. Therefore, this project explored the ways that children broker media for their families facilitate local connections that can encourage their families' settlement.

The parents who were informants in this study were all monolingual Spanish speakers, meaning that children's media brokering often included negotiating language and cultural differences. As children of immigrants develop linguistic and cultural competencies in school (Rueda, Monzó, & Arzubiaga, 2003) their parents come to rely on them for assistance with daily tasks that require English language skills or American cultural competence in addition to media brokering. Tasks may include identifying a doctor in an online directory who accepts the family's insurance and making a phone call securing an appointment time, for example (Katz, 2007; Orellana et al., 2003). The added dimensions of language and culture make media brokering for children in immigrant families a wider ranging and more complex set of tasks than for their middle-class, majority culture counterparts.

Prior research suggested that children of immigrants shoulder increasing amounts of brokering responsibility as pre-teens and adolescents, as they are considered mature enough to handle more tasks and are still living at home and available to help with day-to-day tasks. Their increasing age is often also associated with greater bilingual capacity, cultural sophistication, understanding of meta-language, and the ability to reflexively consider their brokering behaviors (Dorner, Orellana, & Li-Grining, 2007). Understanding the complex roles these children[1] play requires close attention to the context in which media brokering activities take place, including the nature of the domestic media environment, relationships between family members, and how these interactions may affect and be affected by children's brokering.

The Family Home as Domestic Infrastructure

Integrating Livingstone's domestic infrastructure concept (2002) with Lievrouw and Livingstone's (2005) general definition of a social infrastructure creates a useful heuristic for understanding how children's media brokering can affect family functioning. Lievrouw and Livingstone consider a social infrastructure as having three components: artifacts, activities, and social arrangements. Adapting these three components to domestic infrastructure:

- *Artifacts* refer to the range of media forms in the home that children can access in their efforts to connect their families to information about the local area;
- *Activities* refer to the brokering activities that result from connecting with those media artifacts; and
- *Social arrangements* refer to the family sense-making and routinized relationships between family members that affect child brokering activities.

Conceiving of the home as a domestic infrastructure makes it possible to understand the unique constellations of factors that affect children's media brokering activities in different domestic contexts. Variations in the media artifacts available for child brokers to access, the range of activities that they are required to and/or are able to broker for their families, and the quality of family members' social arrangements, all contribute to the outcomes of children's brokering efforts. This study was therefore guided by the question: how does the nature of the domestic infrastructure influence children's media brokering to connect their families with their local community?

Although the interrelations between artifacts, activities, and social arrangements are conceived as reciprocal and dynamic, the term "infrastructure" conveys that these relationships become "routine, established, institutionalized, and fixed to various extents, and so become taken for granted in everyday life" (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2005, p. 4). Emphasizing the routinized aspects of family life is useful for understanding how the persistence of family activities and social arrangements may constrain or enable children's brokering efforts.

Method

Design

In 2005, the Metamorphosis Project at the University of Southern California conducted a Random Digit Dial (RDD) telephone survey of 304 Latino households in a South Los Angeles community that lasted an average of 53–57 minutes and asked a wide range of questions about community life. Respondents could opt to answer the survey in either Spanish or English. Respondents who chose to answer in Spanish were asked questions about whether their children broker media for them, and if so, how often, and in what contexts. Spanish-speaking respondents who indicated that their children translated English-language television, radio, newspapers, or mail, and/or telephone calls "often" or "very often," and had at least one child between 11 and 19 years old, were considered eligible to participate in interviews.

Since almost 18 months had elapsed since the telephone survey and this is a highly transient population, many numbers had been disconnected or had been reassigned. To increase the potential interview pool, two bilingual undergraduate assistants screened additional potential participants at a local community organization that telephone survey

respondents had indicated was a place they trusted and frequented. Between October 2006 and March 2007, these research assistants conducted thirty-four 10-minute screening surveys to identify parents whose children translated for them "often" or "very often" and had at least one child broker between the ages of 11 and 19. The screening surveys also collected demographic information to ensure baseline similarities between participants recruited from the community organization and from the telephone survey.

Table 1 presents descriptive data for the pools of potential interviewees from the Metamorphosis Project telephone survey and from the community organization screening survey. *T*-test and chi-square analyses were conducted to ensure that the two samples were demographically equivalent. Only one significant difference between the two respondent pools was calculated: the percentage of female respondents. The community organization where the screening interviews were conducted specifically targets women with nutritional and medical care for pregnancy and early childhood, which accounts for the heavy majority of females in this respondent pool.

Recruitment

Between November 2006 and March 2007, respondents from the telephone survey pool were contacted and asked if they were willing to participate in an interview about family life in the neighborhood, and to have the child who brokered for them most often

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics of parents eligible for interviews

	Interview Pool from Metamorphosis Project Telephone Survey	Interview Pool from Community Organization Screening Survey	Parents Interviewed
N	34	34	**20**
Age (median)	36	35	**35**
Immigration generation			
First generation	74%	85%	**100**%
Second generation	21%	15%	
Female	56%	93%	**75**%
Household income			
< =$35,000	94%	87%	**90**%
> =$60,000		4%	
Household size (median)	5	4	**5**
Education			
< =8th grade	42%	70%	**60**%
< = High school	52%	26%	**35**%
> = Some college	6%	4%	**5**%
Marital status			
Never married/single	18%	0	
Married/living with partner	71%	85%	**75**%
Country of origin			
Mexico	62%	59%	**70**%
El Salvador	20%	26%	**20**%
Guatemala	12%	7%	**10**%
Years in the US (mean)	21	18	**16**
Years in Los Angeles (mean)	14	12	**13**
Years in neighborhood (mean)	8	7	**8**

participate in a private interview at another time. Once the telephone survey pool had been exhausted, potential respondents from the community organization participant pools were contacted until twenty parents had agreed to be interviewed.

Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted in respondents' homes. Parents were given a written consent form in Spanish that my research assistants and I explained verbally before the interview began. Because their children were minors in most cases, parents consented to their children's interviews as well. Children were given an age-appropriate assent form before their own interviews, and were free to choose not to participate even if their parents had agreed that they would do so. No children opted out of their interviews. All parent interviews were conducted in Spanish, and children chose their language of comfort. With only one exception, children were more comfortable being interviewed in English. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, and analyzed along with comprehensive field notes compiled immediately after each interview. In appreciation for their participation, parents were given a gift certificate to a local grocery store, and children a t-shirt with the university logo.

Interview Sample

The demographic characteristics of parents who agreed to participate are profiled in the final column of Table 1. These parents were asked to identify the pre-teen or adolescent child that helped them with brokering tasks most often. In two cases, parents indicated that two children help equally, so both children were interviewed ($n = 22$). Twelve of the children were in middle school (grades 6–8) at the time of the interview, and seven were in high school (grades 9–12). Maria[2] and Vida (aged 19 and 18, respectively) had dropped out of high school due to pregnancies, and Maya (age 19) was in her first year of university. Most of the child brokers interviewed were female ($n = 17$), and a majority ($n = 18$) were born in the United States. A few were immigrants themselves; Rolando (age 17) had crossed the border alone and without documentation at the age of 15. Vida (age 18) had made the move at the age of 9 and still struggled to read and write in English, as Yanira (age 14) was struggling to do having been in the United States for only 6 months.

Analysis

Parents and children were asked complementary open-ended questions about the places where children brokered, the kinds of brokering they did, and what media were implicated in these brokering activities. Their feelings about brokering in different contexts were also explored, along with questions about relationships within the family and with local community institutions (see the Appendix).

Interviews were analyzed according to Taylor and Bogdan's (1998) "constant comparative" method, which requires the simultaneous coding and analysis of data as it is collected. Specific words, phrases, and recurring activities, meanings, and/or feelings that parents and children assigned to media brokering events were highlighted and coded as patterns began to emerge. By following this methodology, I was able to add a few questions to the interview protocol that participants' responses made clear were missing. However, none of the original questions were deleted to ensure that later interviews were not shaped heavily by findings from earlier interviews.

During interviews, particular attention was paid to the ways that interviewees made connections between questions about brokering activities. As interviews progressed, domestic infrastructure components—artifacts, activities, and social arrangements— emerged as a natural way to organize informants' responses. This analytical process was consistent with Taylor and Bogdan's approach, which necessitates developing and refining concepts that explain emerging patterns in the data, and specifying the relationships between those concepts (1998, p. 137).

Findings

Analyses of interview data revealed key themes within each of the domestic infrastructure's three components. Children's connections with media artifacts were affected primarily by the range of media forms available in the home, the location of those media, and availability of media in the local community. Children's brokering activities with these media artifacts were affected primarily by their bilingual capacities and the nature of the media content being brokered. Their success at overcoming potential constraints to their understanding depended on the social arrangements within the family. Some social arrangements enabled children's brokering, while others constrained children's efforts. Considering the home as an infrastructure facilitated an examination of the consequences of brokering activities for children themselves. These data revealed embedded patterns of family functioning. These patterns give rise to reward structures that in turn encouraged children's over-identification with their roles as family helpers.

Media Artifacts

The term "media artifacts" includes not only newspapers, radio, television, and computers, but also bills, mailed pamphlets, telephone calls, and recorded phone messages children regularly brokered for their families. Although parents reported connecting to media independent of their children, parents' own connections were motivated primarily by desires for entertainment and escapism. Newspapers, if purchased, were for sports scores, television programming was generally limited to *telenovelas*,[3] and radios tuned to Christian music stations.

Children's media brokering activities were generally their families' primary way of actively connecting with and learning about local resources. A few key structural factors made each home a unique context for children's media brokering. The first factor was the range of media artifacts the family could afford to have in the home. The second was the location of these media within the home, and the final factor was the community-level availability of local media, which necessarily circumscribed what mediated resources children could connect with from home.

Livingstone's (2002) emphasis on the range of media artifacts available in the home also draws attention to the media artifacts that are *not* available in those homes (Wilkin et al., 2007). The working-class immigrants who participated in this research could not afford to own any media artifact they might desire. Therefore, the artifacts they reported owning reflected the family's media priorities. Every family had at least one television, radio, and telephone. Television was the dominant artifact in these homes—both literally and figuratively. In a number of homes, the size of the television most closely resembled a

movie screen, taking up most free space in small living rooms. Every family had a cable subscription.

By contrast, although seventeen of the twenty families had computers, most did not have Internet access. Isidro said, "the Internet, it is much too expensive for us," which echoed the sentiments of many parents. Cable television, however, is more costly than Internet access. These choices therefore reflected a clear parental priority on entertainment. Internet access would have served child brokers' efforts to locate local resources more readily than television because the Internet facilitates customized information access in ways that television cannot. Parents' choice to spend their limited discretionary income on cable rather than Internet access was a potential constraint to their children's brokering efforts.

Access also depended on the location of the media artifact in the home. Parents and children were asked to specify the location of media artifacts that we could not see in the room where the interview was taking place. In general, most families had two televisions; one in the living room, and the other in the parents' bedroom. The location of the television determined the primary language of programs; the parents' bedroom was universally a Spanish-only zone, and parents generally controlled the remote control when they watched TV in the living room. Children reported watching Spanish-language programming alongside their parents, but preferring English-language content among themselves. Aurora (15) said, "When I put English stuff on, [my parents] just go to sleep . . . and I kinda get them because I imagine myself putting on, like, the Korean TV channel and not understanding. I would just go to sleep or something [too]." In either language, television was primarily a source of entertainment, and children seldom reported television as a resource for community news or information.

The location of computers was evenly split between the living room and a child's bedroom. Most parents said that they preferred to have the computer in a communal space so that they could more easily monitor their children's online behavior. The setup of the computer also gave clues as to its use. Some families had set up a mini-office for the computer, and children's responses indicated their understanding that the computer was intended primarily for schoolwork. In most homes, however, the computer was tucked into a corner of the living room or next to the television, and therefore less conducive to tasks requiring children's uninterrupted attention.

The range of artifacts available in a particular domestic infrastructure depended on more than the family pocketbook. Different communities have different local media environments, meaning that each community has access (or lacks access) to a different constellation of local media options (Wilkin et al., 2007). The range of locally available media can affect the content a particular domestic infrastructure as much as families' prioritizing ownership of certain media artifacts over others. In this community, families generally had access to a range of English and Spanish-language television programming and radio. School newsletters and other mail were generally not accessible for parents as they were printed only in English, particularly in parts of the community where the residents were still predominantly African American. Children's brokering activities around print and other media forms tried to connect parents to resources they had difficulty accessing independently due to limited traditional and/or new media literacies.

Brokering Activities

Interviews revealed that a great deal of children's media brokering activities revolved around the telephone. Many parents admitted to screening phone calls on the answering machine to avoid the difficulties of conversing in English when their children were not home. Victoria (11) said:

> When, like, a person that doesn't know Spanish calls, my mom puts [the phone] on speaker, and when the person tells it [in English] she tells me to translate . . . When she answers it and she doesn't know who it is so she gives it to me and then I just—I talk to them . . . then [my mom] talks to me: "Well, what did they say?" And I translate for her.

Children were their families' primary links to community institutions and organizations by making and returning phone calls to schools, doctors' offices, and to resolve discrepancies on utility bills.

Cellular phones were not the norm in this community, and if anyone in the family had one, it was usually the father. Cellular phones primarily filled their normal functions; working parents used their cellular phones to make sure their children were safely home from school, for example. For a couple of families, however, cellular phones served as a mobile translating service. Regina (14) said that her mother will often call home from stores and appointments to have Regina broker over the phone if she cannot find someone to translate for her.

Child brokers' capacities to broker new communication technologies depended in large part on whether they had an Internet connection at home (Rideout et al., 2005). The few children who only accessed the Internet occasionally in public access points like libraries and schools knew little about resources available online. For child brokers who did have Internet access at home, there was a great deal of variation in how much of their online time was committed to connecting their families with local resources. Most child brokers reported that they often went online when their parents asked them to look up directions. Fewer reported going online to find stores that sold an item the family needed, or to check the hours a local business was open. Carmen reported that she and her daughter Teresa (15) had planned Teresa's recent *quinceañera*[4] almost entirely online. Another parent had her daughter look for vacant apartments to see if the family could afford to move. Generally, interviews indicated that even in the most connected families, children were unaware that they were not optimizing the Web's capacity for locating community resources their families needed.

Brokering print media generally posed the greatest challenges to children and caused them the most anxiety. Hernando (12) said:

> I help with the [mail] that comes in, like papers from the bank. But some [of] those are really hard because there's a lot of words I don't really know, like I don't really [understand] that much from those words from the bank and everything.

Victoria (11) described similar struggles with brokering the formal, written English typical of mailed materials: "[The people who write the letters] . . . they, like, talk ancient and stuff . . . [and] how can I understand that?"

Printed materials were difficult for two reasons: first, these materials most clearly revealed children's limitations, both in terms of their bilingual capacities and their developmental stages. Many children were able to get by in situations requiring only

informal or verbal language capacity, such as brokering a telephone conversation, but the formal, printed word posed problems because there was no way for children to negotiate understanding or use nonverbal cues to decode meaning. Even if their bilingual capacities had been ideal, many child brokers simply did not have the developmental capacity to fully understand the nuances of official documents at such young ages. Child brokers reported considerable anxiety in situations where their parents were depending on them and their efforts to interpret the content of printed materials was unsuccessful.

The second reason that printed materials were most challenging was because the highest value resources in the community generally had print media components, and thus raised the stakes of making a mistake. A number of child brokers mentioned that completing immigration, naturalization, and health insurance documents was particularly stressful, both because the content was technically advanced and because the consequences of an error were so great. Liliana (15) recalled helping her stepfather, Carlos, with his immigration forms when she was 13. She recalled a lot of the experience, "was going, 'Oooo, I don't know what that means'...I had to look up like every word... I was so scared I'd make a mistake." These justifiable fears often further limited children's abilities to engage with these materials and successfully complete the task of brokering these print media for their families.

It was in these cases, particularly for the younger, pre-teen brokers, that parents could provide the support their children needed to successfully complete the task at hand. Several social arrangements emerged from the interviews that enabled children's brokering activities, while others worked to constrain children's efforts.

Social Arrangements

The social arrangement of family members draws attention to the divisions of responsibility that exist and persist within a family unit. These interviews indicated that cooperative sense-making, retained parental authority, and cooperative brokering between siblings were social arrangements that enabled child brokers' efforts to connect their families with community resources. On the other hand, family instability caused by events ranging from illness to divorce generally constrained children's brokering efforts.

Scaffolding

Although children usually took the lead in media brokering activities, their success in interpreting and explaining the content of these media was often dependent on the active involvement of their parents. Child brokers generally reported scaffolding[5] (Vygotsky, 1978) their parents' understandings of media content by drawing on their relatively greater dexterity with English, American cultural norms, and new and old media forms. Parents would complement these capacities by contributing their adult understandings of world events, and using these scaffolding events as a way to introduce their children to more sophisticated Spanish vocabulary. For example, Gabriela (12) said that sometimes her father tried to watch the local news in English, and asked her to broker the words he didn't understand. In return, Gabriela said, "he explains [the significance of the news event] to me." In this instance of scaffolding, Gabriela provided her greater understanding of the English language, and her father provided his adult interpretation of the events' significance, and together they scaffolded a shared understanding of local events. Scaffolding events of

these kinds were common, and together, parents and children would construct shared strategies about who to contact, where to go, and who to trust in the community.

Parental Authority

Stories retold by children and parents revealed that even in families where children and parents regularly scaffolded shared understandings of media content, parental authority, rather than equality was most conducive to children's brokering accurately and appropriately. These instances highlighted that brokers were, in fact, still young and relatively inexperienced. The continued and clear authority of parents, even when children were invoking parents' voices in adult situations, belies the assumptions in the immigration literature that as children become "experts" on American culture, they undermine traditional parent–child authority structures and parents lose control and their children's respect (Buriel & DeMent, 1998; Menjívar, 2000).

Certainly, inversion of authority is a possible scenario, but the "power" of children and desire to undermine parental authority was not evidenced in this research. Even when children reported brokering at times they would have preferred not to, clear parental authority was evidently a social arrangement desired by parents and children alike. Parental authority facilitated parent–child scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) and increased children's confidence in the accuracy of their brokering.

For example, Evelyn (16) routinely made phone calls to the people who employed her grandmother for casual housecleaning jobs. Before calls were made to confirm or cancel an appointment, Evelyn and her grandmother would sit down so that her grandmother could explain exactly what she should say. During the calls, her grandmother would stand right next to her, ready to give further instructions as necessary. Graciela (13) echoed Evelyn's feelings that making these calls with their (grand)parent nearby made it easier to broker agreeable outcomes. Graciela recalled a phone call with one of her mother's employers that devolved into an argument:

> I was arguing between adults and I was like, "I'm a kid here!" [*laughs*] and it was kind of awkward for me. But then, like, I knew what to say, because my mom was right there and said he can't do anything [to me] by the phone.

Although child brokers often invoked adult voices, they remained acutely aware of their positioning as children, and therefore desired parental authority to assure them that they were making the right choices for their families.

Sibling Cooperation

Similar to the cooperative relationships observed between parents and child brokers, some families indicated that siblings work together on brokering tasks. Milagro (13) and her older sister had a clear division of labor that offset Milagro's developmental and linguistic constraints by taking advantage of her time after school to help at home:

> The real important things [like health insurance forms] we let my sister do because she's more experienced . . . all the doctors' appointments, prescriptions, and stuff, I do it . . . She's always helped us economically, and I do the translating and stuff at the house . . . [my mother and sister are] working so I try to make it easier for everybody . . . It's easier for me

[to be at home] than for my sister, 'cuz she's always liked to work, and I've always liked being around [the house].

This synergistic division of labor allowed both sisters to contribute to the family's resources in accordance with their strengths. Sibling cooperation on brokering tasks could potentially facilitate the family's connections to a wider range of community resources.

A number of families' social arrangements detracted from children's media brokering activities to connect their families to their community. Negative social arrangements effectively turned families inward, so that at the very moment when children's brokering activities were most needed, their efforts to simply hold things together constrained their abilities to broker connections to the community and to resources like drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers.

Inhibiting Family Arrangements

Many children revealed (or hinted) at negative family social arrangements. Two fathers had battled with alcoholism; Julio (17) and Maria's (19) father used to drink heavily, and Julio intimated that his father was abusive when he had been drinking. Alejandro, Milagro's (13) father, broke down in tears during his interview describing his alcohol addiction and the harm done to his family and his health over the years. Both families described the strain on family relations and finances resulting from these addictions.

Illness had a similar inhibiting effect on family social arrangements. Alejandro had been out of work for over a year dealing with complications from his diabetes. His younger daughter Milagro's (13) after school activities were circumscribed by explicit family expectations that she would devote that time to caring for her father: "Most of my time, I just give it to my dad." Luis (11) faced similar pressures; his 7-year-old brother's epilepsy and consequent brain damage had profoundly changed family functioning. Luis took on an enormous amount of responsibility, providing not only brokering but emotional support for his mother. He frequently missed school or sacrificed his own homework to take care of his family, constraining his own chances of making and maintaining successful connections with his teachers and peers.

Divorce had constraining effects on child brokering in some families and enabling effects in others. An emergent finding was the number of parents who had informally adopted a spouse's children and recreated an integrated family. These adopted pairs had genuine emic experiences of the other as family, referring to each other openly, as Carlos and Liliana (15) did, as "my daughter" and "my dad." Child brokers in these families only temporarily suffered the potential detracting effects of divorce. In other families, unstable family arrangements following a divorce inhibited children's efforts to broker connections to the community. When single parents inevitably worked long hours, the oldest child became a surrogate parent to younger siblings, effectively limiting them to the confines of the home and limiting their time to connect with and broker media that could help their families better integrate into their local community.

Conclusion

Findings from this study indicate that children's media brokering activities are variably constrained or enabled by the features of the unique domestic infrastructures

within their family homes. In some families, children's media brokering was facilitated by a wide range of available media *artifacts,* their personal bilingual, bicultural, and media literacy capacities to engage in media brokering *activities*, and favorable *social arrangements* within their families that enabled children's efforts to connect with local opportunities the family had been alerted to through their media connections. The fact that most of the child brokers in this study were not engaging in media brokering activities in these sorts of favorable conditions has implications for child brokers, their immigrant families, and our understandings of social disparities that immigrants often experience.

The families who participated in this research are representative of many immigrant communities within the United States and around the world: low-income, limited literacy populations that do not speak the language of their host country and distrust formal institutions. These populations are notoriously hard to reach with messages and services related to health, education, and other state-funded programs. As a result, these populations often also suffer disproportionately from health disparities, educational inequities, and similar social inequalities. The research presented here offers the possibility that intervening through children in such communities may lead to higher success rates in reaching families with resources and services that can keep them healthy, since children are the primary connectors with media for community information. Future campaigns may take this into account when tailoring messages that target these kinds of communities, and design messages that are attractive to children and easy for them to decode.

There are other potential interventions suggested by these findings that can improve conditions for the child brokers themselves. Interviews with parents and children indicated that children's brokering was a normalized and invisible component of family functioning. This made it difficult for child brokers to articulate their needs for help with difficult tasks, and/or to locate appropriate sources of support. The invisibility of brokering also resulted in little recognition within the family of how the pressures of brokering might affect children's personal development.

Findings from this study indicated that these children identified primarily as their family's helpers, and therefore would routinely put the needs of their families ahead of their own. Contrary to findings that have linked children's brokering to higher school achievement (Dorner et al., 2007), I found that the child brokers who were performing well in school were generally doing so in spite of their brokering activities, rather than because of them. Children would routinely forgo doing their homework or taking advantage of afterschool enrichment and homework programs because, as Hernando (12) said, "I need to be in the house." Interviews with teachers and administrators in the local schools revealed troubling disconnects between home and school, as school officials were not aware of children's brokering responsibilities or that family needs were the cause of incomplete homework and visible fatigue in the classroom.

Given that these disconnects between children's educations and their domestic brokering responsibilities creates multiple difficulties for children's learning, developing intervention programs that anticipate these difficulties could serve both these families and the local schools. Even though schools are already overburdened, given child brokers' many absences from school, creating such programs would be in the schools' interests as well. These interventions could arm child brokers with skills that can improve their media brokering, as well as prepare them for community interactions that result from successful media brokering, such as translating in a doctor's office.

Media literacy is a fundamental component of such a process, as the limited access that many child brokers had to new communication technologies constrained their efforts to access the full range of locally available resources for their families. For child brokers, improved media literacy would not only enable them to access and interpret media content for their families need more easily, but could also help children develop the skills and confidence to engage those media as they advocate for their families' connections to local services to optimize family well-being.

Children indicated that they seldom, if ever, discuss their brokering activities and difficulties even with each other. These silences about brokering constrain children's abilities to improve their brokering skillsets. Providing programs within the schools that actively work to break these silences can help children to help their families more effectively, with less burden, and could also result in improving their sense of comfort and connection to their schools and teachers. Increased feelings of connection and comfort within the schools enhance child brokers' traditional classroom experiences as well (Valenzuela, 1999). Increased classroom comfort would improve their language capacities in ways that contribute to their brokering capacities as well as their personal educational attainment.

Limitations

Although this research develops our understandings of media uses among children of immigrants, there are two potentially serious limitations to these findings. The first is the limited sample size of forty-two interviews, which may not reflect the full range of issues and concerns around children's brokering activities. The second is the gender skew among parents who agreed to be interviewed for this study. Men contacted for interviews were more likely to insist that their children do not broker for them, despite their responses to the contrary in the Metamorphosis telephone survey. There are two possible reasons for this insistence: men may have needed less assistance because media brokering activities were often related to domestic, traditionally feminized tasks such as securing health care for children or shopping for household goods. The second possibility is that men needed as much help as their wives, but refused to admit it to a young woman asking questions that exposed their vulnerabilities (see Menjívar, 2000, for similarly gendered experiences with Latino immigrant men).

Parents who were interviewed in this study generally indicated that the oldest child living at home, regardless of gender, helped them most with media brokering tasks. That this child was most often female may be coincidental, or it may be that girls are more likely to be living at home in their later teenage years than their brothers, indicating confluence between age and gender as determinants of brokering responsibilities (Buriel & DeMent, 1998; Orellana et al., 2003). The gender dynamics surrounding media brokering activities warrants further research attention.

Suggestions for Future Research

Beyond the important questions related to gender and media brokering, this study raises other important areas for continued inquiry. This research also highlights the need for serious explorations into how race/ethnicity, immigration status, and class may affect children's media worlds and relationships to communication technologies. This project focused on one immigrant group in the US context; the experiences of other racial/ethnic minorities and immigrant groups from other home countries, living in other receiving

contexts, are likely different from the findings presented here. The cooperative sense-making between parents and children in Latino families is facilitated by cultural expectations of early responsibility by children (Buriel & DeMent, 1998). Child brokers in immigrant families with more hierarchical, traditional structures may face more significant restraints when their efforts require invoking adult voices to help their families. Latinos are also the largest language minority group in the United States, which likely means that children in families that are part of smaller immigrant communities, such as Hmong or Ibo, likely face even greater brokering pressures than their Latino counterparts.

These findings also suggest that children from working-poor families are unlikely to inhabit worlds of personalized media devices or bedroom cultures experienced by children from middle-class families (James, 2001; Kearney, 2007; Rideout et al., 2005). Personal technologies like cellular phones may have more communal uses in poorer families, which is an interesting co-opting of the intended use of the technology that has not yet been explored.

Finally, the roles that children play in their immigrant families as media brokers are multi-faceted; this article only covered parents and children's home-based efforts to connect with community resources. There is a great deal more to understand about children's brokering activities and family sense-making around information resources, because these forms of communication have direct consequences for immigrant families' adaptation to their new communities and countries. As migration continues to increase population diversity globally, the incorporation of immigrants has emerged as a central concern across immigrant-receiving countries worldwide. Understanding the media worlds of these children and their families have material consequences for family settlement and well-being, and for the communities into which they are settling.

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NOTES

1. Although informants were pre-teens and adolescents, I follow Thorne, Orellana, Lam, and Chee (2003) in referring to young people as "children" to highlight their subjective positioning within the family.
2. All participants are referred to by pseudonyms to protect privacy.
3. *Telenovelas* are Spanish-language soap operas produced in Latin America and aired on US Spanish-language television stations.
4. A *quinceañera* is a traditional "coming out" party for a Mexican girl's fifteenth birthday.
5. Scaffolding refers to activities where interactants support and supplement one another's understanding, much as a scaffolding literally supports a building under construction (Vygotsky, 1978)

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APPENDIX: SELECTED QUESTIONS FROM CHILD BROKER INTERVIEWS

- Tell me about the ways that you help your parents: Do you ever help them by making phone calls that require speaking in English? What about understanding newspapers, television, or radio in English? Answering mail or paying bills? What tasks do you feel you do most often?

- Do you have a computer at home? How much time do you spend on it? What do you use it for most often? Which room of the house is it in?
- Do you ever go online or look things up for your parents? What kind of things? Do your parents use the computer on their own, not at all, or only with help?
- Are there other technologies that you help your parents use at home? *Probe for examples—cell phone, phone calls, cable, ipod, etc.*
- Do you feel proud that you can help your parents by translating for them? *If yes:* Can you give me an example of a time that you felt this way?
- Have you ever had to translate in a situation that embarrassed you or your parent? *If yes:* Would you be comfortable to tell me a little about when that was?
- Are there times when you've been frightened—that you didn't know the right words, and/or that what you were translating about was very important? *If yes:* When was this?
- Are there times when you refused to translate, or got frustrated with having to help? Have you ever told your parent(s) that you don't want to help them? *If yes:* When was that?
- If you have a situation when you need to help your parents with something (*Give examples—understanding a letter, making a call*) and you don't know how to help, what do you do?