

Final Progress Report
Media-based culturally-relevant parent education for divorced Latino families (*Mi Nueva Familia*)
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A. Background

Latino population: Public health concern. Latinos make up the nation's largest and fastest growing minority group (U.S. Census, 2010); 50.7 million strong, they represent 16.4% of the U.S. population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). This population presents a public health concern due to several socio-economic factors. Latinos have much higher poverty rates than whites (Fronczek, 2005), greater periods of unemployment (Clark & Weismantle, 2003), and lower income levels (Fronczek, 2005). An estimated 26.6% of the Latino population lives in poverty (U.S. Census, 2010) and 30.7% lack health insurance. Educational attainment is low, with 62.2% of Latinos age 25 or older obtaining at least a high school education. Only 13% have Bachelor's degree as compared to 31.4 % of whites (U.S. Census, 2010). Divorce among Latino families is on the rise, further complicating the welfare of Latino families. Latino children are at significantly increased risk for detrimental outcomes, including substance and alcohol abuse (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007), development of child behavioral problems and mental health concerns (Prado et al., 2006), and low academic achievement (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). Latino families are especially disadvantaged with respect to treatment barriers and access to culturally sensitive interventions (Cordova & Cervantes, 2010). The need of Latino families for mental health services is reaching crisis proportions due to the lack of trained bilingual and bicultural professionals and the dearth of culturally relevant, evidence-based interventions for Latinos.

Worse outcomes for divorcing Latino families. The Latino population is heterogeneous, with variations in country of origin, socio-economic class, immigration history, and acculturative stress. Research indicates that these values may affect the way Latino families cope with divorce. The importance of family unity and loyalty is referred to as *familismo* (Calzada et al., 2010; Cauce & Domenech Rodríguez, 2002). *Respeto* emphasizes politeness, deferential behavior toward elders and authority figures with a purpose of maintaining harmonious relationships. For some Latinos, these cultural values (*familismo* and *respeto*) may entail stigmatization of parental conflict and divorce due to the damage they cause to family unity and harmony (Blea, 1991; Diaz-Loving, 2006). Divorcing Latinas often experience more blame and disapproval from their parents than white women (Wagner, 1988). The stigma Latino families can experience over divorce may worsen the outcomes for Latino children. Although *familismo* is valued among Latinos (Calzada et al., 2010), statistics indicate that 34% of first time marriages among Latinas end in divorce. This rate is similar to that of white women (Center for Disease Control, 2002). Approximately 42.9% of Latino children are raised in homes that are non-traditional (not comprising two biological parents) as compared to 34.9% of white children (Pew

Hispanic Center, 2010). The incidence of single parenting as a result of economic or legal survival is disproportionately high. The number of households with children under age 18 headed by a single mother between 1990 and 2005 increased 25% in the population as a whole, yet among Latino households the number grew 102% (Suro, 2007). In a current study, 75% of 400 newly immigrated adolescents from Mexico, Central America, Dominican Republic, China, and Haiti spent between six months to 10 years apart from one or both parents (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). This disruption in parenting is a well-known predictor of risk for child adjustment difficulties that are precursors to youth substance and alcohol abuse, as well as behavior problems, school failure, deviant peer association, and depression (Patterson & Fisher, 2002; Sanders et al., 2003).

Risks to Latino children during divorce. Divorce may have significant and persistent negative outcomes for children (Amato, 2000; Fabricius, 2003), but Latino children are increasingly vulnerable to the negative outcomes due to cultural factors and socio-economic challenges. Roughly 30% experience adjustment problems (Fabricius, 2003); face an elevated risk for internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Barber & Demo, 2006; Marquardt, 2005), translating to *twice the likelihood* of serious conduct problems (Simons & Associates, 1996); and greater risk for school behavior problems, academic deficiency, and peer rejection (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995). Poor parenting, including harsh inconsistent discipline, inadequate supervision, and lack of a warm and positive relationship, has been shown to increase children's behavioral problems and later lead to substance abuse, delinquency, and criminal behavior (Fergusson et al., 2005). But poverty, ethnic discrimination, cultural isolation, and language differences heighten the deleterious effects for Latinos (Clark & Weismantle, 2003; Fronczek, 2005; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010).

Potentially toxic and damaging effects of divorce: The need for parent education. Of the many factors affecting children's adjustment, parental conflict is the most influential (Amato, 2000; Fabricius & Braver, 2006; Linker et al., 1999) and a significant predictor of child outcomes (Lansford, 2009). Witnessing parental conflict can be particularly toxic and damaging for children (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Davies et al., 2004). Children exposed to high rates of parental conflict show increased behavioral and emotional problems as compared to those exposed to lower levels of conflict (Hetherington, 1999). These children are two- to four-times more likely to have mental and physical health issues compared to national norms (Johnston & Campbell, 1988). In addition, conflict compromises parents' capacity to cooperate in caring for their children (Johnston, 1994). The problems that arise during divorce are invariably accompanied by and exacerbated by family stress (Pedro-Carroll, 2001; Tein et al., 2000). Changes in family functioning during divorce are empirically linked to reduced parental monitoring and interaction with children and disruption in routines (Guidubaldi et al., 1986). These changes leave children more vulnerable to child adjustment difficulties (Linker, et al., 1999). To preserve homeostasis, families must redefine and restructure family members' roles, boundaries, and relationships (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995). In summary, divorce is often associated with increased parental conflict and family stress, which detrimentally affect children. Thus, divorcing parents need specific parent education that addresses the divorce process. Parent education programs for divorcing families are effective in reducing family stress and increasing parenting skills in conflict resolution and positive engagement (e.g., *Parenting Through Change*, Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999; Martinez & Forgatch, 2001; *Children of Divorce Intervention Program*, Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985; *New Beginnings Program*, Wolchik et al., 2002).

The problem of parent education programs. Despite parent education programs' demonstrated effectiveness, few parents participate in evidence-based programs (Sanders, et al., 2007). Problems include limited availability outside major cities and lack of program utilization by agencies due to the staff time and

resources required (Baggett et al., 2010). Moreover, Latino families are significantly underrepresented in these programs. Difficulties with transportation and childcare, fatigue, and scheduling conflicts contribute to the lack of Latino engagement (Spoth & Redmond, 2000). Programs' lack of cultural relevance, persistent language barriers, and lack of bilingual, bicultural therapists add to the challenges Latinos face regarding treatment. Additionally, disparities exist in Latino parents' access to services regarding their children's mental health (Alegría et al., 2004). At present there are no published studies of parent education programs for divorcing Latino families. This gap in the literature and in parent education programs represents a significant disparity in mental health care. One way to overcome this disparity and increase Latino service utilization, recruitment, engagement, and positive outcomes is to create a new program that is culturally adapted to meet the specific needs of Latino families (Smith, Domenech Rodríguez, & Bernal, 2011) as this project intends.

B. Objectives

Preventing the high risk of child substance abuse, delinquency, and behavioral problems often associated with Latino divorce requires that a large proportion of the Latino population be reached with effective parenting strategies (Biglan, 1995). A promising public health approach to increasing healthy behavior change includes using mass media to influence individual's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Hornick, 2002). A media-based parent education program can provide an efficient, effective, and affordable format for delivering parenting education to large numbers. A recent media-based parenting program for white families had positive effects on parenting and child behavior (Sanders et al., 2008). Media-based programs offer advantages for underrepresented Latino families by providing flexibility and convenience. Specifically, the proposed project aspires to increase engagement, maintain program fidelity, and ensure culturally competent delivery through bilingual and bicultural scenarios. Based on recent data from a focus group of Latino parents (PI co-led the group), parents are well suited for a media-based parent education program. Parents reported having a TV, DVD player, and computer at home. They were fairly comfortable using the internet and email. Many parents indicated a preference for DVD or a web-based format. Thus, our proposed project will fill a significant gap, reduce disparities, and potentially decrease the high risk for child substance abuse and behavioral problems associated with divorce. Further, our project will increase scientific knowledge regarding effective parent education programs for divorcing Latino families. In regards to technical capabilities, the project will increase service agencies' ability to integrate technology with service provision for underserved populations and increase service utilization among Latino families in various contexts.

The practical goals of the program are to use innovations in interactive digital media in order to (a) satisfy court mandated parent education via individualized online use or in group-facilitated settings, (b) offer parents a gold-standard parenting class that is inexpensive, convenient and accessible to parents, (c) support fidelity of instruction in conveying a parenting skill set, (d) allow the formulation and reinforcement of salient parenting skills early in divorce proceedings, (e) increase parental support of children's relationship with the other parent, (f) help parents reduce interparental conflict, (g) help parents learn effective ways of communicating with their co-parent and children, (h) help parents empathize with the stress their children feel, (i) help parents learn to manage their own stress and anger, and (j) strengthen parent-child bonds.

The Phase I aim will be to develop and test a prototype of the *MNF* program. This aim will be accomplished through the following tasks:

Task 1: Develop *MNF* prototype. To test the feasibility of the *MNF* program under Phase I budgetary and time constraints, we will develop a prototype that contains core topics and functionality comparable to the

completed program in Phase II. Content for the Phase I prototype will include video modeling and supplementary interactive material that provides training in foundational effective parenting, reduced stress, and reduced conflict. This content will be presented using a *tell/show/do* instructional approach that incorporates techniques derived from explicit instruction, modeling, and practice with corrective feedback based on the work of Engelmann and Carnine (1991), Bandura (1977, 1986). Components of this material are intended for use with parents and children and will include a parent/child positive interaction activity and a guided relaxation activity.

Task 2: Conduct pilot study of the prototype program. We will assess the feasibility of the Phase I prototype in terms of relevance, acceptability, cultural appropriateness, and potential for efficacy using a single sample pre-post design. This design allows for the evaluation of changes in parental self-efficacy and satisfaction, intentions to use the strategies, and knowledge. Additionally, post-test evaluation of consumer satisfaction and recommendations for modifications to the program will be collected from participants. Threats to internal validity will be addressed during the Phase II evaluation through a large-scale randomized controlled trial of the complete intervention

MNF's innovative aspects are that it represents the first time that evidence-based parenting practices are culturally and linguistically tailored to a Spanish-speaking Latino audience and delivered using sophisticated media and interactive techniques. *MNF* will be made accessible across a variety of digital platforms in order to facilitate individual or group-assisted instruction as mandated by state family court systems.

C. Project Development

Phase I, we developed the *MNF* prototype. The media program was innovative in that it presented the first evidence-based, culturally and linguistically relevant parent training program for Latino divorced or separated parents. The Phase I prototype was made available to parents through the broadest possible delivery means, (e.g., smartphone, tablet, computer, and DVD). The program's components consisted of three modules of video instruction, graphical summary sheets, a parent/child positive interaction activity, and a guided stress reduction activity (the Spanish-language video vignettes, which are sub-titled in English, are available for viewing on a YouTube playlist: <http://bit.ly/1n5vSf1>). The feasibility of the Phase I prototype was assessed in terms of relevance, acceptability, cultural appropriateness, and potential for efficacy using a single sample pre-post design. This design allowed for the evaluation of changes in parental self-efficacy and satisfaction, intentions to use the strategies, and knowledge. Additionally, post-test evaluation of consumer satisfaction and recommendations for modifications to the program were collected from participants.

Content development. The three modules of the *MNF* prototype consist of: Module 1, ***Easy Ways to Reduce Stress***, in which parents learn to manage stress using a pause-breathe-notice technique adapted from mindfulness research and interventions (Duncan et al., 2009), Module 2, ***Positive Encouragement***, in which parents learn how to manage child behavior through positive reinforcement instead of punitive approaches (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999), and Module 3, ***Positive Conversations***, in which parents learn how to enter into and maintain positive communication with children (Forgatch & Patterson, 2010). In addition to serving as important protective factors during separation and divorce, the parenting skills targeted in the three modules also enhance children's speaking, listening, vocabulary, problem-solving, self-esteem, and general school readiness (High, 2008). The parenting skills are easy to do on a daily basis for a single parent. Short videos, printable PDF summaries, and a stress-reduction audio exercise in Spanish supplement the instruction.

Formative research. To gather information we held 2 focus groups with divorced Latino parents and professionals who have experience working with this population. The first focus group consisted of eight

professionals working in advocacy, mentoring, research, mediation services, legal and court services, parental training, and translating. All spoke Spanish and six self-identified as Latinos. These professionals said that money, time, housing, and jobs were stressors for most Latino families. They noted a rising level of family separation due to domestic violence or deportation. They reported that Latino children often experience academic challenges, especially while in the process of learning English. Early onset of sexual activity is also a problem in the community, along with drugs and alcohol abuse. Latino children also face being bullied and discriminated against. Parents sometimes have difficulty understanding that their children's problem behavior might be due to cross-cultural dynamics. There was general support for stress management training. They recommended teaching how to discipline their children in a non-coercive and age-appropriate way. When we asked the participants about PMTO recommendations, three basic approaches stood out: encouragement, non-coercive discipline (time out, restricting privileges), and problem solving (achieved through respectful dialog).

Ten (10) Latino single parents participated in a focus group in Woodburn, Oregon. All were born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States as adults for work. There were nine mothers and one father, all had low household incomes and none had a high school degree. All spoke Spanish as their first and preferred language, and the PIs conducted the focus group in Spanish. The focus group reviewed the three program subjects selected for the study: *Stress Reduction*, *Encouragement*, and *Positive Conversations*. Parents shared examples of stressful situations they experience in their daily lives, the strategies they use to manage stress, their favorite activities with children, and the difficulties they face as single parents. Parents described having good relationships with their children. They agreed that positive reinforcement and rewards would be motivating. Even though their children spoke English or "Spanglish" most of the time, parents expressed a preference for speaking Spanish at home so that children maintain their familial language. All parents, especially those working in agriculture, were subject to stressful situations such as having to leave children at home to be at work at 4:00 am, heavy workloads, not knowing how their children were doing in school, having to rely on older children to take care of younger ones, dealing with the volatile emotions of their teenagers, and worry over not knowing where their children go after school or who they spend time with.

Some participants reported an absence of emotional support from friends or family after their divorce or separation. They described issues such as depression, drug abuse, and feelings of isolation. All participants spoke of "immigrant stress," and acknowledged how stressful it is to live in the United States even though they appreciate the help and resources they have received from state and community organizations. In regards to our proposed technique to reduce stress, parents pointed that our idea of Frenar (Stop), Respirar (Breathe), y Observar (and Observe) was a good one. They recommended changing the Spanish word "Frenar" to "Parar" (which also means to stop). All participants were very optimistic about what they could learn from the *MNF* prototype. In addition to learning how to manage stress, use effective and positive discipline, and protect their children from conflict, parents were also interested in learning how to improve communication and overcome language barriers with their children.

Component development. The *MNF* prototype was designed to support learning through the visual and interactive features that digital media offers. Videos provided explicit instruction as well as linguistic and culturally appropriate modeling of the parenting skills; printable summaries featured graphic representations of the parenting skills to accommodate diverse literacy levels; action plans guided parents from conceptual learning to the application of the parenting skills; and a downloadable audio exercise provided an easy-to-follow framework for practicing stress management. The development process began with refinement of the scope and content of the program by the projects' content experts, consultants, and project team. Focus

group and key informant interviews provided crucial insight into the specific situations that Latino families encounter and this information was later incorporated into the program's video treatments. All drafts of the English and Spanish video scripts were carefully reviewed by content experts and consultants for their instructional, cultural and linguistic integrity.

Production—Video. IRIS Ed employed a professional video crew (director, camera operator, lighting technician, art director, sound mixer, production grip, make-up artist and production coordinator). Filming was carried out on high-definition video with digital audio and a wide collection of lighting and rigging gear.

MNF video footage was edited in IRIS Ed's post-production studio with up-to-date digital editing, graphics, and audio editing equipment. Graphics and animation were added and the sequences were audio edited. *MNF* PIs, development and production staff reviewed and refined drafts of the videos. In the final step, videos were uploaded to the web and tested for usability. To maintain consistency, printable summaries were developed using the specific language used in the finalized videos. These printable summaries were illustrated to provide an engaging look and a design consistent with program content.

Production—Mobile: IRIS Ed's web team went to work refining and testing the entire set of product materials on the web to make sure that the videos and audio exercises were usable on mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, and on desktop web browsers. This process included using modern mobile design techniques to allow the web resources to be navigable and easy to use on the small screen space of mobile devices, ensuring that the videos played on as many devices as possible.

D. Pilot Study

Design. We evaluated the feasibility, usability, and acceptance of the *MNF* prototype using a within-subjects repeated measures pre- and post-training study design. This design evaluated the potential for efficacy for preliminary prototypes (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991) by examining changes in user outcomes such as self-efficacy, parental stress, child behavior, and knowledge. The design did not control for potential threats to internal validity, which can be addressed when the complete intervention is tested in Phase II. At that point, an adequate test can be conducted using a sufficiently powered, large-scale randomized control trial.

Participants. Forty-three Spanish-speaking parents (37 mothers and six fathers) enrolled in the study with 36 completing posttest (16% attrition). On average, the sample was 34.5 years old ($SD = 6.95$; range 23-50). Twenty-two were single, 10 were divorced, three were widowed, one was living with a partner, and seven were married. Of the seven married participants, three participated because their spouse was incarcerated, two were separated but not yet divorced, one because of separation due to economics, and one was separated due to immigration.

Thirty-three participants reported less than high school education, seven had a high school diploma or GED, two had some college, and one an Associate's degree. Thirty-eight parents reported working out of the home, and five did not. Those working outside the home reported an average of 37.69 hours a week ($SD = 6.28$; range 18-50). All forty-three parents identified as Latino/Hispanic. Two parents reported being born in the United States and 41 reported being born in Mexico, with an average of 15.16 years living in the US ($SD = 5.82$; range 7-26) and 14.51 years in Oregon ($SD = 5.73$; range 6-26). Thirty parents reported that they spoke to their child only in Spanish, seven in more Spanish than English, five in Spanish and English equally, and one in more English than Spanish. When asked about their child's reading abilities, two reported their child could only read Spanish, six more Spanish than English, 24 both Spanish and English equally, seven more English than Spanish, and two only in English.

Procedures. The study was conducted in two different group meetings held at CAPACES Leadership Institute in Woodburn, OR. Both groups met for two hours and were moderated by the PIs and Curriculum Developer with support from additional research personnel. Upon arrival, the parents completed written consent forms and pretest assessments. The parents were introduced to the *MNF* prototype and given DVD copies of the video training, web, and mobile links, and additional print and video resources to use with their children. They were instructed to review the training and to complete activities over the next three weeks. After the three-week intervention period, parents returned to meet for another two hours with the PIs to debrief on their experiences using the program and complete posttest assessments.

Measures. The following assessments were collected either at pretest (T_1), posttest (T_2), or both (T_1 & T_2): T_1 pretest included a demographic survey of information about the parents and their children. For pre-post T_1 and T_2 evaluation of change in outcomes, we administered surveys of **behavioral items** assessing the use of positive parenting practices and stress management; **self-efficacy** including general parenting self-efficacy using the Parent Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC; Johnston & Mash, 1989) and a specific scale on positive parenting practices and stress relief developed according to guidelines outlined by Bandura (2006); **parenting knowledge** derived from the conceptual and practical content lessons in the program; **parental stress** using the Parental Stress Scale (PSS; Berry & Jones, 1995); and **parental depression** using the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale Revised (CESD-R; Van Dam & Earleywine, 2011). At T_2 posttest, a previously validated scale assessed **consumer satisfaction** and **usability** using an adaptation of the System Usability Scale (SUS; Brooke, 1996).

Table 1. Paired Sample *t* tests

	<i>Pre Intervention</i>		<i>Post Intervention</i>			<i>Cohen's</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>D</i>
Behavioral Items	4.6	1.1	5.1	0.9	3.16**	.53
Self-Efficacy (PSOC)	3.4	0.7	3.8	0.6	3.00**	.50
Self-Efficacy (Program)	2.6	0.6	3.1	0.5	5.88***	.98
Knowledge	4.5	1.3	5.1	1.7	2.50*	.42
Stress (PSS)	2.0	0.5	1.9	0.5	-2.00†	.33
Depression (CESD-R)	1.8	0.6	1.7	0.6	-1.88†	.31
† $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$						

Hypotheses and findings. We hypothesized that participants completing the *MNF* prototype modules would (a) report high levels of consumer satisfaction and usability, (b) exhibit increases in pre-post measures of reported use of positive parenting and stress management behaviors, (c) exhibit increases in self-efficacy both generally and with regards to positive parenting and stress management, (d) exhibit decreases in parental stress, and (e) exhibit decreases in depression. Study hypotheses were tested using paired-sample Student's *t*. Results of pre-post comparisons are in Table 1.

After exposure to the program, parents demonstrated significantly more positive parenting and stress management behaviors, $t(35) = 3.16$, $p < .01$, greater knowledge about positive parenting and stress management, $t(35) = 2.50$, $p < .05$, increases in self-efficacy both general parenting, $t(35) = 3.00$, $p < .01$ and

specific to stress management and positive parenting, $t(35) = 5.88, p < .001$. There were marginal decreases in stress ($p = .053$) and depression ($p = .068$).

In summary, measures of parental behavioral items, parental self-efficacy, and knowledge showed the predicted changes at posttest. Parental stress and depression were directionally significant as one-tailed tests.

Acceptability. Items on the 16-item consumer satisfaction scale ($\alpha = .88$) were rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Participants reported high levels of consumer satisfaction ($M = 5.48, SD = 0.38$). The means of the individual consumer satisfaction items were all above 5.03. Ninety-seven percent of participants reported that the take-home materials and videos were useful. A good measure of acceptance is the number of times the participants watched the videos, which was reported as an average of 3.15 times ($SD = 3.01$; range 1-12). When asked with whom they watched the videos (could select all that applied), 24 reported watching with their children, four watched with another family member, and one watched with a friend. Nearly all participants had a smartphone and reported ease and increased utility in accessing the program content via their mobile device. During the intervention, participants were instructed how to access *MNF* on their smartphones.

Transcribed open-ended comments from the consumer satisfaction questionnaire included: "I liked all the examples provided because I have been too negative many times before, but I have learned a lot and feel much more confident as a parent." "The steps are easy to follow. They are simple but efficient." "The relaxation exercises reduced stress and made me able to help my children." "I liked the fact that it was able to help me in so many good ways. That other parents had many things to say about their situation. It made me realize that I needed to have more conversations with my children."

Parents said they would like training on topics such as talking to teenage children about drugs, alcohol, and gangs, how to improve a child's self-esteem; bullying, and additional materials for children. We will take these comments into account in the design of the Phase II program.

E. Discussion

We learned that single parent Latino families were eager to receive the Phase I *MNF* training and were highly motivated to complete learning assignments. This was evidenced by the study's high recruitment rate. The increases in positive parenting and stress management behaviors, self-efficacy, knowledge, and the marginal decrease in parent stress and depression were striking given the brief duration of the intervention. In Phase II, with increased dosage and greater duration, it is not unreasonable to expect a continuation of the outcomes noted in Phase I. The acceptability feedback was particularly strong. The frequent viewings by parents indicate that they endorsed the culturally relevant content, design, and style of the educational intervention. Results from the usability investigations bolstered our confidence in Latino single parents' use of digital technology both online and on their mobile devices.

We recognize that the pre- and post-training design does not control for threats to internal validity. In testing the complete program in Phase II, we will conduct a randomized control trial (RCT) during which we will both ensure control of internal validity threats and deliver a program that will cover a broader range of generalizable and impactful content.

F. References

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