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Berkeley, CA: Center for Working Families, University of California, Berkeley, 2000

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The Culture of Concern and Family Economy Among Working Latino Youth

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*Working Paper No. 14
June 2000*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Latino youth who work as a way to participate in and contribute to the family economy. Based on forty in-depth interviews conducted with Latino youth in Oakland, California, this discussion examines working children in Latino immigrant families and the cultural and social aspects of their decision to help support the family. Research findings reveal children's participation in the family economy that contradicts the perception of children as totally dependent subjects and the ultimate objects of family care. Working children in immigrant families were active agents, earning and contributing to the family's welfare and well-being. Although the financial need was evident, parents in Latino immigrant families never directly required or demanded that their children work for the family's sake. Rather, the youths' motivations to work derived from a general culture of concern practiced and understood by many Latino families in this study. This culture of concern was based on a tradition of respect and reciprocity central to the collective survival strategies that Latinos have relied upon for generations. Although many families studied did cohere collectively for survival, there were critical gender differences among the youths' meanings for their financial contributions. Finances were a concern for both male and female youth in my research, but Latina (female) youth recognized that family financial problems were considerably weightier for their mothers because cultural traditions and social conditions tended to shift the burden of child rearing as well as financial support in their direction. Latino (male) youth were as tuned into financial problems, but rarely indicated how sexist oppression intensified the pressure their mothers endured while addressing these problems. Finally, because of a decrease in state support and increase in economic pressure, many children in these Latino immigrant families were participating in a "multiple earner" strategy necessary to remain at a basic subsistence level. Without an increase in state support and a general improvement in wages, immigrant children will continue to work for the family's survival instead of devoting this time and energy to studying or saving for college and ascending into the middle class.

Since the 1970s, women have moved into the US workforce in massive numbers. This workforce shift resulted partly from families applying a “dual earner” strategy to reach a rising standard of living in a declining economic climate (Hanson. S.L 1991; Hochschild and Machung 1989; Hochschild 1991, 1997; Schor 1991). Although dual earner families are now commonplace, Latino youth in my study lived in households that pooled income from several earners, including children, within an extended kin network. Both immigrant households and the dual earner families face economic pressures to combine incomes, yet sharing among the immigrant families in my study consistently called for a “multiple earner” formula. If a parent or both parents had low-wage jobs their earnings would barely support themselves, let alone a family of four or more. Immigrant children, when they reached legal working age, often contributed to the family’s welfare by taking jobs, allowing families to combine multiple earnings. As Latino immigrant families encounter a challenging economy without much in the way of state support, the multiple earner strategy in several cases became necessary for generational mobility and ascendancy into the middle class.

However, in studies of contemporary work/family relationships, children are rarely seen as making any effort that might contribute to the general good, welfare, or social mobility of their parents and family (Thorne 1999). The major tendency among social scientists studying working children is to “periodize” their investigation by revisiting industrialization (Hareven 1982; Lamphere 1987; Matthaei 1982; Tilly and Scott 1978). This “periodization” of working children may be symptomatic of or perhaps a reaction to a white male and middle-class frame of reference that has influenced popular assumptions regarding children’s current familial and societal roles. In particular, the white male child from a higher socioeconomic background has served as a model promoting the widely accepted perception that the abrogation of child labor, economic growth, and compensatory education in industrialized countries absolved children of their role as contributors within reproductive and productive labor and rendered them the sole benefactors of development within families and schools. We must ask whether this assumption can apply to all children (if we consider race, class, ethnicity, and gender) born after industrialization. Scholarship that attempts to answer this question and make visible children’s contributions and agency while simultaneously countering the assumption that children are

passive and dependent subjects in need of development from parents and social institutions is slowly emerging (Duffy 1998; Song 1999; Thorne 1993). Yet further research is necessary in both historical and contemporary contexts to understand the varying social and economic experiences of childhood and children's economic contributions to the family.

This paper contributes to the emerging scholarship on children's agency by examining the adolescent dimension of family support and illustrating how youths work as a way to participate in the family economy. Based on qualitative research conducted in Oakland, California this discussion focuses specifically on working children in Latino immigrant families and the cultural and social aspects behind their interest with helping to support the family. With Latino immigrant children and their work to sustain the family as the focal points of the research, I uncovered evidence of children's participation in the family economy that contradicts the perception of children as totally dependent subjects and the ultimate objects of family care.

Furthermore, my findings point to specific gendered aspects of children's financial contributions and therefore parallel previous studies of gender relations within immigrant families (Hirsch 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Wolf 1990). In her study of Mexican migration, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) claims that the gender dynamics within the family often belied the notion of the immigrant household as a cohesive unit. Immigrant men and women maintained divergent motivations and interests in both migration and resettlement. In my study, the second-generation youth within the immigrant families also exhibited divergent patterns related to gender. While male and female youth were both concerned for the family, many young Latinas (females) expressed a deeply felt sensitivity to their mothers' dual challenges of raising and financially supporting the family. They saw these challenge as the unfair product of machismo cultural traditions and general social injustice and offered their mothers succor not only out of a concern for the family, as males often did, but also out of the recognition that, if tradition had its way, they would one day suffer the same fate. In comparison to their male counterparts, Latinas tended to maintain a different, more feminist interest and meaning for how they practiced their concern.

In the first section of this paper, I discuss the various reasons for children's financial contributions in the multiple earner families. The discussion is based on forty in-depth interviews

conducted with Latino youth living in Oakland, California. The age range for this sample of forty was between eighteen and twenty-four, and everyone began work around sixteen to earn money and support themselves and their families. The youths in this sample were either second generation or 1.5 generation, with parents who had been born in and emigrated from various countries in Latin America, including Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala. In these multiple earner immigrant families, the range of children's support started on one side with the child handling his or her own personal expenses (clothes, food, books, entertainment, etc.) and ended on the other side with some handing over every paycheck to meet daily living expenses and ensure survival of the family. However, the medium contribution among the Latino youth, thirty-six out of the forty in the sample, fell somewhere in the middle of this range. That is, youths kept some money for personal expenditures and contributed the rest for paying some of the family's living expenses (bills, rent, food, rent, emergency savings, etc.).

The next section, which also includes data collected from the working children in immigrant families, looks closely at the culture of concern among Latino youth and how they enacted this cultural practice by becoming providers. Although the financial need was clear, parents in Latino immigrant families never required or demanded that their children work for the family's sake. Thus, parental authority was not involved in "pushing" immigrant children into the workforce. Rather, all the young Latinos in the study independently decided to work because of their deep concern for the family. This compulsion to help proceeded from a Latino cultural perspective that places an extreme value on concern for other family members. I define this "culture of concern" as someone seeing and sharing the burdens of others as if they were his or her own. What makes this concern "cultural" are the youth's strong traditional notions of respect and reciprocity, motivating them to acknowledge the family's financial woes and then decide to share in the burden of support. Respect from Latino children focused on the importance of family, their parents' struggles as immigrants, and the authority of parents. Reciprocity within Latino immigrant families somewhat paralleled the practice of sharing and interdependence among kin documented in Stack's research with low-income African American families (Stack 1974, 1996; Stack and Burton 1993). Latino parents sacrificed to provide for their families while children in turn saw a way in which to alleviate some of the burden of supporting a family. Out

of their respect for family and the need for reciprocity to survive, Latino youth felt concerned over family financial matters and took it upon themselves to share the burden of support.

Furthermore, the insignificance of parental authority in the Latino youths' determination to work counters Song's (1999) research with working children in Chinese immigrant families in which she discovered profound expectations and pressure from parents that children should work for the family. Song attributes cultural norms within the larger Chinese community as informing the parent's perspective that children should help out. Although Latino parents did not explicitly encourage Latino children to enter the workforce, Latino culture likewise motivated youth to become concerned and help out. However, this culture of concern emerged from practices and strategies of interdependence that Latino families implicitly have relied upon for generations.

In the last section of this paper, I focus entirely on Latinas and how their concern for financial matters was about improving household conditions and alleviating some of their mothers' stresses and burdens of supporting a family. It was common for these Latinas to recognize that the financial crisis intensified with a general male indifference to women bearing the full responsibility of raising a family. As stated earlier, this recognition marks a critical distinction between males and females in the study.

Modes for Children's Financial Contributions

In the families studied, children regularly contributed earnings, taking part in the multiple earner strategy. Although the needs satisfied by their contributions varied in small ways, most Latino youths in this study were contributing portions of their paychecks to expand household incomes. The reasons for their contributions, however, differed among families. A few were completely dependent on children's earnings to meet most daily and basic living expenses, including rent, food, and bills. Many more used money from children's earnings as supplemental cash, when parents were short and had a difficult time covering expenses. In a few instances, children contributed to push household conditions closer to a middle-class lifestyle, providing some hope for the immigrant family to one day approximate the "American dream."

Critical Safety Net, Approximating the American dream, Sustaining the Household, and Sustaining More Than One Household

This section examines four modes for children's participation in strategies of multiple earning: *critical safety net*, *approximating the American dream*, *sustaining the household*, and *sustaining more than one household*. A critical safety net was the most common result of children's contributions; more than half of the entire sample of forty supplemented parents' incomes in times of need. Only a four youths in the study contributed as a way to push the quality of life beyond working-class existence, to approximate the American dream. Although expectations of the lifestyle the family could reasonably attain were modest, youth saw how they could enhance living conditions and take a gradual step toward changing class status by working to acquire certain symbols of success, such as home ownership. Although it does not necessarily secure middle-class status, homeownership may represent an approximation of some aspect of the American dream. With better economic opportunities and state support for families, there would be more Latino youth working to help themselves and their families to become middle class than taking jobs to provide a critical safety net or sustain the household. Ten youths in the study fell into the category of sustaining the household, in which the family's survival was completely dependent on children working. Sometimes, the immigrant family was spread across the border with parents and relatives located in the country of origin and children settled in Oakland. The employment of Latino youth in transnational families became an essential income source to sustain more than one household: the home of origin and the new home in Oakland.

Critical Safety Net. Most participants in my research followed the critical safety net pattern of contributing earnings to the family while in their teens. Sometimes the portion of the paycheck provided for family expenses was quite substantial. When Nestor Cruz first started working at sixteen, he used to hand over half of his paycheck to his father. At nineteen and working full-time, he started turning over most of his check because the family needed his earnings to meet expenses and save "a little extra money if something might happen. Anything could happen. We'd just have that money to come up again." Children's earnings offered security, a critical safety net to fall back on when times became rough. With the meager wages of secondary work, living month to month or hand to mouth was quite common among Latino

immigrant families in the study. If someone in the family lost a job, then whatever money had been saved for emergencies would at least ensure food on the table for the next month.

In other instances, much less of the paycheck was offered to the family. When Jose Echeveria was seventeen years old, his family did not expect him to offer much. Nevertheless, he handed over \$50 from every paycheck. His mother used the \$50 every two weeks to purchase a little extra food when she went to the grocery store. Other times, Jose's contribution was used to help pay-off bills. In either situation, Jose's family was not fully dependent on his earnings, but still accepted regular contributions from him to fill in when resources were short. Some of Jose's earnings served as a critical safety net to cover expenses, not necessarily on a regular basis, but in times of need.

Approximating the American Dream. The money children earned for their families also contributed to acquiring aspects of the American dream, a quality of life that parents could not provide alone. Arturo Chavez, a nineteen-year-old Mexican immigrant, turned over almost his entire paycheck to his mother while keeping only \$50 per check for personal spending. He said that he worked for his family so they might eventually enter the world of homeownership. Arturo's family had dreamed of owning their own home since they emigrated from Mexico. However, his dad's job as a janitor was insufficient for attaining that cherished dream. The strategy of multiple earners at least made the American dream seem like a possibility.

My dad always been saying that, that he wanted a house, that we should earn for a house or something like that. But . . . when he was working by himself, he couldn't, we couldn't save money and buy out stuff that we needed so that that money that he used to work for was for rent and the clothes and all that, shoes we needed and all that. So we couldn't save up for no house, but now that me and Gabi [his younger sister of eighteen] started to work, it's like, we don't save all our money but we like, if our check's like \$250, we probably keep \$50 and give them \$200, buy what we need and all that, and just give it all to them. And we're saving little by little, see what happens, cause we are, we do want to move, but we want to move somewhere that it's gonna be our place; we want to get something.

They have been saving for a home ever since Arturo began work at sixteen. It has been over three years now and many more to come, but keeping the dream of homeownership alive was a

way for the family to raise hope in otherwise dismal economic times. Attempting to accomplish this dream was a way at least to feel as if they were moving forward in America.

Sustaining the Household. When she was just a freshman in high school, Cecilia Hernandez started working at a fast food restaurant. Because her father barely earned enough to support the family, she realized her fast food job was necessary to cover expenses and sustain the household. Her father washed dishes for over fifty hours a week at a local diner. Her mother used to clean offices in downtown Oakland; however, she needed to visit her ailing mother (Cecilia's grandmother) in Mexico. When she returned, Cecilia's mother lost her job. To pick up the slack, Cecilia found employment at a local fast food restaurant. Her earnings helped, but the minimum wage was not enough to cover all the bills incurred by a family of eight. Therefore, she talked to the manager and helped her younger brother Angel obtain work at the restaurant. With her father's earnings as a dishwasher and her younger brother contributing as well, Cecilia's family covered expenses and sustained the household while all three were working. The low wages paid in service work necessitated Cecilia's family having multiple earners.

Since she was seventeen, Veronica Valdez has been paying at least half of her family's rent. Now, at twenty-one, she has a work-study job at San Jose State University, and paying rent has become somewhat easier. Yet before her college job, things were more touch and go with the family's financial situation. Her mother had left Veronica's father when Veronica was just a child. When her mother could find sewing or cleaning work, she provided for the family, but depended on relatives for housing. When Veronica was eligible [sixteen] for work, she found employment at a local grocery store making the minimum wage. The earnings allowed Veronica's mom and brother and sister to find their own place and stop depending on relatives. At first when they were on their own, the money situation was tight, even though they were renting an extremely small one-bedroom apartment for \$450 a month. However, one year after Veronica started working, her older brother found a job; he had been out of work for over a year. His cousin procured a job for him at the restaurant at which he was working. By combining the earnings from their low-wage jobs, Veronica's family was able to move out of the small apartment and rent a larger two-bedroom place in a low-income housing project. Sometimes

multiple earners were necessary to sustain a household with barely acceptable or even substandard housing.

Sustaining More Than One Household, Transnational Family Arrangements. The multiple earner strategy evolved into complex networks, connecting family members across borders to form a transnational structure. After he graduated high school in Mexico, Fernando Alvarez left his family and headed to the US to live with his brother and find work. He would have preferred to remain with his mother and father, but there was no work for him back home in Michoachan, Mexico. Once Fernando arrived in the US, a cousin helped him to obtain a gardening job where he was supposed to be paid cash after each day of work. However, pay was erratic and never guaranteed. Depending on how much his boss grossed throughout the day, Fernando might or might not get paid. His cousin, Jose, worked at Happy Burger and received regular weekly checks. Fernando asked his cousin to get him a job there, and within a week, he was wearing a Happy Burger uniform.

With regular checks, Fernando could send home to Mexico \$150 every month. His mother and father, two of his sisters and a brother lived on a ranch in rural Michoachan. Industrialization had severely undermined subsistence or family farming, and the Alvarez family was unable to maintain a suitable livelihood solely on the farm's production. The family required money from the outside to sustain the farm. Both Fernando and his sister, Sonia, lived in the US and sent money back home regularly. Their earnings purchased some of the essentials for farming, such as feed, fertilizer, and livestock.

In this case, multiple earners within a family lived in separate households and in different countries. Although Fernando shared housing with his cousin's family, his sister, Sonia, resided with her husband and child in Walnut Creek, which was closer to the restaurant where she worked. The Alvarez family lived in three different households, dispersing family members to regions where economic opportunities existed. The two North American households had earners who supported not only the original home in Mexico but also the households in the US, because Fernando his sister occasionally give each other money. These kinds of transnational family arrangements are characteristic among immigrant communities (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Rouse 1991). In my research, Latino immigrant families

would often exhibit a structural and spatial composition that belied the traditional Western conception of the nuclear family, seen as replete with two parents and two kids all under one roof. Arrangements were more dense, varied, and complex in immigrant families such that several generations (not just two) lived under one roof or the household economies of several generations were connected across thousands of miles and multiple homes.

A Cultural of Concern: Respect, Reciprocity, and Children's Agency

For young Latinos, family financial need and easy access to low-wage employment surely provided significant motivation for them to join the ranks of earners within the family. However, this decision to work was rarely enforced or suggested by their parents; usually youth came to an independent decision to work. Financial pressures and access to jobs through family networks did contribute to their channeling into the job market. Yet demands from the family were not responsible for their decision to enter the workforce. Young Latinos often explained the reason for this decision using their own terms and perspective. Much in the same way that the Lads in Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour* maintained their own cultural logic behind the choice of manual over mental labor, the young Latinos in my research held a certain cultural premise regarding work.

Although the meaning of work for Latino youth contained instrumental notions of material assistance, work also meant an opportunity to express cultural norms around *respect* and *reciprocity*. This expression was independent of their parents' authority; it was the youths' own agency that moved them into the job market and uplifted families from a dire situation. Latino youths developed patterns of concern from their cultural sense of respect and reciprocity. That is, parents and familial authority were rarely involved in the decision to find employment. Children assessed the financial situation, became concerned, and then took action by working.

In the following statement, Veronica Valdez highlights the common themes of reciprocity and respect reflected in the culture of concern. The act of providing for the family may be just a matter of family responsibility, but simultaneously it was an opportunity to give back and respect the support that the parent provider had given earlier.

VV: Let me tell you that I give money to my mom. For a long time, my older brother would help support us, so I've taken on that role where I help support my mom, me and my sister. I don't see it as really something that will lay me off the hook, but as an obligation, as a part of contributing to what she's giving me the years I couldn't work.

JC: So you see it more as an obligation and not like: I'm doing this, but I'm expecting...?

VV: No. I'm not expecting anything. I'm really glad I could do it, and it really comes from the heart. I guess that's the only way we have been able to survive because we help each other.

JC: So you don't feel like you can ask for more things from your mother?

VV: Not at all. She tells me what to do, I respect her a lot, and money is just a part of getting by around the house. It's not anything like that where you lose respect for your mother or each other because of it.

Veronica appreciated the care her mother had bestowed to her throughout her childhood and enjoyed the opportunity to do likewise for her mother and family. The act of giving for Veronica could be conceived as reciprocation that she deemed necessary for survival. Her mother needed to care for Veronica in her childhood years, and in return, Veronica needed to extend assistance to ensure the well-being of her family in the present. Veronica perceived that the family's collective responsibility became critical for their existence. However, this responsibility was experienced as the delight of helping loved ones instead of the pressure of family obligation.

Reciprocity was a common motivation for youth to work and help out their families financially. They see their parents or other siblings providing support and a home for them and realize that they should give back something in return for what they receive.

JC: Why do you work?

NESTOR CRUZ: I work to help my family out, to pay the bills, buy some clothes, food.

JC: How often do you give money to your parents?

NC: Every time I get paid. Every two weeks.

JC: Is it most of the check?

NC: Almost all of it.

JC: Are you OK with that?

NC: I think it's cool because you can't live without money. I get anything I want. The money I'm giving, it's like nothing. If I had my own place, I couldn't afford it.

That money wouldn't be nothing. I'd probably just have money to pay the place, no money to eat or pay the bills. So that's cool.

JC: Is that the reason why you got your first job, so you could help the family?

NC: Yes, because we wanted to move out of that place; it was so small apartment.

JC: So was your family involved in deciding whether you should work or not?

NC: No. They didn't tell me, "You should work. Go look for a job."

I was choosing so I could help out, make things better.

The earnings Nestor made as a fast food worker were not enough to support himself independently. However, his earnings combined with those of other family members were enough to cover all living expenses; the family had a roof over their heads, food on the table, and clothes on their backs. Nestor understood that if he dropped earnings into the family pot, the quality of the items necessary for subsistence would improve; the roof was a little larger, food more plentiful, and clothes somewhat newer. In appreciation for what he could not provide on his own, Nestor handed over most of his check to reciprocate the offerings as well as make life better for everyone in the family.

Respect was integrally related to reciprocity in the multiple earner families as well as another factor influencing young Latinos' interest in family matters and relationship to parents. Without the family members feeling respect for each other, they would lack the initiative to help out without expectations for immediate returns. As Veronica Valdez stated, respect was presumed in her family, an important feeling that shaped family relations. It was a respect for other family members for being "family" and respect for the sincere effort and sacrifices that were part of the role of family members. Because her mother was incapable of handling the full financial responsibility for the family, Veronica did not lose respect for her mother. The act of earning money for the household could never shake the respect that Veronica had for her mother. Her mother had given quite a bit of support and made many sacrifices for the family's sake. Respect, in this case, was not materially based, but built from an emotional response of concern.

In her study of Latino immigrant families, Guadalupe Valdes (1996) also notes the critical importance of respect within the Latino culture.¹ She argues that respect for family as a collective elevates the value of supporting and maintaining the integrity of the family. This respect for the good of the family and attendant impetus for guaranteeing the success of the

entire collective lead family members to make individual sacrifices for ensuring everyone's survival, which tends to prioritize the well-being of the entire family over achievements of individual members. Note that Latino immigrant families are not the exclusive practitioners of family strategies that focus on ensuring the survival or 'good' of the family while curtailing the desires and needs of individual members. In the early moments of industrialization, French and English-lower class families embraced a "family economy ideology" that required multiple family members, including children, to become laborers, make sacrifices, and contribute to the general welfare of the household (Tilly and Scott 1978). In contemporary lower-class African American communities, families enact helping practices that involve kin across multiple generations (Stack and Burton 1993). Young African American women make present sacrifices for an older generation that allow them to receive resources and help when they become older. In whatever time period and whatever race, lower class families tend to apply collective strategies, involving both reproductive and productive labor, to ensure that family and future generations survive.

In the immigrant families of my research, respect was also a key cultural aspect. Children were prepared to take action necessary for the family's survival and yield to the authority of their parents. However, parents' authority was rarely ever involved in their children's decisions to enter the workforce. Not one youth out of my entire sample of forty said that his or her parents had told him or her to get a job. When I asked them whether their parents expected them to work, they unequivocally said "No." The comments of twenty-one-year-old Aura Gabriella represented the standard response given when youths were queried about parents' involvement in the decision to work.

JC: Did your mom expect you at all to work?

AG: No. My mom never told us to work. She just told us if we wanted things—our work was school. . . . She never pressured us to work. I wanted to work.

No one (her mother or anyone else) told Aura that she needed to work or had to take a job for the family's sake. The lack of parents' explicit guidance with children's work decisions counters other research on working children in which parents explicitly pressured or expected

their children to help out and work (Song 1999; Wolf 1990). In Aura's case, as well as , those of other youths in the study, the decision to work emerged from feelings of concern motivated by cultural norms of respect and reciprocity, which have been instrumental for the family's survival for many generations. There was not a need for parents to tell their children to become concerned and contribute to the welfare of the family because generations of Latinos have infused the family milieu with concern and helping out. These young people grew up within a culture and family context in which many considered helping others as normal behavior. There was no need for parents to pressure or expect them to do something that they felt was normal and in many cases delightful because contributing inspired positive emotions for the giver and receiver.

Gendered Aspects of the Culture of Concern

Although male and female youths demonstrated concern, Latinas more frequently expressed how their mothers' challenges as women were tied to the family's financial problems. Concern for many Latinas therefore pointed to financial matters as well as the general burden of support that was mostly in their mothers' charge. Besides their full responsibility of raising the family, Latina mothers found themselves in the position of being a significant provider because the earnings of fathers were extremely low or they were divorced or separated from their spouses. Latina youth felt that this dual challenge was the result of a male-dominated society and machismo culture that consistently left Latina women on their own to care for children. Thus, they spoke about their mothers' burdens and stresses as products of the unfair treatment that Latinas normally experience.

Although a few Latinos did mention gender relations, an overwhelming majority of the eighteen males in the study was silent about issues and problems in the family related to gender. These were some of the only comments made by males about gender relations and their mothers. The first comment is from nineteen-year-old Ishmael Ramirez, who felt that his mother (a single parent) was unfairly treated by his father.

My father says that my mother was going out with another man, and that was a problem. So nobody liked that cuz my mother, she was doing nothing, so she stayed all day in the house. So I don't know why he said that. And he was

the one, he was going out with the girls, with the other woman that I know that. So that's why I was mad that he would start talking about my mother.

Nestor Cruz, who lived with both parents, felt a little indignant about females having power in the family.

JC: What about in your family? Are things different between males and females?

NC: Yeah.

JC: Can you talk about that?

NC: They don't say it, but they see my sister just a little bit higher than me. So they sometimes treat me like that, like sometimes they'll blame me for some things. Like if I forget to clean up some things, they start yelling at me. They never get on my sister's case.

JC: You don't think females get treated unfairly in the house?

NC: Uh, no, because my mom has a lot of power, so my dad is like the follower.

Comments like these reveal very real tensions and power struggles between males and females in Latino families. Noticing the gender dynamics within families allowed for a view of the household that was not always unified, but often complicated. It is primarily from the voices of Latinas in the study that we learn about the complicated character of immigrant households and shifting gender relations, because they frequently expressed how family problems included the financial and child-rearing pressures mothers had to endure.

The final part of this section therefore will focus exclusively on Latinas and the gendered aspects of their concern for family financial matters. This focus allows for an understanding of generational changes in the family's gender relations and how these changes might reveal important differences between family members. Social scientists have pointed out that while families do enact household strategies for survival, there may be a tendency among work/family researchers to assume that the household is a cohesive unit and overlook conflict and contradictions within the family (Hareven 1982; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Wolf 1990). Wolf (1990) argues that assuming the household is an uncomplicated analytic unit is problematic for understanding gender relations inside the household. "While not denying the utility of understanding what poor people . . . must do in order to survive . . . the concept of household strategies misrepresents intra-household behavior, obscures intra-household stratification by

gender and generation” (p. 44). Many Latinas in my sample did indeed grow up in families that experienced changes in gender relations. The following examples of the gendered aspects of concern and generational change derive exclusively from Latina working children who were more inclined to elaborate in detail the gender circumstances within family.

Watching, Borrowing, and Their Mothers’ Dilemma with Asking for Help

Daughters would consistently observe their mothers’ emotional state and determine levels of stress and anxiety resulting from overwhelming responsibility. Because the only jobs available for Latina immigrants were hard, dirty, backbreaking, and low paying, the Latina youth felt empathetic toward mom’s burden of supporting a family and therefore carefully and consistently monitored her temperament. Observing her mother’s emotional expressions was therefore a common way that the Latina practiced the culture of concern. She would watch her mother’s face to see what it revealed about the current situation of the family. By maintaining a vigilant awareness of her mother’s moods and expression, she read and determined the seriousness of financial problems.

Sometimes, daughters of single mothers could easily read in their mothers’ expressions and emotions the burden and pain of sexist oppression on top of raising a family alone. In Rosie Juarez’s case, her mother experienced single parentage twice. She left her first husband, Rosie’s father, years back when Rosie was barely walking. She could not handle the continuous abuse of him yelling and screaming at her. When Rosie was in middle school, she remarried and moved the family to San Rafael, where her new husband had a good job working in an auto repair shop. Two years into the marriage abusiveness reared its ugly head, but this time Rosie and her sisters were victims as well. Rosie’s mother quickly grabbed her children and left to raise them back in Oakland. She received AFDC and relied on relatives for any extra care for her children.

RJ: I always saw my mom crying, and sometimes we wouldn't have anything to eat, especially when we left Marin County. We left Marin County because me and my sisters told my mom how he [stepfather] was treating us, and she was like, "You know what, we're leaving. We're going to leave." And especially after we told her what he would do to us, she was like, "That's it. We're leaving." So we came back to Oakland, and we moved in with my grandmother again. And my

mom always struggled. You know, we didn't have stuff to eat, and I thought, what if all of us worked, and then we could eat.

JC: But you could sort of feel this financial pressure.

RJ: Yeah, and every time we went to the store, we said, Mom, could we have this, and no, we don't have any money. Money was always an issue. So, and I hate too, learning how to count if we have enough to buy milk, because she would send my sister to buy milk. I think that's when I started liking math a lot.

JC: Because you were thinking about the money.

RJ: Yeah, so it was like that all through elementary and through junior high school. It was really hard for us.

The tears from the emotional distress of single parenthood and sexist oppression wore heavily on Rosie's mother's face. After frequently witnessing her mother cry, Rosie developed a serious concern with financial woes. The way in which the family would survive became a constant matter on her mind starting as early as grade school. Once the dilemma settled into her everyday thoughts, Rosie understood that providing for the family was not only her mother's concern but her concern as well. She was cognizant of this role as provider way before she was eligible to work.

Aura Gabriel also felt the responsibility and respect for her mother's situation and took action to alleviate some of the burden her mother incurred as the primary provider.

JC: Why did you take this first job?

AG: It was not such of a burden for my mom because it was my mom and I had two more sisters. So there was four of us and she was a single parent with three daughters. So it was a lot of burden for her to work and then wash this, and then come home, then take another job to make sure there's food on the table, make sure there's paying bills. It did happen that she took another job for a year and a half or two years. She took another job because the money wasn't enough. She needed to pay bills, she wasn't catching up with the rent, and then she was always worrying she'd be evicted or something like that.

JC: How did you find out about your mom's financial situation when times got tough? Did she talk to you about it?

AG: No, you see it on their face. I would see it on my mom's face. She was stressed.

JC: Did you ever approach her and talk to her about her financial troubles?

AG: No, I don't think so. I don't know if it would have been appropriate or not

but I never wanted to. My sisters were too young to understand but I'm pretty sure that they knew. It's something like they wouldn't really trip on it because they're young.

JC: You're the oldest?

AG: Yes, I'm the oldest out of my family. So I knew when there was financial need. It wasn't being nosy but I always looked at the bills. I was always curious to see how much they were paying and the food we brought home would be very limited. I know that meat would be not often. It was more like chicken all the time.

An awareness of her family's financial situation led Aura Gabriel to taking a job when she was a teenager. This awareness developed while she witnessed the penury of her family life and realized how much pressure her mother handled. Through her own realization, Aura accepted that additional earnings could alleviate some of this pressure and contribute to a better situation for the family.

The child's awareness of shifting moods and emotions was necessary for understanding the financial situation because most mothers rarely, if ever, communicated money matters to their children. Perhaps it was a matter of pride or feeling ashamed of talking to children about money and garnering their input. A traditional perspective on parenting implies that the basic goal for parents to achieve is to provide for their children. Going to their children and consulting with them about money problems could imply failure as parents. Naturally, mothers avoided having their children see them as failures. When I inquired about the extent that parents spoke about money, it was unsurprising that most said the family attempted to evade discussions of money problems. In Rosie Juarez's family, the situation was so dire that her mother needed to accept money from Rosie. However, she would never ask Rosie directly to contribute or share the financial burden. She took the money, but designated the exchange as "borrowing" to signify that she could eventually handle the full financial responsibility herself and thus not appear dependent on Rosie's income.

JC: Did you feel good that you got a job and could help out?

RJ: Yeah. And then, I felt good because I could buy clothes. I could buy myself some clothes. That was hard for my mom; it was one less pressure to worry about, clothes. Every time I got a job, I would just make sure I was in charge of me.

JC: Were you expected at all to help your mother once you got this job? Did she expect you to help the family out?

RJ: She wouldn't take my check or anything, or say, give me "x" amount from your check, or give me this. She never did that, but when she would run short, like she always would, she would ask me, can I borrow some money? And I'd say yes, and I'd say, you don't have to pay me back. I would just give her the check.

JC: Give her the money? So, it really wasn't borrowed.

RJ: Yeah, but she always said it that way, I'll pay you back. I think she felt bad, that it was my money, yeah.

JC: Was it a lot?

RJ: It happened a lot.

JC: Like once a month, or

RJ: I think every paycheck.

JC: Every paycheck? Do you know how much, about?

RJ: It couldn't have been a lot, because it was minimum wage. It was about 50\$; it seems like a little bit, but it was a lot.

JC: That really does help, even 20s. Did you ever offer first, before she asked?

RJ: When we were in the store, and she would count how many items she had and how much money she had. So she would start adding it up in the grocery line, and she would say, "Here, take this back," and I said, "I won't. Why? I have extra money." So, whenever she wanted to put something back, I was like, "I'll put in the rest."

The pain of money problems as well as the necessity of Rosie's earnings to supplement her income made Rosie's mother somewhat reluctant and guilty about asking her daughter for cash. Rosie realized the difficulty with asking for money and became observant within various situations to determine the appropriate time to cover expenses. As they were ready to make purchases at the grocery store, Rosie put in the extra to ensure they bought what they needed. Handing money over in the store understated Rosie's role as provider as well as alleviating her mother's concern that she was dependent on her daughter. The randomness of Rosie's offerings conjured the appearance that her earnings were not structurally integrated into the resources required to meet household expenses, which made it easier for Rosie to give and her mother to hedge the notion that she "needed" her child to work.

Although he had left the family and house years ago, Rogelia Silva's father had decent work shipping products for 7UP and therefore was capable of maintaining his financial responsibility. His income was insufficient to clearly distance the family from the working class

but it still allowed for some stability. Rogelia commented that she wanted to work to satisfy personal material needs, but wanted to avoid turning these needs into an extra load on the family.

JC: Were you ever worried or scared about money problems for your family?

RS: They wouldn't tell me stuff. We were at school and everything, and they wouldn't really tell us. And we weren't hungry, because we would eat at school, so we weren't worried. There always was food, but they wouldn't tell us, we don't have money for this; we don't have money for that.

JC: So why did you start working?

RS: Because the money, I guess, because I wanted to buy. My dad always bought me stuff, and everything, but by the time I already had, we were stable, and we had a house and everything, more money. But I suppose I was being, I was an extra load on my dad because I wanted to dress differently; I wanted to have more clothes and stuff like that. My dad had bought me, I was fifteen and he didn't do a quincinera (birthday party for fifteen year old girls). He bought me a car. So it's like I had to have money for gas, and stuff like that. So I decided to work.

JC: Did he say these things to you?

RS: No, because I see his money being stretched in all different directions. So I just didn't want to be - I felt like I was old enough to work. I wanted to work; I wanted to have the experience to work to be able to just to work and have the responsibility. So I was still getting money for food and rent and stuff like that, but I wanted a little bit of extra to have in my pocket.

JC: So they never talked to you directly about money?

RS: No. They would just say, "That's all there is to eat today," or "Carina, I don't have no money today." Okay, because there's always a meal, beans and rice and meat. So, it's like my mom, she's like, "I didn't have money today. I was like, "Okay, I'll look for a job." I was sixteen when I started working. Ever since then, I've been buying my own clothes. I mean, my dad gives me money, but it's just that when I wanted more main brands of clothes that I know he wouldn't have bought me.

The material signs of financial stability were apparent for Rogelia's family: renting a house instead of an apartment, meat for dinner, more than one car in the family.² However, there were clearly limits to their spending capacity; clothes were modest, food was not always plentiful, and some days went by when the money had dried up. Her parents never spoke directly about these limitations, protecting their children from adopting fears or anxieties about life crises. However, the limitations were hard to conceal when children asked for certain things that

were unattainable. Rogelia realized that to go beyond these barriers and experience an improved quality of life, she must earn it on her own.

Daughters in two-parent homes tended to involve themselves with financial matters and engaged in practices similar to those observed among daughters and single mothers. They carefully monitored the financial situation and then noticed when they needed to initiate some action to resolve a problem. Young Latinas in two-parent homes developed their involvement in household finances primarily through their relationships with their mothers. That is, they monitored the family burden by observing their mothers' emotions as well as offering their concern, in the form of checks or cash, only to them. For instance, twenty-year-old Vicky Torres lived at home with two employed parents. Although her mother cleaned houses every day and her father worked as a machinist in a local foundry, their full time jobs occasionally failed to bring in enough to cover some of the bills. Vicky's parents sometimes supplemented their income as Vicky handed money over to her mother.

VT: I know I can't really ask my mom for money so that's why I right now, if I don't give her money, I try to buy my own clothes. The whole time I was working I was trying to do that, but I always gave money to my mom. I would put it in a savings account or whatever, but every time she needed money, I would get it out and give it to her. I've always tried to have my own money, so I won't have to ask her because I know she doesn't have money so I will try not to ask her.

JC: Was she ever using some of your money to pay bills?

VT: Yes, that's what she needed. Like the water or the electricity went out, or she didn't pay the bill, and they were about to cut off the phone. So I'd give her money for that.

Although sometimes Vicky's mother asked her directly for money, she did watch her mother's emotions and figured out when to offer before being asked.

JC: Do they ask you for the money?

VT: Sometimes they do. Or I'll just give them. At first, I was giving them every month a certain amount of money because I was making more. But right now it's been like a few months that I haven't. But I always see when my mom needs money because she always talks to me when she needs it. Or I can tell. She's all worried, so then I'd be like do you want to borrow some.

Vicky, like Rosie Juarez, represented her support as a form of “borrowing” so that her mother could understate the fact that Vicky contributed earnings to meet household expenses. By her labeling the contribution as “borrowing,” Vicky could give money and her mother could ask without much shame. Borrowing became a way to supply an alternative meaning to the practice of children contributing to the family so that parents could morally accept money from their children. But the children usually knew that the practice really wasn’t borrowing because their parents rarely paid them back. As Vicky said, “If they need money for something and I have some then I let them. I lent them a thousand in total, it never comes back.” Vicky expected that she would never see that money again, but she realized that her family needed it to keep them afloat. The offerings were her way of taking part in easing the burden of survival, yet seeing this role not as an additional burden to her individual desires. It was emotionally fulfilling to give to those who had provided her with care and support for many years.

Maintaining Respect in Changing Times

Latinas were watching their mothers’ emotions, letting them borrow money, and finding moments to help without them needing to ask. These actions explain why these young Latina daughters were so interested in their mothers’ burdens as well as protect the mothers from having to fully acknowledge their children’s role in sharing these burdens. The concern for their mother’s anxieties over financial woes began with the feeling of respect. It was obvious that many Latinas in the study held a deep and strong respect for their mothers. Respect arose from observing and knowing about the struggles their mothers encountered in life. I asked Rogelia Silva about her mother’s employment when they first settled in Oakland.

JC: When your mother got here, did she start working?

RS: Yes.

JC: What was that?

RS: Sewing.

JC: What did she think of the job?

RS: It was hard for her because she was working, and cooking and cleaning, and all that.

JC: She was doing everything .

RS: She was doing everything a housewife did and worked on top. I don't know how she did it, she should have said, "Forget it."

JC: Do you remember why she started working?

RS: She wanted to help out.

Rogelia's words reveal a sense of astonishment with what her mother managed for the family's sake. At the same time, Rogelia felt indignant about the unfairness of her mother's responsibilities. She implied that her mother warranted the option of doing either paid work or housework and not be forced into juggling both.

Young Latinas noticed that their mothers also struggled in the dynamics of marriage. Oftentimes they raised the family by themselves with little support from their spouses. Rosie Juarez informed me that the most difficult challenge for her mother was not raising a family of all girls but raising a family alone and with the pain of malevolent husbands. She was quick to point out my poor line of questioning due to my own unexamined sexist notions.

JC: What was it like with a family of all girls?

RJ: What do you mean? I don't know what it's like to have a family of all brothers, so I can't compare it. I can't really compare it.

JC: So you never really thought about that? Did anyone ever comment?

RJ: Everyone always says, wow, all girls. But I don't know what they're talking about. I think maybe, it was hard for my mom because she was a single mom. I don't know if it was harder because we were girls. She's been through a lot. She went through two really abusive marriages, and I have two half-sisters. I think it was just hard because she was alone, and she raised us.

In the worst cases, the machismo culture allowed husbands to physically oppress their wives and render them submissive. Nineteen-year-old Kiri Souza explained how Latina women from her mother's generation have embarked upon a project of change in which they will no longer experience the harsh oppression that women from previous generations frequently endured.

Our parents, like my generation, I know all the girls, all my homegirls or homeboys, whatever, in my generation, we were raised by our moms, not our dads. This generation is more like divorce, and more like just the moms, not just the dads, you know? I mean, I used to go home, and my mom wasn't there

sometimes because she was working, and I'd have to do the things with the house. When my mom came home from work, she had to clean the house. Too much! I guess my mom's generation, how she explains it is that maybe there was some divorce. Like, it's different with the different generations. Like her mom's generation, it was like all women was getting beat by their man. Like all women, their man was drunk, and they took all that. And their children they were looking at that, and they thought, "I don't want that to happen to me." So that was the generation that my mom was in. So what happened when they were growing up is like their man wanted to hold them down -- they were going through the same things their moms went through, and they didn't want that to happen, and that's the reason why they got divorced. So that's how they explain it. I have talked to other women from my mom's generation, and they always say the same thing, "Oh, I'm not going to be like my mom. I don't want to be pushed down. I don't want this to happen. I don't want my kids to see that."

Kiri was right to imply that there has been a significant generational shift in gender relations and family structure within Latino households. National statistics reveal that female-headed households among Latinos are increasing at a higher percentage rate than among whites and African Americans.³ Qualitative research among young Latino couples in Atlanta suggests that the Latino family culture has undergone a significant generational shift in gender relations. Young married Latinas in Atlanta negotiated for more intimacy in the marriage relationship as opposed to accepting the traditional Latino marriage, which focused primarily on reproducing and raising a family (Hirsch 1999).

Beyond their homes, Latina women also encountered harsh difficulties. Economic conditions required mothers to earn money for their families and become waged workers. However, opportunities for Latina immigrants were primarily located in the worst kind of low-wage occupations. To put food on the table for their children, some mothers scrubbed floors on their hands and knees with opulence glaring before their eyes every day. Others sewed garments until their hands were too numb to feel the softness of the children's faces. After the drudgery and exhaustion of wage work, mothers went home and did more work cleaning, cooking, and caring for children. In some horrible situations, Latina wives also came home to an abusive husband. Latina youth understood that their mothers' lots in life were extremely unfair. However, mothers never closed up shop in the face of this unfairness. Rather, they carried their burdens and went on to raise their children as best they could.

Furthermore, male-dominated society accepts the state's and men's indifference to child rearing and the everyday tasks of reproductive labor. Latina mothers often found themselves raising the family on their own or with the kindness of other female relatives or friends. Latina youth grew up realizing that their fathers, men, and society could easily abandon them and therefore understood that women depend upon each other for survival, support, and general concern. They came to accept their place and role in a network of female support that was necessary for living and surviving. Veronica Valdez commented about the supportive network of women that functioned as a critical lifeline for her.

JC: What kind of support do your friends give you?

VV: I have a really supportive circle of friends. They're mostly a range of people. Mostly women.

JC: They're not necessarily Latino, right?

VV: Not necessarily Latino, mostly women.

JC: Besides being friends, do they ever help you out in other ways?

VV: I get a lot of support from them, from monetary to psychological support. I get help if I have problems with school. A lot of people are fortunate enough to have gone to school, and they can help me in school. One of the reasons I'm encouraged to do what I'm doing is because I do have that circle of friends that are really supportive and that I know I could go to if I have any kinds of problems. It's really cool and unique.

JC: You said you're in a supportive group of friends that are women. You pointed that out to me. Why is it women?

VV: Because there's a history behind it because I was raised among women. My mom is a single mother. We were raised by women. By my tias and my cousins-women. So I guess that's my comfort zone and what I grew up with and who I identify with.

JC: You were talking about feeling comfortable around Latinos. So once again, you feel comfortable around women in particular?

VV: Not in particular Latino women, but women. I guess I feel more comfortable around women because I grew up around women and I think that women understand me. That's the people that understand where I come from to bring me that support. I have male friends, but it's not that big of a deal.

JC: You feel like you can get greater support from women?

VV: Yeah.

JC: Like how?

VV: Like women have got your back if you really needed or depended on something.

JC: Women as opposed to men would come through?

VV: Yeah. I think that's very true. Women have always been there for me. The only two male figures that I have in my life are my brother and a white male that was boyfriends with my best friend. That's it.

JC: So you have a history?

VV: I was mainly raised around women, and that's what I feel comfortable with. Therefore, I never really looked into anything else.

The supportive network of women provided psychological help for Veronica when she faced personal problems and human capital for improving her academic performance. She expected this kind of help from women because this was what her own history had shown her. All the support and care came from women while she was growing up, and there was no reason for her to expect it to come from any other place now or later.

Women's ability to continue caring despite the burden of sexist oppression formed the basis of young Latinas' respect for their mothers. Because they had this deep respect, Latina youth avoided subverting their mothers' roles as parents by obfuscating their provisions to the family. They would rather mask their own role of provider through false borrowing so that their mothers would not suffer from a loss of dignity and respect. Latinas wanted to ensure that nothing could shake their mothers' perceptions of themselves as good parents. Finding ways to help that were easier to understate, and therefore, allowing mothers to misrecognize their children as significant providers was the young Latinas' way of honoring them and respecting the challenges, importance, and position of motherhood. They did not want them to feel they were unsuccessful with family management and mothering. Despite the continuous setbacks imposed by unequal gender relations, daughters reinforced their mothers' needs to feel successful as parents.

Providing for the success of motherhood was a way that young Latinas contributed to changing the gender experience of Latinas. However, this change began with their mothers' critical perspectives on the status quo. Responsibility in care was no longer placed entirely in their hands; they demanded that everyone pitch in, including the males.

Rogelia Silva: My mom totally changed her way of looking at things. Now that she's been doing the housecleaning, she feels like, why do I have to get stuck at home, clean this, and clean that? And my dad just comes in the house and sits down, my mom brings him the food and everything. And now it's like, no more,

my little brothers clean. She'll have him, on Saturday throw out the trash, vacuum, clean, do your beds, clean your room; and before, it wasn't like that. Before, I had to help my mom.

JC: Why did she change? Do you know?

RS: I guess through all the years of doing that hard work in the house, cleaning, and now she has my brothers do their laundry, so they could learn. Because she says now times have changed. My dad just comes home, sits down, and my mom serves him the food, and that's all he does. I understand he works and all that, but it's different now. It's much different.

The task for some young Latinas was to take this project of change further by easing some of the financial pressure. However, Latinas handled this contribution in a way that allowed mothers to feel secure in their place as primary provider. They did not want to threaten the self-respect of their mothers.

Raised Among Women

For Latina youths acknowledging that their assistance helped their mothers survive in a male-dominated society, the culture of concern took on a specific gender quality inasmuch as their actions were geared toward mitigating the injustice encountered by women. By attenuating some of their mothers' burdens from sexist oppression, they began to rewrite the history of Latinas, thereby rewriting their own histories. Veronica Valdez spoke about the new history of which she was a part and that had changed the gender relations in the family.

VV: Our family is really unique in that sense because we were raised by a single woman and raised among women. There's no room for machismo in our family. They have no time for that. They had to survive on their own, and that was just an obstacle. So they didn't really accustom that in the family. Everybody had to help out cause my mom was on her own. So we didn't grow up with that [machismo].

JC: You see other families that are like that?

VV: Definitely. Where the male is the king of the house, and you abide by their rules. But definitely not my family. It's the other way around.

Not only were young Latinas willing to join in the struggles of their mothers and other women, but they also participated in changing gender relations to prevent these struggles from persisting.

The Significance of Youth's Concern

In the first part of this chapter, I described four modes for children's contributions in the multiple earner family. The most common purpose was using a portion of children's earnings as a critical safety net for desperate situations. Although families were not fully dependent on children working, youth still supplemented the family income with varying contributions. Families would utilize portions of children's paychecks to bolster income when resources fell short and bills were left unpaid. In addition, families saved regular and sometimes substantial contributions for something to fall back on in case of an emergency or when it was difficult some months to put food on the table.

Jobs for at least ten youths in the study were necessary for sustaining the household. Paychecks, sometimes the entire amount, but most of the time only a portion, were a considerable part of the household income used for covering daily living expenses. Without regular contributions from children, these families could not meet expenses and therefore would find it difficult to survive. In these cases, families were dependent on children working to generate a vital source of income for subsistence. Sometimes immigrant children were working to support themselves in the host society as well as sending regular remittances back to the country of origin. The economies of families and sometimes entire hometowns were dependent upon children, native sons and daughters, earning money in the States.

Working also functioned as an attempt to approximate the American dream. Immigrant families perceive migration as an opportunity for economic and social advancement. Among the myriad immigrants who have arrived throughout the history of this country, social and economic mobility has been a common reason for settlement and patterns of integration. Families in my study held similar notions of success and advancement. However, tough economic circumstances in Oakland made attaining mobility a daunting task. Children worked and contributed as a way to achieve the American dream and prevented the family from losing faith in the possibility that one-day prosperity will arrive. At minimum, children could contribute toward savings that eventually would purchase some symbol of success. Acquiring a home may not solidify a place

in the middle class, but at least in the minds of family members, and perhaps others, it represented a move forward.

Expanding the Definition and Research Agenda

Work/Family research and policy must expand the definition of "working family" to include, along with dual and single earner families, the phenomenon of the multiple earner family. Making multiple earner families more prominent in research agendas might prove beneficial to the many disregarded in policy initiatives. Although national statistics on children providers are somewhat rare, my sense from my own research is that the multiple earner arrangement is common throughout much of the nation's working poor and immigrant communities. Further research is necessary, on a broader scale, to support family policies that would meet the needs of multiple earner families.

An increase in state support for immigrant families would be an obvious and immediate policy recommendation that one might glean from this study. With an increase in state subsidies and aid, many Latino families and children in Oakland would experience life with significantly less pressure and stress. Because the most common purpose for children's contributions in the multiple earner family was providing a critical safety net in times of need, children undoubtedly were filling in some of the holes left by the state's ever-decreasing fiscal involvement in the reproduction of families. If somehow the polity recaptured the essence of the welfare state, then many youths in my study might abandon their roles providing critical safety nets. Instead, they could possess meanings of work that would present them with a purpose more in line with approximating the American dream. In my categorization for children's contributions, approximating the American dream had the smallest numbers, only four youths out of the entire sample of forty. A state-sponsored safety net for immigrant families would surely increase the numbers of Latino youth working to attain mobility. They would experience less pressure to work and thus spend more time on schooling. If they still decided to work, Latino youth could apply the money they earned toward a college education. Saving for the future or even attaining a college degree may symbolize advancement to some extent. Allowing immigrant children

opportunities to maintain the historical pattern of generational ascendance into the middle class is what many believe this country is all about.

A Culture of Concern

Concern for family matters was at the heart of children's decisions to find work. They would see and learn about parents' inabilities to earn enough to support the family and then decide to pitch in some of their own earnings. Closely observing money problems and accepting that some resolution would require a collective effort was the reaction of most youths in this study. Furthermore, youth acknowledging that work was more important for the good of the family than for personal needs was such a common theme throughout the research that I felt certain I was uncovering a cultural belief and practice. Youths in Latino immigrant families were practicing a culture of concern when they willingly and delightedly contributed to the family's welfare. Because their parents' anxieties over financial woes were inseparable from their own feelings and concern, the burden of support became their burden as well.

Youth practicing the culture of concern and sharing the burdens of other family members was not an inchoate phenomenon among these Latino families. Concern seemed grounded in strong cultural traditions of respect and reciprocity as well as generations of families working as a collective unit for survival. Respect was a foundational feeling for the development of family relationships. For the family to work together as a collective, for children to lend a helping hand for the general success of the family, respect was necessary to maintain strong bonds and a sense of a unified purpose. Respect also provided the feeling that lives were inseparable and connected, that the key to survival was the integrity of the family. Feelings of collectivity were not exclusive to the Latino families in this study; scholars of family economy have described similar patterns of reciprocity and survival strategies throughout different ethnic/racial communities and time periods (Stack and Burton 1993; Tilly and Scott 1978).

Reciprocity connected to the feelings of respect expressed by young Latinos. Children respected the struggles their parents went through as immigrants, providers, and caregivers to such an extent that they saw in themselves a responsibility to give back something of what parent providers had bestowed upon them. This act of reciprocity noticed among contemporary

immigrant families is unsurprising given the context of oppression in American society. African American families have relied on a strategy of reciprocity to contend with the consistent disadvantages and scarcity of opportunities and resources imposed by racism and poverty (Stack 1974; 1996; Stack and Burton 1993). The immigrant families in this study had developed a need for reciprocity under analogous circumstances back in the home country. However, as they settled in the US, they realized this was one practice that had practical use and should remain as an active part of tradition. As many families had done before in Latin America, they followed a generational pattern and arrangement for survival, in which an adult generation would bear most of the responsibility of caring for and supporting both children and the elderly until children became old enough to take on some of this responsibility. Yet in this study, parents never explicitly articulated the need for this generational pattern to their children. Parents did not remind children of their responsibilities and how families reproduced certain practices for generations. Children just knew; the structure of reciprocity was embedded in the family culture. Thus, Latino youth independently decided to work and took up the role of provider, which clearly represents children's agency within the family.

Children's Contributions

Work/family research tends to ignore children's agency and contributions to the family's welfare. To understand how caring, contributions, and concern occur in families, scholars must recognize children as potential and critical agents in these areas. It is a grave mistake to assume that family welfare, health, and emotional well-being are matters that only adults with children are capable of addressing and acting upon. The children of these adults are equally capable of feeling concerned about the general state of the family, especially as they enter the early teen years. Recognizing children's agency will expand our knowledge of the dynamics of family support and the experience and formative aspects of childhood and the teenage years.

Gender Differences and Small Changes

Although I have argued that a sense of unity offered many immigrant families leverage with handling difficult circumstances, I share Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) perspective that

immigrant families sometimes exhibit complicated and conflictual gender relations that render arguments of complete household cohesiveness difficult to substantiate. By conducting a gender analysis of the families in her study, Hondagneu-Sotelo systematically demonstrated how migrant men and women often held different and sometimes divergent meanings and interest for migration and settlement. Her research countered long held assumptions of how cohesiveness within the immigrant household is necessary for the migration and settlement process.

Although finances were a critical concern for both male and female youth in my research, gender differences were also apparent in the ways Latinas thought about and focused their concern. Latinas recognized that family financial problems were weightier for their mothers than their fathers because cultural traditions and social conditions tended to shift the burden of care and support in their direction. Males were as tuned into financial problems, but rarely indicated how sexist oppression intensified the pressure their mothers endured while addressing these problems. In contrast, Latinas recognized that the consistent absence of fathers often placed the entire burden of raising and supporting the family on their mothers' shoulders. While society offered Latina mothers little economic and social support, many daughters saw that their mothers' low status as women of color resulted in chronic unfair treatment. They recognized that their help could mitigate the pain of unfairness and push for a future in which women, including themselves, would no longer sit back and suffer silently from their social disadvantage and cultural oppression.

Notes

¹ Guadalupe Valdes (1996) identifies the cultural practice of *respeto* among the Latino immigrant families in her study. She argues that *respeto* practiced in immigrant families “goes way beyond the English term respect. . . . Respeto . . . involved both the presentation of self before others as well as a recognition and acceptance of the needs of those persons with whom interactions took place” (1996, 130). This practice of *respeto* derived from the agrarian society from which many immigrant families originate. Although many Latinos immigrate to urban areas, they still retain some of the agrarian values of the previous generations. In agrarian society, the family was the main unit for social organization and survival. Because the family organized most practices of production and reproduction, interdependence among family members was necessary. Valdes argues that *respeto* parallels agrarian familial interdependence in that contemporary immigrant families tend to value the integrity and well-being of the family more than individualism.

² Although Rogelia’s family was more stable economically than most other in the study, they still were qualitatively working class. One may wonder if purchasing a child an automobile qualifies the family as middle class. However, the car was used, and it was common for families to find inexpensive vehicles for children to use.

³ US Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports*, P20-515, indicates that female family householders with no spouse present are increasing throughout the general population, including whites, blacks, and those of Hispanic origin. However, the percentage change for Hispanic female-headed households from 1980 to 1998 increased dramatically by 164%, whereas African Americans in that same period witnessed a 57% change in female-headed households. Whites were lowest among the three groups with a 37% change.

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