

**Rosemary McGunnigle**

**Economic Necessity: Gender and Role Changes among Hispanic Immigrant families**

**Introduction**

The purpose of my research in Adams County, Pennsylvania from September to December of the year 1998 has been to discover the extent to which family roles change as a result of economic necessity when Latin Americans immigrate to the United States. My original research hypothesis, which was based on a brief survey of relevant literature, contains four aspects. They are as follows:

- “Manliness” is traditionally defined as the ability to endure hard physical labor in exchange for power.
- In agricultural and factory work, especially in an economy wherein women are increasingly entering the workforce, men’s authority in the home is undermined. The role changes that take place cause tension within the home.
- Racial tensions in the labor market cause similar tensions within the home, as the immigrant feels continually isolated.
- Women in migrant families must bear the burden of many of these phenomena, yet they do not find any solace in the middle-class American feminist movement and organizations.

When formulating my hypothesis, not only was I interested in role changes resulting from economic and employment issues, but I also wanted to explore options that exist for immigrant women in terms of support. This seems to be extremely important when discussing issues of migration, culture, and family transition.

When I look at my research proposal and hypothesis now, I see my expectations, when writing it, as somewhat unrealistic, and my hypothesis as partly based on stereotypes that I will outline later in the discussion. In writing the second statement of the hypothesis I feel that I expressed unwillingness, at the time, to accept that men, particularly Hispanic men in low-skill jobs, might not resist what I saw as possibly being a threat to their authority. Yet I did not consider it a possibility, let alone a reality, that Hispanic males have historically, and do currently, accept the wage labor of women as an economic necessity in terms of survival. In fact, the subsequent section contains an explanation of the debate surrounding the issue of Hispanic male attitudes toward women's work and family roles. More importantly, and perhaps more profoundly, I saw the increase in women's employment as an almost exclusively American liberating

force. Therefore, a man grappling with a loss of authority in the household was part of some phenomenon in which the family is "Americanized", since I assumed that American men were already involved in this process. In my view, those tensions were necessary because it represented the larger societal tension between the sexes, which is not a result of a woman's assertion of her identity, but of a man's fear of the possibility of such a bold claim. Finally, according to my previous views, all of this was magnified in the case of Hispanic males. As Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo asserts in "Overcoming Patriarchal Constraints: The Reconstruction of Gender Relations Among Mexican Immigrant Women and Men", "...view that sees Mexican immigrant families becoming less patriarchal because of American cultural influence...correct in its assessment of the general trend toward more egalitarian relations among Mexican immigrants, but incorrect in its explication of why this arises" (Ngan-Ling Chow 187). The third statement of the hypothesis, concerning the racial tensions in the labor market which cause additional tension within the home, remains a valid point. Perhaps it is true in many cases, however it did not seem to be evident among the couples living in Adams County with whom I spoke. It is easy to overlook the support that the Hispanic family provides for both the sexes in terms of Hispanic immigrant women being overburdened with little organizational support in which to find solace.

## Historical Background and Related Studies

I find it impossible to begin a discussion of gender roles in Hispanic families and their relation to economic necessity without first exposing the historical conflict in regards to Mexican and other Hispanic families. Many assumptions people maintain concerning the Hispanic family are merely based on common and antiquated stereotypes regarding its structure. In Becoming Mexican American Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945, George Sánchez successfully explains the two problematical depictions of Mexican immigrant families:

Chicano social scientists...depicted *la familia* as warm and nurturing, an environment of support and stability...machismo represented an appropriate mechanism to insure the continuation of Mexican family pride and respect...the oppression of women in the family was dismissed as a necessary evil. (130)

Yet, according to Sánchez, this view was just as misguided as the older view of the Mexican family, in which they were considered "as authoritarian and macho-dominated, impeding individual achievement and independence while

promoting passivity and familial dependence" (130-131). However, in reality, Hispanic immigrant families in the United States have displayed their capability of flexibility, as well as adaptability. Such patterns of adaptation began, specifically in Mexico, in the late 1800s and early 1900s at which time rigid gender roles could not be maintained under the economically stressed conditions under which people were living. This leads to another related, and likewise incorrect, stereotype that is exposed by George Sánchez, Pierrette Hondagnue-Sotelo, and Mary Romero, in which it is thought that Hispanic women are more likely than native-born American women to be full-time mothers. On the other hand, "Working mothers are the norm rather than the exception. Women's greater participation in the labor force has had significant impacts on gender relations and family life" (Romero 213). This contradiction has become, in a sense, the basis of my research, which has led me to the realization of how many of these cultural misconceptions, which are pervasive in United States society, have been reflected in my own thinking, and even in sections of my own research proposal as developed at the beginning of this semester.

Although there are many studies on immigration, the breadth of research on Latin American immigrant women leaves a lot to be desired. In my literature survey of related material I also reviewed studies of immigrant women from other areas of the world. The results for different ethnic groups' reactions to transformations of typical family roles are varied and often conflicting. Even though there is much literature that upholds my original hypothesis, many of the most recent studies that are specifically focused on working-class Hispanics, many of which involve Mexicans, have reached similar conclusions. These conclusions dispute the validity of the stereotypical and exaggerated profile of the Latino family. Instead, while claiming that it is more egalitarian than previously believed, they stress the importance of recognizing the relations between race, class, and gender.

## **Methodology**

My research has been collected through the use of the method of participant observation, in which I became involved in informal activities with the informants, for lack of a warmer description of them, as well as in-depth interviewing. The places in which I met women are as follows: Rural Opportunities Incorporated Migrant Headstart, Bonnie Brae migrant work camp, The Gettysburg Center for Human Services, Survivors Incorporated (a domestic/sexual violence hotline, support network, and shelter), and a home in York Springs (using a connection from another researcher). In these settings I had the opportunity to speak with social service providers and women working elsewhere, all of whom were female immigrants from Latin America and most of

whom are in their twenties and have young children born in the United States. They all have contributed to my research, however, the study is primarily based on the *historias* of two of these women.

By no means do I attempt to claim absolute authority in terms of making definitive statements about female immigrants from Latin America, even though I do feel that I am seeking "to understand sociological questions about a group, a community, and context through the individual's lived experience" (Marshall 87). In the case of these two women, Belén and Nereida, I feel that I can best describe the data collection and presentation as the humble beginnings of a narrative inquiry. This method is best described by Marshall and Rossman in Designing Qualitative Research:

Narrative inquiry requires a great deal of sensitivity between participant and researcher...sincere collaboration, a caring relationship akin to friendship that is established over time for full participation in the storytelling, retelling, and reliving of personal experiences. It demands active listening and giving the narrator full voice. (86-87)

Although I describe narrative inquiry, which is my preference of style, as what I have used, I know that to achieve a more complete narrative would take a longer period of time and more intense collaboration with both Belén and Nereida. This is why I describe this study as merely a beginning to my research of this topic, as well as to my relationship with the women of Adams County. However, I will save the discussion of future plans for later this *historia*.

In my conversations with Adams County's immigrant women, stories have taken an important role. Through the retelling of events as well as the countless explanations of the current situation, they have begun to create their own *historia* which I have tried to present as accurately as I am capable of doing. In Testimony Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History Dori Laub discusses Holocaust testimonies. However, her reflections are not exclusive to that situation: "As an interviewer I am present as someone who actually participates in the reliving and re-experiencing of the event. I also become part of the struggle to go beyond the event and not to be submerged and lost in it" (76). As Laub suggests, this process of "witnessing" is not something to be undertaken without offering one's heart and soul. Helping me accomplish this has been Women's Words The Feminist Practice of Oral History in which Dana Jack warns:

We must remember that the researcher is an active participant... critical areas demanding attention are frequently those where I think I already know what the

woman is saying. This means I am already appropriating what she says to an existing schema, and therefore I am no longer really listening to her. (19)

This essential realization, as expressed by Jack, remained within my mind throughout the ethnographic fieldwork experience because I was determined not to stifle the voices of other women as is systematically done to us in our societies. Perhaps it transformed me into an overly timid ethnographer. However, I feel that it just forced me to remain conscious of not thrusting my hypothesis into questions and thereby tainting the *historias*. The manner in which I proceeded to do so was by spending a lengthy amount of time *conociendo la gente*. Instead of immediately and narrowly focusing on the issues that I was researching, I would begin by discussing general topics or asking very basic questions about the family. Many times, I waited until after I had seen the woman interact with the males in her family before focusing on issues of marital relationships. Other times, I would wait until a subject entered into the conversation that would allow me to lead naturally into my topic of research. Perhaps this style of research that I have employed stunted the process of accumulating data. Yet I would not make any adjustments. As a result, I was able to develop closer friendships with the women as well as penetrate their thoughts on a deeper level than if I would have structured each conversation. By using this method of research I was able to observe the women's actual relationships without them having a preconceived notion of what I was "looking for". In addition it forced me to continue re-evaluating my hypothesis throughout the entire semester, as I was participating and observing. I feel that this is what has allowed me to ultimately discard some of the aspects of my original hypothesis. If, instead, I had sought to prove my hypothesis, I could have easily done so. However, I would not have been secure in the fact that my findings were honest and representative of the actual phenomena.

## **Findings and Analysis**

### **Point 1**

The first statement of my hypothesis is that "manliness" is traditionally defined as the ability to endure hard physical labor in exchange for power. In a study of steelworkers, Karen Olson observes that "Manliness is thus understood by steelworkers as the ability to endure hard physical labor and debilitating working conditions in exchange for financial control over the households they head and the prerogative to 'blow off steam' at home and to choose recreation for themselves in lieu of sharing responsibility for household maintenance"

(Gluck and Patai 190). In formulating my hypothesis I used this statement with the intension of applying it across ethnic and occupational boundaries. The statement is independent of ethnicity. Following this brief introduction to the subject, I first will discuss what I found to be the exception as opposed to the rule. Nereida, while working as an assistant at Rural Opportunities Incorporated Migrant Headstart spoke with frustration about her husband's non-existent support of her efforts to move forward in regard to her education and occupation. On a bright Sunday morning at her church, *Jesus is Lord Ministries*, she expressed her frustrations to me:

...she has the opportunity to get this Child Development Associate, which would help her a lot. But, she really doesn't have the money. It's already becoming a problem that her husband has to watch Monica during the day...She could take classes at night but her husband just sits around watching TV and doesn't really do anything. He says that he'll help her, but she doesn't see him helping her. She's the one that cleans the clothes and house, cooks, washes the dishes, and takes care of the kids after she comes home from work at night (and I know that she doesn't get out of work until after 6 PM). She said that she feels that he really doesn't support her at all. Her son is the one that helps her out with everything... (McGunnigle Sunday October 25, 1998)

Not to exhaust the popular discussion of machismo, but when asking the Mexican women with whom I spoke about how important it is for Mexican men to be manly, I consistently received responses as to how *machista* they are. Yet, no one ever really elaborated on that, even when prompted to. It was just stated as a commonly known fact. It seems that machismo is simply an attitude that is attached to men whether it applies or not, since many times, after saying that, the women contradict themselves in their descriptions of the men with whom they are closest. The most accurate manner in which I can describe the idea of machismo is as a trait that is culturally ascribed to the men, yet rarely to an individual male. An illustration of this can be found in a conversation with Belén on Monday November 2, 1998:

We talked about men and machoism and she said that a lot of men just say those things...her family jokes about how the husband listens to the wife...she says men do like to say "que él es el que manda...but it's just talk...but there are a lot of *machistas* in Mexico. (McGunnigle)

Perhaps this seemingly confusing message leads us to the current debate as to what constitutes an accurate portrayal of the experience of Mexican-American families and what place machismo holds. In their discussion of "Work-Family

Role Allocation in Dual Earner Chicano Families", Scott Coltrane and Elsa O. Valdez support the denial of the validity of many antiquated stereotypes: "machismo implies respect, loyalty, and generosity... contemporary Chicano fathers are now participating more actively in child care than in the past" (Romero 230). This view acknowledges the existence of egalitarian relationships among Mexican-American *parejas*. Under this rationalization, the contradiction that I previously spoke of that seemed to be evident in the narratives of Mexican women does not exist. In reality, it is a contradiction that is seen by one who is not aware of the positive definition of machismo, how it implies respect and responsibility for one's family, and how it is reflected in relationships between the sexes.

## Point 2

The second aspect of the theory guiding my research was that "in an economy wherein women are increasingly entering into the workforce, men's authority in the home is undermined and the role changes that take place cause tension within the home". To my surprise, while involved in my research, I found this theory, in general, to fall apart in front of my face. Ironically, the opposite was true as a direct result of the same path of logic that I had followed. Since I had already established that men demanded authority and respect as a result of their work, it naturally follows, not necessarily that they would struggle to maintain it, but that they would similarly respect a woman that works. Although this does not hold in *all* cases, neither in literature nor in my own research, it was much more common throughout my study than one would have expected. The first time that I sensed this profound respect was during a conversation in Carlos' living room, on the Bonnie Brae farm. "He said that women almost never work in Mexico, that more Mexicans living here work...He did say that la mujer mexicana es buen trabajadora (he repeated that a few times pensively) and that he has a lot of respect for them" (McGunnigle Wednesday October 21, 1998). In addition, Carlos often made comments about Julia, one of his workers, and how hard she worked and how people should respect that.

Throughout our conversations, which took place over a one month period, Belén consistently spoke of what she feels is increased respect toward her on the part of her husband since they have immigrated to the United States. In Mexico, although she earned a bachelors degree and was studying before her marriage, Belén did not work whereas her husband, who has less education, did. Yet, in the United States she began working as soon as her only son César was born. Currently her husband works at PQE, an egg factory in Adams County, and Belén just finished a temporary job in a Motts factory that is very close to their Route 95 apartment. Her entrance into the workforce was a result of economic necessity. They needed to pay for their passage to the United

States as well as reach their goal of raising their standard of living, or *superarse*. In his cultural anthropological study, Leo R. Chavez discusses this common desire among undocumented Mexican immigrants:

...(in the United States) hard work and sacrifice can earn them upward mobility at least for their children if not for themselves... They hope to *superarse* (surpass their current situation or circumstances)... (29)

As Belén explains to me over a cup of coffee at her kitchen table, "Queremos ahorrar para cuando vayamos a México...poner un negocio...irnos pronto...una navidad buena" (McGunnigle Monday November 23, 1998). According to her, here in the United States, with two people working, a family can achieve this. On one hand, working temporarily and adapting to being away from her son when she prefers to stay home to care for him, has been a sacrifice that she has made in order to reach the young family's goals. On the other hand, now she claims to be "de otro modo"; she doesn't feel dependent, scared, or unsure. Even her husband claims that she has changed since beginning to work. With the pride of a strong woman for whom I personally have a lot of respect and *cariño*, *mi amiga me dice que* she has realized, by working, that "una puede seguir adelante sola" (McGunnigle Monday November 23, 1998). This cannot be overlooked in the case of a Mexican woman raised in a culture in which, according to Remy, a Spanish speaking employer at Survivors Incorporated, "están enseñados a obedecer siempre" (McGunnigle Monday November 9, 1998). According to my hypothesis, such a "brazen" exhibition of female confidence should force her husband to resent his loss of power within the home, which, as a result of the woman's new consciousness and subsequent refusal to accept his authority, would cause tension in the household. Yet, in Belén's descriptions of their interactions, a more egalitarian relationship comes to light. She claims that, if in Mexico, "she would be doing all of the housework simply because she would be in the house all and day and if she didn't then they'd say that she does nothing" (McGunnigle November 2, 1998). According to M. Patricia Fernández Kelly and Ana M. García in their study titled "Power Surrendered, Power Restored: The Politics of Work & Family Among Hispanic Garment Workers in California and Florida", it is asserted that, "while 'family' designates the way things should be...households represent mechanisms for the pooling of time, labor and other resources in shared space...constantly adjust to the pressures of the surrounding environment" (Romero 121). Likewise, Belén successfully describes the flexibility existing in her household and her husband's willingness to assist her:

In Mexico when the baby needs to be changed, washed, or fed, the man will say, *ándale*, *el niño quiere comer*, *Ándale*, *el niño se tiene que bañar*...Their relationship here is more equal and yes, men respect the women more here



because they work and they treat them with more respect by helping out with things in the house. They understand each other better now because she works when she didn't before, so she understands him and he helps in the house and takes care of their son, so he knows what it's like to do work in the house. (McGunnigle Monday November 2, 1998)

This understanding is a result of actual role reversals and increasingly egalitarian relationships. "...so there's more stress (in the United States) but it's more equal. In Mexico all the stress is on the men because they alone have to worry about providing for the family" (McGunnigle Monday November 2, 1998). From Belén's explanation about the equality of stress in the family, it is easy to see that working women remove some of this pressure from their husbands and therefore gain their respect. Fostering such an understanding among couples is the positive force that leads to more respectful relationships and the exhibition of the positive aspects of machismo that was previously discussed. It is displayed both in increased participation in household tasks as well as in attitudes. Yet, it seems, from reading The Second Shift that the necessity of male participation in the domestic sphere may even improve the relationship simply because the men notice that their wives react positively to the assistance. According to Hochschild:

...working wives (are)...more likely to have considered divorce. But people who conclude that it is women's work that causes divorce only look at what the *women*, 2 of the couples, are doing-earning money, feeling more independent, thinking better of themselves, expecting more of men...what *did* contribute to happiness was the husband's willingness to do the work at home. Sharing the second shift improved the marriage regardless of what ideas either had about men's and women's roles.

Belén spoke with me about the men in her house as having a different attitude now:

She doesn't like how they drink too much and get drunk and she tells them not to...but no se enojan ellos, no dicen nada. But in Mexico they would say, yo puedo hacer lo que quiero porque yo soy hombre, y ya. y ya. But here it is not like that. (McGunnigle Monday November 2, 1998)

### **Point 3**

Following from the idea that "Racial tension adds a dimension of combatitiveness to men's lives..." (91) as expressed in Women's Words *The*

*Feminist Practice of Oral History*, The third aspect of my hypothesis was that racial tensions in the labor market are carried into the home, as the immigrant feels continually isolated. This point remains an interest of mine, as well as a mystery. It seems that, among the Adams County residents, there is not a large amount of interaction among the races in job situations. Most Hispanic immigrants with whom I spoke worked and associated almost exclusively with other Hispanics. Therefore, they not only had little understanding of members of other races or ethnic groups, but neither were there any racial tension to speak of. Even when speaking to Belén and her brother Jesús, I noticed that whenever they spoke about African Americans it was posed in the form of a question. Their beliefs of race issues in America were formed from American television and media. They did not take any type of negative action as a result of it, especially since, as a result of their relative isolation, they had no occasion to do so.

However, although not in a work situation, I did speculate as to the effects of racial tension on the marriage between Nereida and her husband José. Nereida, a fluent English speaker, has found solace, after many personal difficulties which include her son's death from cancer only a few years ago, in an evangelist church by the name of Jesus is Lord Ministries, International. Aside from her complaints and lamenting as to his non-involvement in the church, his non-existent support for her in terms of continuing her education and/or finding a better job is extremely painful for her. On a hay ride at her church picnic, she unloaded all her frustration as to his distance. That night I wrote in my journal about the strained couple:

He was saying that he needs to learn English as well as I know Spanish, so I was kind of giving him advise, telling him how I learned...I would think that it wouldn't be that hard for him to learn since his kids and wife speak it so well...You know, part of the reason that he doesn't want to be involved in the church is probably because the people there are mostly white; there aren't any Mexicans. Maybe he doesn't feel any connection with them linguistically or culturally. (Sunday October 25, 1998)

At the time I wrote this in my journal, even I was not aware of its profound significance. Currently, Nereida's husband is unemployed. Yet, as she was working as a teacher's assistant at ROI Migrant Headstart, he was struggling to start his own business on Route 34 near Gettysburg: José's Auto Sales. In a burdensome financial situation, he is still struggling to support his wife and three children, while his wife, being fluent in English after living in New York City for over ten years, is more capable of doing so, as well as being more confident when interacting with *anglosajón* culture. José probably feels this imbalance to be extremely threatening, especially when forced into the

situation of *cuidando la hija*, Monica, while Nereida works. In Hochschild's The Second Shift, the case of Nina, whose salary is higher than her husband Peter's, is discussed:

Nina was giving Peter the kind of gift that, under old rules, a man should give a woman: relief from the pressure to provide..."the choice of whether to work or not"...He felt he couldn't be the man Nina would still love 30 years from now if he *both* earned less than she did *and also* shared the second shift...two assault on his manhood...What he did care about was his marriage. (83-85)

In this particular case, one can see that this dilemma is not even necessarily related to culture nor ethnicity. Perhaps, when in the situation of caring for a daughter during the day, it is even more difficult to maintain one's pride and simultaneously support a wife in her educational and professional endeavors, even when it is in the best economic interest of the family. A similar situation, focusing on the cultural aspects of this conflict, is documented by Irene Kwanghye Lee Oliver in Women in Cross-Cultural Transitions:

Another reason Korean men experience difficulty in the United States is the change of power in the family...Korean society is very patriarchal...when they come to America, this structure of power starts to change. ***Very often fathers have the kind of language problems that their children overcome very quickly. Wives work outside the home, which gives them a certain financial independence...***(35) [italics and bold type added]

Whereas in Belén's case she feels that she receives more respect from her husband, this situation makes that impossible. José feels disrespected, therefore he is not capable of showing respect to his wife and children. This is best described in Terry A Repack's "New Roles in a New Landscape": "Alienation within the family increases with time as *children become acculturated more quickly than their parents and lose respect for parental authority*" (Romero 251). [italics added]

#### Point 4

The fourth aspect of my research proposal also provides a natural synthesis for the study in its entirety. It followed that women in (im)migrant families must bear the burdens of economic and racial stress, yet they do not find any solace nor support among the middle-class white American feminist movements and organizations. I still feel this to be a valid statement. However, this is not just a fact in terms of women, I feel that, to some extent, men feel uncomfortable in terms of organizations staffed by middle-class white Americans as well. On the third day of my internship at Rural Opportunities Incorporated I had the

opportunity to speak with a migrant worker being enrolled into the program: "The man trying to conseguir apoyo de ROI is Mexican and he was sitting here with his esposa, quien es una (blanca) americana...Pero, solo me habló cuando John salió del cuarto poque cada vez que regresó, el hombre se quedó callado excepto cuando John le preguntaba algo" (McGunnigle Wednesday September 23, 1998). Perhaps such a feeling of discomfort is the result of feeling out of their element, outside the protection of their specific cultural environment. This is magnified when the organization's employees are speaking English to each other in front of the non-English speaking immigrant.

The isolation and loneliness felt by female immigrants can be overwhelming. The absence of meaningful relationships with other women is very difficult to cope with, yet "when migrant women maintain contact with their support network of kin in Mexico, they are much better adjusted" (Gabaccia 53):

When Belén arrived in Pennsylvania and her father left she felt bien sola. In Mexico she had her younger sister. Here she had no one. It was awful...when her and her sister write to each other they tell each other all their problems. (McGunnigle Monday November 23, 1998)

It seems that three events help immigrant women to adapt and alleviate such loneliness to some extent. The first event was the birth of her son César. Of the three, this is perhaps the least concrete, just as the feelings a mother has for her child are so powerful and yet intangible. Even Belén jokes with her husband that César is more hers than his because she started loving him the moment she became pregnant, but her husband began loving him the moment he saw him (McGunnigle November 23, 1998). For Belén, being a mother is one of the most significant elements of her identity. In "A Francophone Korean in America", Irene Kwanghye Lee Oliver describes the experience, as an immigrant, of becoming a mother in the United States:

I felt very isolated...I could not get close to anyone...But something happened recently that has given me new hope. I had a baby boy in 1991, and he is playing the role of intermediary between me and American society...And most importantly, I feel now that I belong to the noblest category that exists in the world, that of *mother*...I am still very Korean. I get a secure feeling from belonging to a meaningful category in another society. (Bystydzienski 36-37)

Being a mother is universal. One can see it in the conversations with all the women with whom I have spoken throughout the semester. The majority of the time was spent listening to stories about their children. Instead of trying to

change the topic and persistently ask questions related to my hypothesis, I was forced to come to the significant realization that the women were already answering my questions. They were relating to me, a white American college student, the way we all knew how: as a woman and as a mother.

Another manner of coping with the stresses of immigrant life is through working outside the home. Female employment accomplishes even more than giving women financial independence and confidence. The environment provides them with a form of expression as well as a support system. This type of support system would not be accessible to them if they stayed at home. In fact, when speaking of abusive husbands, of which she is relatively knowledgeable as a result of her work with support groups for women healing emotionally from abusive relationships, Remy asserts that this is exactly what they remove from the grasp of their wives in order to maintain complete control: "Muchas...están forzadas a dar todo su dinero a sus esposos. Muchas veces los hombres las aíslan. No las dejan ir a la escuela, no las dejan aprender inglés, no las dejan arreglar sus papeles" (McGunnigle Monday November 9, 1998). In Seeking Common Ground *Multidisciplinary Studies of Immigrant Women in the United States* this supportive work environment that is seen as a threat by abusive men is explained:

Women have social license...to share their personal concerns and worries with each other. These discussions take place informally...social and religious functions...common job...female-centered networks...confianza...provide the framework within which immigrant women seek help from formal agencies... dramatic change from Mexico where women rarely work outside the subsistence economy. (48)

This is why a place such as the Gettysburg Center for Human Services holds such importance in the lives of the women who are involved, such as Griselda, who cannot work in the United States because of the restrictions of her husband's visa. He is here as a visiting professor at Gettysburg College and according to the arrangement of his particular visa, she and her daughters are listed as his dependents. Although she prefers to work, Griselda was aware, before leaving Mexico, that she would not have the opportunity of working in the United States. Also, Survivors Incorporated, the Gettysburg domestic violence hotline and shelter, works through female's personal networks. Hired two years ago as the first Spanish speaking employee of Survivors, Remy is the center of these connections. Many of the Hispanic women in the shelter are introduced to Remy through mutual friends and she maintains close contact with them throughout their stay. In October, a worker was sent to the Survivors shelter because she was physically abused by her husband, both of whom were residents of Carlos' camp. This was due to a long-standing friendship between

Remy and Carlos. Remy felt gratified as a result of the interest I displayed in her work and she was very proud to share her experience as the first Spanish speaking employee who began to work at Survivors two years ago:

La primera cosa que le pregunté era...Como te sientes acerca del trabajo que haces?...Es un trabajo social y ella está muy orgullosa de tenerlo y de estar apoyando su gente, especialmente las que están en estado de crisis.  
(McGunnigle Monday November 9, 1998)

Among many Hispanic immigrant women there exists a strong feeling of responsibility toward each other. Such women create a support system for each other that is not available among many established American organizations. These networks are invaluable since "immigrant women often not only face a clash of cultures, but also may be deprived of the support of networks of kinship and community that existed in the countries they left behind" (Gabaccia 43). It also must not be overlooked that, for a community that is accustomed to pooling the resources of an extended family and friends by the use of informal networks, it is natural for them to continue doing so after immigrating to the United States. They are simply not accustomed to formal organizational support in times of crises. Both Belén and Remy have expressed that in Mexico there exists no recourse for women in a any type of crises; one must rely on the family. Other reasons that such networks are invaluable to (im)migrant women are that many Hispanic immigrants have difficulties with English as well as not identifying with American culture and attitudes. Therefore, in order to provide support, established American organizations would have to be involved in relatively extensive recruitment efforts. In Gettysburg, the YWCA and the Penn Laurel Girl Scout Council each publish literature in Spanish. However, many women do not have access to such literature nor do many have the time to utilize the services that may be provided by such organizations. According to Meg Klackner the Regional Outreach Director of the Penn Laurel Girl Scout Council, many people are not as receptive to recruitment unless a well respected member of their community is involved in the efforts. In addition, Meg's lack of knowledge of the Spanish language makes it even more difficult because the mothers are then put into the possibly humiliating position of asking their young children to translate for them (McGunnigle Thursday November 12, 1998). I do not believe that it would be misleading to assume that this happens in many other organizations aside from the Girls Scout Council.

Finally, and ironically, marital relationships function as a mechanism to contend with the difficulties with which female immigrants from Latin America are confronted. In a study of Korean immigrants to Hawaii, Gabaccia advocates that "men and women are both separated from their customary social and support

ties and need to rely on each other. They spend more time together both in domestic tasks and in social activities. A majority of women...report enhanced marital relationships" (49). Whereas Carlos sees that "men here that work with their wives tend to tomar, pasear por aquí y allá por los fines de semana y dejar las esposas...instead of siguiendo adelante como una pareja" (Wednesday October 21, 1998) Belén, Mariella, and Griselda speak of completely different men. "...In Mexico, men go out...with other men and go en las calles and the women stay by themselves in the house all the time. But here, where my husband goes, my son and I go..." (Monday November 2, 1998). During other conversations Belén would speak of how the three of them would go for walks together in the summer and of other times that her and her husband would go out to bars or parties. Likewise, Mariella spoke of a very loving relationship between her and her husband, the struggle to spend time with each other on the weekends due to busy work schedules, and a powerful realization of the importance of family when separated from her husband and daughter for two months after arriving alone in Miami, Florida (Tuesday November 17, 1998). Although Griselda has not seen many American couples, they seem to her to be reserved and private. Her husband joins in her effort to maintain Mexican culture and values in their household while simultaneously adapting to American customs. She points out that this adaptaton is sometimes difficult for her daughters, who were both born in Mexico, but that "tratamos de que no cambien (the relationships and values in the family)" (Tuesday November 17, 1998).

## Conclusions and Revised Theory

Since I have already explained where my findings have conflicted with my original hypothesis, I suppose that the most concise manner in which to conclude the discussion of my research in Adams County would be to rewrite my theories according to my experience. Therefore, my conclusions and new hypothesis are as follows:

- Mexican and Hispanic men are categorized by white Americans within a largely exaggerated and stereotypical model of the Latin American family. This is a result of confusion concerning the true definition of *machismo* as well as the extent to which the Mexican belief in, and actualization of *machismo* has altered in the past, and is currently doing so.
- Since manliness is defined as the ability to endure hard physical labor, as a result of which men demand respect, it is for the same reason that men respect women who work.
- Since more Hispanic women work in the United States than in their native country, their families are forced to develop flexibility in terms of dividing

work in and outside of the home. This leads to greater understanding between the sexes and betters the marital relationship.

- If, in comparison to his wife and children, a male has difficulty culturally and linguistically adapting to the United States, this will disrupt the balance that otherwise develops. As a result of feeling inferior to his wife, tension will arise. Since, in many cases, working women feel that they are accorded more respect when employed in the United States, and comments from males have reinforced this idea, one wonders why a more egalitarian relationship is not evident in other relationships. It seems that this tension arises, not from female employment, but from the male's feeling of inferiority to his wife as a result of her obviously more rapid adjustment to American society. In the cases of successful relationships, the couples' experiences were shared and adjustment to American society was simultaneous.
- Although female immigrant women may not find support in middle-class white American feminist organizations, this necessity to alleviate economic and racial stresses is met through other support systems. These women are able to adapt more successfully through their children, networks formed through their jobs, and the previously described enhanced marital relationships, that make the transition to a new culture more of a partnership between the husband and wife.

Therefore, one can maintain the fact that *machismo* implies respect and loyalty, which is seen in the relationships of the majority of couples with whom I spoke. In a sense, women, as providers for their families along with their husbands, internalize some of the *machista* attitude and demand respect for the work that they do. This is a result of becoming a mother, maintaining supportive relationships at work as well as a strong commitment to their husband. Even Belén testifies to this commitment, "Un matrimonio no es para estar juntos a veces y ya no...(mi esposo y yo) luchamos para salir adelante por el matrimonio y por el niño" (McGunnigle Monday November 23, 1998). Having these three ways of easing herself into American society, especially that of being a mother, the woman has an advantage over her husband in terms of adjusting to the culture. In situations where such respect is not evident, many times the male is experiencing an internal conflict as a result of the trying experience of immigration to the United States. This conflict makes communication with his wife and children, under new cultural norms, extremely difficult. Issues of marital communication aside, it has even been maintained by some, that it is the way we are taught to socialize as women, that permits us to adjust more rapidly to another society. In "Reflections of a Cultural Commuter", after quoting Virginia Woolf's statement that "As a woman my country is the world", Birgit Brock-Utne asserts:

Women are usually brought up to be caring, to cater to the social needs of the family, and to build networks around the family...the ability they have



developed for building networks, socializing...is transferable and can help them in the new culture. Women tend to bond with each other when they experience pain...Women seem to adapt to new cultural environments more easily than men, although...acculturation has its emotional cost for women...

## Research Limitations and Obstacles

I found the entire experience of this semester to be extremely rewarding and positive, however, one major limitation that I needed to overcome was the inability to meet women in situations where I could speak to them comfortably about relationships and gender issues. "When I came up with my research proposal about women for Professor Enge I did not take into account one possible difficulty. How is one going to speak about women's issues with another woman when there are all men around??" (McGunnigle Monday October 19, 1998). I was extremely frustrated throughout the few weeks I visited Bonnie Brae camp to *placticar con* Julia, the only woman picker in a crew of more than fifty men. Again, I expressed my confusion:

(Julia's husband) never came over to talk with us. In fact, both times I was there he never said anything to his wife. There is no interaction between them whatsoever. I think that maybe it's because I'm there and I make him a little uncomfortable. I wonder what he thinks we talk about or if he asks her and she tells him after I leave. (McGunnigle Monday October 19, 1998)

Although I will never positively know, there is a possibility that this type of behavior could have been indicative of problems between them. I never felt particularly close to Julia, but I do not think we could not have been close. The first time we met she did not even smile until an hour and a half later. It is not that she is cold, because her interaction with Jose, her brother-in-law was very sweet and affectionate. Also, the last time I saw her, I brought pictures of her daughter Élica and she was *emocionante*, smiling and thanking me profusely, which only makes me believe more strongly in the fact that women can relate easily across ethnic boundaries. The situation and setting are what prevented us from having a truly naturally flowing conversation as I did with many of the other women I spoke about.

## Additional/Future Research

I do feel that, with more time spent in the area, this frustrating limitation will diminish. I suppose that this leads me to the subject of additional research. In the future I would like to continue researching gender relations among immigrant couples, especially in Adams County, Pennsylvania. In order to do this I also sense that it is important to speak with more men on the issue. Although I have accumulated a vast amount of knowledge and most importantly, developed very close relationships with the women, I feel that I can still enlarge the scope of my research. The field of studies that includes race, class, and gender is still quite young as are the studies of Hispanic immigrant families very scarce. I hope to have contributed and to continue contributing to them both.